Where to stay

Our picks in ★ Pune ★ Seoul ★ Chandigarh ★ Zurich

INDIA'S TOP 30 ECO HOTELS

We know: you want to do your bit for the planet, baut can't bear to sacrifice 500 thread-count sheets for an itchy chatai. Here, **Mandip Singh Soin**, founder president of the Ecotourism Society of India, and his wife **Anita** profile the most stylish eco-friendly properties in the country

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

SINGINAWA JUNGLE LODGE Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh

What makes it great
Conservationists and guides Latika and Nanda Rana, who built Singinawa (meaning 'protectors of the sacred forest') have over 30 years of experience in tiger conservation between them. Latika also has a doctorate on tiger conservation and management from the University of Oxford.

What makes it green
A colonial shikar-type lodge with 12 cottages stretched across 58 acres of restored forest, Singinawa is constructed using local stone that promotes thermal insulation. In addition to rainwater harvesting, composting and energy-saving light bulbs, 60 percent of the staff comes from the local community. *(0763 6256 806; www.singinawa.com) Doubles from ₹19,320*

Where to stay

Above: A bungalow at Ooty's O'Land Estate

FORSYTH'S SATPURA Madhya Pradesh

What makes it great It offers unique walking, canoeing and elephant-back safari experiences with well-trained guides.

What makes it green Not only does walking or canoeing through the park make your wildlife encounters more intimate, but your guide at Forsyth's Lodge has been specially trained in traditional animal-spotting techniques. The 12-room lodge was built using natural materials and all waste water is recycled. The local habitat has been painstakingly restored and is home to chital, wild boar, sloth bears, leopards and nilgai. *(093 0262 5334; www.forsythlodge.com) Doubles from ₹24,000*

DIPHLU RIVER LODGE Assam

What makes it great Get a bird's-eye view of Kaziranga's wildlife from your bamboo-and-thatch machaan.

What makes it green Designed to blend into its natural surroundings, all of the resort's 12 raised cottages are made from eco-friendly materials. Separated only by a boundary river from Kaziranga National Park, you'll spot otters, buffalo, deer and rhino from the lodge's dugout canoes. Cottages and machaan are linked by bamboo walkways through fields of paddy, which allow guests to move around without disturbing the surrounding ecosystems. *(0361 266 7871; www.diphluriverlodge.com) Doubles from ₹24,000*

KHEM VILLAS Ranthambore National Park, Rajasthan

What makes it great Feast on organic food grown on the premises of this 17-room vegetarian hotel overlooking Ranthambore National Park.

What makes it green Three small lakes catch rainwater and the power consumed comes from solar energy and generators to minimise the resort's carbon footprint. Co-owners Goverdhan Rathore and Usha Singh Rathore have also established two NGOs which help conserve the tiger population and provide health care and education to the local community. *(0941 403 0262; www.khemvillas.com) Doubles from ₹10,000*

GOOD VALUE INFINITY CORBETT WILDERNESS Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand

What makes it great Built using local materials, this 24-room resort encapsulates safari-chic at its best.

What makes it green The Corbett Foundation has been involved in wildlife conservation since 1994. Guests can participate in its Kids for Tigers programme, which spreads environmental awareness by involving kids in workshops and nature walks. *(0594 725 1279; www.infinityresorts.com) Doubles from ₹8,000*

GOOD VALUE O'LAND ESTATE Ooty

What makes it great Eco-friendly accommodation and great wildlife experiences are accompanied by amazing views of the hills.

