

INDIA TODAY travel PLUS

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BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE. BEAUTIFUL PLACES.

KARNATAKA with NAWAZUDDIN SIDDIQUI

The Gangs Of Wasseypur
star hits the jungle trail

SHOPPING CITIES

Store guide
NEW YORK CITY

Shopaholic
in GUJARAT

10 DUTY FREE HUBS

WEEKEND BREAKS

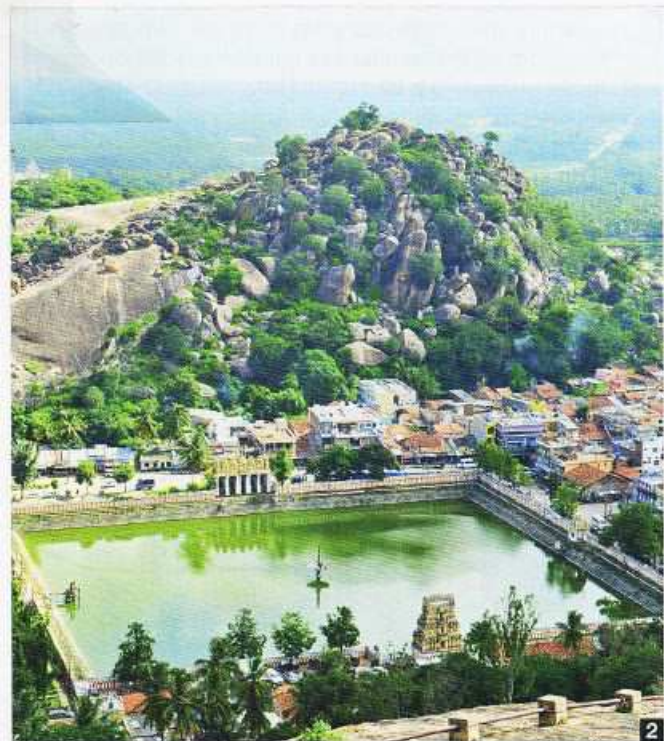
Bishnupur WEST BENGAL

Gulmarg JAMMU & KASHMIR



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AYESHA TAKIA GLOBETROTTER • SAIF ALI KHAN LUCKNOW



gone all quiet, gazing intently as if trying to discern the stories wafting in the breeze. Turning away from urbanity, history and heritage, we drove to Kabini, abutting the Nagarahole National Park, on day three. As the city rapidly fell away, Nawaz seemed to be absorbed by the passing scenery, made beautiful by the monsoons.

Located on the banks of the river, the sprawling Orange County was welcoming and pampered us with luxury and delicious meals, all of which seemed to relax Nawaz a good bit. Sated with good food, and despite a gentle drizzle, we set out on a boat for a safari on the river. Nawaz seemed happy to go with the flow against the gentle drone of the boat, drifting along the water even as he had the binoculars glued to his eyes, watching with fascination such diverse fauna as langurs, peacocks, crocodiles, sambar, kites, cormorants, kingfishers and egrets at close quarters. The experience seemed to have impacted him quite a bit and I could feel he was bubbling with barely suppressed anticipation the next morning as we set out for the jeep safari. "Even though we shot for *Jungle* within the forest, I haven't ever been on a safari; this is my first one," he said, in his down to earth manner.

And it was inevitable that his enthusiasm become infectious. Even though the big cats and the elephants too eluded us, scores of spotted deer, jungle fowl, a variety of birds and gaur made the trip quite eventful, bumpy jungle roads notwithstanding. But the crowning glory came towards the end, when a rare fishing owl flew past us to perch on a nearby tree. Binoculars trained on the feathered creature, Nawaz was mesmerised by its large eyes. "It seems to be looking right into my soul," he said, a bit shaken and his eyes as round as the owl's as

