

A guide to the wildlife in Madhya Pradesh



TIGER and BEYOND

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WILDLIFE & NATURE IN MADHYA PRADESH

All you need to know about wildlife trips here

- Top wildlife destinations
- Options for staying, eating and safaris
- Everything you need to know while planning a trip
- Tips for activities and sightings

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TIGER and BEYOND

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FOREWORD

All Creatures Great and Small

**PUSHPRAJ SINGH JUDEO**

Madhya Pradesh's jungles and scrubland go beyond the majestic tiger and are home to a variety of animals and rich flora.

If there's any message to share about Madhya Pradesh's vibrant wildlife and natural parks, it's how stringent conservation is to enable you to enjoy its natural bounty better. Many jungles and wildlife areas of Madhya Pradesh are veritable bio-geographical zones that offer shelter to many species of animals, trees and plants and aboriginal forest people. Safaris are undoubtedly the best way for travellers to glimpse the wonderful natural treasures of the state.

TIGER HEARTLAND

Way back in 1951, my father had captured the first white tiger in Madhya Pradesh. My father's decision to give up shooting and protect the white tigers in Govindgarh, coupled with the state's wonderful wildlife, made me push for conservation efforts and a ban on hunting early on. My late father's kingdom of Baghela or "the tiger's lair" is a tribute to this magnificent animal. The tiger is the real king in the jungles of Madhya Pradesh, standing majestic in the midst of the lush forest cover. It speaks volumes for the state's commitment to protecting this beautiful beast that as many as six of India's major tiger reserves, 25 sanctuaries and natural preserves lie within its confines. Today, Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Pench, Panna, Satpura and Sanjay are important tiger reserves that invite travellers for great safaris.

A SANCTUARY FOR WILDLIFE

Madhya Pradesh's wildlife is varied. Pench is a newly created tiger park and this Mowgli land with its hilly terrain and jungle bushes is a major draw for tourists due to its healthy tiger population. But besides the tiger, there are other animals to spot like the gaur or bison. Panna is a haven for panthers, sloth bears and many species of antelopes and upland birds. The Ken crocodile sanctuary is a great place to halt and see these ancient aquatic

reptiles in their natural surrounds. The Chambal region is home to the gharial or river crocodile, river dolphins, otters, turtles and more. Satpura is a good halt for tigers, leopards, antelopes, deer, wild boar, fox, wild dogs and more.

A VARIETY OF FLORA

The varying topography and soil makes Madhya Pradesh's sub-tropical forests a vertical haven for flora life. The twin mighty ranges of Satpura and the Vindhyas loom over the green cover in the Bori-Pachmarhi-Satpura cluster, making this a heaven on earth with evergreen trees and even pine forests perched at the higher altitudes. Teak, sal, bamboo, mixed forests and medicinal plants all grow in abundance in the jungles. The flower and seeds of the mahua (*Madhuca indica*) are popular forest products. The mahua is almost a floral motif for Madhya Pradesh.

The author belongs to the erstwhile royal kingdom of Rewa. He was on India's wildlife board and is involved in conservation practices in Madhya Pradesh.

Bandhavgarh National Park is known for the Royal Bengal Tiger





Plan Your Trip

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A jeep safari is one of the popular ways of exploring a park

Need to Know

With a third of India's forests encircled by the boundary of Madhya Pradesh, this is easily the country's most untamed territory. While the big cat is undoubtedly its biggest draw, the robust colony of mammals, avian population and reptiles, makes the state heaven for wildlife enthusiasts. Ten national parks, of which six are sprawling tiger reserves, and 25 wildlife sanctuaries loop around the state.

WHEN TO GO

The ideal time for wildlife spotting is during peak summer, when animals find it hard to camouflage themselves in the sun-parched forests that are bereft of thick foliage. This is when both natural and man-made watering holes work as beacons for travellers, as animals come here to quench their thirst, or merely park themselves for an afternoon dip inside. Though the parks are open from October to June, the best period lies between March and April, before the rains hit the jungles. All national parks in Madhya Pradesh are closed on Wednesday evening, so plan accordingly. Parks are likely to close on 15 June before monsoon sets in, but extensions are made closer to date, for no later than 30 June.

More than 300 species of birds can be spotted in Sanjay National Park



i Quick Facts

LANGUAGES:

Hindi and English

MONEY:

ATMs of both nationalised and private banks are available in all major towns but not near national parks or sanctuaries.

PHONE CONNECTIVITY:

BSNL numbers do work in remote areas where connectivity can drop. Get a pre-paid SIM if you must stay connected.

INTERNET ACCESS:

Wi-fi is mostly available at hotels in Bhopal, Indore, Khajuraho and other major cities. In some cases, Wi-fi may be available only in the lobby area or if paid for.

FOREST AREA:

10,862 sq km

NATIONAL PARKS:

There are nine national parks, namely Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Panna, Pench, Satpura, Sanjay, Madhav, Vanvihar and Fossil.

WILDLIFE SANCTUARIES:

There are 25 wildlife sanctuaries in the state.

MAJOR RIVERS:

Chambal, Shipra, Dhasan, Son, Betwa, Denwa, Parbati and Narmada.

FAUNA:

Tiger, leopards, Indian gaur, chital, sambar, nilgai, dhole, jackal, macaque, chinkara, barking deer, wild boar and swamp deer.

BIRDS:

White eyed buzzard, red jungle fowl, Indian pitta, red wattled lapwings, vultures, owls and kingfishers.

REPTILES:

Indian krait, python, cobra, viper and more.

LOOK OUT FOR:

The swamp deer or the hard ground barasingha is the state animal and is found in Kanha National Park.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air: Madhya Pradesh is well-connected to the rest of the country by a number of airports, but for travellers, these three are the most important ones: Raja Bhoj International Airport (Bhopal), Devi Ahilyabai Holkar Airport (Indore), Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindia Airport (Gwalior), Jabalpur Airport, also known as Dumna Airport and Khajuraho Civil Aerodrome Airport (Khajuraho). These are close to the national parks and wildlife sanctuaries and are connected to major Indian cities by airlines such as Air India, IndiGo and Jet Airways.

✓ Top Tip: Book in advance

March and April are busy months for wildlife lodges so it is best to book at least one month ahead. There is a limit on jeep safaris that can enter each day, so you need to inform the resort to arrange them for you beforehand. Even though tickets and 4-wheel drive (Gypsies) are available at the park gates, it is best that you ask your accommodation to arrange this. The premium of approximately ₹500 is worth it.

Rail: Rail connectivity to major national parks in Madhya Pradesh is relatively easy and cheaper than taking flights. Jabalpur and Umari are major junctions and are close to Kanha, Bandhavgarh and Pench National Parks. Satpura can be accessed via Bhopal.

Road: Most of the national parks lie a couple of hours away from major nodal towns. Even though many of the interiors have single lane highways, traffic is not unruly and the roads are in decent condition. One needs to get to a major junction or airport and then travel by car (₹9–11 per km, minimum 250km per day) to reach the lodges that skirt the national parks. This can be arranged by the accommodation that you book in advance.

WHAT TO PACK

Avoid clothes in loud colours while packing for your trip to the jungle. Olive greens, browns and beiges are ideal. A sun hat, sunscreen, binoculars and a camera that allows you to zoom between the bushes is recommended. Jungle lodges, wedged in the middle of grasslands and dense foliage are bound to be riddled with insects and mosquitoes. Carry a strong repellent of your choice. Wear comfortable walking shoes. Most of these are away from main towns and proximity to medical help is a challenge so carry regular medication if you are on any.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The head office of the Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation Ltd (MPSTDC) is in the capital city, Bhopal (Paryatan Bhawan, Bhadbhada Road; 9am–5pm; ☎755 4027100, 274340/42; closed on Sun, 2nd and 3rd Saturday and government holidays). Their website www.mptourism.com has ample information. Brochures of all popular sightseeing places are available at MP Tourism counters at the airport and all MPSTDC properties throughout the state. Helpline ☎1800233777

ACCOMMODATION

There are plenty of wildlife lodges and resorts that lie on the fringes of these major national parks. It is better to stay in the resorts that engage with the local community and make an effort in preserving the forest by keeping large tracts of their own land minus any construction, and employ eco-conscious efforts to assist the jungle diaspora. You will find many recommendations in this book to choose from.

All rates are for an AC double room (d) unless specified otherwise. The reviews in this book have been categorised by their rates as follows.

₹: below ₹2000 ₹₹: ₹2000–5000 ₹₹₹: above ₹5000

Abbreviations

s single rooms d double rooms ste suites ctg cottage

i Dos and Don'ts

Do

- Wear muted, earthy colours for visits inside the forest.
- If travelling to villages or forested areas, take sunscreen, insect repellent, bottled water and snacks. Avoid eating in the middle of the jungle as the smell of food may provoke a wild animal.
- Thick-soled shoes are a must in the jungle lodges that you stay at, since there are plenty of snakes and other reptiles in central India.
- A torch is mandatory on your packing list. Most lodges provide you with one.
- Keep your volume low at all times in the forest.
- Carry cash, unless you're paying ahead, as many lodges do not have connectivity to facilitate card payment.

- Carry a photo id for verification at the gate, even if you have booked the safari through the resort. The officials still need to check.

Don't

- Veer off too much from the main highway or try to enter places that your local guides tell you to avoid.
- Leave any litter (bottles, snack wrappers). Instead, discard it at the lodge when you get back from the safari.
- Travel too late in the evening between national parks as lodges are located in far flung villages and you lose GPS connectivity often. Reaching your lodge can be a challenge with no assistance for directions en route.