What makes it green Set within an organic estate with its own waterfall, O'land is a lush 140-acre tea, coffee and pepper plantation. The buildings are made of compressed earth bricks made from soil dug up on the site, and there is a biomass converter that fuels the heaters. *(0992 080 7280; www.olandestate.com) Doubles from ₹4,900*

CULTURAL HOLIDAYS

BARADARI PALACE
Patiala, Punjab

GOOD VALUE

What makes it great Experience the grandeur of India's only palace-hotel to be built in Sikh-Mughal style. **What makes it green** Neemrana's Aman Nath and Francis Wacziarg have conscientiously restored this historic palace, bringing in artisans from Rajasthan, Puducherry, Orissa, Bihar and Delhi to refurbish and recreate elegant vitrified tiles, mosaics and Burma teak flooring. Period furniture and other vestiges of the property's royal past have been painstakingly collected in order to give guests an authentic palace experience. The hotel uses equipment like a sewage treatment plant to remove waste in an eco-friendly manner. At night, its 12 cusped arches are illuminated using energy from solar panels on the roof. *(0175 230 4433; www.neemranahotels.com) Doubles from ₹5,000*

Where to stay

‘Glenburn Tea Estate’s welfare trust sponsors primary education in nearby schools and supports local communities’

GLENBURN TEA ESTATE
Darjeeling, West Bengal

What makes it great It’s a restored, working colonial-era tea plantation set against a stunning Himalayan backdrop.

What makes it green Owners Husna Tara and Anshuman Prakash grow fresh herbs, vegetables and fruit, and create menus using local ingredients. The estate’s Glenburn Workers Welfare Trust sponsors primary education in three nearby schools, facilitates traditional performing arts and supports local communities in seven villages. Guest activities focus on outdoor pursuits like hiking, bird-watching and angling. *(0983 007 0213; www.glenburnteaestate.com) Doubles from ₹22,000*

STOK PALACE Ladakh

What makes it great Stay at a 186-year-old Ladakhi palace in the company of true-blue royalty.

What makes it green Built in 1825, every detail of the Stok Palace is handcrafted by local artisans, from the rugs to the brightly painted woodwork. The palace and museum, owned by Ladakh’s King Jigmed Wangchuk Namgyal, displays family treasures like the Ladakhi queen mother’s ancient turquoise-and-gold crown and a collection of thangkhas (Tibetan silk paintings). The king is also involved in using part of the hotel’s revenue for the restoration of monasteries in Ladakh. *(0198 224 2010) Doubles from ₹11,500*

ORANGE COUNTY RESORT
Kabini, Karnataka

What makes it great Experience traditional South Indian culture amidst low-key luxury.

What makes it green Owner Cherian Ramapuram built this resort according to the principles of responsible tourism. Waste water is treated for use in its gardens, efficient lighting systems ensure energy saving, and food and kitchen waste is used in its biogas plant. Tribal culture is showcased through ethnic cuisine, interactive storytelling sessions, a slow cruise down the Cauvery on a coracle, and evening performances of traditional tribal dance forms. *(0822 826 9100; www.orangecounty.in) Doubles from ₹23,000*

Above left: The verandah at Glenburn Tea Estate’s Burra Bungalow.
Above right: One of Orange County Resort’s traditional houseboats

THE MALABAR HOUSE Kochi

What makes it great With its turquoise walls and much-loved chocolate samosas, this cool 17-room mansion has managed to preserve its heritage while bringing contemporary style to Fort Kochi.

What makes it green The first Indian property to obtain the international Green Globe 21 Certificate, its owners Joerg Drechsel and Tzuku conserve local heritage and promote the revival of art forms, positioning Kerala as a bridge between the East and West. The restaurant serves delectable, sustainably-sourced seafood, and from the spa to the bathrooms, all materials are natural and eco-friendly. *(0484 221 6666; www.malabarhouse.com) Doubles from ₹13,800*

GOOD VALUE

SHAAM-E-SARHAD VILLAGE RESORT
Bhuj, Gujarat

What makes it great Stay in a bhunga, or mud hut, and experience the richness of Kutchi culture at this resort bordering the Rann of Kutch.

