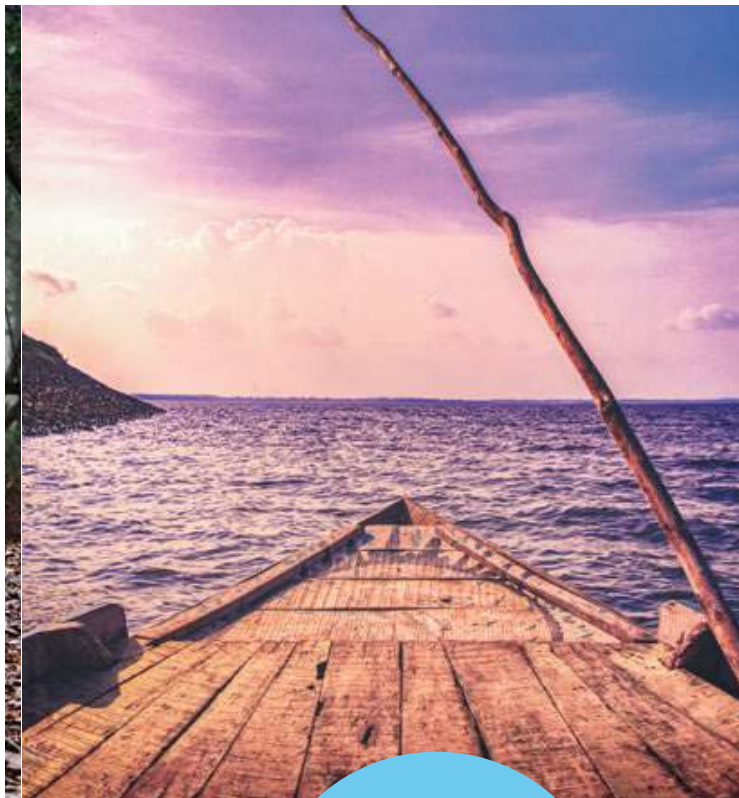


THE LONG WEEKEND GUIDE TO 2018

The current year has 16 long weekends, and we tell you how
to make the most of them. By Neeharika Satyavada







ABOVE AND RIGHT: Jim Corbett National Park was set up in 1936. Project Tiger was first launched here.



Jim Corbett is about 245 km from Delhi. GoAir operates direct flights to Delhi from Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune, Patna, Ranchi and Jammu, with convenient connections from other cities. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

JIM CORBETT

Hands down the most popular national park in the country, the Jim Corbett National Park is only six-odd hours from Delhi. Part of the larger Corbett Tiger Reserve, Jim Corbett is famed for its tiger population. In fact, it is here, the country's oldest established National Park, that the Project Tiger was first launched. Add to the magical landscape of Uttarakhand, the fact that this is the only place in India where you can stay the night in a jungle, in a snug old rest house, and you have an adventure on your hands.



ABOVE AND BELOW RIGHT: A stunning view of Jaipur, and the Hawa Mahal



JAIPUR

Rajasthan's largest city and its capital ranks number one, right up there with the Taj Mahal, for all foreign tourists wanting to visit India. Not only is this home to the country's biggest literature festival, but it is also the starting point for exploring more of Rajasthan, be it the painted *havelis* of Shekhawati, or the Thar Desert. Known for its UNESCO World Heritage Sites, striking palaces, sprawling forts and colourful bazaars, Jaipur is the perfect destination for a family holiday. Jaipur is 280 km from Delhi.

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GoAir operates direct flights to Jaipur from Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and Kolkata with convenient connections from Kochi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Goa. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in



Sunset in Dharamshala; make it a point to paraglide in Dharamshala



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Dharamshala is an eight-hour drive from Delhi. GoAir operates direct flights to Delhi from Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune, and Patna, among others, with convenient connections from other cities. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

DHARAMSHALA

Famous for a lot of things, Dharamshala is many things to many people. From monasteries, hip cafes and scenic trekking routes through the Dhauladhar mountains, Dharamshala has something to offer for every kind of traveller. There is much to do here – take delight in the distinctly Tibetan vibe of the place, or take a shot at being a hippie. And if one tires of this and craves a change of scene then there is McLeod Ganj to head to for the day. Dharamshala is 470 km from Delhi.