Tiger and Beyond

In a landscape that is bound to fascinate, the lush forests of Madhya Pradesh promise ample animal encounters – sometimes head to head and sometimes from a distance when you catch a glimpse of the wild inhabitants that melt into the undergrowth. Nevertheless, the rendezvous will be etched in your mind forever.

ORIENTATION

Madhya Pradesh is home to a third of India's national parks and is all about stuff that wildlife enthusiasts dream of – romanticised Gypsy safaris, spotting the elusive tiger, listening to jungle tales from old-timers like forest guards, and staying at thickly draped tented cottages or wildlife themed resorts. This is as close as you can get to the wild. The ten national parks and 25 sanctuaries have a rich composition of forest types – sal, teak, mixed, bamboo, khair and medicinal plants covering nearly 11,000sq km of land.

The forests of Madhya Pradesh were Kipling's inspiration for *The Jungle Book*

HISTORY

The state has a longstanding association with conservation of wildlife in India. In fact, Kanha National Park was declared a wildlife sanctuary as early as 1935 and the state enacted its own MP National Parks Act in 1955. However, Madhya Pradesh's most significant contribution has been in the conservation of tigers, with efforts such as the big turnaround story of Panna, where females from Bandhavgarh and Kanha were relocated to the forest after the reserve had lost almost its entire tiger population. They gave birth to cubs and this helped stabilise the tiger population in the sanctuary.

Six of the ten national parks of Madhya Pradesh are also integrated with Project Tiger, a conservation programme that was launched in 1973 by the Central Government when the tiger numbers had dwindled so dramatically that there were fears that the big cat was in danger of extinction. In forest areas designated as tiger reserves efforts were made to create conducive conditions for the natural breeding of this magnificent animal.

ANIMAL SPOTTING

Of all the other animals that have made these central Indian forests their home, the Royal Bengal tiger holds a special charm for travellers. With the





animal being in the spotlight for conservation for the last decade, it is no wonder that the interest in spotting trumps all other wildlife.

But apart from these striped wanderers who roam the dense swathes of sal, teak and mixed forests, the leopards, Indian gaur, dholes, sambar, nilgai, monkeys, jackals, wild boars, swamp deer also hold sway within the myriad shades of green. The avian and reptile life also adds to the wealth of bio-diversity here. No wonder for the wildlife enthusiast a trip here is exceptionally exciting. In fact, the wild thickets of this region are a priceless learning ground for researchers across the world.

KIPLING'S INSPIRATION

Not only do the forests of Madhya Pradesh drape the state in a soothing shade of green for a cathartic experience for both animals and travellers, they have provided inspiration for one of the best classics of all times – *The Jungle Book*. It must have been the rich hues of lush green in India's geographical heart that drew a celebrated author like Rudyard Kipling to its towering sal and teak forests and unkempt undergrowth. These were the

Kanha National Park is one of the most popular stops on the tiger trail

very jungles where he created *The Jungle Book* characters that have regaled us for decades, a book which has become synonymous with every child's perception of forest happenings.

THE MAIN WILDLIFE LOOP

The most treaded loop of national parks that makes for the well-oiled tourist trail starts from Panna, swinging below to Bandhavgarh, Kanha and Pench. Resorts and lodges in these four, especially Bandhavgarh and Kanha, are booked months in advance. Satpura has recently climbed the popularity charts, given its hearty population of leopards and the fact that one can experience a walking safari, allowed only in a handful of Indian jungles. An extension of this is the lush mountain town Pachmarhi that makes for a great sightseeing day trip for caves, waterfalls and nature walks. Smaller pockets like Sanjay Gandhi National Park have also amped up the wildlife experience, being resurrected as credible tourist spots. Ken Ghariyal,

Ratapani, Orchha and Son Ghariyal are among the state's total tally of 25 wildlife sanctuaries.

THE WHITE TIGER SAFARI

The world's first white tiger safari was inaugurated in April 2016 at Mukundpur, as an opportunity to spot the three white tigers – Raghu, Vindhya and Radha – that roam the region. The government plans to bring in six more white tigers in the coming months. This region has been chosen because historically, the first white tiger was spotted here in 1915. Later in 1951, a white tiger cub, Mohan, was captured and used to carry on the lineage. The ruler of Rewa, Maharaja Martand Singh, arranged for its breeding so that the population of this unique creature could grow.

WHAT TO EXPECT

The wildlife experience in Madhya Pradesh starts from the accommodation that you choose to stay at. With a large number of luxury wildlife themed properties with chic amenities and facilities available, a jungle holiday has become far from a roughing it out experience. Despite that, many resorts are eco-conscious and work in tandem with the government to bring about awareness in the locals by offering employment. The naturalists of these resorts are the most insightful people, many of them from local areas and

Deer is endemic to all the national parks in Madhya Pradesh



Take a boat ride on the Ken River at Panna National Park to spot crocodiles

well versed with the topography and wildlife movement. The experience of the jungle is via 4-wheel drive Gypsies (mandatory), which can be hired privately. A forest guard accompanies each Gypsy.

THE SHOWSTOPPERS

Everything you hear about tigers in this region is in superlatives but nothing really prepares you for the experience. When you finally spot one, it's not uncommon for your breath to stop or your heart to skip a beat as the majestic creature walks by casually. Sometimes you may just catch a glimpse, but even that is memorable. Do remember it's his home and you are the outsider. The naturalists and guides are so familiar with the population of tigers that many have been given names – some of them have even become stars in their own right. While Munna (aka Langda) is the show-stopper at Kanha National Park, it is Collar-Wali that holds sway in the jungles of Pench. Apart from these, BMW and a tiger with an inverse T on his head and Neelum are names that you will hear often.



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Sloth bears can be found in many national parks across the state



SATPURA TIGER RESERVE

Why Go?

Satpura offers one of the most distinct topographies and experiences of Madhya Pradesh's wildlife – from deep canyons cut by rivers, walking safaris, a high leopard population and a promise to run into a sloth bear. One of the very few jungles that allows people to experience the forest on foot, the national park has started looming on the radar of tourists and it's only a matter of time that it will burst into popularity.

i Quick Facts

GETTING THERE

Bhopal (190km) is the closest airport and railway station.

WHEN TO VISIT

March to May is the best season for animal sightings. The park is open from October to June.

TIMINGS

Summer 5–10.30am & 4–6.45pm,
winter 6.30–11am & 3–5.30pm.

BEST FOR

Sloth bears and leopards.

ACCESS

The access to the forest (Satpura Tiger Reserve) is via the Madai region, which is interchangeably used as Satpura. Move 93km east of this part and the forest melts into Pachmarhi town.

A jungle lodge in Satpura that overlooks the backwaters of the Denwa River

Sights

Satpura Biosphere

Satpura Biosphere encompasses both Satpura (Madai region) and Pachmarhi. The Satpura Biosphere is made up of three wildlife regions; Satpura (524sq km) the Bori range and the Pachmarhi range (together adding up to 903sq km). It is a large area that spans more than 1427sq km with Son and Denwa rivers fracturing the topography as they flow inside the forested region.

The Forest

The three main circuits here are Jhinjhini Mahal and the more popular Keria and Lagda routes. Churna is a full day loop that keeps

Entry

Boat crossing: ₹50 per person

Boat hire: Indian ₹2000, foreigner ₹2500 per boat

Jeep safari: Indian ₹3200, foreigner ₹4000

Full day jeep safari with guide: Indian ₹6000, foreigner ₹8000 (incl jeep for 6–7 people, forest permit and boat crossing)

Elephant safari: Indian ₹500, foreigner ₹700 (incl of guide and forest permit)

Walking tour: Indian ₹750, foreigner ₹1400 per person

3 seater canoes: Indian ₹950, foreigner ₹1050

you in the forest. Imagine the thrill of spending the whole day in the company of beasts and entrancing jungle stories recounted by your forest guide.

Trails & Safaris

There are five ways to experience the jungle – jeep safari, elephant safari, boat, walking and canoe ride. One needs to hop across the Denwa River to start all these except the canoe and boat safaris that can pick you from the edge of the river, where the forest ticketing counter stands (same bank as the resorts).

Since Satpura is not as big as the other forests of Madhya Pradesh, the zones have no special or separate ticketing. There are two driving trails (Bagha Nala and Peeliya), both not more than 10km and both rising and dipping over sandstone peaks, narrow gorges and deep ravines. Many resorts organise breakfast here and guests can sit on the rocks, waiting for an animal to arrive on the other side for a drink of water. Sightings here are not uncommon. Only 15 jeeps enter the forest every day, making this one of the few parks where you may go without encountering another jeep for your entire safari.


Wildlife

This tiger reserve is brilliant for serious wildlife enthusiasts who come here not for the big cat, but for other animals. There is a healthy population of sloth bears and the


elusive leopards, although given the amount of sightings they don't seem all that elusive in this patch of the wild. The backwaters also make this an ideal spot for birders. Those fascinated with reptiles can spot snakes, frogs and monitor lizards.

Accommodation


Denwa Backwater Escape JUNGLE LODGE ₹₹₹

 9810253436; www.denwabackwaterescape.com; ctg ₹17,000, treehouse ₹20,000 (incl full board) Spread over 10 acres, the hotel overlooks the backwaters of the Denwa River. The main pavilion with the pool is perfect to relax in after a safari, but the highlight is visiting the jungle with the knowledgeable naturalist here.

