



The Machan Lonavala

BY RESHMA KRISHNAN

Living in cities, most of us don't even know what true solitude means. The Machan is an abode that wants you to find out. After a few hair-pin bends we entered a dense path, deep in the forests of Lonavala, that transported us to a small open reception deck on stilts and a sanctuary of stillness; not a soul in sight.

ODE TO ECOLOGICAL TOURISM

Situated only two hours away from Mumbai and an hour from Pune, The Machan is built on 25 acres of tropical cloud forest. Their flagship three-bedroom tree house, The Heritage Machan, hangs 45 ft above the ground and has been built around the branches of an ancient fig tree, which ensured that the tree, a site of worship for locals and a favorite with birds, remained unharmed.

After an effortless check in, we were taken to The Canopy Machan, via a small pathway in the woods and then a green spiral staircase. The

Canopy Machans are built on platforms 30 ft off the ground and are divided into a bedroom, a skylit bathroom and a large wooden viewing deck that affords you a splendid view of the valley. We spent the first five minutes marveling at the ingenuity of it all and the next hour watching the sunset over the green valley while we tucked into delectable onion *bhajias* and chilli cheese toast that arrived within 20 minutes, remarkable as a kitchen was nowhere in the vicinity.

DINING EXPERIENCE

For dinner we chose the private dining experience. Our wooden deck had been transformed into tree top restaurant for two complete with white tablecloth, flickering candles and Bach, courtesy of the ipod doc. Dinner was a medley of simple but delicious home-style chicken curry, steamed rice, *dal*, *roti*, *paneer masala*, and deep-fried *okra*. Our personal waiter was so discreet; our plates seemed to be helping themselves. Great service lies in the details. Like getting into bed on a cold night, rubbing your frozen feet against the duvet only to find it deliciously warm courtesy of a hot water bottle kept there during turndown service.

The tree houses at the Machan offer a bird's eye view of the surroundings

ACTIVITIES

The next morning we decided to explore the four kilometers of private paths. The best part about the walk were the intermittent resting points by way of tree houses, perfect for that mid-trek nap. If you're lucky perhaps your guide will be a resident naturalist who will introduce you to birding as numerous species call The Machan their home. Other activities include stargazing at night or visiting nearby historical sights like Koraigad Fort. The Machan makes you realise the following adage is as true for vacations as for life. Take the road less travelled and it makes all the difference.

At a Glance

WHAT: A luxury ecological tree house resort.

WHERE: Forest of Lonavala

tel: (022) 3063 5133, (0) 95940 53113

COST: ₹25,000 a night for Heritage Machan (sleeps 4-6). ₹10,000 a night for Canopy Machan. Tariff is dependent on seasons and days of week.

VERDICT: Perfect nature getaway.