ABOVE AND BELOW RIGHT: Drive further and higher from Mussoorie and you are in Landour, home to Ruskin Bond



Landour is about 280 km from Delhi. GoAir operates direct flights to Delhi from Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune, Patna, Ranchi and Jammu, with convenient connections from other cities. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

LANDOUR

Bored of Mussoorie already! Drive on a little higher and you are in Landour. A British era cantonment town, which together with its twin town Mussoorie is crowned as the Queen of the Hills. From being home to Jim Corbett's parents once to today being Ruskin Bond's, Landour has always been distinctly more European than Mussoorie. So slow down in this quiet little hill station, go for walks among the cool conifers, indulge in delicious cheese pizzas that the town is famous for and take a break from the other often-frequented hill stations.



ABOVE AND BELOW RIGHT: Chail overlooks the Sutlej Valley, and the Chail Palace



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Chail is about 340 km from Delhi. GoAir operates direct flights to Delhi from Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune, Patna, Ranchi and Jammu, with convenient connections from other cities. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

CHAIL

Chail is a charming hill station overlooking the Sutlej Valley in Himachal Pradesh. Originally built as a summer retreat for the Maharaja of Patiala, it works as a worthy alternative to noisy and overcrowded Shimla. From exploring the Chail Palace for its splendid architecture to hiking all the way to Kali ka Tibba, or even venturing out as far as the Giri River for some angling, there is enough to keep one actively engaged here. This hill station of deodars and pines also boasts of being home to the world's highest cricket ground.



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Colourful Goa, where life is indeed a beach, never disappoints



GOA

The Portuguese called it the Rome of the East. One may of course agree or disagree but one cannot take away from the fact that Goa sure is the coolest place in India. Balmy beaches, weekly flea markets, wild parties and the smorgasbord of food make Goa a much sought-after destination. But there is so much more that Goa has to offer. Its venerable convents and churches and its fishing villages and spice plantations are all just waiting to be explored, slowly. Goa is 585 km from Mumbai.

GoAir
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GoAir operates direct flights to Goa from Bengaluru, Delhi and Mumbai, with easy connections from Ahmedabad, Jaipur and Patna, among others. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in



ABOVE AND BELOW RIGHT: Mahabaleshwar is especially lovely in the monsoon; Venna Lake



Mahabaleshwar is about 230 km from Mumbai airport. GoAir operates direct flights to Mumbai from Delhi, Bengaluru, Pune, Patna, Ranchi, and Srinagar among others. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

MAHABALESHWAR

Once favoured by the British, this hill station in the Sahyadris is one of the few evergreen forests in India. It is also the starting point of the River Krishna that flows through Maharashtra and three adjoining southern states, and there is an eight hundred-year-old temple dedicated to the river in Old Mahabaleshwar. With its vast strawberry fields, panoramic views of the surrounding valleys and the gorgeous waterfalls that dot them, Mahabaleshwar makes for the perfect monsoon road trip.



Lakes and waterfalls abound in Bhandardara



Bhandardara is about 165 km from Mumbai airport. GoAir operates direct flights to Mumbai from Delhi, Bengaluru, Pune, Patna, Ranchi, and Srinagar among others. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

BHANDARDARA

Trek routes and forts abound in Bhandardara, but it is the pre-monsoon 'fireflies camping' that has pushed it to the top of the weekend getaway list for the folks in Mumbai and Pune. Sitting on the banks of the River Pravara near Igatpuri, this verdant village has enough lakes, dams and waterfalls for one looking to unwind outdoors in the lap of nature. Maharashtra's most popular trek route to the state's highest peak, the Kalsubai Peak, also starts here, from the nearby village of Bari.