Bison Resort MPSTDC ₹₹₹

 9425011294; www.mptourism.com; ₹3,590 onwards (with breakfast) The state owned resort offers 12 AC deluxe rooms and a multi-cuisine restaurant.

Reni Pani JUNGLE LODGE ₹₹₹


 755 2661100; www.renipanijungleodge.com; ctg ₹20,000 (incl full board) When contemporary style meets local aesthetics, the stay is nothing less than gorgeous. The luxury property draws inspiration from local life but infuses luxury seamlessly into it. There are three kinds of units: nullah, hill and forest. Of this, the

nullah rooms are situated along the small streams.


Forsyth Lodge JUNGLE LODGE ₹₹₹

 9302625334; www.forsythlodge.com; ctg ₹31,050, machan ₹34,155 (incl full board & 2 safaris in shared vehicles) Sprawling across 44 acres, Forsyth Lodge is one of the most eco-inclined luxurious properties of Satpura. Local nuances are reflected in everything in the lodge – the decor, warm hospitality and even aesthetics inspired from the Gond tribals of the region. A pool, bush dinner and astronomy sessions are some of the favoured experiences.

The Madhai Resort HOTEL ₹₹

 9424437150; www.themadharesort.com; Bijakhari village; d ₹2500 (AC) ₹2200 (non AC) This 12-room basic property is one of the few that is suitable for budget travellers. The rooms are divided in three blocks that overlook a garden and the kitchen. It is close to the ticket counter for the forest.

Madhai Riverside Lodge HOTEL ₹₹

 94250443620; www.madhairiversidelodge.com; Sarangpur village; d from ₹2500–3500 This hotel may not be swanky, but has certainly bagged the most vantage address. All 13 rooms look onto a garden that stretches into the backwaters of the Denwa River. The rooms are clean and simple.



PACHMARHI

Why Go?

Overlooking lush forests, this charming hill station tucked in the Satpura range offers an ideal atmosphere to unplug surrounded by slopes draped in sal trees. Though the cantonment town is part of the Pachmarhi biosphere, it is not a destination for wildlife lovers but a tourist retreat that makes for a cool getaway in the plains of Central India.

Quick Facts

GETTING THERE

Bhopal is the closest airport to Pachmarhi (195km). Alternatively, Pipariya railway station lies 47km from the town, on the main Mumbai-Howrah line. Delhi, Mumbai, Agra, Gwalior, Indore and Jabalpur are well connected by buses.

WHEN TO VISIT

Pachmarhi is a round the year destination but the main holiday season is between October and May. Ideal for a relaxed holiday, you can even head here in the monsoon months, when there is a lush green tinge everywhere.

Pachmarhi offers glorious views of sunsets

Sights

Bison Lodge

Captain James Forsyth, a British officer with the East India Company named Bison Lodge after a herd of 'bison' (gaur) he spotted here. It's now an interpretation centre focusing on the history, flora and fauna of the Satpura region. The complex also doubles up as the Eco Parayatn Office where one can buy tickets for the sights that fall under the forested region and hire Gypsies and guides, which are mandatory. Forest entry ₹60 per head or ₹960 for upto 7 people incl of guide, 4WD Gypsy ₹1425 per day (₹2500 peak season) 9am–5pm Thu–Tue, 9am–1pm Wed

Chauragarh Loop

At 1308m, Chauragarh is Madhya Pradesh's third-highest peak. The Shiva shrine at the top attracts tens of thousands of pilgrims during Shivaratri Mela. On the way, stop at Handi Khoh, also known as Suicide Point, to gawk down the 100m canyon into the dense forest. You'll spy Chauragarh in the distance from here, as well as

Top Tip: Cycling

Pachmarhi sights can be reached by bicycle, although bikes have to be left at the trailheads from where the hiking begins. You can rent one from Baba Cycles (Subhash Rd; per hr/day ₹20/100; 10am–9pm).

Priyadarshini (Forsyth Point), further along the road. About 3km beyond Priyadarshini the road ends at Mahadev Cave (7am–7pm), where a path 30m into the damp gloom reveals a lingam with an attendant priest. This is the beginning of the 1365-step pilgrim trail to Chauragarh (five hours' return hike).

Rajat Prapat

Steps up from the snack stall by Apsara Vihar lead to a point with magnificent views of the gorge and of Rajat Prapat, also known as Big Fall. The tallest of Pachmarhi's waterfalls at 106m, it tumbles down a gully over a sheer cliff. Also called a silver cascade when sun rays fall on the waterfall, it shimmers giving a silvery look.

Apsara Vihar

Around 1km past Pandav Caves is the trailhead for Apsara Vihar, a pool underneath a small waterfall, which is the best of Pachmarhi's natural pools for swimming. It's popularly known as the Fairy Pool.

Bee Falls

Originally named Jamna Prapat after a local lady who chanced upon these falls, they have now been named as the 'Bee Falls' due to the stinging sensation that one feels when the water plummets down on people. There are two levels to the falls. The easier spot is a short walk down where tiered and more tamed water allows people to bathe or dip their

Snapshot: Highest point in Central India

Pachmarhi is home to the highest point of Central India, the Dhupgarh peak at 4429 feet, and is a popular sunset point. It's a steep drive till the peak. The highest peak here is called Hathi Shikhar. Besides lush greenery, you get a bird's-eye-view of Pachmarhi town.

feet sitting at the edge of the rocks. Climb down 350 steps to see the real wonder where the falls crash down onto the rocks.

₹600 local jeep that drives you from the parking lot for 3km down to the first level – only if you haven't already hired a jeep for the day; 9am–3.30pm

Reechgarh

More famous for the shooting of Bollywood blockbuster *Asoka*, rather than for the jaw dropping gorgeous rockscape, Reechgarh is worth your time. It's a short loop of a cave, which one can easily duck and enter and then walk along for a small

stretch before emerging back into the light.

9am–4.30pm

Duchess Falls

The only fall that closes down during the monsoon, this is where the famous Liril advertisement of yester years was shot. The falls lie about 8km away from town. This is accessible by a Gypsy, but one needs to leg the last 1.5km stretch. Once there, a 35ft tall cascade of water comes thunderously down.

Pachmarhi is home to many waterfalls



Satpura Adventure Institute

There are plenty of activities for adventure enthusiasts in Pachmarhi. The ground next to the airstrip is rife with adrenalin as parasailing (₹600), ATVs (₹300–500), zipline (₹500) and other sporting activities like paragliding attract many frenzied first-timers.

9am–6pm

Accommodation

MP Tourism runs most of the hotels in Pachmarhi. Most of them can be found in the Jai Stambh chowk area, 2km southwest of the centre of the town.

A few rooms at Champak Bungalow overlook a large garden



The Golf View

HOTEL ₹₹

☎755 2466515; www.golfview.in; Mahadev Rd; d Royal Club ₹7000, Regal Club ₹8000, Forsyth Ste ₹9000, Victorian Ste ₹10,000 Originally constructed by the Roman Catholic Mission Estate in 1926–27, this is now a refurbished version by a heritage chain. Overlooking the golf course of Pachmarhi, this is ideal for those looking for something plush. Think period furniture, mini bar, an LED TV and other trappings of a luxury resort. The Victorian Suites are the best rooms on the property, but also the priciest. The Royal Club and Regal Club rooms are packed away at the back with no view.

Vanasthali Cottages

HOTEL ₹₹

☎9424439679; www.vanasthalicottages.co.in; VIP Rd; d ₹4800 (incl full board)



The location is one of the few things going for the resort. Away from the main town, it beats the clutter. They have Swiss tents and cottages and a large garden with a fountain. This is the kind of place where a group can play music late into the night and ask for a bonfire in the cooler months to spend time under the stars.

Champak Bungalow

MPSTDC ₹₹

☎7578 252034; www.champak-bungalow-pachmarhi-mptdc.hotelsgds.com; d from ₹4500 (incl full board) Champak Bungalow boasts a pool and gym along with excellent rooms and Swiss tents that overlook a large garden. Choose the rooms away from the reception block to escape the constant buzz here. There are

Bison Lodge is an interpretation centre focusing on the history of Satpura

cycles for hire to go around town.

Glen View

MPSTDC ₹₹

☎7578 252533; www.glen-view-pachmarhi-mptdc.hotelsgds.com; Raj Bhavan Rd; d from ₹4600 (incl full board) Large, comfortable AC tents and cottages are dotted around the lush garden of a huge colonial-era cottage, which has also been converted to house the luxury 'heritage' rooms, all of which open out onto a sweeping verandah. There's a restaurant and bar.

Evelyn's Own

HOTEL ₹₹

☎7578 252056; Saptura Retreat Rd; r ₹2000–4000 This rustic colonial-era

cottage, built by a British priest has been converted into a charming guesthouse by Colonel Balwant Rao and his wife Pramilla and has the right ethos. The main cottage, full of family portraits and period furniture, and the lush grounds, holding loads of hideaway nooks for a peaceful read or afternoon drink, are antiquated delights. Despite being comfortable, some of the guest rooms have cramped bathrooms.

Rock-End Manor MPSTDC ₹

☎ 7578 252079; www.rock-end-manor-pachmarhi-mptdc.hotelsgds.com; ₹ ₹5400 (incl full board) A gorgeous colonial-era whitewashed building, Rock-End is perched above the parched fairways of the Army golf course. Six spacious rooms with high ceilings and furnishings are luxurious with quality furniture, framed paintings and full-body massage showers. The seating areas around the covered walkway have great views.

