

TOURISM UPDATE

COASTAL
KARNATAKA



PHOTOS: SUPRIYA SEHGAL

▲ **Guiding Light:**
Built in 1901, this lighthouse provides a mesmerising view of the entire beach and shoreline with its Jain *basadis* and temples.

◀ **Worshipping Rights:**
The Gokarnatheshwara temple's importance in India's religious history is unique for the equality it brought among all faithfuls.

▼ **Magical Destination:**
Golden sands, blue sea and green coastline—Someshwar Beach in Ullal at the confluence of river and sea is a romantic's retreat.

The Coasts are Calling

Beat the winter blues with a beach holiday in coastal Karnataka.

BY RAVI SAGAR

Spring is in the air. The long damp, dark days of biting cold are come to a welcome end...well almost. The days are bright and warm and well the blues beckon—the lakes, the lagoons, the seas and the coasts. It's not the ubiquitous New Year destination Goa for a quick winter break but the pristine coasts of Karnataka that we are headed to. Coastal Karnataka, the almost 320 km of the most vivid coastal stretch of golden-white beaches and breathtaking sights that can ever be found in a single place! Bordered by the Arabian Sea on the west and bounded by the plains of Kerala on the south, Konkan on the north and Western Ghats on the east, coastal Karnataka has the most mesmerizing landscape that runs from



Mangalore in the south all the way to Gokarna in the north. Its miles of sandy coastline present a picturesque view with nary a manmade eyesore to scar nature's brow. The natural rock formations, coconut plantations and marshes add to the charm.

While Goa continues to captivate the young buccaneers, coastal Karnataka is reaching out to woo a different class of travellers with its serene charm—a largely offbeat destination on the itinerary of only the discerning traveller. If Kerala is

God's own country and a destination for its healing and rejuvenating ambience, and Goa, the revelers' paradise, coastal Karnataka is the thinking man's serene island—peaceful, unhurried and untouched. Coastal Karnataka is idyllic most parts of the year. Yet March to August is the best time to plan a visit to its many famous beach destinations. Most of the beaches are at an easy distance from Mangalore, which is the nearest airport and railway station. Mangalore is also well connected to all the major cities of Karnataka like Bengaluru, Shimoga, Hassan and Chickmagalur, via road.

Mangalore, called the gateway to Karnataka, is itself breathtaking in its quaint beauty. This former trading port is today one of the fastest developing cities in the country. Walk down the narrow lanes lined by quaint houses, a relic of their Portuguese and colonial past, fringed by palm fronds swaying gently in the sea breeze. It's like time stopped here to let the weary visitor rest a while in its green cocoon. The picture perfect postcard houses with red tiled sloping roofs that dot the countryside stand like silent sentinels to this melting pot of diversities. Mangalore is serene and calm and a homestay in one of the ancient villas is a perfect way to explore the many hued Mangalorean culture.

Take your time to explore the port town Mangalore, the seat of higher education with its many cultural cross currents, at leisure. Its exotic restaurants serve a mouthwatering variety of seafood while its religious circuit fascinates with its mix of architectural wonders. You have temples and mosques, churches and Jain *basadis* vying for your attention, each with its own unique historical and cultural significance. Myth blends with legend into a unique fascinating amalgamation. Aqua sports, a water park, nature park, boating, an artisans village, an arboretum and science centre, a golf course, a heritage home, and a cashew factory throw up a host of activities for as long as you stay. Do not forget to visit the tiles factory with its history and legend woven into its structure.

The beaches around Mangalore are secluded, waiting to be discovered. From the city, many of the other famous beaches, hill stations, heritage sites and temples are weekend getaways, given its strategic location. Karwar, though not near Mangalore (268 km), is ideally the best place to start exploring the enchanting beauties of Karnataka's coast. Blessed with many beaches, Karwar is a beach paradise with miles and miles of golden sand that the ocean laps up with its gentle waves,

FIVE KEY HIGHLIGHTS

1. HEIGHT OF FAITH



Murudeshwar boasts of the second tallest idol of Lord Shiva in the world. It is 123 ft high.

2. BEACH BUFFS



Tourists play a game of volleyball on the sparkling sands in the backdrop of foaming surf of the sea.

3. RED LEGACY



Introduced by a German missionary, the famous red tiles that define Mangalore's skyline.

4. DIVINE HALT



Ullal Masjid has an interesting history that draws the faithful from all religions.

5. REWARD!

The sea turns up a great catch for her hardworking sons at the end of the day.



Coining History: Learn your history through coins at the Numismatic and Notaphily Museum in Udupi.

a tranquil ambience that is yet untouched by the hurly burly of mainstream tourism. Soak in the sun, drink in the peace, commune with nature, meditate, read or spend some quality time with your companions. The backdrop of the rugged mountains and deep valleys of the Western Ghats adds a touch of mystery to the landscape. You can explore the hill stations and the valleys that are just a few hours' drive from the coast. Augumbe, Kemmangundi and Kodachadri are some of the hill stations along the way. Do hire a motor vehicle for this expedition if you are to explore all the hidden delights at leisure!

