

For these children from the hills, a train ride is a ticket to the world

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Chennai: For Nagaraj from Agnibavi in Erode district, an 1895 model of Fowler steam ploughing engine at Chennai Rail Museum seems the ideal train as it has bigger wheels compared to those that run on the tracks. Boopathi, another student from Vilan Kombai from TN Palayam in Erode, said toy trains were more fun than bigger trains. The sight of the engines and coaches thrilled them. They climbed atop these engines, and hopped off of them with ease.

These 50 students studying in special schools established under National Child Labour Project undertook their first train journey from Erode to Chennai on Friday. Most of these children are seeing such engines for the first time.

Boopathi said many of the students didn't sleep during their train journey.

"We chatted and played throughout our journey. A train it was very different from a bus," he said.

Many of these students re-



OLD, BUT FOR THEM IT'S NEW: Children studying in special schools in Erode visited the rail museum. Most of them were hooked onto the steam engines of yore

side in hilly areas near Anthiyur in Erode. "There are no railway tracks near our area and we have not seen a train before," said another student.

Sudar, a non-governmental organisation which runs the special schools, organised this trip for the children. "The kids travel along with their parents wherever they go for job. Many of them drop out after completing eighth standard to work in sugarcane fi-

elds. We arranged for this trip to inspire them to pursue school education and wanted to give them some exposure," said S C Nataraj, director of Sudar. "Some children studying in our special schools have never travelled in buses. So, we used to take them for bus trips. Now, it has moved onto travelling in trains, metro rail and visiting planetarium, rail museum and the Marina," he said.