



RUN TO THE HILLS

What do you get when you combine a long, wide highway, 20 hairpin bends and the Jaguar XE? Read on and find out.

ROAD TRIPS. THE very term brings about visions of open roads, fast-moving scenery, great music and happiness. Road trips are simply the best way to really explore a place. You get a glimpse of the local life. You get to see the quirks that make each place unique. You get to stop over when you feel like it for a taste of the local delicacies. But most of all, you get to drive. You get to power up the road in the car you love and enjoy the feeling of freedom and control all at the same time. It's a rush.

But then, how road trips are done is just as

important as the activity itself. You need the right road. A good mix of straights and twists on smooth tarmac. Some fast winding sections so you can feel like you're on a special stage of a rally. Maybe even a nice destination at the end of that great road. And yes, there are enough examples of roads like this available in India. The one we chose for this drive was the road from Coimbatore to Salem and on to the beautiful hill station of Yercaud.

Next, we needed the perfect car for the job. It had to be something special. A car that was trustworthy,

comfortable, and sporty. One that had enough power and the handling capabilities this road would require. A car that was refined enough to iron out any imperfections in the road but aggressive enough to make the drive an incredible amount of fun. That car was the Jaguar XE.

THE DRIVE

The easiest way to get to Yercaud is to fly into Coimbatore and then drive towards Salem via NH544. A highlight of this 167km route is that the



highway between these two places is long, straight, and wide. It is the perfect place to stretch the XE's legs. The punchy response from the XE's 2.0-litre diesel engine put a smile on our face as soon as we set off. The ride felt beautifully balanced between sporty and supple. The two hours we took to cover the distance went by a little too quickly.

PIT-STOP

An enjoyable drive really takes the focus away from everything else. Soon, a rumble from our bellies brought attention to the fact that we were running on empty and needed a pit-stop to refuel. While there are plenty of restaurants along the way that serve delicious local food, we were on our way to the highly recommended Mangala Vilas hotel in Advaith. To get there, we had to navigate narrow lanes and tight bends. We headed into the narrow streets with our trusty steed.



“ THE JAGUAR XE WAS BUILT TO BE DRIVEN BY PEOPLE WHO LOVE CARS AND LOVE DRIVING.”



Smooth, winding roads through the woods are a drivers delight.

The serene Yercaud lake offers a great break away from the hustle of city life.



20 hairpin bends, a road that feels like it belongs in a rally stage and a rewarding view at the end; this is a special place for all drivers.

Its compact dimensions and easy manoeuvrability made the going surprisingly easy. We were stuffing ourselves with mutton pepper fry and essence (a rather unique curry) with egg dosa in no time at all. While we heartily recommend these dishes, we must warn all those who try them to be ready for a good spice hit.

POST-LUNCH NAP?

Not when we had the XE and the most exciting section of the road ahead of us. 20 tight hairpin bends climbing all the way from Salem's 912 ft above sea level to Yercaud at 4970 ft above sea level waited for us. And what a drive it was. The quick and brilliant steering and the beautifully balanced suspension turned our time on those curvy roads into pure joy. We attacked each corner with intense enthusiasm. A flick of the paddles, a nice surge of torque and a slide from the back-end just added to the adrenaline rush. The instant power delivery, tight cornering and excellent grip let us feel we were driving a sports car and not a saloon. Through every bend, the car kept inspiring us to go a little faster. Adding to the experience were the super smooth roads with lovely wide switchbacks that allowed us to see ahead. This meant that we despite our slightly aggressive driving, we were always sure of our safety. There were certain sections where the road narrowed to about one-car width, and we had to exercise caution for those parts. But driving this



Behind the wheel of a fun machine is where you want to be on a road trip like this.

section was thoroughly enjoyable. Another thing was also clear. The Jaguar XE was built to be driven by people who love cars and love driving. What a rush.

LAKESIDE SERENITY

And all too soon, we had arrived at our destination. The temperature felt like it had dropped by about 10 degrees and the air felt clean, crisp and fresh. And the beautiful hill station of Yercaud was waiting to be explored. We made our way to the oddly named ladies point, gents point and pagoda point which are three structures a few feet away on the same hill. For the slightly adventurous, there's another place for a great view - the JRT trails skywalk. Located

near the 20th hairpin at the top of the ghat, this glass gangwalk lets you feel like you're floating high above the ground. But it can get scary for those afraid of heights. Another popular spot is the lake where a boat can be hired for some peaceful floating about.

If the peace and quiet get a little too much, there's a beautiful 31km loop road that goes from the lakeside to wooded areas and sections with plantations on both sides of the road. With many tight, winding sections this road is a driver's delight. We had an absolute blast tearing through it. There was no better way to end the day. The only thing to look forward to was the rush of attacking the drive downhill.