What makes it green Shaam-e-Sarhad Village Resort has been set up in Hodka village as part of its Endogenous Tourism project, which helps promote local culture and craft-based tourism. The eco-friendly resort, built entirely by locals, has 12 rooms decorated in traditional mirrorwork and embroidery. The project has also improved employment opportunities by encouraging locals to work as guides and sell their crafts at the resort. *(0280 329 6222; www.hodka.in) Doubles from ₹3,200*

GOOD VALUE

INDECO HOTEL SWAMIMALAI
Tamil Nadu

What makes it great Sample Tamil art at this heritage hotel, which also houses a museum of local artefacts.

What makes it green This eco-friendly heritage hotel is a result of the restoration of an entire 19th century Tanjore village. The INDeco Hotel Swamimalai has 30 suites, each designed in indigenous ethnic style. In addition, this vegetarian hotel employs only local people. *(044 2498 4114; www.indecohotels.com) Doubles from ₹4,800*

PASTORAL HOLIDAYS

ECO DUNE, Puducherry

What makes it great Eco Dune is the ultimate child-friendly eco getaway, with a farm where kids can milk cows, feed rabbits and learn pottery. Grown-ups will enjoy the tastefully designed villas, pool, nearby beach and great food.

What makes it green Eco Dune, which sits on reclaimed land, uses recycled wood and windmills for electricity, and solar heaters to heat water. The hotel also runs a vocational school, where students from tsunami-affected local villages have so far enjoyed a 100 percent job placement rate. For guests wanting to explore the extensive grounds, the hotel provides bicycles as well as electric cars and scooters. *(0413 265 5751; www.thedunehotel.com) Doubles from ₹8,180*

Where to stay

Above left: The dining hall at Saratha Vilas. Above right: Samode Safari Lodge, near Bandhavgarh National Park

GOOD VALUE SARATHA VILAS Kothamangalam, Tamil Nadu

What makes it great A former home restored in Chettinad-French style, using ecological techniques.
What makes it green The early-1900s mansion has been carefully restored by French architects Bernard Dragon and Michel Adment with the help of local village craftsmen, and has 12 private rooms furnished with pieces from Bernard and Michel's art and antiques collection. The architects, who also own the mansion, have revived local pride in traditional construction techniques, allowing guests to experience the Chettinad of yore—with all the modern conveniences of a luxury hotel. *(0988 420 3175; www.sarathavilas.com) Doubles from ₹5,600*

SAMODE SAFARI LODGE Bandhavgarh National Park, Madhya Pradesh

What makes it great Experience the luxuries of an African safari lodge in a setting inspired by the village kothis of MP—all a stone's throw from some of India's best tiger-spotting territory.
What makes it green The nearby villages of Mardari and Gohori were the setting and inspiration for owners Yadavendra and Raghuvendra Singh, who have built 12 state-of-the-art villas less than a kilometre from Bandhavgarh's boundaries. While building, they planted drought-resistant trees and installed low-energy products. Their charitable trust helps the village panchayats to improve sanitation, education, health and infrastructure. Plus, two percent of your room rate goes to the trust. *(0141 263 2370; www.samode.com) Doubles from ₹45,000*

GOOD VALUE TWO CHIMNEYS Gethia, Uttarakhand

What makes it great It's like escaping to your grandmother's home in the hills, with home-cooked food and old-world charm.
What makes it green Legend has it that Mahatma Gandhi visited this eight-room colonial home in Gethia village near Nainital back in 1936, when it was simply called 'The Big House'. Since then, it has been restored by Geetan and Tarun Tejpal, who have installed solar panels and an air-flow system for electricity, in addition to recycling organic kitchen waste and dry leaves into manure. A forestation programme has also seen the endangered leopard and musk deer returning to the area. *(0594 222 4541; www.twochimneysgethia.com) Doubles from ₹3,800*