On the platter

Dishes change every few kilometres, depending on communities. Not just idli and masala dosa but do try ragi mudde (balls of ragi flour) with chicken curry of southern Karnataka. Other must tries: jowar roti with fiery brinjal curry of North Karnataka, neer dosa and sannas (toddy fermented idlis) with fish curry of Mangalore and vinegar-based pandi (pork) curry with rice rotis and noolu puttu (string hoppers) of Coorg.





he lowered the binoculars. From Kabini, the road to Coorg was fraught with potholes but once the district's thick forests and endless slopes of coffee plantations came into sight, the atmosphere changed tangibly. The air was thick with the smell of spices such as pepper and cardamom that grow amidst the coffee plants and everything had a glossy sheen to it due to rains. Owing to the altitude and rains, the air bordered on chilly and we were glad to stretch our legs and sit down to an elaborate Coorgi banquet at the home of Divya and Prithvi Madaiah, near Virajpet, comprising noolu puttu (string hoppers), *akki rotti*, mushroom curry, *colacasia* curry, chicken curry, *pandi* (pork) curry and *nei choru* (ghee rice).

We then went to the Madaiahs' traditional home, called Aina Mane in local lingo. More than three centuries old, the house was white walled and red roofed with a wide verandah and rooms aligned around a central courtyard. The setting was dramatic and Nawaz was inspired to try out the traditional Coorgi costume, complete with black robes, dagger and silk belt and said he even felt regal and warrior-like in it. He even seemed comfortable in it and would have probably liked to have it on for some time but pouring rain and the reality that we were miles away from our destination for the night meant that he reluctantly got out of it.

In Gokarna: 1. Flower sellers outside Mahabaleshwar Temple 2. A partial view of the Mahaganapathi Temple 3. The setting sun casts a surreal glow on the beach

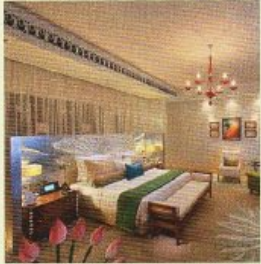
Night fell swiftly and a few hours later we swung into the driveway of Orange County Coorg's front yard in Siddapur. A bit worse for the wear, a warm welcome and refreshing coffee seemed to work their magic. It was in this setting that Nawaz unwound enough to speak about his craft and what guides him in choosing a movie and enacting a role. He seemed to be unwittingly sharing a piece of himself, opening the window just a sliver for a peek in, now that his five day trip was almost at an end. Movie schedules beckoned, promotional events awaited and he had to return to the world of arc lights but his enthusiasm prompted me to look at things in a new light as I carried on.

Washed clean by an unusually heavy downpour, the scattered monuments of Hampi seemed to have shed the weight of history and beckoned me closer. But they were as enigmatic as ever though the setting sun lit them up, especially the Lotus Mahal, Mahanavami Dibba and the Vijaya Vittala Temple. As I climbed the gruelling steps at Shravanabelagola, I had almost forgotten how serene and calming the gigantic Gomateshwara statue can be. And in Belur and Halebid near Hassan, the glory of skilled craftsmanship and attention to detail struck me anew as I discovered hidden sculptures and reliefs that had eluded me on earlier visits, though the graceful Shilabalikas continued to hypnotize.



The stay options

A list of comfortable and luxurious hotels and resorts our team stayed in through the gruelling 10-day itinerary



ITC Royal Gardenia, Bangalore

What: Inspired by Bangalore's gardens, ITC Royal Gardenia is filled not only with greenery but also adheres to a high standard of environment-friendliness. Its luxurious rooms cocoon the guest and its choice of restaurants can take the diner's palate on a global

journey or stay rooted in Indian flavours.

