

Pages from the diary of Tejas – Orange County, Coorg, June 2010

Tejas visits our resorts in Coorg and Kabini and shares with you some of his uplifting experiences. Join him as he immerses himself in the activities at our two resorts, and enjoy them with him, virtually!



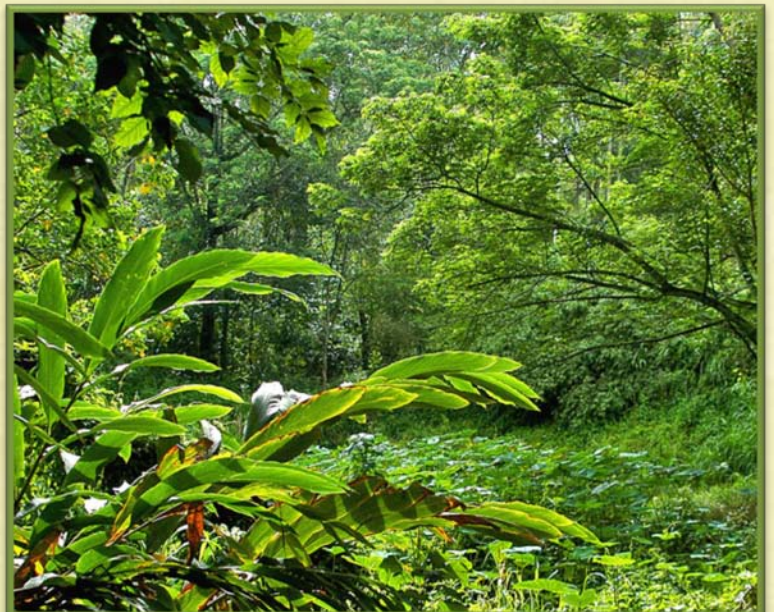
Tejas Joseph resides in Auroville near Pondicherry and is part of a consulting group engaged in creating viable models of decentralised lighting (using solar energy) for off-grid Indian villages. Tejas travels a lot in the course of his work and feels a deep connection with the history and ethos of the places he visits. He is a keen observer of the winds of change that are now blowing across the physical, cultural and social landscapes of India and seeks to capture its effects in his articles, ever believing that the journey is as important as the destination, the travel as rewarding as the arrival! Feel free to write to him at pjtejas@gmail.com if your interests or work coincide with his.

Activity Name	Nature Walk
Duration	2 Hours
Timing	10.30 AM to 12.30 PM
Guided	Yes (Part of common group) (If required exclusive guide can be arranged at nominal charge of Rs.1200/ Prior booking required)
Cost	Included in the package
Transfers	Not required
Prior Booking Required	Yes

Through a dense and winding forest lane

The next day, we decided to stay in the resort and do the guided walks. After a late and leisurely breakfast, we joined Gopalakrishnan, our guide on this tour, at the activities center. We were a small group of six, eager and excited about taking a walk into the forest that ran beside the resort a few hundred metres away, home to ancient trees, many birds, insects and wild animals. We were handed out a pair of leach stockings, a necessary survival tool, we were told.

It was monsoon time and the forest floor was host to a variety of parasites, notably the Garden Leech (*Hirudo medicinalis*), the closest thing to a vampire we can get in these parts. It started to drizzle as we were setting out. We could choose to take umbrellas, raincoats or risk getting a little



wet. The vast canopies of the forest trees would keep us dry, joked our guide. There was some truth in what he said. The Dubare reserve, encompassing an area of 50,000 acres, was a moist deciduous forest that nurtured a great many varieties of tropical trees with vast branches and thick foliage under which one could actually wait out a big drizzle, if not a downpour or thunderstorm. Mind the leaches though!

We trooped in single file through the outer limits of the resort leading to the reserve on the other side, separated by an electrified fence to keep out elephants, deer, boar and other animals that could wander into the cultivated parts of the plantation.

We stepped through the lines of the fence (now turned off) and across a small trench into the forest. A short lane led us into its heart and we followed it. We soon felt the temperature drop a bit. The flora of the forest had its own micro climate that kept it a shade cooler than its non-forested surroundings. The forest was abuzz with the sounds of many birds and insects. We kept brushing back small vines and branches out of our way, feeling like a small band of intrepid treasure seekers hoping to make a lucky (but safe) sighting of a wild animal or rare bird. Fresh elephant droppings at our feet told us that a wild herd had passed this way sometime in the night. The thought sent a little chill through our collective spines.

Gopalakrishnan dramatically called our attention to an enormous tree that stood before us. He quizzes us. Did we know this tree? It was a life saver, he hinted. *Terminalia arjuna* was indeed a magnificent tree to behold. This one before us could be more than a century old guessing by its enormous girth. The great masses of India fondly called it 'the Mathi tree'. It was also called the 'water tree' by the natives who dwelt in this forest at one time. The tree stored water in its bark, which could be released by gently splicing it at certain points. It was a source of water for those who had strayed far away from the Kaveri river or forest streams in search of wood or wild game and were thirsty.

Our guide then helped us negotiate a little canyon that required some care and tact as its sides were slippery and steep as well. It was fun, particularly for the young and agile in our group. On the other side, we came to a dense bamboo grove, some of which had been uprooted by elephants on a rampage recently. Here too, many bamboo plants were in the throes of death. **The flowering of the bamboo (Bambuseae: a species of grass taxonomically) is considered by botanists to be a very unusual and mysterious phenomenon, unlike any other in the plant kingdom. They flower infrequently (minimum once in 60 yrs and maximum once in 120 years) and just once in their long lifetime. We realized that we were witnessing a very rare botanical event indeed, for the next time the bamboo flowers here, it will be witnessed, not by us, but by another generation; perhaps our grown and aging children.*

Majestic Rosewood (*Dalbergia latifolia*), Teak (*Tectona grandis*) and other hardwood tree species stood around us like sentinels. We saluted them, oxygen-givers and climate controllers that they were!



The forest kept getting thicker and more enchanting. In a clearing just before the river, we came upon what could have been the perfect setting for a horror film. Giant parasitic vines (that uncannily resembled monstrous pythons)

twined around large Banyan and other trees in a macabre bond. They quite literally strangled their hosts after living off them. Some of these intimate relationships between trees were also beneficial to host and guest alike - from sharing scarce nourishment to serving the cause of their reproduction.



How intricate and vast nature's ways and objectives were, one wondered. There was a purpose, hidden or visible, behind every natural phenomenon and expression.

We could now hear the roar of the Kaveri. A fortnight's rain up at its source (some 50 km away) was beginning to swell it. Soon she would be in spate and the water would rise to the top of the shore where we now stood, looking down upon her frothing torrent heading speedily downstream to Mysore and beyond, before discharging into the waiting arms of the Bay of Bengal far away. After a brief spell of sitting

in contemplation on the rocks by the riverside, we headed back to the resort, this time through a slightly different and shorter route.

We spent time taking photographs along the way of bugs and beetles, identifying bird calls, inspecting the webs of forest spiders, marveling at mega anthills and talking in hushed tones before we left the sylvan world of the Dubare forest and its natural wonders, to enter the world of man on the other. This magical trek had taken us more than two hours and through some 7 km of winding and small forest tracks.

There was spider gossamer on our hair and our shoes were wet with forest dew, tokens of our secret but enlightening tryst with the goddess of the Dubare forest.