

Height of adventure

The Pench Tree Lodge by the Pugdundee Safaris Experience is a place like no other. The images, the stories, the experiences all come together to create a journey – even experience - that is more important than the place

by MICHAEL SWAMY

Adventure travel and luxury travel these days is big business. While, at times, the word “luxury” may seem a dirty word (read decadence), the luxury traveller is here to stay and so they must. What with tented luxury to five-star properties in the middle of nowhere, so much so that you feel that you are on a movie set and some yesteryear actor may walk through the piece.

The current trend is one of experiences over collecting souvenirs. The thirst for adventure and creating one’s own idea of luxury over what is given is the call of the moment. The fancy travel bags are out of the window; those matching suitcases rest on a shelf and so it must.

The luxury traveller is outfitting himself rather than being told or having some designer piece of travel accessory thrust upon him. One such place is the The Pench Tree Lodge by the Pugdundee Safaris Experience, a few hours drive from Nagpur it is close to the

Karmajhiri Gate. It was an invitation to visit this space in the balmy heat of a late summer that got us all worked up.

The excitement shone on all our faces and the glee was palpable. The long exotic drive through clean villages / tolas, made me think about sustainable tourism and the simple pleasures of the people out there.

The evening sun captured outlines and silhouettes of cattle being walked home. The colourful birds showcasing their plumage to the sudden dash of a baby mongoose and even the sighting of a royal tiger, there was never a dull moment.

A zone apart with hardly any lodges around stand the 50- acre property of Pugdundee Tree Lodge with tree houses interspersed across the property. Every child dreams of living in a tree house but here it is a reality. The spacious view in the front has the feeling of an African savannah, and you can dream of tigers and leopards hiding in the bushes.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Attention to detail is a generous talent in the hands of the right person. And so it is here at the Pugdundee resort. From the minute one walks in, one is immediately transported in to another realm, and there shall, one stay ensconced in luxury till it is time to leave should you choose that option; the other is to traverse into the jungles of Pench in search of the tiger.

What makes this property so special are the tree houses. The disappearance of brick and mortar, for one. There are wooden panels, the soft creak of the boards, the rustling of the trees. The colonial look is in the four-poster bed with the insect net hanging over. A childhood dream has become a reality. It's all there – the heightened view amidst the trees gives one a bird's eye view of things; the waking up call of birds to the settling down of the nocturnal creatures in the trees; and the magic of being amongst





them is different and is a solemn moment.

It's the classical idea of sustainable tourism that makes the luxury seem opulent. But the concept moves in the right direction. While the words 'food' and 'travel' go hand in hand, it's the very concept of pre-plating that is the icing on top. The young chef is dynamic and creative at the Pench property. It is here that one sees local dishes being changed about. Luxury dining is now a trend and it's all about the art of decompressing a moment; making it longer than it actually is. Simplicity is the key term being used these days.

Here, at the Pench property, it's more about connecting than rather being stuck up at one's own table. Dining and snacking around a bonfire and making new friends takes the word 'simplicity' to another dimension. It's food after all and the journey is about food.

The local cuisine is the tale of the year and the traveller has become the storyteller. The images, the stories, the experiences all come together where the journey is more important than the place. That is exactly what Pugdundee is about.