Once you have had your fill of its beaches (Karwar has five great island beaches, Devbagh being the best), you can explore the historically rich beach town. Take a boat trip across to the small island of Kurumgad, just 4 km off the mainland. For the devout there is the Narasimha temple topped by an unhindered view of the vast panorama formed by sea, sand and the neighbouring islands. Indulge your adventurous side with a bit of trekking, fishing, seal and dolphin spotting, boating or just laze around discovering the flora and fauna. While at Karwar, don't forget a trip to explore Sadashivgadhi Hill Fort with its abode of Durga, and the 300-year-old Venkatarama temple. It also has a famous architectural marvel, an octagonal church. Wrap up the day watching the sunset at dusk with a bonfire, barbeque and great seafood (you can catch and cook your own!).

The best time to visit Karwar is now—March to October. If you plan a longer stay, do include the famous Oyster Rock lighthouse, Dargah of Peer Shan Shamsuddin Kharobat, Kaju Bagh beach, Naganatha temple, scuba diving and Koodi Bagh beach in your list of places to visit when at Karwar. Who knows you may

▶ **Sea Lions:** Fishermen stand in harmony with the seascape with their nets making waves.



▶ **Sunset Point:** Tannir Bavi Beach, 12 km from Mangalore, is one of the best beaches of coastal Karnataka, especially for the sunset view.

even be inspired as was the bard of Shantiniketan, and discover the poet in you. Karwar beach is famously said to have inspired Rabindranath Tagore to write his first poem!

Gokarna, 60 km off Karwar and approximately 225 km from Mangalore, is the most famous coastal Karnataka township. Considered one of India's most sacred places, the beauty of this small town lies in its geographical location. It is surrounded by five beautiful beaches—Gokarna beach, Kudle beach, Om beach, Half Moon beach and Paradise beach. Add to it the natural scenic beauty of the hills and you are tempted to linger here and explore. The 1,500 years old Mahabaleshwara Temple, with its enchanting mythology, is the devotees' first stop. Gokarna, meaning cow's ears, is dotted with Hindu shrines and is a pilgrimage of great importance.

The scenic beauty too seems to have few parallels elsewhere. The virgin beaches and unspoilt landscape are breathtaking in their sheer beauty. The white sand beach of Kudle glows brilliantly, framed against the paler blue of the sky and the azure blue of the ocean. A mere 20-minute walk from Gokarna, this beach, fringed with palm trees, is a visitor's paradise.

The templescape or should one say the seascape at Murudeshwar is enchanting. Situated on Kanduka Giri, a hilltop, the temple is surrounded by the Arabian Sea on three sides. The picturesque spot is 165 km from Mangalore and is bounded by the undulating hills of Western Ghats on one side. A great picnic spot, the hill top itself offers an unforgettable view of the sunset. There is a fort behind the temple that is worth exploring as is the centuries old temple. A recent attraction is the second tallest Shiva idol in the world erected beside the temple.

The virgin beach of Malpe is 66 km from Mangalore. Malpe, an important fishing centre, packs its own attraction for local and inbound tourists. St Mary's island, a set of four islands just a boat ride across Malpe, is the added bonus of visiting Malpe. The islands are a geological monument and have natural rock formations of columnar basaltic lava.



▶ **Legendary Lady:** Church of Our Lady of Rosary of Mangalore, or Rosario Cathedral, is replete with history.

One of India's most beautiful beaches, Marawanthe village and beach, remains relatively untouched by tourism. This one is for those who seek solitude, the sunset, fishing, boat rides, and island visits to explore Nature at its best and wonder at the unique meeting of the river and the sea.

The small town of Ankola too has its share of great beaches like Belekeribeach, Nadibag, Gabitkeni, Hani Gudi beach, Honey beach and Keni beach for those looking to holiday away from commercial hotspots.

Kaup beach, our last call, is famous for its lighthouse—a must visit. I am keeping Kaup the last in my list of beaches on coastal Karnataka as this is also closest to Udupi, barely 12 km away. And no trip to coastal Karnataka can be complete without a visit to this thrumming-with-life temple township. Udupi may have granted its name to the world famous south Indian cuisine, but there's certainly more to it than *vadai*. For starters, its 14th century Krishna temple, which remains a major tourist destination. A short drive (58 km) from Mangalore, explore this coastal town, the seat of Marathas, the devotees of Lord Krishna.

If you are still inclined and have time on hand, take trips to Jain centres of pilgrimage at Karkala and Moodabidre. They promise to be enriching. ■