GOOD VALUE KALMATIA SANGAM ESTATE Almora, Uttarakhand

What makes it great Ten cottages spread over a spacious estate—with majestic views of Himalayan peaks such as Nanda Devi and Nanda Kot—make for a perfect hiking base.
What makes it green Owners Dieter and Geeta Reeb ensured no trees were felled whilst building the resort, and many of the labourers involved in the construction have stayed on as staff. Most notable, though, is its partnership with locals, through which it showcases the Pahari community's lifestyle to visitors using guides educated in the village's traditions. *(0596 225 1176; www.kalmatia-sangam.com) Doubles from ₹6,400*

GOOD VALUE JUDGE'S COURT Pragpur, Himachal Pradesh

What makes it great At 300 years old, Pragpur is Himachal Pradesh's first Heritage Village and Judge's Court is active in preserving its history.
What makes it green This Indo-European haveli's domes, galleries and terraces instantly transport visitors to the early 18th century. The 10-room hotel uses solar energy for heating and lighting and sits amidst a 12-acre orchard where mangoes, lychees and plums grow. All fruit, vegetables and grains consumed here are grown in and around the manor. *(0197 024 5035; www.judgescourt.com) Doubles from ₹5,500*

SARAI AT TORIA Khajuraho

What makes it great Adjacent to Panna Tiger Reserve and close to the Khajuraho temples, it has breathtaking views of the Ken River.
What makes it green Owners Raghu Chandawat and Joanna Van Gruisen's strong environmental philosophy is reflected in the culturally sensitive buildings made with mud, thatch, lime and stone. Staff are 90 percent local and encouraged to develop specific skills—thus a graduate is sent on an accountancy course and park guides are trained to become qualified naturalists. *(0124 235 6004; www.saraiattoria.com) Doubles from ₹12,500*

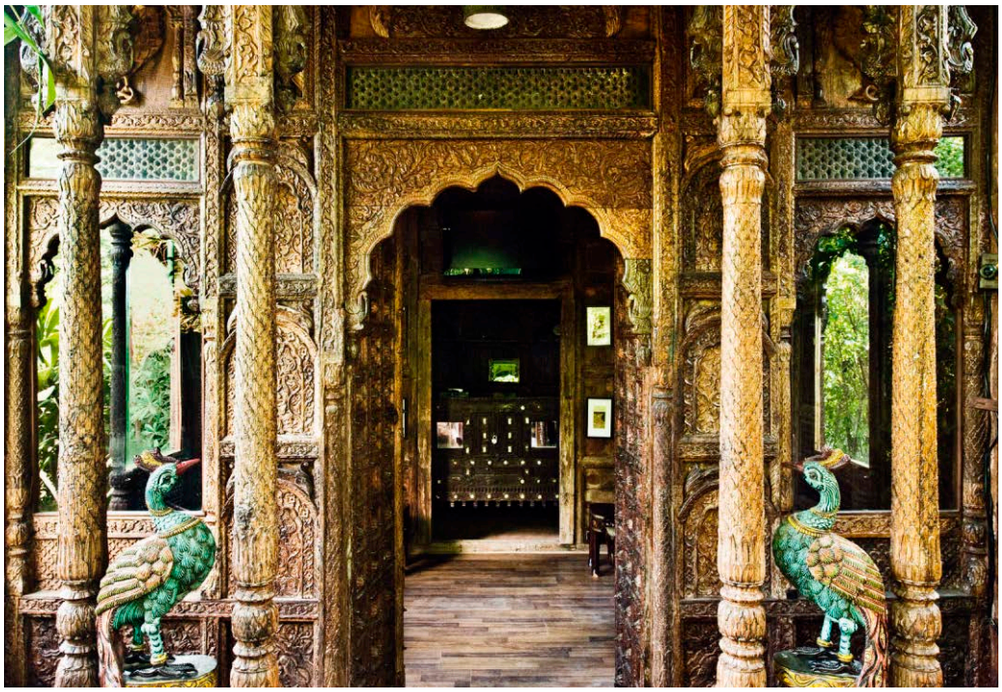
NATURE HOLIDAYS

SHER BAGH Ranthambore National Park, Rajasthan

What makes it great This upscale tented accommodation by the SUJAN Luxury Hotels group combines ethnic inspiration with safari chic.

