



The days when an eco-vacation meant sojourns at resorts set in lush surroundings are long over. No longer wanting to be restricted to the property and what it offers, more and more vacationers are looking for unique experiences—getting involved in activities with the local community, learning about the area’s folklore and customs, and tasting traditional cuisine. Think of it as a crash course in understanding a new culture. And let your first stop be the Orange County, Coorg.

Set in one of southern India’s most verdant landscapes (in a 300-acre family-owned plantation, no less), Orange County, Coorg, is luxury-meets-eco-vacation at its best. Everything at the resort is geared towards showcasing the nature and culture of the land. From the architecture to the resort’s Ayurvedic wellness village, each aspect is immersed in local traditions, aimed at helping guests experience a different lifestyle.

Home to the Kodava community, the paddy-cultivating indigenous people of the region, the villas at the property blend local architecture with elements from Raj-era plantation houses: Sloping roofs, terracotta tiles, and wooden columns recreate an old-world charm. Spacious Private Pool Villas, secluded and intimate,

NATURAL CAUSES

Is eco the new exotic? With its focus on local communities, traditions, and cuisine, the Orange County resort, Coorg, is changing the way vacationers holiday.

Clockwise from top left: The Elephant Camp at the resort; the lavish Pool Villa; the traditional interiors of the Pool Villa; a coracle on River Cauvery.



are ideal for those looking to leave behind their city woes. Just park yourself in one of the planters’ chairs with a book and a drink, and let nature do the rest. The Lily Pool Villas and Bungalows (lilies are everywhere) feature romantic water bodies and gazebos to while away the hours.

Being a coffee plantation, days at Orange County start with a freshly brewed cuppa as you decide on what to do for the day. There’s the popular plantation tour, a guided walk around the estate where you can learn to differentiate between

COURTESY ORANGE COUNTY, COORG



A gazebo at the Lily Pool Villa

Arabica and Robusta. On the Orange County Coorg's Worker's Trail, you can experience a plantation worker's day firsthand, take part in their daily activities, and harvest coffee and spices yourself. The natural splendour of Coorg also affords guests plenty of opportunities to indulge in local activities—head for the trail around the adjoining Dubare Forest Reserve. While guides will keep you entertained with local jungle folklore, remember to have binoculars handy: The forests are home to hundreds of species of birds.

However, the most popular walking tour is the one to a traditional Karadigodu village, where guests can spend a day with a local family, sharing their meals and soaking in the local sights. The quick experience of the pastoral life comes by way of villagers who lead you through their everyday activities and give you a personal glimpse of ancient Coorg. You can walk through their verdant rice fields, forest trails, and even the ancestral Kodava homes, which are opened only on ceremonial occasions. Finish your trip with a ride on a coracle—local fishing boats—across River Cauvery. Another must-visit site close to the resort is Bylekuppe, the second largest Tibetan settlement outside Tibet. The sonorous chanting at the settlement's Buddhist monastery, home to thousands of priests, will transport you to an entirely different time and space.



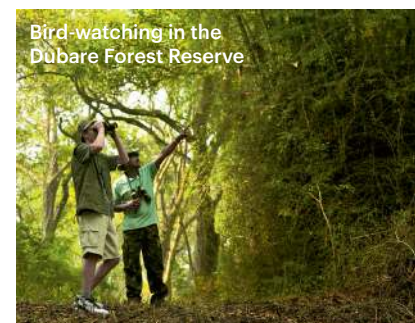
An intimate dining set up at the property

More and more vacationers are looking for unique experiences—getting involved with activities in the local community, learning about an area's folklore and customs, and opting of traditional cuisine. Think of it as a crash course in understanding a new culture.

Local customs permeate every aspect of the resort. At Vaidyashala, the Ayurvedic village, trained therapists rid your aches and pains with traditional treatments and specialised therapies meant for each part of the body, including Netra Tarpana (which targets the eyes) and Sarvangadhara, where five masseurs use medicated oils to treat free radicals and build internal immunity. Our pick, though, is the Padashubhakari pedicure and Karashubhakari manicure treatments, which will leave you feeling soft and nourished. Even the meals come inspired by local delicacies and ingredients. “We serve a selection of indigenous recipes and the food is prepared from fresh produce,” says Jose T Ramapuram, director of marketing at the resort. He recommends the pandi curry (Coorg-style pork curry),

akki roti (made from rice flour), kadumbuttu (steamed rice balls), and curries made with bamboo shoot or wild mushrooms. Want your dining experience to be intimate? The resort happily arranges exclusive meals overlooking the Cauvery or even in a tree house.

Committed to showcasing the best of local culture, the resort has roped in residents from the village to be an integral part of its daily activities, adding an authentic touch to the services offered here. With every experience handcrafted to evoke and uphold the natural and cultural heritage of Coorg, this is eco-vacation at its most splendid. ■



Bird-watching in the Dubare Forest Reserve