

Travel & Living



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POWERED BY EARTH

As the clamour for protecting our home planet grows louder, hotels are doing their bit by turning eco-friendly. **Gustasp & Jeroo Irani** list out a few eco-resorts that are worth checking out...



A villa in Coco Shambhala villa, Sindhudurg; (below) a tea-inspired plate of food in Kurumba Resort



A 'welcome cart' in Reni Pani Jungle Lodge. PHOTOS BY AUTHORS

Go Green' is the new buzzword. Many hotels, resorts and lodges across the country have save-the-planet programmes in place. Water recycling and waste treatment plants, zero-plastic initiatives, offering guests the option of not replacing bed linen and towels... the schemes are many. However, there are some that have gone the extra eco-friendly mile and the selection below examines the ingenious work that a few of these hoteliers have done:

Au naturel at Coco Shambhala

When we mounted the red laterite steps to our hilltop villa in Coco Shambhala, located in Sindhudurg, South Maharashtra, we felt like a curtain was being slowly drawn aside to reveal nature's drama unfolding on a limitless stage. Hemmed by tropical foliage, our villa's open-sided living area embraced vistas of the white swathe of Bhogave Beach. A cluster of four 2-bedroom villas on stilts that come with private infinity pools, Coco Shambhala is a luxury boutique property that seems to have soft-landed on earth.

Giles Knapton, owner, architect and designer rolled into one, who spent years trekking the picturesque coastline of Sindhudurg in search of an Edenesque location, told us. "We didn't put a road into the site. The project was put together manually to reduce the impact on the environment and to allow us to dismantle the villas at any point." The local construction crew was subsequently trained to work in housekeeping, gardening and as waitstaff. The resort's understated interiors are

adorned with recycled and vintage artefacts and handmade coconut wood furniture. Coconut wood is recyclable for a tree has a 70-year life cycle. In Giles's words: "I'm driven by two things, the creativity brought out by a challenging environment and location, and the opportunity to create a living space in harmony with its surroundings."

Visit: www.cocoshambhala.com/luxury-villa-hotel-in-sindhudurg/



The light footprint of Reni Pani Jungle Lodge

Reni Pani Jungle Lodge is a dun-coloured complex of cottages and tents that sprawls across 15 acres, on the outskirts of Satpura National Park and Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh.

The lodge exudes rustic chic but conceals a world of comfort within. Reni Pani offers its guests a bouquet of unique earth-friendly options. Night patrol in the buffer zone, anyone? How about a walking safari or a mobile one?

We opted for the night patrol: checked out the pugmarks of a stealthy leopard; a pack of watchful wild dogs was briefly caught in the glare of our guide's spotlight; and in the gathering darkness, we thought we saw a sloth bear lope away in

a thicket. Next day, at the crack of dawn, we embarked on a walking safari with a naturalist from Reni Pani and a forest guard, armed with a stick, pepper spray and a blow horn.

We walked across a dry river bed and felt the feral spirit of the silent forest in the mangled remains of a kill and gorgeously coloured birds... We will return one day to experience mobile camping, The Satpura Under Canvas, Pachmarhi Trail, where one gets to explore tiger country on foot, leaving no evidence of human presence behind.

Visit: www.jehannuma.com/reni-pani-jungle-lodge/

Traditional living at The Grand Dragon Ladakh

We stayed at The Grand Dragon Ladakh during a hushed, muffled winter when the hotel served as a beacon of light and warmth in Leh, Ladakh. Located at an intimidating 11,562 ft, its Tibetan-Buddhist-Ladakh-style architecture seemed to proudly assert its identity as a timeless icon.

Wafted by a sense of history, The Grand Dragon Ladakh, the region's first luxury hotel, is also wheelchair-accessible, solar-powered, and centrally heated. It is the brainchild of brothers, Ghulam Mustafa and Ghulam Mohiuddin. (Ghulam Mustafa is billed as Ladakh's first modern artist.)

This 76-room hotel has dexterously woven into its sinews, the region's artistic traditions: traditional carved dragons at the entrance; the exquisite pine-wood

carved balconies and windows which open up to field views of nature's largesse; teak wood ceilings and carved cornices; walls that glow with Ghulam Mustafa paintings and precious artefacts like *perak*, the turquoise-coloured headgear worn by local women; Ladakhi silk called *koshen*, and plush brocades; ornate copper and silver tea kettles...

The Zasgyth coffee shop's gilded interiors frame views of the ageless mountains, drawing our gaze heavenwards, as always happens in Ladakh.

Visit: www.thegranddragonladakh.com

Nature Resorts: Small is beautiful

It was once a spice plantation, and still is. Kurumba Village Resort in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, the flagship of Nature Resorts, is suffused with the rich fragrance of spices... It wafts through the tribal-style cottages and suites that have been grafted along meandering pathways, without cutting a single tree. Named after the Kurumbas, a forgotten tribe that lived in sync with nature, the resort is as eco-friendly as they come. Care and concern for nature have also been embedded into the DNA of the other properties managed by the group. Three abandoned plantation bungalows now house Tea Nest, an eight-room tea-themed homestay in the middle of a tea estate in Upper Coonoor where it is not uncommon to see wild gaur stroll past. The two-suite Tea Nest Annex, down a leafy winding road, was once a dilapidated cottage that has been tastefully restored.

Likewise, in the neighbouring hill town of Kotagiri in the Nilgiris, the group transformed a vintage cottage into a charming four-room retreat — Tea Nest Nightingale — that has

a prized view of rolling hills carpeted with tea plantations.

Tea tasting, tea menus where every dish has an element of tea in it, treetop dining, plantation tours... Going a step beyond the standard eco-friendly features, Nature Resorts offers its guests unique ways to connect with the land and its bounty.

Visit: www.natureresorts.in



A pool in Kurumba Village Resort in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu

FEEDBACK

We'd like to hear from you. Do mail us at: dhtravel@deccanherald.co.in

Pench Tree Lodge: Tarzan's paradise

Tarzan would have loved it and felt right at home, checking into one of the six treehouses at Pench Tree Lodge in Pench National Park in Madhya Pradesh. Sitting in an air-conditioned bedroom 18 ft above the ground, he would have nodded his approval as large French windows offered him a commanding view of the property (which also has six cottages) where nature was given a free hand to do the gardening.

He would probably regret the fact that there were no vines to swing on, but would have loved to wake up each morning to bird song and scouting the waterhole in the lodge for pugmarks to see which wild animals — deer, wild-

boar, leopard — had stopped by to have a drink at night and graze in the private wilderness of the property. Then he would stop to admire dew drops strung like diamonds on a spider's web and take a sip of filtered water from the re-usable metal bottle presented to him — as also to other guests — at the reception desk when he first checked in. Yes, he would welcome this simple and ingenious gesture that ensures that the jungle he so loves is not littered with plastic bottles.

Come evening, he would set off on a safari to say hello to his family of wild animals living in the national park, and regale those who care enough to listen about the joys of dossing down in a luxurious treehouse.

Visit: www.penchtreelodge.com



Pench Tree Lodge, Madhya Pradesh

“Water recycling, zero-plastic initiatives, offering guests the option of not replacing bed linen... eco-friendly initiatives are aplenty.**”**