



THE TRAIL ORGANISER

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Whenever I talk of the mountains, I am usually asked about the sights. Some even ask me about the moments, but rarely has anyone asked me about smells of the mountains. Yet, when I think about it, the mountains are full of intoxicating smells that can make a trek come alive.

In the hills near Narkanda, some 65 km from Shimla, are some of the oldest deodar forests you will ever see. The pines are so old that they climb over a hundred feet, and it is impossible to caren your neck to see their tufts. Sunlight rarely touches the bottom of these pine forests. In these magnificent forests near Narkanda, there are a number of wonderful short treks.


In early March a few years ago, my wife and I trekked through these deodar forests. The first thing that stirred us was the fragrance of the forest. It was so heady that we had to stop for a while. The woody scent of the pines was omnipresent. It was impossible to go further without stopping to savour the scent. We sat down on the springy carpet of pine needles as a gentle breeze swayed through the trees, almost urging the scent to reach our noses. It remains one of the most refreshing moments of my trekking days.

On another occasion, I was on a short trek from Hillely to Barsey in Sikkim, through the rhododendron sanctuary. In the beginning of April, the rhododendrons are in bloom, the hills a scarlet fire. I had taken my young bunch of nephews and nieces for an introduction to trekking, because I imagined that seeing the trees in full bloom under the watchful gaze of the Kanchenjunga would be an incentive to trek for life.

With the kids in tow, I entered the sanctuary and, as I'd expected, the walk under the rhododendrons was incredible. The roots of the trees snaked around the trail and the sun filtered through the blooms in a translucence of crimson and pink. That lent the trek a fairytale-like feel. Then, like a gentle wisp, the almond-like scent of the rhododendrons touched the air. It wasn't as overpowering as the pines, but it was everywhere, like mist rolling down a hill.

That night also had a clear sky, a half moon lighting up the Kanchenjunga, stunning shadows peppering the land. The kids and I were cosy in our sleeping bags, but the silent night air was filled with the crisp scent of the flowers and it wafted through the tent and caressed us gently. To be honest, I have rarely slept better on a trek.

Another scent I will never forget was in Uttarakhand's Dayara Bugyal, which has, perhaps, India's most beautiful meadows. It is a pity that not too many trekkers set foot on this bit of paradise because, in September—just after the monsoons—the meadows are lush. Magic unfolds as

hundreds of sheep descend on the green wonderland to feed on the bounty of nature. The wet earth throws up an unreal earthy fragrance. It is a smell that connects right to the core of our beings, a smell that reminds us of our roots. So omnipresent and earthy is the scent that you want to stay in the meadows forever. And, not surprisingly, most people tend to—it is a call of the earth, the smell of the mountains. 

Arjun is the founder of Indiahikes, a blogger and an experienced trekker. He takes a keen interest in training youngsters to appreciate our trails.

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