ABOVE AND BELOW RIGHT: A 110-km narrow gauge heritage railway is the best way to get to Asia's only automobile-free hill station; a golden langur



Matheran is about 100 km from Mumbai airport. GoAir operates direct flights to Mumbai from Delhi, Bengaluru, Pune, Patna, Ranchi, and Srinagar among others. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

MATHERAN

Asia's only automobile-free hill station is also India's smallest. Matheran is a popular weekend getaway for Mumbaikars whenever they feel the need to disconnect. An ecosensitive area, the whole of Matheran is luxuriantly green, covered in dense evergreen trees, and its lakes, parks and numerous viewpoints are best explored on foot. It is not uncommon to see butterflies everywhere, or spot a wide variety of wildlife from the giant squirrel to golden langurs. Getting here by the 110 year-old narrow gauge heritage Matheran Hill Railway from Neral will only add to the experience.



ABOVE AND BELOW RIGHT: A pathway along the sea at Digha, and Digha Beach

KOLKATA



Digha is about 165 km from Kolkata. GoAir operates direct flights to Kolkata from Ahmedabad, Chennai, Bhubaneshwar, Delhi, Hyderabad, Jaipur and Patna, among other cities, with convenient connections from Srinagar and several other cities. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in



DIGHA

One of the most popular weekend getaways from Kolkata, this coastal resort town in West Bengal is known for its mellow sunsets and shallow sand beaches. Digha also has lush green parks and lakes that are just perfect for an idyllic amble. Add to this the delightfully painted Shiva temple at Chandaneswar, where the annual fair draws people from all over West Bengal during Chaitra, the last month of the Bengali calendar, and you have the ideal itinerary for a quick refreshing weekend.



ABOVE AND BELOW RIGHT: Tea estates in Darjeeling; and Darjeeling-Himalayan Railway



Darjeeling is about 615 km from Kolkata. GoAir operates direct flights to Kolkata from Ahmedabad, Chennai, Bhubaneswar, Delhi, Hyderabad, Jaipur and Patna, among other cities, with convenient connections from Mumbai and several other cities. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

DARJEELING

Darjeeling has long been one of the most loved hill stations in India, thanks to its pretty tea estates, the views of the Kanchenjunga it affords and the iconic Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. Take the 137 year-old toy train through the foothills of the Himalayas to India's highest railway station at Ghum. The journey on the narrow gauge heritage train affords several delights such as spotting wild orchids and cutting through denser oak forests. Once in Darjeeling, sip on some black tea and stroll along the charming little lanes of this quaint old town and be enchanted by the mock Tudor residences, Gothic churches and the Buddhist pagodas.



Zang Dhok Palri Phodang monastery



Kalimpong is about 625 km from Kolkata. GoAir operates direct flights to Kolkata from Ahmedabad, Chennai, Bhubaneshwar, Delhi, Hyderabad, Jaipur and Patna, among other cities, with convenient connections from Srinagar and several other cities. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

KALIMPONG

Famed for its impressive colonial-era buildings, Kalimpong sits across from Darjeeling, on the other side of the River Teesta. Surprisingly, it isn't the tea plantations that draw people to this east Indian hill town, but its flowers and cacti. The absolutely brilliant array of orchids and gladioli do not just adorn the local flower markets here, but are a major source of export revenue. So, head out to the nurseries, check out their impressive cacti cultivation, walk along the sloping pathways in the backdrop of the Kanchenjunga, shop for Tibetan jewellery, and eat noodles and cheese in this charming little town.



