



The Machan, Jambulne, Maharashtra

TO CLIMB INTO A TREE

If you're dreaming of an escape to the Amazon, hold that thought – it's closer than you think. Close enough to not require an airline ticket, close enough to drive down to from Mumbai. The journey past Lonavala over winding roads that seem to cut through misty clouds will put you in the perfect mood to discover your forest getaway – The Machan, tucked into the forests of the Western Ghats, one of the world's top 10 bio-diversity hotspots and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Set on 25 acres of forest close to the tiny village of Jambulne, this sustainability-conscious resort offers nature-lovers a choice of three canopy *machans* and one heritage *machan*, set on iron stilts so as to have the least possible impact on the surroundings. Perched above the forest canopy, each of the spacious 'treehouses' is dotted with antique knick-knacks collected from different corners of the globe. Peace and solitude come with the booking; your only neighbour might be a giant Malabar squirrel.

If you visit in the monsoon, the cosiness of your *machan* will be heightened by the lulling sound of raindrops as they trickle down the canvas roof. You will be very tempted to stay in, the view itself compelling enough to keep you still for hours on end. But do venture out – even if just around the property itself – on the Afternoon Nature Trail. The Machan's naturalists Mandar and Trey will enthusiastically introduce you to the flora and fauna of the region, including the reptiles and birds that call the property their home, and go

so far as to offer more plucky visitors a tutorial on handling the creepy-crawlies (5.30pm; starts from the reception; free). You may even stumble upon the resort's barking deer. The Lunar Trail is a must-do if your stay coincides with a full-moon night and the weather's favourable. You will be taken, armed with torches, through the forest to explore its nocturnal wildlife (free). And of course, you can always borrow a bicycle to ride around the property (free).

If you can drag yourself out of your cocooning biosphere, turn



1. The *machans* are set above the forest canopy
2. Chicken olivette at Fusion (see What to Eat)
3. Intricate carvings at Karla
4. Naturalist Trey takes you on trails through the property

GREAT FROM
Mumbai

GREAT FOR
A taste of rustic luxury

GO NOW
To a get a glimpse of the area's monsoon wildlife.

your steps to exploring the rest of the area. The climb up to **Lohagarh Fort** is made atmospheric by the waterfalls, rain and thick mist shrouding the steps to the top (*the 40-minute*

climb starts from Lohadwadi Village, Taluka Maval, Dist Pune; moderate fitness essential; free). Occupied at different periods of time by the Chalukyas, Bahamanis, Mughals and the Marathas, among others, the fort was captured by Chhatrapati Shivaji in 1648 and again in 1670 before the British took over in the early 19th century. Check out the narrow fortified spur on the west of the fort, the *bauli* (step-well)

and the Laxmi Kothi in which Shivaji allegedly hid his treasures. Or trek up to **Koraigad Fort** from Shahpur Village, a 4km drive from the Machan. You will find nothing but the fort ruins and a temple riddled with monkeys up there, but you're going for the view and the ancient, otherworldly ambience (*moderate fitness essential; free*). And if you're a culture junkie, take a half-hour drive to the rock-cut **Karla and Bhaja Caves** to get a glimpse of early Buddhist temple art. Dating back to the



2nd century BC, the Karla Cave houses a representation of the Buddha and a corridor made up of 37 carved pillars. Just outside the main cave is the Ekvira temple beloved to fisherfolk (9am – 5pm; ₹ 5 entry). Nearby, the Bhaja Caves complex consists of 18 caves and 14 stupas (8am – 6pm; ₹ 5 entry). It's totally worth the 20-minute climb to get to these mystical caves, made even more magical in the rain.

WORDS FRIYAN DRIVER
PHOTOGRAPHS JEREMIAH CHRISTANAND RAO

FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: Mumbai (103km) is a two-and-a-half-hour drive away.

Closest city: Pune (81km)

Closest airport: Pune's Lohegaon Airport (84km).

Air India, Go Air, IndiGo, Spicejet, JetKonnnect and Jet Airways fly to Pune's Lohegaon Airport from major Indian cities (return fares from ₹ 5,500).

Closest railhead: Lonavala Railway Station (LNL; 17km).

Take the **12127 Intercity Express** (leaves CSTM 6.45am, arrives LNL 8.50am; ₹ 218 AC chair car) and return by the **11008 Deccan Express** (leaves LNL 4.35pm, arrives CSTM 7.40pm; ₹ 188 AC chair car).

GETTING AROUND

Hire a car to take you around, especially in the monsoon, as autos and taxis can only be found in the main town of Lonavala. We used and liked the services of **ANFA Travels** (00-91-9821352189 [Mr Laeeq]; car hire from about ₹ 2,600 a day).