Woodland Adventure Resort HOTEL ₹

☎ 7578 252272; www.woodlandpachmarhi.com; d from ₹2500 A family-friendly spacious resort, it has the same aesthetics as its counterparts, with the additional draw of adventure activities on the property – a climbing wall, ATVs and Burma bridge – that are hugely popular with guests. There are only six rooms but the property, which has ample space, is going to add Swiss cottages soon.

Hotel Saket HOTEL ₹

☎ 7578 252165; www.sakethotel.in; Patel Rd; r from ₹600–1500 The rooms, which have flowers painted on one wall, are better than the hotel's lobby would lead you to expect. The attached restaurant Raj Bhoj (mains ₹60 to ₹200) dishes out good and cheap Gujarati, Bengali, Chinese and south Indian dishes.

Hotel Highlands MPSTDC ₹

☎ 7578 252099; www.hotel-highlands-pachmarhi.hotelsgds.com; Pipariya Rd; r ₹2590 (incl breakfast & bed tea) This MP Tourism property on the approach road into Pachmarhi has great-value rooms with high ceilings, dressing rooms, modern bathrooms and verandahs which are dotted around well-tended gardens. There's a children's play area and a bar-restaurant. Wi-fi is in the lobby only.

Eating

New Hotel and Open Garden Restaurant INDIAN

☎ 7581013370; Mahadev Rd; mains below ₹500; 7am–11pm This place has a good selection of Gujarati, Chinese, Bengali, south Indian and north Indian classics. But there are perils that come with eating at an open restaurant so beware of the monkeys, who watch you keenly. However one has to admit that no other meal at Pachmarhi trumps such entertainment.

China Bowl CHINESE

Mains below ₹500; 8am–10.30pm Choose the open-air garden seating over the cosy restaurant inside at the atmospheric China Bowl. The large, airy verandah also has tables, making full use of the spacious colonial building. The food is good, but it's the breakfast that comes as a pleasant surprise.

Raso MULTI-CUISINE

Near Company Garden; mains ₹90–500; 8am–11pm This is not your average roadside dhaba. A scrumptious, long-winded non-veg, south Indian and Chinese menu is served here by uniformed waiters in several open-air seating areas covered by corrugated roofs. Our waiter's recommendation, Tawa Veg (₹180), was downright delicious.

Shopping

Mrignayanee SOUVENIRS

Mahadev Rd; 10am–5pm This chain of souvenir shops run by MP Tourism also has a presence in Pachmarhi. Find bric-a-brac from all over the state and adjoining Chhattisgarh too.

Prakrit CLOTHES

☎ 7578 252093; Raipur Rd; 11am–7pm The silk themed boutique with a manufacturing showcase section of the Hoshangabad silk, is a great place to pick authentic silk stoles, saris and dress pieces. Contemporary designs have been used to make them more attractive. The walk through the production unit is not charged.

Many restaurants in Pachmarhi offer north Indian classic dishes





PENCH NATIONAL PARK

Why Go?

Suffused in silence that is broken only by the occasional rutting call of a deer or the rustling of animals in bushes, Pench has a paradisiacal touch. This is the national park where the famous classic The Jungle Book was conceived. Go here to spot Collarwali, the star tigress, gangs of dholes and families of nervous deer that flit swiftly through the jungle.

i Quick Facts

GETTING THERE

The closest airport is in Jabalpur (210km) and Nagpur (95km) with daily flights to Delhi, Mumbai and other major cities. These cities also serve as major rail junctions for Pench.

WHEN TO VISIT

Best sightings are between March and May. The park is open from October to June end.

BEST FOR

Largest population of herbivorous animals (deer) in Madhya Pradesh.

ACCESS

Pench National Park has three entry points, Jamtara, Turia and Karmajhiri. Of these Turia is the most popular one, with many resorts clustered around this gate. Jamtara and Karmajhiri lie some distance away.

In search of the big striped cat

i Entry

Jeep safari: Indian ₹1370, foreigner ₹2640

Gates: Karmajhiri ₹2500, Turia ₹3000, Jamtara ₹3000

Forest guard: ₹300 per jeep.

Timings: 5.30–10.30am and 4.00–6.45pm

o Sights

Forest

Pench National Park is named after the river that flows through it, dissecting the park into two halves. Spread over 758sq km, the mixed forest has a prominent teak treeline. It was declared a sanctuary in the late 70s and then given national park status in early 80s. There are two major routes inside the forest that overlap only in the middle thus helping to reduce the clutter of jeeps and offering a fairly peaceful tryst with the jungle. Apart from keeping your eyes peeled for wildlife, also look out for the 'ghost trees' (white kulu) that serve as beacons in the thick forest.

Wildlife

Pench is a popular addition to the tiger trail but it also has the largest population of herbivorous animals (largely deer) in the region. Apart from these, it's easy to spot dholes, jackals, wild boar and cheeky macaques. Along with them is the robust population of tigers,

sloth bears, leopards, jackals, 285 species of birds, rare vultures, gliding squirrels and many varieties of snakes. The Asian paradise flycatcher (state bird of Madhya Pradesh) can also be seen here. Collarwali, a tigress that had been previously collared for radio tracking, still roams with the contraption. The famous tigress, who was part of a popular documentary series called *Spy in the Jungle*, has mothered over 22 cubs over the years. Tigers named BMW and Raiyakasa, also called Sula, a tiger with an inverse T on his head are the highlights here. The legendary tales of their rivalry make for interesting conversation.

o Accommodation

If you do not want to have a package tour ambience, then staying at resorts close to Jamtara and Karmajhiri might be better because they are slightly further away from the main gate and entry point – Turia. The number of Gypsies allowed at every entry point is what determines the popularity of a section. Jamtara and Karmajhiri allow 6 in a day, while 40 leave the gates of Turia daily.

TURIA GATE

Kipling's Court MPSTDC ₹₹₹

☎ 7695 232830; www.kiplings-court-pench-mptdc.hotelsgds.com; Khawasa; dm ₹1100, r ₹4000 (incl full board), r (AC) from ₹5700 This government-run

property wins in both the budget category (considering prices include all meals) and the family category (it boasts the best playground in Turia and is also home to 30-odd rabbits). The two well-kept, six-bed dorms here are good value and the private cottages are dotted around well-manicured gardens. There's also a bar. It's 2km past Turia, about 1km before the park gate.

Tathastu HOTEL ₹₹₹

☎ 7695 232838; www.tathasturesorts.com; Awarghani village; villa ₹13,000, tree house & tent ₹16,000, cave room ₹18,000 There's a haphazard kitsch to the interior design at this Pench newcomer, but that's immediately forgotten by the incredible value in the villas. Set in American southwest desert style, each three-bedroom villa comes with a living room, kitchen, dining room, dip pool and a cook, waiter and housekeeper. The cave room, 10m-high tree houses and well-appointed tents are great as well, but are more expensive than the villas.

Baghvan Taj RESORT ₹₹₹

☎ 7695 232847; www.tajsafaris.com; Awargani village; d ₹47,000 (incl full board & 2 safaris) Twelve massive bamboo



Many birds including the woodpecker can be spotted at Pench National Park

and sal cottages are tucked away amid the forest and feature exquisite artwork and furniture (including antique Rajasthani porch swings), indoor-outdoor showers and massive elevated machans (open-air patios). The open-air common areas follow suit, only to be pleasantly offset by the occasional retro appliance, giving the place a quirky touch. Food is good. A pool area and massage room (treatments from ₹2500) add to the experience.

✓ Top Tip: Holiday during off-season

Many properties at Pench tend to remain open during the monsoon as well, as this is only 167km from Nagpur and is used as a veritable weekend getaway although the more serious lodges close down between July and October. The spoils of this holiday might be different from the one that involves an authentic jungle holiday.

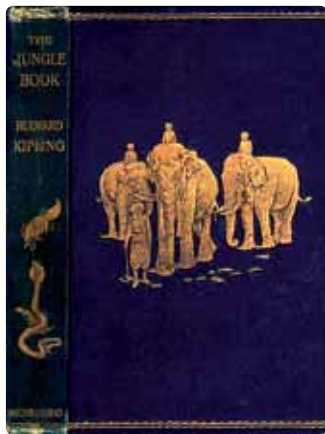
Mahua Vann RESORT ₹₹₹

☎9911087646; www.mahuaresorts.com; Kuppitola village; machan ctg ₹12,000, super deluxe ctg ₹10,000, deluxe ctg ₹8,000 (incl full board) Mahua Vann is blessed with thick foliage around making you feel one with nature the moment you enter. The cottages have a vintage vibe and a dash of luxury. While there are plenty of spaces in the resort to relax, it's the library that steals the show.

Tuli Tiger Corridor HOTEL ₹₹₹

☎7695 232859; www.tulihotels.com; Avarghani village; ctg ₹7500, luxury tent ₹7000 (incl full board) Walk along bamboo thickets to reach the ultra-luxury cottages that dot the 22

The original cover of *The Jungle Book* that was set in Pench



acre-lush property on the fringes of Pench. This resort satiates all hunger for a luxury holiday blended with the wildlife experience – you'll see that in the spa, swimming pool and superior dining experience offered.

