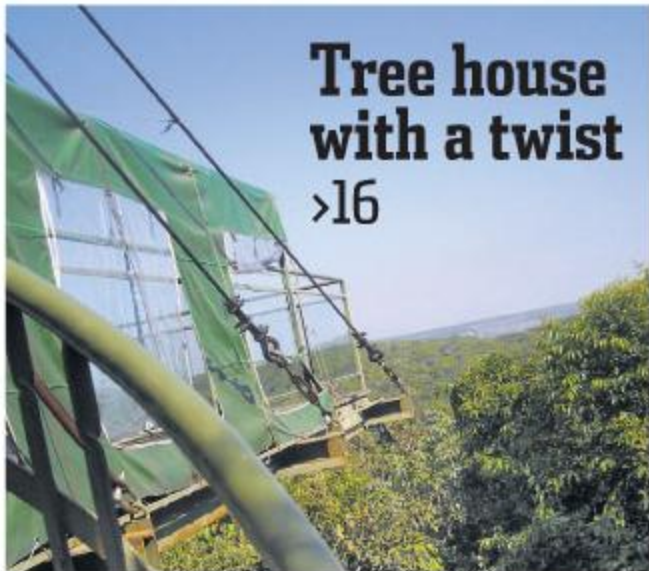


TRIP

Tree house with a twist >16



Cliffhanger

A large green tent structure is suspended by cables over a dense forest canopy. A spiral ladder leads up to the tent. The tent has a green tarp roof and clear plastic walls. The forest below is lush and green, with hills visible in the background under a clear blue sky.

HOW ABOUT A WEEKEND SPENT HANGING IN THE ATMOSPHERE, 30 FEET OFF THE FOREST FLOOR IN THE SAHYADRI HILLS, WITH LITTLE DISTRACTION EXCEPT AN ORCHESTRA OF CRICKETS ACCOMPANIED BY THE OCCASIONAL CALL OF THE LARGE GREEN BARBET? pg> 16

It takes serious balance to go up a spiral ladder that hoists you to the 800 sq feet Camp Canopy tent that houses a bedroom, bathroom and private deck at The Machan. [PIC/TINAZ NOOSHIAN](#)

TRIP

THE FOREST BREATHES BELOW US

PEACE COMES DROPPING SLOWLY (YEATS WAS RIGHT), AND AT A PRICE (HE DIDN'T MENTION THAT ONE). A WEEKEND IN A TREE HOUSE IN A 'PRIVATE' 25-ACRE TROPICAL FOREST IS THE STUFF DREAMS ARE MADE OF (OR REALITY, IF YOU ARE THIS WRITER). HERE'S WHY A STAY AT THE MACHAN SHOULD MAKE IT TO THE 20-PLACES-TO-EXPERIENCE-BEFORE-YOU-DIE INVENTORY

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It was for the third time that I was experiencing the feeling. Clawing up the slick trunk of a Gulmohar as a 17 year-old at boarding school, balancing on the Y of its strapping branches; its orange canopy of flowers turning the pages of the book I was reading from pale grey to warm carrot.

Teetering at one end of the Canopy Walk at Mt. Kinabalu Park, Sabah, Malaysia, aware that a few sturdy wooden planks interlaced with ropes were all that separated me from the forest floor, a 100 feet below.

Resting my chin on the railing of a wooden deck of a luxury safari tent hoisted 30 feet above the ground, eyes unsuccessfully searching for a glimpse of the earth through a crown of wild evergreen trees in the Sahyadri Hills.

On its website, it calls itself a 'unique resort'. What The Machan actually is, is a test in lonesomeness. On a 25-acre private forest at Jambulne, a 2.5 hour drive from Mumbai, stands a tree house that shares a relationship with the fig tree it has depended on for three years. A nut and bolt steel structure clad in wood, it's

designed to withstand earthquakes, and wind speeds of up to 200 kmph that are as frequent in the region as the cricket call. No machines were used while erecting it. No trees were felled, say the owners. With photovoltaic panels and wind turbines generating power on site, it's a strange lesson in architectural surprise and sustainability.

The family house is now a vacation home let out as a single unit, and can host six adults. The three double bedrooms and two bathrooms overlook a precipice matter-of-factly. The rest of the property including the kitchen tent that stands to its right, and the reception hut-on-stilts a short walk away, is isolated from it within minutes, with the winding up of a draw bridge, offering acute privacy just when you think this is as far as classified tourism can get.

