

If you really want to get away from the madding crowd, then head to Reni Pani a brand new jungle lodge. The place which has neither music systems, cellphone connectivity, nor telephones, is as far from metro life as you can get.

On the other hand, the lodge owners work overtime to provide a 'wow experience.' From tiger spotting, to sipping cocktails in the heart of the jungle, Reni Pani is a good example of how environmental creature and creature comforts can co-exist. Go Now tells you more.

Reni Pani jungle lodge, bhopal

sip cocktails in the jungle

It is a long meandering road, some times disappearing into mere mud trails, that finally brings us to the lodge in the heart of the Satpura tiger country. The cellphone networks have all but disappeared and dusk is fast falling. All is quiet and still, as it can only be in a jungle – but for a small band of men and women, standing on a pavilion – waiting to greet me. Welcome to Reni Pani, a brand new luxury jungle lodge set up by two young brothers, scions of an old and royal Bhopal family, who would rather contemplate the silence of the jungle than party hard in the metro.

Sitting in the 'Enchanted Wood'
Faiz and Aly, the two young men in



You can spot many rare varieties of birds and butterflies apart from animals on this safari.

FAIZ AND ALY, AS INDEED THEIR PARENTS, HAVE MANAGED TO CREATE A UNIQUE ENVIRON WHICH IS ROOTED IN THE LOCAL ENVIRON, YET CONSTITUTES A LEGIT 'LUXURY' EXPERIENCE.

question are waiting with their small team to usher me into this pristine territory. Tea has been laid out on the verandah overlooking one of the central cottages that serves as the dining area. It is wonderfully old fashioned: Thin cucumber sandwiches, lovingly buttered, cup cakes and cookies brings back the nostalgia of the Raj in many ways and, for me, in particular the intrigues of many an Enid Blyton book – where the enchanted wood often forms the perfect setting for this kind of repast and adventure.

'luxury' experience. The cottages, for one are all furnished by materials available locally. They are made out of commercial plantation wood and not a single tree was felled in this area adjoining the protected Satpura Tiger Reserve for construction activities. In fact, local villagers and craftsmen were employed to do up the entire place – right from the village potter (for bric-a-brac in the bathroom) to the carpenters and masons.

Chucking up urban living

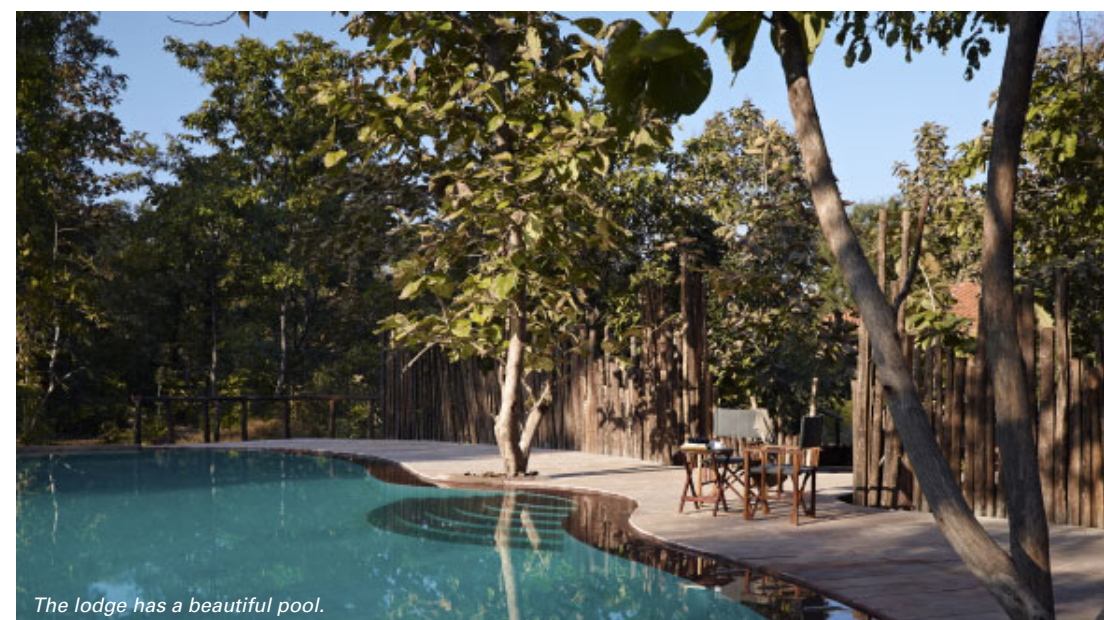
As children, Faiz and Aly would come to this part of the forest, just a few hours drive away from their home in Bhopal, to camp. Their father, an avid jungle enthusiast, instilled his love for the animals and the trees and perhaps the very soil into his two sons. On starlit nights, they would camp out in the open, learning to coexist with the wilderness and cope with the demands of this very different world. Aly, a budding naturalist, is almost as good as any professional when it comes to spotting the many different kinds of birds that exist in this environ, spotting pug marks and hearing the most distant of alarm calls of various

