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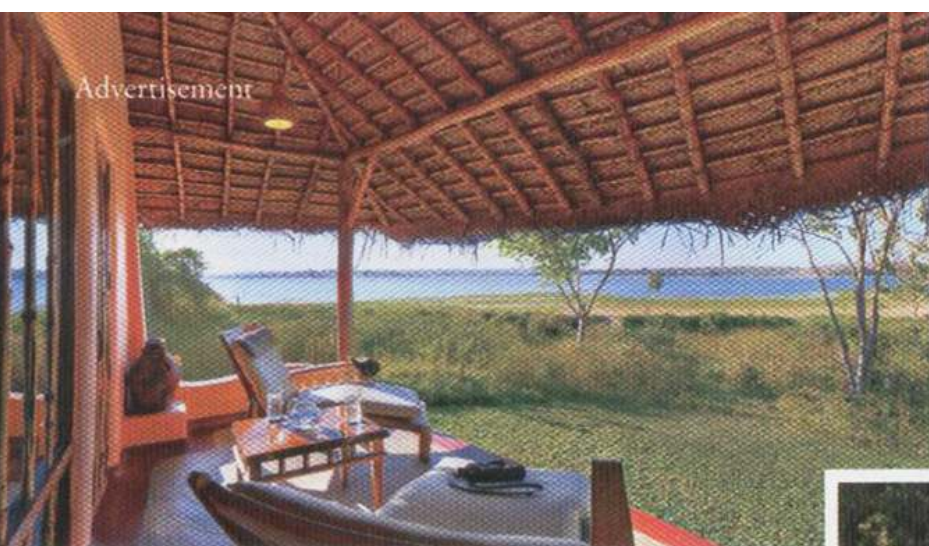
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New Horizons: Exploring India's Wild Side

First-time visitors to India often build their itineraries around the country's booming cities, New Delhi and Mumbai, or iconic tourist destinations such as the Pink City of Jaipur and the Taj Mahal. As spectacular as these sites are, the lush jungles of India are also not to be missed, teeming with exotic wildlife that offers another dimension of discovery.

Along with booming economic growth and rising prosperity, India has discovered a new appreciation for its wild spaces, greatly expanding its network of protected lands. Going from just five national parks in 1970 to more than 100 today, and with dozens more planned and authorized, India also proudly maintains hundreds of wildlife sanctuaries that provide safe haven for threatened species.

International tourists, eager to experience India's natural wonders on safari or guided tour, can now stay in full-service, eco-friendly resorts located on the periphery of these parks, knowing that their visit is helping to sustain the future of Indian wildlife. Sustainable practices in hospitality not only provide locals with jobs, they decrease the pressure on the park's resources and create a built-in local constituency with an interest in protecting the park's wild animals.

Located in the southern state of Karnataka, the **Orange County Resort in Kibini** is a case in point. Bordered on two sides by the Kibini River and adhering closely to ecologically sound principles, the resort is a model of responsible tourism, taking many of its design cues from nearby tribal villages. It provides an ideal vantage point for exploring the nearby wonders of **Nagarhole National Park**, known for its large elephant and bison populations, as well as abundant species of wild cats, including tigers and leopards.

Two hours from New Delhi, outside the ancient fortress city of Bharatpur in Rajasthan is the **Laxmi Vilas Palace** hotel. Built in 1887 by the Bharatpur Maharaja for his brother, this opulent hotel offers a glimpse of the region's storied past, while providing visitors a luxurious jumping-off point for exploring the **Keoladeo National Park**, one of the most incredible water-bird sanctuaries in the world.



Clockwise from left: View from the pool hut at the Orange County Resort, Kibini; a Common Kingfisher captured on camera during a recent boat tour through southern India; a herd of elephants pausing for a drink on the shore of Kibini Lake.

Designated a world heritage site by UNESCO in 1984, the park is a migratory thoroughfare, a nesting and breeding destination for thousands of bird species—many from as far away as Siberia—seeking a warm refuge from winter. The hotel provides quiet near-dawn boat rides to the park most mornings.

Stretching nearly 350 square miles in the southern Indian state of Kerala, the **Periyar National Park and Tiger Preserve** was first declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1934. One of 18 reserves in India devoted specifically to protecting tigers, the park is also an excellent place to spot herds of wild elephants. Visitors might also catch sight of Dholes, or Indian wild dogs; mongoose, foxes, and four species of primate: Gee's Golden Langur, the Bonnet Macaque, the Lion-Tailed Macaque, and the Nilgiri Langur. **Spice Village**, Thekkady, an eco-resort composed of thatched-roof, private multi-room villas, is one of India's most consistently top-rated getaways, offering guests an opportunity to commune with nature in a low-impact way.

For more information on making the natural wonders of India part of your travel plans, visit IncredibleIndia.org.