ABOVE AND BELOW RIGHT: Auroville in Pondy, and the colours of the French part of the town



PONDICHERRY

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Pondicherry is approximately 180 km from Chennai airport. GoAir operates direct flights to Chennai from Mumbai, Port Blair, Kochi and Pune, with convenient connections from Delhi, Lucknow, Chandigarh and Ahmedabad. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

They say if you can't afford a ticket to Europe, travel to Pondicherry instead. Stroll through the French part of the town where the cafes are cool and inviting at every turn. Or wander through the streets on the Tamil side to absorb the distinctive Franco-Tamil culture of the place. Pay a visit to Auroville to experience life in this utopian community, meditate in the Matrimandir and shop for eco-friendly products. Take a short drive to Arikamedu, an ancient Roman archaeological site, or to the Fossil Forest in Tiruvakkarai. Or simply sit on the edge of the rocky beach and let a sense of tranquillity wash over you.



ABOVE AND BELOW RIGHT: The group of 7th and 8th century monuments at Mahabalipuram is a World Heritage site

CHENNAI



GoAir
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Mahabalipuram is approximately 60 km from Chennai airport. GoAir operates direct flights to Chennai from Mumbai, Port Blair, Kochi and Pune, with convenient connections from Delhi, Lucknow, Chandigarh and Ahmedabad. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

MAHABALIPURAM

Renowned for its ancient monuments dating back to the seventh and eighth centuries, Mahabalipuram is home to numerous Hindu temples that together form a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The most famous of these are the five Rathas dedicated to the Pandavas of the *Mahabharata* and the elephantine open-air rock relief which is the Descent of the Ganges, also known as Arjuna's Penance. Today, this ancient seaside town is buzzing with surfers that make a beeline for it in their quest for big waves.



ABOVE AND BELOW RIGHT: Pamban Bridge; and Ramanathaswamy Temple



Rameswaram is approximately 540 km from Chennai airport. GoAir operates direct flights to Chennai from Mumbai, Port Blair, Kochi and Pune, with convenient connections from Delhi, Lucknow, Chandigarh and Ahmedabad. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

RAMESWARAM

A major Hindu pilgrimage sites, Rameswaram is where Rama worshipped Eswara or Shiva. It is also believed that it was from here that he built the bridge to Lanka to bring back Sita after defeating Ravana. But it is the Ramanathaswamy Temple here that brings most of the travellers to this 'site' from the *Ramayana*. Visit it for its fantastic architecture and its many sculpted corridors. The outer corridor alone has over a thousand carved pillars that taper off into what looks like an exquisitely painted tunnel. Or, go and enjoy the scenic beauty of the Pamban Island on which this town is located. And if you are up to some adventure, Rameswaram is also an ideal place to go kite-surfing.



ABOVE AND BELOW RIGHT: Meenakshi temple;
Thirumalai Nayakkar Mahal Palace

CHENNAI



GoAir
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Madurai is approximately 460 km from Chennai airport. GoAir operates direct flights to Chennai from Mumbai, Port Blair, Kochi and Pune, with convenient connections from Delhi, Lucknow, Chandigarh and Ahmedabad. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

MADURAI

One of the oldest cities in India, Madurai is Tamil Nadu's pride and the illustrious Meenakshi Amman temple here is truly a marvel. One cannot help but lose oneself among the labyrinthine courtyards of this sprawling temple complex of immense proportions. Its fourteen Dravidian style *gopurams* etched in beautiful detail and intense colour dominate the city's skyline. So striking is this temple that it has even inspired many a movie set. One can combine this trip with a short detour to Kodaikanal.



Fort Dansborg



Tranquebar is approximately 277 km from Chennai airport. GoAir operates direct flights to Chennai from Mumbai, Port Blair, Kochi and Pune, with convenient connections from Delhi, Lucknow, Chandigarh and Ahmedabad. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

TRANQUEBAR

Tharangambadi ('Place of the singing waves') was the first Danish trading post in India and in a Danish twist to its original name, it came to be called Tranquebar. Just like Pondicherry, here, too, you will find an eclectic mix of two cultures coming together. So there are the lyrical singing waves and swaying palms of the Tamil Nadu coast line, but there are also the Dansborg Fort and a New Jerusalem Church to explore.