A KONKAN CRUISE

To hear the song of the sea and witness the wonders of the Konkan coast.

TEXT: BOB RUPANI
PHOTOS: BOB RUPANI AND MAKARAND BAOKAR
The Konkan Coast is sandwiched between the Arabian Sea and Western Ghats and has a lot to offer. After loading the Mahindra Thar we left Mumbai and joined NH 17. This national highway curves through the Western Ghats and in a couple of hours we were at the Karnala Bird Sanctuary. A little later, at Vadkal Naka, we parted ways with the NH 17 and carried on straight to Alibag, which is known for its beaches. Henceforth the road narrows and passes through many palm fringed villages. At Kashid, it meets up with a sandy, white beach and the Arabian Sea. After a most enjoyable drive along the sea, we ascended a gentle hill, and stopped for a quick photo at the Nawab of Janjira’s sea-facing palace before proceeding to the Golden Swan Beach.
the lesser-known delights of the Konkan. We rejoined the NH 17 at Nivli and drove on it till Talera, where we turned right for Vijaydurg, which was once the main naval base for the Maratha Navy.

Vijaydurg or the 'Fort of Victory' was one of the strongest forts on the western coast, with a triple row of fortifications interspersed with bastions, each mounting cannons. Though the ravages of time and neglect have taken their toll, it remains a very impressive fort.

To the south of Vijaydurg lies another of Maharashtra’s ancient coastal forts, Devgad, that at one time was manned by a large garrison and had 40 cannons. The town of Devgad is also famous for its delicious Alphonso mangoes and the beach is quite nice too. After checking out all this it was time for us to experience ‘A Culture Aangan Holiday’ (www.cultureaangan.com). Culture Aangan offers a rural home stay experience and having opted for one (the main purpose of this journey); we headed to Pitruchaya in Shirgaon village, to meet our hosts for the next few days.

Pitruchaya, is the home of Vaishali and Vijay Loke and is an ideal home stay for nature lovers and those seeking a silent retreat. Birds, peacocks and even some wildlife can be found here. The home is situated amongst a tranquil setting surrounded by mango orchards and other fruit bearing trees and it has two comfortable rooms for guests. we discovered that both Vaishali and Vijay are good hosts and Vaishali’s culinary expertise ranges from mouthwatering seafood dishes to traditional farmland variations. She also uses chicken from their own poultry farm and much of the fruit and vegetables are also from their farm. Staying with this couple helped us mix and meet with the locals and we were able to experience Konkan the way most tourists never do. This was all
thanks to Culture Aangan, which has pioneered the concept of rural home stays in the Sindhudurgh District. Dotted by an array of green villages tucked away in coconut and areca nut groves, Sindhudurgh is a wonderful combination of natural beauty, cultural heritage and lots of traditional activities. Culture Aangan offers 5 home stays, with each being unique and located in pretty villages. What are common though are the welcoming smiles, and the peace and tranquility. All properties have vegetable gardens, so the food is fresh and the families are also trained in housekeeping and required to maintain high standards of hygiene. The home stays also offer lots of activities like trekking, cycling, mango picking, nature walks, wildlife and Dolphin sighting trips, fishing with locals, traditional arts and crafts workshops, Chitarkathi (tribal painting), temple and fort visits, etc.
Yoga classes and ayurvedic massages can also be arranged. Rashmi Sawant of Culture Aangan says: “Our aim is to offer ‘rural activity’-based home-stay holidays where you get introduced to the slower pace of village life, and also experience the natural, cultural and culinary beauty of Sindhudurg”.

After a most interesting and educative experience it was time to party. We met up with the NH17 again at Kudal, and proceeded to Goa, India’s most popular beach resort. In gorgeous Goa, we lost ourselves in its golden sands, its blue sea, and its tanned brown bodies and stimulating spirits. In the shacks that line the beach, we danced all night long, but the party never ended. Goa is a dream destination that lets you ‘be what you want to be’ and we can’t help but quote the great words of Mark Twain: “Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you did not do than by the things you did do. So, throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream Discover.”