The Riverwood Forest Retreats HOTEL ₹₹₹

☎9711326357; www.waxpolhotels.com; Mudiyaareeth village; d ₹5900 (incl full board) Choose the garden facing rooms over the others for a view of the well-manicured lawns, and a relaxing setting where one can unplug. Apart from the clean and spacious rooms, the resort offers a pool, spa and activities like nature walk and star gazing.

Jungle Home Resort and Spa HOTEL ₹₹₹

☎11 46035500; www.welcomheritagehotels.in; Avarghani village; d dlx ₹7000, ctg ₹7500 ste ₹9000. (incl full board) This hotel entertains a lot of weekend vacationers from Nagpur. Those interested in unwinding in the pool and the barbeque area might enjoy the relaxed, no-fuss atmosphere of the place. Serious wildlife enthusiasts are likely to find the place subpar.

Pench Jungle Camp HOTEL ₹₹₹

☎9999742000; www.penchjunglecamp.com; d ₹11,000 (incl full board) With cottages tucked away behind small thickets and manicured gardens, Pench Jungle Camp has a family-vacation vibe to it. In fact, you may

Snapshot: Jungle Book

Born in India, famous author Rudyard Kipling spent the first six years of his life in the country and returned after schooling in Britain to spend more time here. A significant amount of his work was inspired by the Indian landscape and it was the lush environs of Pench that he chose as the setting for the legendary character, Mowgli and his troop, the stars of his novel, *The Jungle Book* (1894). If you're a fan of the book, and the more recently the movie, you will be able to relive the moments of the book in the forest.

want to choose the large family rooms if travelling with kids since they come with two double beds. Three in-house dogs (Tarzan, Jane and Bagheera) are a part of the hospitality team that works hard to make the stay extremely special.

KARMAJHIRI GATE

Pench Tree Lodge LODGE ₹₹₹

☎11 46035500; www.pugdundeasafaris.com; Sarrahiri village; d ₹18,000 (incl full board) The fact that there are only six tree houses here ensures that it's not too crowded. The main pavilion is where one can dine, swim or sit on the first floor common area. It's like having a 'Jungle Book' experience with many an anecdote from the staff, and warnings to not carry any food to the luxury tree house (in case an animal or a reptile slithers in for a bite). The balconies of the rooms overlook a vast expanse of undergrowth – a soothing mélange of green.

Mowgli's Land, Forest Rest House REST HOUSE ₹₹₹

☎7695 232832; d ₹2500 The vintage styled, high-ceiling, Mowgli's Land is a good choice. The large rooms are basic but clean. The advantage lies in staying extremely close to the gate of the national park. In fact, a smaller wing of six rooms lies just inside the gate.

JAMTARA GATE

Jamtara Wilderness Camp LODGE ₹₹₹

☎9190618805; www.jamtarawilderness.com; Jamtara village; d ₹39,501 (incl full board & 2 safaris) Luxury tented accommodation with all the trappings of a high-end resort ensure that one is pampered silyly here. The star bed steals the show; it lies on a wooden platform from where you can gaze at the clear skies. Meals are served under a huge banyan tree.



KANHA NATIONAL PARK

Why Go?

Among the most famous national parks, not just in Madhya Pradesh, but across the country, Kanha presents a welcome traffic jam in its lush green swathes – a heavy convergence of deer, wild boar, hyenas, jackals, macaques, langurs, the wild dogs and the Bengal tigers. This bounty of nature within the sal and bamboo forest definitely puts it on top of the list for wildlife enthusiasts.

i Quick Facts

GETTING THERE

The closest airports are Jabalpur (133km) and Nagpur (261km) with daily flights to major cities. The same cities, Gondia (134km) and Bilaspur (175km) serve as major rail junctions.

WHEN TO GO

The park is open from November to June but March to May is the best time to spot animals.

BEST FOR

To spot the barasingha (hard ground swamp deer).

ACCESS

There are three entry points for Kanha, of which only two have major tourist activity. Khatia Gate in Khatia village is quite popular; other gates into the park include Mukki, 45km from Khatia, and Sarhi, 60km northeast.

Spotting a tiger at Kanha is a cherished moment for travellers

Sights

Terrain

The largest national park in the state sprawls across Mandla and Balaghat districts, taking up 940sq km. With the buffer zone and adjacent Phen sanctuary included, the park is more than 1100sq km. The sal and bamboo forests make for lush undergrowth here, where the original habitants of the wild live. Kanha National Park is one of the most popular stops on the tiger trail offering a more enriching experience.

Wildlife

Your dream of spotting the tiger may not always come true here, but

The barasingha's numbers grew in Kanha under special care

there are other rare species like the barasingha (hard ground swamp deer) you can hope to encounter.

The barasingha is special as it was close to extinction in the region until the Kanha authorities sprang into action and created a special enclosure for the animal. In 2015, Kanha had a population of 600 barasinghas and this is now being used as the pool to re-introduce them in other jungles of Madhya Pradesh, like Satpura. The heart of the jungle has this large enclosure, but with its numbers having stabilised, the deer are no longer kept inside.

Besides tigers, the thick sal forests and meadows are home to leopards, deer, antelope, langur monkeys, gaur (Indian bison), Indian wild dogs (dhole), Indian fox, sloth bear, nilgai, wild boar, wolf and the odd lonesome jackal or two. The park also boasts

Snapshot: Star attractions of Kanha

The highlight of the forest is Munna, the male tiger, who has stripes on his forehead that spell CAT. Given this special marking, photographers and wildlife enthusiasts alike find it extremely exciting to spot and photograph him. Link 7, Kingfisher, Bawa, Chhoti Mada and Bheem are the other popular tigers who trawl the jungle. Barasingha is the other speciality of this forest – this deer is not found anywhere else in central India.

more than 300 bird species. Some of the common names that one can spot are the Indian Roller, owlets, Scarlet Minivet, Indian Pitta, Black Hooded Oriole and sometimes the elusive Malabar Pied Hornbill.

The Forest

There are four zones inside the forest; Kanha, Sarhi, Kisli and Mukki. Of these, Kanha is generally on top of the list for visitors because they expect more sightings here than in the others. But this is not necessarily the case as it obviously depends on the movement of animals. The River Banjar cuts through the forest as the key water provider to the animals. Interestingly Gonds and Baiga tribals live in this region, still keeping their traditions alive, but now slightly urbanised thanks to the resorts that employ many of them. A walking trip to the closeby villages that surround the park makes for an interesting orientation to the tribal culture of the region.

Safaris

There are two safari slots each day: morning (roughly 6–11am) and

afternoon (roughly 3–6pm). The morning safaris are longer and tend to produce more tiger sightings. There is also a well-marked 7km driving trail leading from just inside Khatia Gate and skirting along the edge of the park before looping back to the village. Mostly you'll see a lot of monkeys and birds, but tigers do venture into this area on occasion and an accompanying guide is essential. Kanha also offers elephant safaris; this is good to access places where the jeeps cannot go. The elephant safari is coveted for tiger sightings, especially when the tiger melts into the jungle, away from the prying eyes of travellers.

Entry

Kanha zone: Indian ₹1980, foreigner ₹4010

Other zones: Indian ₹1370, foreigner ₹2690

Gypsies: ₹2500/3000 (depending on the pick-up point) with ₹300 for the forest guides.

Timings: Summer 5.30–11am & 3.30–6.45pm; winter 6–11am & 2.30–5.30pm



Bamni Dadar

The highest point in the park, Bamni Dadar is a plateau with thick undergrowth surrounding the craggy top. This is also popular as the sunset point of the park and awards visitors with an idyllic view, especially when the sun colours the sky in fierce shades of orange in the evening.



Accommodation

INSIDE THE FOREST

While lodgings in the buffer zone enjoy a wonderfully natural forest location, there are no facilities that are available in the Kisli village next to the Khatia Gate that lies just outside the park. You must book a room in advance in order to get past security at Khatia Gate. This can be booked at the MP Tourism Tourist Information Booth next to Khatia Gate. There are no standalone restaurants around Kanha so all hotels include all meals in their tariff.

Baghira Log Huts GUESTHOUSE ₹₹

☎ 7649 277227; Kisli Village; d from ₹6000 (incl full board) Apart from the nearby Tourist Hostel, this is the only place inside the buffer zone. Comfortable rather than luxurious log cabin-style rooms are set among the trees and overlook a beautiful meadow. There's also a restaurant and a bar here.

Tourist Hostel HOSTEL ₹

☎ 7649 277310; Kisli village; dm ₹1300 (incl full board) This property has a

few large well-kept multi-bed dorms with clean, shared bathrooms and lockers. It is inside the buffer zone, right in Kisli village, which leads into the park's core zone. There are no facilities here apart from the dorms, the nearby canteen and the adjacent Baghira Log Huts. The attraction is that you're staying right in the midst of monkey-filled forest, and a stone's throw from meadows that attract deer and gaur throughout the day, though you are not allowed to wander far off.

MUKKI GATE

Infinity Resorts RESORT ₹₹₹

☎ 9650193662; www.infinityresorts.com; d from ₹8000 (incl full board) The resort is located on a small hillock with mango and mahua trees around. Choose from large villas or tent rooms, where the local Gond art is integrated with the design giving the place a charming and rustic touch. It even has a huge pool, a library and a spa that has a range of therapies on its menu.