Where: FM Cariappa Road, Bangalore; (080) 2211 9898; www.itchotels.in

Cost: Rooms start from ₹18,000 a night

Hoysala Village Resort, Hassan

What: Located just outside the bustling town of Hassan, Hoysala Village Resort provides a glimpse of Karnataka's folk, cultural and architectural traditions, including local food. The spacious rooms are set amidst thick green foliage and offer a relaxed stay while the

ayurvedic spa provides rejuvenating treatments

Where: Handinkere Village, Belur Road, Hassan; (87172) 256 764; www.hoysalavillageresorts.com

Cost: Cottages start from ₹8,900 a night



Windflower Resort and Spa, Mysore

What: Sitting beneath the majestic Chanumdi Hills, Windflower Resort and Spa is tucked away from noise and bustle of the town. The resort's palatial rooms offer comfortable stay while the resort's fantastic spa is ideal for a rejuvenating session.

Where: Maharana Pratap Road, Nazarbada, Mysore; (0821) 2522 500; www.thewindflower.com

Cost: Rooms start from ₹4,500 a night



Royal Orchid Central Kireeti

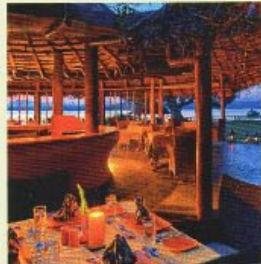
What: Less than 30 minutes away from the ruins of Hampi, Royal Orchid Central Kireeti is ideally located to experience the heritage site. As many as 134 luxurious rooms overlook lush green paddy fields.

Where: Station Road, Hospet;

(08394) 300 100;

www.royalorchidhotels.com

Cost: Rooms start from ₹4,500 a night



Orange County, Kabini

What: The hotel is spread over acres of greenery on the banks of the beautiful Kabini river. The pool huts are not only spacious but luxurious, while the infinity pool overlooks the water body.

Where: Bheeramballi Village and Post, HD Kote Taluk, Mysore District;

(082) 2826 9100; www.orangecounty.in

Cost: Pool huts start from ₹23,400 a night

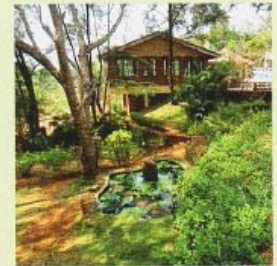
Om Beach Resort, Gokarna

What: Located on a hillock, overlooking the Arabian Sea, Om Beach Resort has a set of eight cottages spread out amidst lush greenery and towering trees. The sea is a distant roar but is also just a few minutes walk away.

Where: Bangle Gudda, Gokarna;

www.junglelodges.com

Cost: Rooms start from ₹2,500 a night



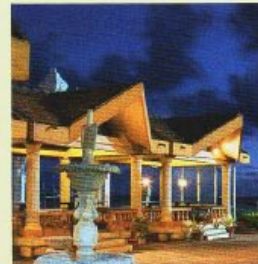
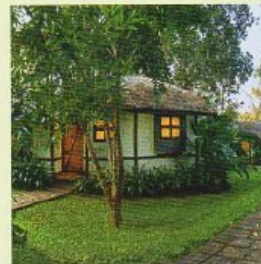
Orange County, Coorg

What: Set amidst rolling coffee plantations, Orange County Coorg is a spectacular vacation getaway. Suites are arranged around a pool and are sprawling as well as plush. It is ideal for relaxing as well as for a host of activities such as plantation walks and bird watching and tasting Kodava specialities in the restaurant. If you want to just relax, this is still perfect.

Where: Karadigodu Post, Siddapura, Coorg;

(082) 7425 8481; www.orangecounty.in

Cost: Suites start from ₹20,500 a night



Paradise Isle Beach Resort, Malpe

What: The hotel is ideally located to access the temple town of Udupi as well as the enigmatic St Mary's Island and many other destinations around this part of Karnataka. Comfortable and spacious rooms overlooking the sea and a restaurant serving local delicacies

add to the stay. Over all makes for a great pick for a few nights stay.

Where: Malpe Beach, Udupi; (0820) 2538 666;

www.paradiseisle.com

Cost: Rooms start from ₹2,000 a night