



#TRAVEL

# The hills where silence stares back at you

You don't really know how loud your life is until it gets quiet. The kind of quiet that doesn't come with noise-cancelling headphones or a do-not-disturb button, but the real, unsettling silence of no signal.

An incomplete plan and sheer desperation to escape the daily urban grind is where we got the idea for the trip. We packed as light as possible, a phone and a few board games to keep us entertained. The idea was simple: to stop scrolling through the endless feed.

As the car drove deeper into the hills, the signal bars began to fall like flies. As the bars were going down, we ensured to utilise the chance to inform our families about being safe. Even to think that we are going to be completely off the grid was surreal. Then the moment came, two bars, one bar, then none!

That is when a strange kind of worry set in. No texts from chat groups. No alerts. No quick Google searches to get

rid of awkward pauses. I was in a car with my wife and a couple of friends, and we shared a look, and we knew this was all we had for the next two days.

When we finally reached our destination, it didn't welcome us with any fanfare. The only way to commute there was by boat. No resorts, no influencers posing with straw hats. Just hills, houses on stilts, and a silence that stared back. Our host served lunch. Fish from the stream, vegetables from the garden, rice that tasted alive. No fancy presentation. No photo filter required. Food that filled you up in more ways than one.

The first few hours were restless. My hand kept reaching for the phone, but with no signal to feed the itch, the mind slowly started to soak up the other side

of the spectrum — the serenity.

We sat on a bamboo porch, sipping tea that could wake the dead, and watched the cloud come and go. By night, the power went out.

We thought all we had were the board games until we actually looked up and saw the stars giving the hills a whole new character.

We decided to take a boat ride. A wooden boat drifts across in the slow current of the river. For sound, there were just water splashes and hills full of crickets creating the most natural white noise. That's when you realise how small you are, how loud your life has been, how little all those notifications actually matter. My wife leaned back, just looking up, and whispered, "This is insane." She was right.

The hills stripped us down. Not in a

spiritual, preachy way. More like it forced us to look at ourselves without the noise. My friend, the reel addict, admitted she didn't miss it once. At first, the stillness seemed overwhelming to me, but after it sank in, it felt like a reset button I didn't realise I needed.

We didn't bring back any souvenirs. Sure, a few snaps. But the most important thing was how light we felt. It's a special type of lightness that comes when you finally quit carrying other people's noise.

The fact is that the hills will not provide you with luxurious hotels or planned activities. It won't care for your hashtags or your reels. What it will give you is space. The kind that makes you squirm at first, but eventually sets you free.

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