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 biodiversity 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 your steps to exploring the rest of the area. The climb up to Lohaghat 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) and the Jamshetji Niwas 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 ambiance (moderate fitness essential; free). And if you’re a culture junkie, take a half-hour drive to the rock-cut Karla and Bhaja Caves complex consists of 18 caves and 14 stupas (9am – 5pm; free). Nearby, the Bhaja Caves are set on iron stilts so as to have the least possible impact on the area. The climb up to these mystical caves, made even more magical in the rain, is totally worth the 20-minute climb to get to these mystical caves.

The Machan, Jambulne, Maharashtra

ARG FROM
Mumbai

GREAT FOR
A taste of rustic luxury

GREAT FROM
Mumbai

GO NOW
To get a glimpse of the area’s precious wildlife

Words: PRATHIMA DESHPANDE
Photographs: JEREMIAH CHRISTIAN AND RAO
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 nearby Lonavala for more options. The multi-cuisine restaurant Fusion at the Fariyas Resort has an excellent murg ki khurchan (00-91-2214-273852; 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.

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.