And then the irony. The main deck, entirely enveloped in glass, leaves you standing stripped before the valley. A walk up and down a labyrinth of small staircases shuffles you between 85 feet where The Crow's Nest offers a 360 degree aerial view that seems a shade more sublime when a glass of Merlot is in hand, and The Hanging Room suspend-



The Machan is a nut and bolt steel structure clad in wood, designed to withstand earthquakes and wind speeds of up to 200 kmph. No machines were used in its erection nor were trees felled in the process, say the owners.
PICS/TINAZ NOOSHIAN



THE CROW'S NEST

THE LOFT

THE MAIN DECK

HOW TO GET THERE

IF YOU ARE DRIVING FROM MUMBAI OR PUNE

- Take the Mumbai-Pune Expressway to the Lonavala/Khandala exit (onto the old highway NH4)
- Turn right (coming from Mumbai)/turn left (coming from Pune) at the Kumar Resorts T-junction on NH4
- Follow directions to Aamby Valley/INS Shivaji onto Jalvaayu Marg (1.7 km)
- Continue on Jalvaayu Marg until you pass Air force colony on your left (6.7 km)
- Follow this road (Aamby Valley road) to Cloud9 Resort (6.5 km)
- At Cloud9 Resort turn left and again immediate left towards Essar Agrotech (0.0 km)
- Follow this road until you spot two whitewashed stones on the left (0.9 km)
- Turn left onto private access road and follow it to The Machan

WHEN TO GO

- The property is open all through the year

WHAT TO CARRY

- Mosquito repellent lotion
- Sunglasses and a cap/scarf
- Sunscreen
- Comfortable walking shoes and socks
- A camera, notebook or drawing book, depending on how you prefer to record memories
- Light woollens (if travelling in monsoon or winter)
- Rainwear and umbrella (monsoons)
- A torch with spare batteries
- Personal medication
- Longsleeved shirt/tee/blouse and trackpants

CONTACT

- e-mail: reservations@themachan.com Call +91 8080877420 or +91 9594053113 (10am-8pm IST) (Prior reservation is an absolute must) **A minimum two-night stay is mandatory between Fri, Sat & Sun.** Check-in time is 2 pm, check-out is at 12 noon. **Rates include dinner and breakfast. Lunch is provided on prior notice and at an additional charge.**

THE MACHAN is a vacation home with three bedrooms (sleeps 6), two full baths and a living room, let out as a single unit

ed in the belly of the main deck, lending the illusion that you are engulfed by the forest canopy.

As an offshoot of the motherhouse, three 800 sq feet Camp Canopy machans (each housing a maximum of three guests) stand raised on a 30-foot platform accessed by a winding metal staircase. The platform supports a safari tent that holds a bedroom, bathroom and a hardwood deck plunging out into the heavens, seating a retro brass lamp in one corner to light a seating cove made up by two lazy armchairs and a side table that will hold your dinner for the night.

Disturbance here, is a bad word, and so, grid connecti-

ty is weak (leave your mobile phones at home) and the staff, inconspicuous. Other than the customary welcome (with a big smile, wet towel and a glass of chilled Fresh Lime on a tray) by caretaker Sarla Adhikari, staff sightings are rare, and on-call.

A request to have your dinner sent up to the machan will mean a staffer discreetly leaves a 4-tier tiffin casserole packed with simple Indian fare at the far end of the sheltered passage, for you to polish off in privacy. They'd of course, be happy to host you at the open-air dining area by a fireplace where large visiting groups often congregate around chatter and spirits.

The kitchen staff prides



itself on stirring up ghar ka khana, with a typical lunch menu including Chicken Methi, Jeera Aloo, rotis and raita. The all-day dining menu card that lies on a table that also holds a retro table fan that you may need to switch off unless you enjoy its decadent whirring, offers you nibbles between 7.30 pm and 10 pm; Onion Bhajia (Rs 110), Chicken Seekh Kebab (Rs 170), and a pot of tea (Rs 50) delivered to the tent.

A stay at The Machan doesn't come cheap. A night's stay at Camp Canopy costs Rs 12,000 (couple), and at The Machan (weekdays) costs Rs 25,000. Well, it's the price for peace.

And if 'what's there to do?' is the question currently circumnavigating your mind, go book a 2 night-3 day deal at a hill resort where the cackle of kids at the community pool will drown out the noise in your head.



Once the forest canopy was nurtured back to health, the owners decided to provide an incentive to farmers by cross pollinating and cultivating (in narrow 4' wide plots) the Amaryllis, a bulbous flowering plant native to South America. The Amaryllis, with its massive, flamboyant trumpet-shaped flowers standing atop two-foot high stalks, now number close to 700,000 (bulbs in various stages of growth). The ready to bloom bulbs are also available for bulk supplies annually, from February to September.



THE CAMP CANOPY TENT bedroom has parquet flooring, retro brass light fixtures salvaged from ancient ships and a table fan to create a period feel. The roof, walls and floor are made from one continuous piece of fabric.

WE LOVE THAT > 10% of all profits go towards the preservation of the flora and fauna of the Western Ghats