

Living it up at Thaneerhulla

Deep inside Coorg are coffee plantations where you encounter birds and boars, eat great chow and learn more about the world's favourite brew.

Ananya Bahl checks into one such aromatic space



Long walks, bird-watching and coffee lessons in and around Thaneerhulla



I'm not sure when we left the plains of Mysore behind. The road seemed to slope upward, albeit slightly, and we were surrounded by dense woods on either side. The drive from Bengaluru to Coorg—or Kodagu—takes about five hours to complete and is a pleasant one that's dotted with lovely restaurants serving lip-smacking dosas and idlis. I knew that my prized cup of coffee was not far away when the rosewood and silver oak trees gave way to coffee plants — thousands of them, on either side of me, as far as my eyes could see! As we whizzed past the shrubs, I noticed the names of the estates—Polibetta, Cottabetta, Woshully, Margolly and Coovercolly—and knew at once that this was the real deal: I was bang in the centre of all the coffee action, far from the commercialisation of Coorg and its many hotels!

My home for the next two days was going to be a colonial bungalow called Thaneerhulla, which literally translates to 'cold water spring'. It used to be the home of British planters who introduced coffee plantations to India. Over the years, the estate managers and their families lent their own flavour and feel to the bungalow, ensuring visitors get a slice of that old-world homely charm. True to its name, Thaneerhulla provided much needed rest after the long drive. In typical colonial style, my room was decorated with antique furniture, large windows and ornate tapestry, and was probably larger than most apartments in metro cities. I felt a little bit like a coffee planter from the British Raj era!

Aromas and textures

What impressed me the most was that everyone on the coffee plantation was like a walking-and-talking encyclopaedia. This stemmed from an innate passion



Things to keep in mind

The plantations are rife with wild elephants so make sure you don't roam without a guide. Wear sturdy shoes, be kind to the plants and animals, and don't pluck coffee beans and flowers. In case you want to stop in the plantation for pictures, always ask your guide if it is all right to do so and avoid venturing out at night by yourself. For more information: <http://www.plantationtrails.net/>

for coffee and its surrounding ecosystem. On a safari through the plantation I learnt about the two types of coffee grown in India: the aromatic arabica and the stronger robusta. Arabica plants are grown in the shade so they usually have large trees looming over them. On these trees, grows another gem: the peppercorn! Dressed in bright red and green, the peppers were growing like creepers making sure that the air was enveloped with a coffee aroma laced with spice. Did you know that the wild boars abound here are helpful to the coffee plant? They have a habit of digging through the soil – this makes it airy and ensures that the minerals are churned thoroughly. The plantations are a part of a large elephant corridor in Coorg—they come here to gorge on the diverse vegetation and drink from the various ponds. I noticed some bees flying around and realised that beekeeping or apiculture thrives here. From mid-February to mid-March, the white coffee flower blooms. It has a jasmine-like fragrance and if you're lucky, you can find it in pockets in April as well. Towards the

end of the safari, our guide drew our attention to a sound from a cricket-like creature. According to him, if you heard this it implied that rain was imminent!