Not a single tree was felled to build this lodge

Reni Pani gets its rather charming name from a nearby village; Reni refers to a special kind of berries that grow locally. The lodge is in the form of cottages; each set far enough from the other and yet form part of a cohesive whole, so that administering the entire set up doesn't get too difficult. With the experience of running Bhopal's stellar Jehan Numa Palace Hotel, Faiz and Aly, as indeed their parents, have managed to create a unique environ which is rooted in the local environ, yet constitutes a legit



All cottage balconies afford uninterrupted views of the jungle.



The lodge has a beautiful pool.



The perfect spot for a quiet evening: Tea, or cocktails, can be arranged on request in a nearby clearing.

animals when a predator is in sight. At any rate, when the brothers decided to chuck up urban living, corporate jobs and such, to do something of their own, setting up a jungle lodge was the obvious answer, especially considering that the land was acquired by the family.

Inspired by the African lodges

Reni Pani, the lodge, is also a pointer of how private enterprise can aid conservation activities, largely the preserve of the government in India. Inspired by the African lodges, the brothers set out to build something, that would let people experience the wonders of the jungle without harming its ecology in any way. The result is something that is very different from the commercial hotels and cottages that have sprung up in other reserved forest areas – where every vacation people without any regard for nature throng to picnic and where weddings and parties can be fixed if you know the right people. In fact, sightings are often engineered by luring the beasts with underhand means which are potentially risky situations both for animals and mankind.

Escorted by a personal butler

Tea over, I am escorted to my cottage by a personal butler who will accompany me each time to my lodgings in the interest of safety. I am told that while enough security measures are in place and the area has

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been fenced, this *is* a forest area and anything – a big cat, a smaller hare or sundry creepy crawlies may come calling even at my cottage. However, none do – at least during my stay there, though I have been told to flash my torchlight from the room in case of any need or emergency during the night. An old-fashioned watchman sitting under a peepal tree in the night would always be on call.

Dinner in the heart of the jungle

The lodges being totally eco-friendly, there are no water-depleting bathtubs – there is an open air shower instead; there are no televisions or music systems (playing loud music is in fact discouraged) and there are no telephones either. So don't expect 'room



There are no television sets for recreation but the common area is apt for a quiet read by the fireplace.



Local materials are used to furnish the cottages.

service' of the hotel kind. Instead, fixed meals are provided and the menu is home-style, using locally available fruits and vegetables. On the other hand, dinner or tea can be arranged in a clearing or by a picturesque waterfront – though these do involve considerable effort on part of the staff, something we city dwellers must not forget. I have cocktails one evening under a totally darkened, no-moon sky by the light of old-fashioned lanterns hung from trees, sitting on roughly hewn benches and boulders. It is a surreal experience and one that is to be cherished.

Spotting the big cat?

For the safari, we begin early in the morning, accompanied by Edgar, the

resident naturalist and Aly. And the powerful jeeps take us soon to the water's edge. We cross over in a boat and arrive at the Satpura Tiger Reserve, protected country. Our drive through the jungle is a leisurely one and there are black-bucks, rare butterflies and birds that we have never quite seen in our cities, hare, monkeys a plenty. Alas, the big cat remains elusive. But we are happy nonetheless.

The next evening, as Edgar drives the powerful jeep in blinding rain, through paths that have dissolved into slush, there are enough thrills to last us a while. We drive to the waterfront and back, with some trepidation but exultant nevertheless. There's tea waiting for us in warm, homely flasks, upon a balcony of a cottage that faces the mountains. The woods meanwhile are lovely, dark and deep... and there are miles to go before we sleep in our own beds back home.

by **ANOOTHI VISHAL**