Chitvan Jungle Lodge RESORT ₹₹₹

☎ 8860518887; www.chitvan.com; d ₹8000–19,000 (incl full board) The four different kinds of suites in the resort are done up in soothing colours and some of them overlook a small lake. Apart from a spa and a pool, Chitvan offers a number of activities to keep you busy, such as bullock cart rides, cycling, a walk with the naturalist to the Banjaar River and

dance performances by tribals each evening. The terrace is the most coveted place where you can sip tea and take in the sounds from the jungle.

Singinawa Jungle Lodge RESORT ₹₹₹

☎ 124 4908610; www.singinawajungleodge.com; d from ₹14,500 (incl full board) Apart from luxurious and well-appointed cottages, Singinawa offers a 4-bedroom bungalow with a private lounge dining room and library that's perfect for large groups. The most fascinating part of the lodge is a tiny museum that celebrates the history of the Gond and Baiga tribes through its art. It also has a spa offering a range of treatments and a pool. Besides safaris, they offer plenty of activities including visits to the market to keep you busy.

KHATIA (KISLI SIDE)

Kanha Earth Lodge RESORT ₹₹₹

☎ 124 2970497; www.kanhaearthlodge.com; d from ₹18,000 (incl full board) Located adjacent to a tribal hamlet, Kanha Earth Lodge sits on 16 acres of natural forest land. The warm hospitality and attention to detail is commendable, and so is the knowledge of the naturalist and manager of the resort, who accompanies guests to the forests.

Courtyard House HOMESTAY ₹₹₹

☎ 9425153571; www.courtyardhousekanha.com; Patpara village; d from ₹6500 (incl

♥ If You Like: Corbett Foundation

Visit the prestigious foundation to come up and close with wildlife conservation, awareness, tribal livelihoods through a museum and special initiatives for the local community.

☎ 91 7636 290300; www.corbettfoundation.org; Kanha office, village Baherakhar, Near Baihar, P.O. Nikkum, Dist. Balaghat

full board) Courtyard House is one of the most charming properties in Kanha, with five cosy rooms done up in hues of yellow. Choose the upper floor that overlooks the pool and the forest canopy. This is a great way to step away from staid hotel hospitality and feel like you're in a home away from home.

Tuli Tiger Resort RESORT ₹₹₹

☎ 7489611006; www.tulihotels.com; tent ₹6500, ctg ₹7000 (incl full board) Wake up to the sound of chirping birds or the cheeky calls of langurs close to your window. Bamboo thickets and mixed trees grow on the property itself, inducting you into a jungle just as you step in. The refreshing yellow colour adds an endearing charm to the ambience of the ivy-clad cottages. Apart from the swimming pool and spa, the resort has pavilions where you can relax with a book.

♥ If You Like: MPSTDC options

Mocha Baghira Jungle Resort 📍7649 277244; near Kisli Gate; ₹3,790–4,990 Located on the banks of the Banjar River the resort offers AC rooms and can arrange nature walks and village visits.

Kanha Safari Lodge 📍7636 290715; 500km from Mukhi Gate; ₹3590–4,990 This is a good mid range option and is family friendly.

Kipling Camp

HOTEL ₹₹₹

📍11 65196377; www.kiplingcamp.com; Mocha village; d deluxe ₹9400, ctg ₹10,500 (incl full board) This wildlife lodge is the brainchild of one of India's most formidable tiger protection proponents, photographer and wildlife conservationist Belinda Wright. It's as informative as it is relaxing to stay in this jungle setting, where wildlife discussions follow excellent communal meals (Indian for lunch, continental for dinner), and guests retire to rustic-chic lodges with English cottage style touches. Nature abounds in the fenceless grounds where langur monkeys and chitals make regular appearances. You can also swim in the river with Tara, the camp's favourite resident, a 55 year-old elephant.

Banjaar Tola

RESORT ₹₹₹₹

📍9303651100: www.tajsafaris.com; Kanha National Park; d ₹5,0500 (incl full board & 2 safaris) The super luxury camp set up by Taj Safaris transports you to an ethereal atmosphere. Despite a camp-like feel to the accommodation, expect plenty of amenities. The tented suites with

a private deck are situated next to the Banjar River; bird song and the soothing sound of the river are a relaxing lullaby.

Pugmark Resort

HOTEL ₹₹₹

📍7649 277291; www.pugmarkresort.com; d luxury ctg ₹9500, pool villa ₹25,000 (incl full board) These spacious, village-like cottages in Khatia are just a step above basic but they are bright and airy and set around a pleasant, albeit slightly overgrown garden. It's a well-oiled family-run operation, and Rahul, the owner is very knowledgeable and nails five-star service for three-star prices (in addition to being the resident painter). The food is outstanding – they even use milk from their own two Holsteins.

Muba at Mukki

HOTEL ₹₹

📍9303037453; www.mubaresorts.com; Village Bahmani; d ` 4800–8000 (incl full board) Located slightly away from the gate of the jungle, Muba offers a taste of the countryside in its surroundings, quite contrary to the plush interiors where you can relax in at the resort. The great part of Muba is that it offers multiple

options in different price brackets. Surrounded by a thicket, you feel that you are in the heart of the jungle anyway.

Machan Complex GUESTHOUSE ₹

📍9993672827; dm ₹100, r ₹500–700

This is a perfect option for those on a budget. Machan has five basic cottages set around a huge banyan tree. There's a new dorm building with larger rooms. The owner, Anil, is a naturalist and welcoming.

Motel Chandan

HOTEL ₹

📍7649 277220, 9425855220; www.motelchandan.com; r ₹1000 (non AC) ₹2100 (AC) This budget hotel with modern rooms done up in teak-wood accents is one of the closest to Khatia village. The friendly owner organises safaris with four of his own 4WDs and two resident naturalists.

🔒 Shopping

Kaladirgha

📍7642 291859; 6am–10pm; closed July–Oct Located close to Mandla gate, the shop is packed with wildlife themed bric-a-brac – tees, magnets, caps, key chains, mugs and tribal handicrafts.

Aranyak

HANDICRAFTS

Khatia Gate, Opp Motel Chandan; 9am–9pm Aranyak Art Emporium is one of the few bonafide souvenir shops near the Khatia Gate of Kanha National Park. Tribal inspired handicrafts are available here. The shop may remain closed during off-season.

Kanha Earth Lodge sits on 16 acres of natural forest land





BANDHAVGARH NATIONAL PARK

Why Go?

If your sole reason for visiting is a date with the tiger, look no further. Bandhavgarh, whose Tala Range boasts a very high density of Royal Bengal tigers, is India's top tiger playground and should net you a tiger sighting in this relatively small park. The origin of the white tiger can be traced here.

i Quick Facts

GETTING THERE

The closest airport is in Jabalpur (200km) and Khajuraho (250km) with daily flights to Delhi, Mumbai and other major cities. The nearest railway stations are Umaria (35km) and Katni (100km).

WHEN TO GO

Best sightings are between March and May. The park is open from October to June.

BEST FOR

Apart from tigers, it is also known for its vulture population.

ACCESS

The forest has three gates, of which Tala is the most treaded as 20 gypsies enter from this gate each time. The other gates, Khitauli and Magadhi, allow 15 and 20 respectively.

This national park is home to many Royal Bengal tigers

i Entry

Tala zone: Indian ₹2690, foreigner ₹5330

Other zones: Indian ₹1370, foreigner ₹2690

Gypsies: ₹2200 (depending on the pick-up point) with ₹500 for the forest guides

Timings: Summer 5.30–11am & 3.30–6.45pm; winter 6–11am & 2.30–5.30pm

o Sights

Terrain

Primarily a sal and bamboo forest, with the River Charnaganga winding through it, Bandhavgarh National Park stretches over 1150sq km and came under Project Tiger in 1993. Located in Umaria district, that is surrounded by outlying hills of the Vindhya range, the park has a slightly rocky and hilly terrain with large grassland meadows. The Bandhavgarh hill is the highest point of the park.

Bandhavgarh Fort

The park takes its name from an ancient fort perched on top of 800m-high cliffs. Its ramparts provide a home for vultures, blue rock thrushes and crag martins and there are monuments that lie dilapidated with centuries of weathering. Once accessible to general public, there are now restrictions to visit the area.

Wildlife

As an erstwhile hunting reserve of the maharajas of Rewa, this land was a rich repository of tigers, but 111 of them had become game for the Raja and his guests by 1914. The forest became world renowned when a small population of white tigers was found here after which authorities began a programme to procreate and increase their population. It is said that all the white tigers of the world can be traced back to this forest.

Home to the highest number of Royal Bengal tigers in the world (68 as of 2013), during peak season, few travellers return disappointed and a

✓ Top Tip: Tiger express train

A semi luxury tourist train with 1st and 2nd AC options was launched on 5 June, 2016, by the tourism minister, to boost tourism in the 'Tiger Circuit' of Madhya Pradesh. The train started in October when the parks opened. It is flagged off from Delhi's Safdarjung Railway Station, connecting Bandhavgarh, Kanha and Jabalpur, using Katni as the closest station to the parks. Dhuandhar Falls of Bhedaghat will also be included in the 5 night, 6 day package. Cost 1st AC/ 2nd AC ₹45500/39000 (dbl occ, per person, full board).

📷 Snapshot: Legend of Bandhavgarh Fort

Few know that the thick forests of Badhavgarh also carry a historical legend of Lord Rama and his brother, Lakshman. The Bandhavgarh Fort is supposed to have been gifted to the lord by his younger brother to watch over Lanka. Interestingly Bandhav means brother and Garh means Fort. So the meaning of Bandhavgarh is 'brother's fort'.

tiger sighting is a distinct possibility even if you are here only for a couple of days as this is a relatively small park. It is ranked on par with Rajasthan's Ranthambhore National Park for sightings. Monga, Kankati, Bheem and Bhagoda are star attractions for tiger centric wildlife enthusiasts.

