

Battle of the train tracks



Pick someone who was raised in the dry, 49°C summers of Central India. Plonk her down in Chennai's humid breeze. Give her the simple task of commuting from home to office. And you will witness a terrifying spectacle. I have seen auto drivers recoil in horror as I clamber in. I have seen friends stop in panic, mid-street, to ask if I'm having a fit. I have seen a train carriage full of people take two steps back when I hop on board. In technical terms, I sweat and my hair gets frizzy. In real terms, I make Medusa look like a demure damsel and goat cheese smell like a garden in springtime, in comparison. And I'm not the only one, Chennai. You think that stinking uncle in the bus likes your glares? That the sweaty aunty bumping into you in a train wants to be that way? None of us chose this: it's how we were born, and the world punishes us for it. Except in the Metrorail. Oh, the joy of a cool breeze throughout the daily commute! MRTS lovers can wax eloquent about the sights of the city and the smell of the sea, but many would choose comfort, speed and self-respect instead. At least now we have that choice. The choice of travelling from Egmore to Little Mount to Anna Nagar, for a cost lower than a plate of chicken 65. Or just from Mount Road to Chennai Central for ₹10, dignity intact. Sure, the bus is ₹5 cheaper, but the absence of a 20-minute wait under the sun must be worth something. And it is, if rush-hour crowds are any indication. Central Metrorail's escalators carry people as tightly packed as sardines. That's when the AC is a double advantage: for some people, deodorant is not enough.

— **Meghna Majumdar** is cursed to forever oscillate between the humidities of Kolkata and Chennai, but would rather die of dehydration in Nagpur



You want to talk about sweat? Let's talk about sweat. Take nearly 100 people, all freshly anointed with their bodily secretions and stuff them inside an enclosed carriage. Not exactly a heavenly smell, yes?

The Metrorail might be the shiny new toy everybody wants to play, and take selfies with, but the local trains have been ferrying us back and forth across Chennai for years. When you're inside an MRTS train, you don't need to be babied by air conditioning, the wind will be going 60 kilometres per hour against you, all for ₹5. The best joys of life

are simple: and one of them is resting your head against the train window, taking in the sights of a city you've come to love.

Chat up the woman stitching jasmine garlands, make silly faces at the child beside you, get into a heated political debate with a *thatha*, even peep into the WhatsApp screen of that blushing boy. Try doing any of that in the silence of Metrorail, and people will look at you as if you flew to London to burp in front of the Queen. Instead, you must continue looking at the same three posts on Instagram, because oh wait, you don't have any network inside.

Each station of the MRTS line has a personality. Greenways Road screams rebellion with its graffiti. Lighthouse sits pretty as sunlight blinks in through its roof, Velachery is a painting of blue skies and green fields. Why, you have even learnt to read 'Chepauk' upside down ever since the signboard upturned. Readers, don't ferret yourself into a soulless steel container when you could be tapping into the beating heart of Chennai.

— **Sweta Akundi** is not to be disturbed when she's by a train window, daydreaming of seducing Hozier in an Irish pub. Unless her stop is here.

(Where we pit two Chennai icons against each other)