WHERE TO STAY

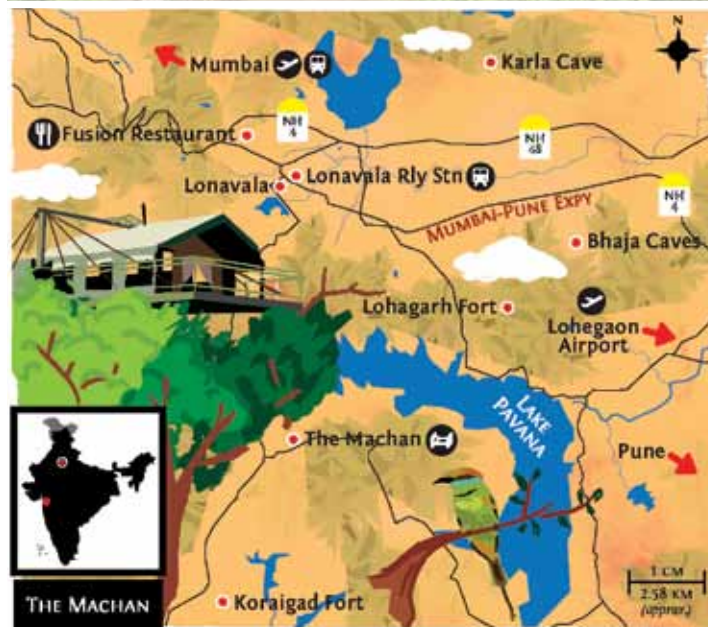
The Machan: The heritage *machan* is ideal for a family break; it can accommodate six guests, plus two at an extra charge. The three canopy *machans* can each accommodate two, plus one at an extra charge (00-91-22-30635133; themachan.com; reservations@themachan.com; *Jambulne*, 8km short of *Amby Valley*, Lonavala; heritage *machan*: ₹ 25,000 Mon – Thur, ₹ 30,000 Fri – Sun, canopy *machan*: ₹ 10,000 Mon – Thur, ₹ 12,000 Fri – Sun with breakfast and dinner, extra person: ₹ 3,000).

WHAT TO EAT

Breakfast and dinner are included in the tariff, lunch is provided at an extra charge (₹ 500 veg, ₹ 575 non-veg; prior notice required). There's also an a la carte snacks menu, or you could head into



Lohagarh Fort is beautifully green in the rain



nearby Lonavala for more options. The multi-cuisine restaurant **Fusion** at the Fariyas Resort has an excellent *murg ki khurchan* (00-91-2114-273852; fariyas.com; Post Box No 8, Frichley Hills, Tungarli, Lonavala; lunch 12.30pm – 3.30pm, dinner 7.30pm – 11pm; murg ki khurchan ₹ 575) or go to **Pragati Foods** for really good cold coffee with ice cream (00-91-2114-271603; *Lunav Retreat*, Shop No 1, MG Rd, Lonavala; cold coffee ₹ 60).

WHAT TO PACK

Rain gear, a light jacket, as it gets chilly in the

evenings, sturdy shoes for the nature trail, books, binocs if you are an avid bird watcher, extra clothes if you're going to get wet in the rains

SHOPPING

The tiny **Cooper's** is well known for its chocolate fudge. Get there early before they sell out (00-91-9822851145; opp Lonavala Railway Station; 10.30am – 1pm, 3pm – 6pm or until stocks last; ₹ 800 per kg).

CLEAN LOO GUIDE

The **McDonalds** at Kalamboli just before you get onto the Mumbai-Pune

Expressway has clean loos (00-91-9619145311; Kalamboli Sector 1E, Navi Mumbai; 6am – 11pm).

SAFETY

The Machan is not recommended for toddlers and elderly people.

MEDICAL AID

The Machan has a basic first-aid kit and its own stock of anti-venom. The nearest hospital is **Parmar Hospital and Research Centre** in Lonavala (00-91-2114-273007; No 204, G Ward, behind Neelkamal theatre, MG Rd, Lonavala).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

The resort is great for children, with nature trails, froggies and board games to keep them busy. However, it is not recommended for very young children due to the *machans*' height and kids' tendency to slip through gaps.

GOOD TO KNOW

- ◆ The Machan is a bit difficult to find as there are no sign boards on the way; print the directions off the website to take with you.
- ◆ Don't eat in your *machan* as it attracts insects.
- ◆ Check if the forest *machans* are ready when you call.
- ◆ Check your shoes before you put them on; a bug or a frog could have crawled in.