There are also more than 40 rarely seen leopards besides more commonly sighted animals such as deer, wild boar and langur. Apart from the big cat, keep your eyes peeled for 36 other species of

mammals (important ones include wild boar, sloth bear, sambar, leopard, jackals and hyenas), 250 species of birds and 80 kinds of butterflies and numerous reptilian varieties.

Interpretation Centre

The centre has interesting exhibits detailing the history and legends of Bandhavgarh, and also some superb tiger photos on the first floor. It is

There are more than 40 leopards in Bandhavgarh area



♥ If You Like: MP Tourism canter

If you're going in peak season and don't get a safari reservation till the Tala zone, you can try to book one of MP Tourism's two 12-seat canters, which only traverse the Magadhi and Khitauli zones of the park. It will cost ₹1200 per person.

located on the right just before the Tala village.

11am–1.30pm & 6–8pm, closed Wed evening

🏠 Accommodation

Nature

Heritage Resort

HOTEL ₹₹₹

📞7653 265351; www.natureheritageresort.com; d dlx ₹7500 luxury ctg ₹8000 (incl full board) This hotel is a wonderful mid-

Kings Lodge is one of the oldest in the area

range choice with 22 comfortable cottages and a slick safari operation. It has three restaurants serving farm fresh meals. The owner survived a tiger attack in 2003 – ask him about it!

Treehouse Hideaway HOTEL ₹₹₹

📞124 4222657; www.treehousehideaway.com; d ₹20,000 (incl breakfast), ₹34,000 (incl full board & 2 safaris) The five massive treehouses here with four-poster beds undoubtedly offer the most interesting accommodation around the national park. They are



named after the trees on which they are built – mahua, tendu, peepal, banyan and palash. Spacious outdoor porches frame the forested green surroundings and as the resort has its own resident animals and birds, you can spot animals below your cottages.

The treetop stay is a unique experience at Treehouse Hideaway

rooms that are close to the main building with the dining room, or slightly away where silence engulfs you with the occasional crock of the frog.

Kings Lodge

HOTEL ₹₹₹

📞124 2970497; www.pugdundeefaris.com; d ₹18,000 (full board) Located in the heart of tiger country, Kings Lodge is one of the oldest resorts that pioneered the importance of eco conscious accommodation in the region in its own rustic yet luxurious way. Steeped in love for wildlife, this is usually the pad for many photography workshops and talks. You can choose between

Bagh Sarai

RESORT ₹₹₹

📞9818680958; www.baghsarai.com; deluxe private bungalow ₹6950 (incl full board) Bagh Sarai offers private bungalows in the thick of the forest with each one looking like a traditional village home as it is made from material sourced locally from nearby villages. The central structure of the building houses the restaurant and bar called 'Jackal's House'.





Bhandav Vilas is a comfortable option near the Tala Gate to stay

Bandhav Vilas RESORT ₹₹₹

☎9810726252; www.bandhavvilas.com; d villa ₹9000 (incl full board) A large stone statue of sleeping Vishnu greets you as you enter the resort. The sprawling and luxurious villas here have plush decor and come with private sit out areas, rain showers and herbal accessories in the bathrooms. A wide courtyard doubles up as an amphitheatre where local performances are held in the evening, surrounded by the dining area and a few rooms. It is located in the Kuchwahi village, close to the Tala gate.

Samode Safari Lodge RESORT ₹₹₹

☎9810726252; www.samode.com; d ₹66,550 (full board & 2 safaris) Located away from the entry gate of the forest, Samode offers luxurious villas with an open-air bath court. On top of honeymoon and safari lists for travellers from across the world, unmatched hospitality and luxury is the theme of the lodge. The vernacular architecture is the best part of the resort. Besides a heated open-air swimming pool, a lounge, library and gym, it also has a spa offering a range of therapies. The best part is that you can dine at various locations – around the campfire, amidst the bushes, besides the pool or in your villa and even have a picnic under a tree.

Syna Tiger Resort RESORT ₹₹₹

☎761 4003888; www.synatigerresort.com; village d from ₹12900–17900 (incl full board) Syna's has 15 cottages and one treehouse that works very well for families, as they want to visit the jungle but come back to a restful place with amenities. In fact, the pool and the spa are the most popular spots for guests to hang out in. The resort offers a perfect mix of wildlife orientation and a lazy holiday.

White Tiger Forest Lodge MPSDTC ₹₹

www.mptourism.com; Village Tala; American plan ₹4490, with AC ₹4990 onwards Located just 2 km from the Bandhavgarh National Park, this

MPSTDC property offers furnished rooms featuring modern amenities. A bar, restaurant, swimming pool and massage centre offer plenty of options to indulge. The resort is used for conferences and tours to the National Park.

Tigergarh LODGE ₹₹

☎7489826868; www.tigergarh.com; d ₹4500 (incl breakfast); ₹5500 (incl full board) This small, but new hotel, with 12 cottages and four villas, sits under the nose of the surrounding mountains close to Ranchha village. The fashionable country-style cottages include four-poster beds and rain-style showers.

Kum Kum Home HOTEL ₹

☎9424330200; r ₹600–800 One of the most economical options close to the park, its rooms are basic and clean but have verandahs. There are garden swings as well.

Eating

Malaya Cafe CAFE ₹₹

Tala Main Rd; 9.30am–8pm; snacks ₹10–120, breakfast ₹350 This welcoming cafe run by an extrovert Gujarati woman does fabulous three-course brunches (bookings essential) that are the perfect finish to a morning safari. Authentic filter coffee or lemongrass chai, fresh fruit, porridge and lentil pancakes typically find their way to your plate. This is also an excellent souvenir shop that's got wares from around the country.

Kolkata Restaurant DHABA ₹₹

Tala Main Rd; 8am–9pm; mains ₹70–330, thali ₹140 Friendly chef-owner Amal Jana is a one-man show at this glorified dhaba in the middle of the village, where he whips up extremely tasty thalis. He reckons that it's the mustard oil that does the trick along with a side of his spicy tomato chutney. There are omelettes, Chinese and limited continental on offer as well.

Malaya Cafe offers breakfasts and brunches





PANNA NATIONAL PARK

Why Go?

Panna is relatively remote and unaffected by a dense concentration of resorts or lodges. An excursion to Panna is relaxed than other forests, where the hustle to spot a tiger can sometimes overtake the experience of the jungle. The stillness and silence of the forest is broken by the sound of the Ken River that flows inside and incessant birdsong. Keep your fingers crossed to spot a big cat.

i Quick Facts

GETTING THERE

The nearest airport is Khajuraho (24km). The city is well connected to Delhi by air. The Khajuraho railway station is well connected by daily trains. Roads from key cities from Bhopal are also good.

WHEN TO VISIT

The peak summer months of March to May are the ideal period, but since the main resort, Ken River Lodge, is

open during the monsoon, those who love the rains can get a chance to see the buffer zone in a truly different light. The park remains closed.

BEST FOR

Night safaris as it's the only park in the region to offer this experience.

ACCESS

There are two entry points to Panna National Park; Madla and Hinauta, of which the former is used more often.

Panna National Park by the Ken River offers a picturesque jungle experience

Sights

History

Historically, Panna was included in the hunting grounds of the rulers of Panna, Chhatarpur and Bijawar states. Later, when hunting was banned, Panna was integrated with the Gangau sanctuary and in 1994 it was included in the list of tiger reserve, as the 22nd addition to the coterie. Over the years, rampant poaching caused the near extinction of the Royal Bengal Tiger and strong steps had to be taken to recreate the magic of Panna.

Saving the tiger

In 2009, Panna National Park's Panna's entire tiger population had been wiped out. However painstaking efforts to relocate those from other parks like Kanha and Bandhavgarh have paid off. After almost two years and several attempts at reintroducing male and female tigers to Panna, they took charge of this forest as their own and gave birth to cubs. A heartening story followed and now Panna has a substantial population of the big cat.

Entry

Indian ₹1320, foreigner ₹ 2640

Gypsy: ₹2000

Forest guard: ₹300 per Gypsy

Timings: 5.30–10.30am & 4.00–6.45pm

Wildlife

Fortunately, the reserve is not as tourist savvy as its counterparts, Bandhavgarh and Kanha, making it a more peaceful experience. The 547sq km of forested land is replete with animals like leopard, chital, chinkara, nilgai, sambar and sloth bear. This, along with over 200 species of birds and ample reptiles, makes the forest an essential on the list. The gharials (crocodiles) in the Ken River that flows for over 72km inside the park are something that no other national park in the region boasts of. They can be seen quite closely from a boat in the river. The ride will cost ₹200 per person.

Night safari

A night safari is organised in the buffer zone. Lying on the periphery, this is the non-core part of the forest where tourism activities are conducted, so that there is less pressure on the biotic reserves. This is an exclusive aspect of the Panna National Park, but it is on the expensive side. Surprising as it may seem, there are occasions when you can spot more animals at night than in the day. Leopards, civet cats and jackals, the fox, boar and other animals often make an appearance – to the wildlife enthusiast, a rustle in the bushes is enough to inject some excitement during the trip. It is usually two hours long.

