

A WALK IN THE WOODS



Pages from the diary of Tejas

Evolve Back Kuruba Safari Lodge, Kabini, June 2010

Tejas visits our resorts in Coorg and Kabini and shares with you some of his uplifting experiences. Join him as he immerses himself in the activities at our two resorts, and enjoy them with him, virtually!

Tejas Joseph resides in Auroville near Puducherry and is part of a consulting group engaged in creating viable models of decentralised lighting (using solar energy) for off-grid Indian villages. Tejas travels a lot in the course of his work and feels a deep connection with the history and ethos of the places he visits. He is a keen observer of the winds of change that are now blowing across the physical, cultural and social landscapes of India and seeks to capture its effects in his articles, ever believing that the journey is as important as the destination, the travel as rewarding as the arrival!

Feel free to write to him at pjtejas@gmail.com if your interests or work coincide with his.



Activity Name	Guided Nature Walk
Duration	2 HOUR
Timing	7:00 AM to 9.00 AM
Guided	Yes
Cost	Nil
Transfer	Not required
Prior Booking Required	Yes

A morning's adventure: discovering nature around the resort in Kabini

Starting your day at dawn brings a lot of blessings. Watching the sun come up to dance and shimmer off the placid waters of the sleeping Kabini, or going on a safari into the Nagarhole sanctuary a few kilometers upstream to see some spectacular wildlife are two of them. A third can be joining one of the Naturalists on a short walk of the perimeters surrounding the resort to discover natural wonders that we take for granted simply because they are all around us all the time. The nature trail starts at 7 am from the shores of the Kabini where you are likely to spot more than a few interesting species of birds on any given day, depending on their seasonality. This morning as we set out we were greeted by the call of the Western Reef Egret looking for his breakfast presumably, while a little off the path ahead of us, we spotted the Eurasian Collared Dove, also going about the important business of finding breakfast before starting her day. Other birds that one could see at this time of the day and year will be the Asian Koel, the Cormorant and the Grey Heron, to name a few of the tens of species both rare and common that live here or visit these parts. Avid bird watchers on these nature walks will be amply rewarded with a great variety of avian sightings that will make their day.



As we kept walking along the shoreline to the south, we caught a glimpse of a few fishermen casting their lines and village cattle being herded out to feed upon the sparse grass that grew on the banks. It was dry and the land looked like it could do with some showers. The previous evening, we had spotted some dark clouds that rolled out of the Vyanad hills to the west, where the Kabini originates. While they inspired hope in all of us, it failed to rain. Rain was what the land, its people and animals needed. It brought life along with it. At this time of the year when most of the water holes in the reserves had dried up or were drying up, the Kabini was the last hope of the region, particularly for its animal life.

As we walked away from the shore we encountered small agricultural plots that grew a variety of food and cash crops. These included corn, sugarcane, groundnut, millets, ginger and a few vegetables. Cotton was the chief cash crop because the region had black soil, ideal for its cultivation. Farming practices of this region are still artisanal and have not been mechanized yet. It could seem like one were in a time capsule when observing farmers plowing their fields with bullocks and using heavy stone rollers for threshing and milling their grain like they have been doing for a few hundred years. Most of the work on small farms in this region is still executed by human hands and animal power but for the occasional intervention of a tractor or a thresher.

The flora of this area was diverse and mixed. Shrubs and thorny bushes grew alongside giant banyans, pipal and tamarind trees. You will encounter an old pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*) as you skirt the little track leading away from the small farm towards the main road.

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Ancient pipals and banyans are more than just floral specimens of the region. They symbolize its essence. They are veritable eco - systems in themselves, sheltering a great variety of insect and bird life on their branches, leaves and trunk.

We are told by the locals that some of them are at least 100 -150 years old and sanctify the area with their august and serene presence. We pass the first temple, which we are told was rebuilt upon the site of an older one. Farmlands stretched on either side of us. They had been tilled and were waiting for rains before sowing. The agriculture in this area was mostly rain-fed. Up in the distance we spot the tantalizing flowers of the Plumeria, also called the temple tree. Its big boughs seemed to bend in homage to the gods of the temple outside which it stood. It was in full bloom and its hauntingly fragrant-white and yellow flowers lay scattered around it like a necklace upon the dry ground and leaves. As we entered the last leg of the walk

and vended our way back we chanced upon an ancient hero stone that chronicled the valor of someone who had expressed an act of courage and heroism a long time ago. The stone, though hard to date precisely, was believed to be a few centuries old.

This land pulsed with antiquity. We could sense it all around. Soon we found ourselves under the big Pipal that stands by the roadside a few hundred meters from the resort's gates, a lone sentinel bearing witness to the passage of time. You cannot miss it. We were embraced by the mesmeric murmur of its whispering leaves and shaded by its generous canopy. So big was its girth that we assumed it would need 2-3 full grown adults holding hands to cover its girth. We were stilled into rapture beneath it. What was it about this tree under which one man had sat a few thousand years ago and touched the very essence of life?

This tree was the epitome of symbiosis. We saw many types of ants clambering up and down its branches and spiders that had spread their gossamer network across its leaves. They shared mutual space with beetles, bugs and butterflies of many types. Nested in a crevice on one of the branches above us were a family of three spotted owls. If we could have stayed a whole day and night, we sensed that we could have catalogued a great many species of insects and birds that had their habitat in this one tree. So bountiful was its generosity, so magnificent its capacity to sustain so many forms of life other than its own. It was these qualities of giving and nurturing that stayed with us as we left its gentle presence and returned to the resort for a warm breakfast. Even trees can teach we realised.