What makes it green Owners Jaisal and Anjali Singh work with neighbouring villages by donating teaching tools to schools, and mainly employ locals trained at their own school of hospitality. Sher Bagh also practises organic gardening. All waste water is sent to a reed-bed, which soaks up the toxins and releases the water back into the water table. Sher Bagh also uses as much solar energy as possible. The Singhs have projects around Ranthambore and also assist with park management. In 2008, Sher Bagh donated a troop-carrier for patrolling the park, and funded the construction of a well and water-trough for animals. *(0746 225 2120; www.sherbagh.com) Doubles from ₹28,750*

Where to stay



Above: The Peacock Bar at Tree House Resort, Jaipur

TREE HOUSE RESORT Jaipur

What makes it great The treetops of Rajasthan's rolling Aravalli hills are the ideal place to spot birds, leopards, hyenas, jackals and porcupine.

What makes it green Inspired by hunter-turned-naturalist Jim Corbett's fabled tree houses, resort owner Sunil Mehta decided to build his own tree houses as part of this ambitious, 200-acre eco-resort. Mehta has shown great commitment to transforming the land, with his planting, forestation, employment and training programmes giving the Tree House Resort 360-degree green credentials. *(0900 179 7422; www.treehouseresort.in) Doubles from ₹13,000*

CHHATRA SAGAR Nimaj, Rajasthan

What makes it great Live in a hand-stitched canvas tent on a 19th-century dam overlooking a lake teeming with pelicans.

What makes it green Owners Harsh Vardhan, Shrinidhi, Nandi Vardhan and Vasundhara Singh took up the challenge of water harvesting by restoring the 27ft deep reservoir with monsoon water. They have maintained traditional methods of farming fed by rainfall alone. They protect the near-extinct grasslands, thus allowing over 200 bird species to survive. The camp staff is hired from settlements within a kilometre of the estate, ensuring the revenue remains within the community. *(0293 923 0118; www.chhatrasagar.com) Doubles from ₹21,780*

> 'Rainforest Retreat has preserved the biodiversity of the forest by leaving uncultivated sections of 'weeds' and fauna'

FLAME OF THE FOREST Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh

What makes it great It's an intimate, exclusive safari experience, with only four cottages on 16 acres by the Banjaar River, as well as hands-on attention from inspiring owners Karan and Isa Modi.

What makes it green The Modis encouraged village schoolchildren to join them in planting over 600 trees on the property, and boast of a 100 percent local community staff that also helped build the lodge. Designed in a chic vernacular style, the mud walls with cow dung plaster provide insulation, while a two-chamber sewage system processes sewage. *(0966 955 5339; www.flameoftheforest.in) Doubles from ₹22,000*

GOOD VALUE

RAINFOREST RETREAT AT MOJO PLANTATION Kodagu, Karnataka

What makes it great Witness sustainable agriculture first-hand on an organic spice and coffee plantation in the Western Ghats.

What makes it green Catering to environmentally-conscious travellers looking for a natural holiday experience, the retreat's unique cottages are eco-friendly in design. The rich biodiversity of the rainforest has been preserved by leaving uncultivated sections of 'weeds' and fauna in each valley, encouraging indigenous creatures to flourish. *(0827 226 5638; www.rainforestours.com) Doubles from ₹2,000*