 7732 275235; www.kenriverlodge.com;
Indian/ foreigner ₹6000/7000


Terrain

The deep gorges formed by the Ken River that flows in the park are the highlight of the forest – they make the topography unique. The forest has largely broad-leafed trees owing to its subtropical nature. Teak and mixed forest varieties dominate the landscape.

Accommodation

Ken River Lodge

LODGE ₹₹₹

 7732 275235; www.kenriverlodge.com;
cottages ₹11,000, huts ₹8000 (incl full board) The wooden dining pavilion overlooking the Ken River is clearly the most interesting place in the resort. What comes close is a narrow bridge that you need to cross in order to reach the main resort area. The passionate naturalists and owners of Ken River Lodge make all

Snapshot:

Diamond mines

Panna district and surrounding areas were identified as lands with rich diamond deposits in the mid-9th century. The diamonds extracted from here are not large and are classified into four types: the clear Motichul, orangish Manik, green tinged Panna and the muddy seipa tone Bunspt. Government managed mines still run in the region but do not offer much for the traveller.

the difference to your experience. This is one of the few resorts in the area that remains open during the monsoon. The night safari is organised by this establishment.

Panna's dramatic landscape



Detour: Khajuraho & Pandav Falls

Khajuraho: The erotic carvings in Khajuraho's three groups of UNESCO World Heritage Site-listed temples are among the finest temple art in the world. The Western Group of temples, in particular, contains some stunning sculptures. Many travellers complain about the persistence of touts here, and the village is fully on the tour bus map. Their complaints are well founded, but it's not so bad that you should contemplate missing out on these beautiful temples.


Pandav Falls: If you have time, then the Pandav falls are a notable spot to detour from the park. The entry to the falls lies 8km from the gate. Plunging down 98feet, the falls lie on a tributary of the Ken River 1km off the highway. Legend says that the exiled Pandava brothers from the epic, *Mahabharata*, spent some time here. There is a small shrine at the base of the falls.

Entry ₹55, car ₹550, guide ₹60; entry is free if you visit the falls on the same day as the national park.

Pashan Garh


Taj Safaris

RESORT ₹₹₹

 22 66011825; www.tajhotels.com; d from ₹12,750 (incl breakfast) The luxury boutique jungle lodge has only 12 cottages, which makes the experience of staying here intimate and exquisite. Apart from the top-notch rooms, the highlight of the lodge lies in its team – the naturalist and other staff are extremely knowledgeable and warm. The lodge lies over 20km away from the gate of the national park, but the drive through the lush, forest-flanked road is worth your while. Plus, the lure of an exclusive terrace of your cottage to hear the sounds of the jungle cannot be trumped.

Sarai at Toria


LODGE ₹₹₹

 124 4062481; www.saraiattoria.com; d cottage ₹19,800 (incl full board) The eight cottages of Sarai at Toria, done up with thatched roof and made-up of mud, are tucked behind tall grass. The main dining area and the library is abuzz with travellers in the evenings, eager to share stories from the forest. The main building overlooks the Ken River.

Panna Tiger

Resort

HOTEL ₹₹₹

 712 6653666; www.tulihotels.com; Machan cottages from ₹d 6550 (incl full board) Choose the outer wing of the Panna Tiger Resort that overlooks the River Ken. The bright white rooms and the outside pavilion

shine through as great features for the resort.

Jungle Camp

MPSTDC ₹₹₹

 732 275275; www.mptourism.com; tent d ₹2990 Run by the Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation, Jungle Camp is a superior tented accommodation with en-suite bathrooms, complete with a jungle gym for kids and an in-house restaurant. A popular haunt for a good meal, the restaurant dishes out quick Chinese, Indian and continental fare.

K Raj Tiger Resort

HOTEL ₹

 732 275260; www.krajtigerresort.com; d ₹1500 The hotel has simple and clean rooms, but what really steals the show is the extremely warm hospitality of K Raj staff. The bright rooms seem a bit off, considering one is in the vicinity of a jungle and attuned to mellow colours, but the comfortable stay makes it a good option.

Ken River Lodge is one of the few places that remains open during the monsoon season





OTHER WILDLIFE DESTINATIONS

Why Go?

Even though the major national parks of Madhya Pradesh are a big draw for wildlife enthusiasts to come to the state, there are plenty of other sighting opportunities in small pockets. The state is home to ten national parks and 25 wildlife sanctuaries, many of which lie in close vicinity to the national parks and can be clubbed together during a visit.

i Quick Facts

GETTING THERE

Rewa: Rewa (19km from the safari point) is well connected by train to major cities and Khajuraho (167km) is the closest airport.

Sanjay National Park: Rewa (170km) is the nearest railway station. Varanasi (275km) is the closest airport, and Sidhi (70km) is

the bus junction.

Madhav National Park: The closest airport to the national park is Gwalior (130km) while Shivpuri (13km) is the the closest railway junction.

National Chambal Wildlife Sanctuary: The closest nodal junctions to the sanctuary are Agra and Etawah in Uttar Pradesh.

The langur and spotted deer can be seen in many parks and sanctuaries

Sights

The smaller parks and wildlife sanctuaries transport one into the haven of natural bounty that exists in the state. While six of the ten national parks are focused on Project Tiger, some of the sanctuaries are dedicated to other animals; while Chambal for example, shift attention to crocodiles, Rewa, on the other hand has a lineage of the white tiger. Those for whom an encounter with wildlife is not just sighting the tiger, but experiencing the many variations of the jungle, will enjoy these fragmented pockets.

Maharaja Martand Singh White Tiger Safari & Mukundpur Zoo, Rewa

This safari offers the rare opportunity of witnessing white tigers, which were originally found in this region decades ago. This was the private hunting ground of Maharaja Martand Singh, who first spotted and caught a white

tiger in 1951 in the Bargadi forest. Fascinated with the unique coloured animal, he named him Mohan, and brought him to Govind Garh Palace in Rewa. The tiger escaped from here and was caught again in Mukundpur area, less than 30km away. Since then, Mohan has remained here, even though his progenies made way to different parts of the world. The white tiger safari and zoo has been open to the public since April 2016 and remains open throughout the year. A tigress named Vindhya can be seen in her natural habitat.

Sanjay National Park

Part of the Sanjay-Dubri Tiger Reserve, the dominantly sal tree forests are great for bird watching with more than 309 species of birds in the park. Of these, Racket-tailed drongos, Indian pitta, Lesser adjutant, Redheaded vulture, Cenareous vulture, Indian white-rumped vulture, Rufus-Treepie, Golden Hooded oriole, Egyptian vulture and Nightjars are easy to spot. Although the mammals are less notable, it is home to barking deer, leopards and sloth bears.

Madhav National Park

Named after the Gwalior raja, Madho Rao Scindia, this park was the erstwhile hunting ground of the royals. Spread over an area of about 355sq km, this is one of the oldest national parks in the state. Thanks to the two lakes, Sakhya and Madhav Sagar situated inside its boundary, it

has ample marshy areas and a large population of crocodiles.

Other than these, this thick canopy of forest has a vast population of deer, jackals, wild dogs and birds and reptiles as well. Given that it is close to Gwalior (117km), this makes for a good day trip from the city. Although this was a land with a large tiger population, there are no big cats left because this was also the shooting playground for many British officers and royalty. It is said that in 1916, not less than eight tigers were shot on one day by the British viceroy, Lord Hardinge. Although bereft of tigers, continued efforts to restore the biodiversity have made this a quick getaway from Gwalior.

National Chambal Wildlife Sanctuary

Also known as the National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary, this sprawls over 5400sq km and is a well-known haven for the endangered gharial (crocodile). Straddling both Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, the Chambal River wends its way through the deep ravines and gorges inside the sanctuary, providing a home to the gharials. This is also home to the red crowned roof turtle and the Ganges river dolphins. The best way to spot these is by taking a boat and a forest guide and gliding through the river, in close proximity to the wild inhabitants. This is also an important migratory hub for birds in winter.

The Chambal Safari Lodge is a



Migratory birds at Chambal Sanctuary

20-minute drive from the sanctuary and is located within a 35-acre plantation of the original woodland, surrounded by farms. The owners conduct trips across the region, among the best being the three-hour Chambal river safari that weaves its way through the NCS, providing visitors with views of the ravines and resident river life, including the endangered Gangetic dolphin, gharials, turtles and waterbirds. The blackbuck jeep safari is another worthwhile excursion, taking you towards the Chambal ravines. It promises sightings of blackbuck and dry-land birds.

Entry

Rewa: Indian ₹20, foreigner ₹40, walking tours ₹100, safari ₹200, bicycle ₹50, golf cart ₹100 per hour

Sanjay National Park: Indian/Foreigner ₹4500/5800 per Gypsy

Madhav National Park: Indians/Foreigners ₹15/50/, Guide fee ₹50, parking charge ₹50, video ₹200, camera ₹50

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THIS GUIDE HAS BEEN

RESEARCHED AND AUTHORED BY:

This book marks Supriya Sehgal's 37th contribution to Lonely Planet and other India-based travel books. It's been a thrilling decade of being on the road for long stretches – an addiction which throws up withdrawal symptoms if she doesn't get on a bus or a train for a month. Madhya Pradesh had remained elusive for a long time until this book gave her an opportunity to explore it. Wild encounters aside, it was Chanderi's raw historical backdrop and Bhopal's stirring food scene that left her smitten – coming from a non foodie, that's all the testimony one needs.

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