Hoots and flutters

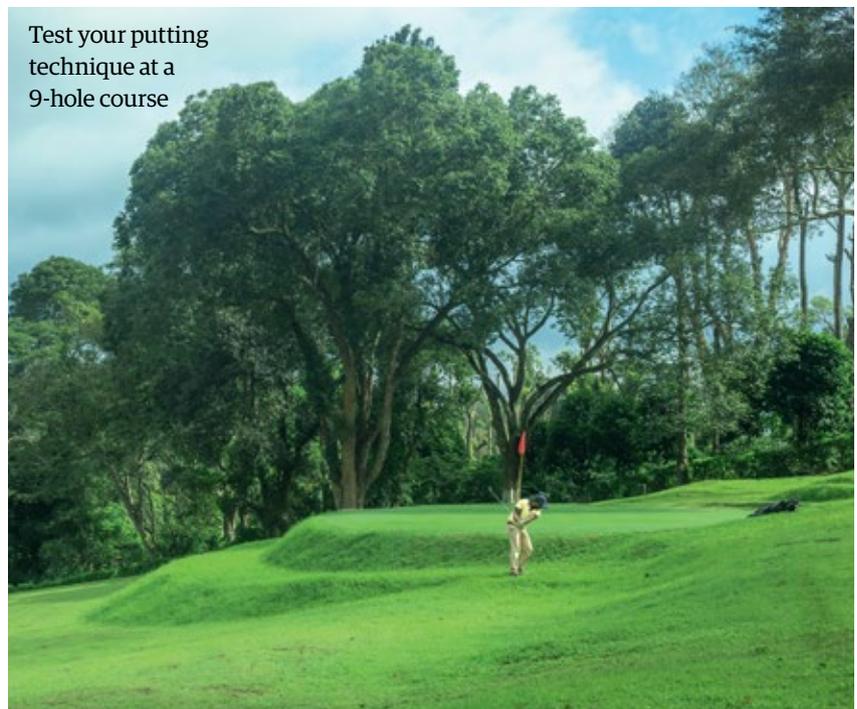
On my second day at the plantation, I woke up close to dawn and headed deep into the woods with Uday, the in-house naturalist. On our agenda was a date with the birds and plants of the region. One needs to be patient and quiet to encounter these avian species. Uday had the best stories to tell: did you know that the birds follow a morning ritual similar to our own? They wait for the Sun to rise, perch themselves on the highest branch, open their wings and bask in the sunshine. They also comb their hair and if they feel like they need to be cleaned, they hide little red ants between their feathers who do the job. These birds are important for pollination to ensure that the plantation's ecosystem is always thriving. Apart from the usual parrots, parakeets, swallows and swifts, we also spotted wagtails, white-throated



What to shop

The coffee plantations are dotted with provision stores selling fresh Coorg coffee, tea, Coorg honey and spices like cardamom and peppercorn.

Test your putting technique at a 9-hole course





“Rice is the main carbohydrate and is used to make flat akki rotis, kaddambuttu or rice dumplings and the noodle-like noolputtu.”

on our faces. In the flora department, we came across lilac and bright yellow jacaranda flowers in full bloom, morning glory, hydrangeas, wild coriander, basil, spinach and brahmi. We blew bubbles from the sappy stem of the jatropa curcas plant and took in the sheer beauty of the bright pink water lilies.



Filter coffee and pandi curry

The meals on the plantation centre around Kodagu or Coorgi cuisine. No prizes for guessing that the dishes are prepared with pepper and other spices found in the region. Rice is the main carbohydrate and is used to make flat akki rotis, kaddambuttu or rice dumplings and the noodle-like noolputtu. These offset the fiery hot preparations like the Koli curry, pepper chicken and pandi curry. The locals eat a lot of varied meats, and this is reflected in the plantation cuisine as well. Their vegetable stew is equally delectable. How can one come to a coffee plantation and not drink coffee? I made sure that I utilised every opportunity to gulp down endless cups of filter coffee!

The art of doing nothing

Some locals say that the best thing to do on a coffee plantation is – nothing at all. These estates provide much needed rest and rejuvenation and their clean, still air and silence add to the relaxation quotient. Tee off at the plantation's golf course, sit back in the garden with a book and cup of coffee, or indulge your inner shutterbug by going on a short photography tour: the coffee plantation ensures that you are well-rested and can spend time focusing on your hobbies.



Coorg is about 260km from Bengaluru. GoAir operates direct flights to Bengaluru from Mumbai, New Delhi, Hyderabad and Pune with convenient connections from Lucknow, Nagpur and Patna.

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kingfishers, white-breasted waterhens having a quick dip in the pond, red-whiskered bulbuls and chestnut-headed bee-eaters. The surprise, though, was the Bharadwaj or greater coucal replying to Uday's call with a deep-set hoot. We also saw it in spectacular flight! Another treasured find was the Indian golden oriole— even though it was camouflaging itself on a hidden branch, Uday helped us find it and that brought a huge smile