

# ANDHRA PRADESH'S FIRST WILD ORCHIDARIUM TO COME UP IN VISAKHAPATNAM SOON

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A view of the orchidarium being planned by the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department in Visakhapatnam. The orchidarium is a part of the Eastern Ghats Biodiversity Centre that is coming up soon. | Photo Credit: KR Deepak

A line up of beautiful orchids with delicate blooms from the forests of the Eastern Ghats will soon find a home in an orchidarium. The scientifically designed orchidarium, planned by the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department in Visakhapatnam, is a part of the Eastern Ghats Biodiversity Centre. This centre, a first of its kind project in Andhra Pradesh by the forest department, is coming up near the ACA VDCA Cricket Stadium area bordering the Kambalakonda Wildlife Sanctuary.

A view of the orchidarium being planned by the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department in Visakhapatnam. The orchidarium is a part of the Eastern Ghats Biodiversity Centre that is coming up soon. | Photo Credit: KR Deepak

The beautifully developed orchidarium brings to light a delightful ecosystem showcasing the colourful world of orchids. A gate designed with images of animals of the Eastern Ghats welcomes one to the vast green oasis perched along the busy National Highway 16. A little away from the gate is a nursery that nurtures native plants accompanied by a board that gives details about the species. Near the bed of plants is an enclosed dome structure, which is the new orchidarium with an automated mist chamber.

A view of the orchidarium being planned by the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department in Visakhapatnam. The orchidarium is a part of the Eastern Ghats Biodiversity Centre that is coming up soon. | Photo Credit: KR Deepak

At the orchidarium, rows of blooms sway gingerly, rustled by a summer breeze. About 20 species of orchids found in the Eastern Ghats including the cooktown orchid, moon orchid, dancing lady orchid and eight varieties of vanda orchids can be seen here. "The orchidarium is designed by a team of four landscape experts from Chennai in a way that it is a self sustaining environment with controlled humidity, ventilation and light exposure. The automated mist chamber maintains the temperature at 27 degree Celsius," says Anant Shankar, district forest officer.

It is estimated that there are as many as 25,000 varieties of naturally occurring orchids in the world. Of these, more than 1,300 species of wild orchids are recorded in India. However, the focus of the orchidarium is to highlight the varieties found in the Eastern Ghats, a region where the flora has remained less explored and documented.

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“The orchidarium is a big terrarium that houses plant species which support the natural ecosystem in which orchids flourish,” says Yagnapathy Adari, project scientist working with AP Forest Department.

There is a circular walkway which takes one through the orchidarium. The soil has a top layer of dense, knotty green moss that helps retain water or moisture. “It takes about one month for the plant to establish and the flower to bloom. The orchid flower stays fresh for 20 days before they wither away,” adds Yagnapathy. To mimic the natural ecosystem, geckos, centipedes, butterfly larva and caterpillars are being introduced at the orchidarium.

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The new orchidarium is expected to help researchers study orchid varieties of the region at one repository. “It will serve as a knowledge centre for ex situ conservation of orchids and for students and scientists who want to study the flora of the Eastern Ghats,” says Anant and adds, “For the public, this will be an introduction to the world of orchids. We are currently working on designing knowledge boards on orchids for the public.”

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While the orchidarium is almost ready, work is going on to develop other sections of the Eastern Ghats Biodiversity Centre. “So far, a total investment of 2 crore has been done, mainly through CSR funding. The entire project is expected to be ready in the next two to three months,” adds Anant. The centre will also have a dedicated building that will highlight the ecosystem of the Eastern Ghats and there are areas earmarked to conduct workshops, and for a souvenir shop. A ficus garden and a medical plants nursery will soon be added.

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As part of the conservation of native plants, seeds of around 120 species collected from the forests of Anantagiri and Chodavaram regions will be raised at the nursery, which is a part of the newly-developed centre. As of now, only 36 species have been successfully raised. “The seed collection process is currently underway. We are training the staff to identify some unconventional but non-invasive native species to be raised in the nursery,” says Anant.

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