THE MACHAN Lonavla, Maharashtra

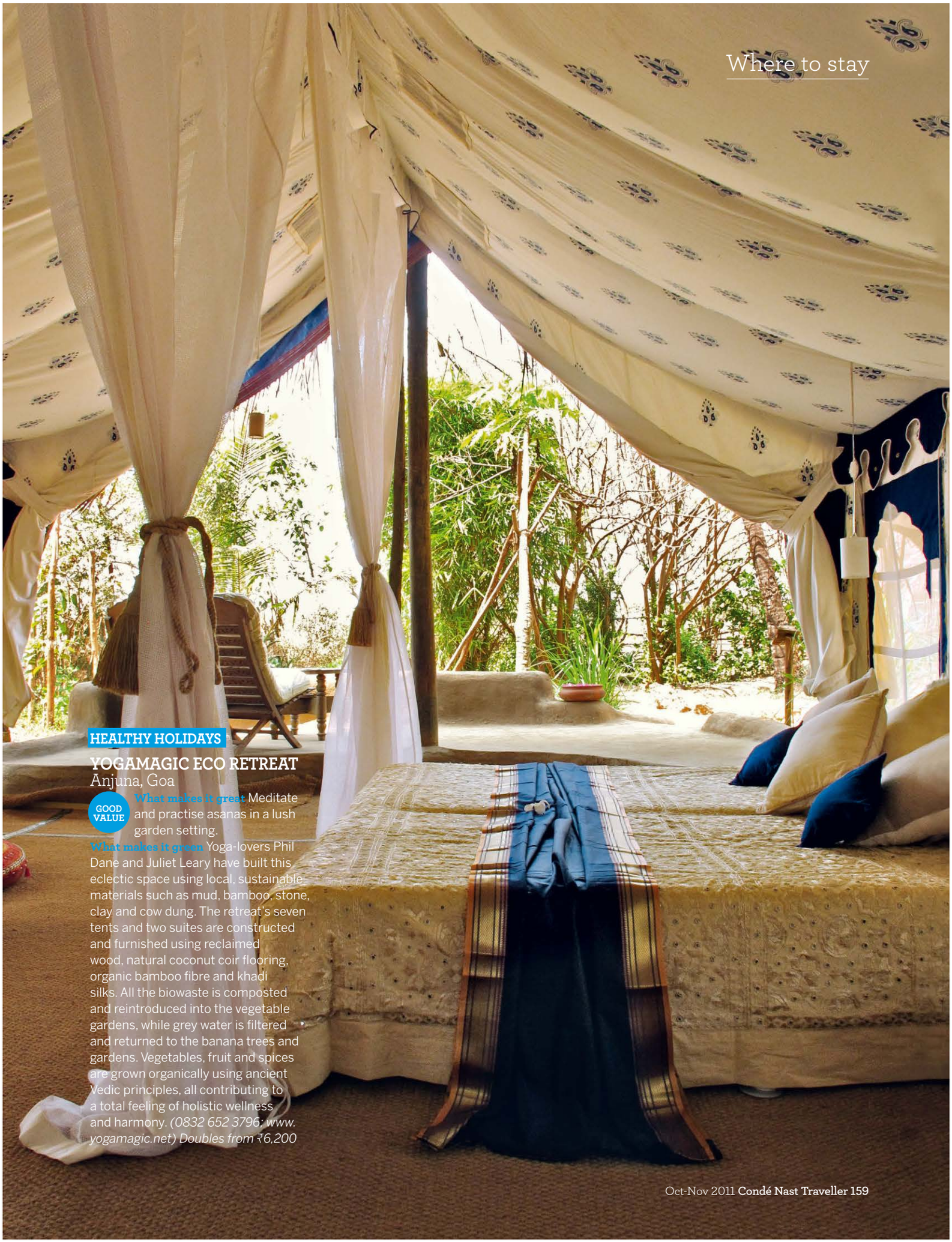
What makes it great Panoramic views of the Western Ghats from luxury machans and tents.

What makes it green What started out as a holiday home for Mumbaikar Varun Hooja is now one of Maharashtra's foremost eco resorts. Comprising four tree houses, the resort is set on a 25-acre 'green island'—100 percent off-grid, with all electricity from wind turbines and solar panels, and all water sourced from nearby springs and rainwater. *(080 8087 7420; www.themachan.com) Doubles from ₹10,000*

ITC MAURYA NEW DELHI

What makes it great ITC Hotels is now officially the 'greenest luxury hotel chain in the world', thanks to a recent platinum LEED certification.

What makes it green The most prominent initiative is the installation of a solar concentrator, which generates steam for the hotel's cooking and laundry needs. The 440-room property is also working towards becoming an off-grid hotel, by implementing solar power systems and by treating its own wet garbage. *(011 2611 2233; www.itchotels.in) Doubles from ₹14,000*



HEALTHY HOLIDAYS

YOGAMAGIC ECO RETREAT
Anjuna, Goa

GOOD VALUE

What makes it great Meditate and practise asanas in a lush garden setting.

What makes it green Yoga-lovers Phil Dane and Juliet Leary have built this eclectic space using local, sustainable materials such as mud, bamboo, stone, clay and cow dung. The retreat's seven tents and two suites are constructed and furnished using reclaimed wood, natural coconut coir flooring, organic bamboo fibre and khadi silks. All the biowaste is composted and reintroduced into the vegetable gardens, while grey water is filtered and returned to the banana trees and gardens. Vegetables, fruit and spices are grown organically using ancient Vedic principles, all contributing to a total feeling of holistic wellness and harmony. *(0832 652 3796; www.yogamagic.net) Doubles from ₹6,200*

Where to stay

GOOD VALUE

OUR NATIVE VILLAGE Bengaluru

What makes it great A holistic wellness retreat for body and soul with a strong environmental ethic. **What makes it green** If you've always wanted to go on a holistic getaway, Our Native Village may be among the few resorts that has used sustainable technologies in all aspects of its infrastructure—energy, water, waste management, architecture and the food chain. Every brick of the 24-room retreat was handmade using soil from the site, and sun-dried, rather then kiln-fired. Passionately led by CB Ramkumar, an ad-man-turned-hotelier with a 'simple, real and local' philosophy, the retreat generates over 70 percent of its electricity using a windmill, solar panels and two biogas plants. Rainwater is harvested and stored in an 84,000-litre underground tank. Most of the vegetables used in the restaurant are from its 12-acre organic farm, while in the bathrooms, all soaps are organic and made exclusively for the retreat. It also has India's first pond-style, fully-natural swimming pool, where aquatic plants clean the water without the use of chemicals. Rediscovering and respecting nature is a path to peace of mind, and walks through surrounding grasslands as well as tours of the eco practices used at the resort are on offer to guests. *(0804 114 0909; www.ournativevillage.com) Doubles from ₹8,000*

Above left: **A verandah at Swasara, Gokarna.** **Above right:** **The Conference Room as seen from a cottage at Our Native Village, Bengaluru**

> "Our Native Village has India's first fully-natural swimming pool, where aquatic plants clean the water without chemicals"

SWASWARA Gokarna, Karnataka

What makes it great A one-of-a-kind therapeutic resort with yoga, ayurveda and meditation, it is located on Karnataka's famous Om beach. **What makes it green** CGH Earth's philosophy is that 'the customer and the environment are kings'. Nourishment is needed for the soul and body and so it is said at Swasara that food must be ripened naturally on good soil and then prepared with the right attitude. The idea of imbibing healing energy is central here, and starts with simple but creative organic meals, all of which are made from ingredients procured from within a 60km radius of the resort, or from Swaswara's own land. The resort also captures 237 lakh litres of rainwater and reuses every drop. The solid waste management system converts waste food into cooking gas, while plastic water bottles have been replaced with recyclable glass, and air-conditioning is limited to the 24 guest rooms. *(0484 266 8221; www.swaswara.com) Doubles from ₹1.15 lakh for a minimum five-night stay*

For more, www.cntraveller.in

For a guide to eco style, see What to Pack, page 292