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India's food, wine & travel magazine

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EATING OUT

OKO IN BANGALORE

INTERNATIONAL BEAT

BOSTON, VICTORIA MARKET

'TIS THE SEASON
OF YOGURT

NARI HIRA
IN FEEDBACK

ZINIA LAWYER
NAVROZE MUBARAK

BUSYBEE
HIS WITTY BEST

DESTINATION COORG

KAVYA MADAPPA WITH PARENTS,
YESHIE AND MITTU CHENGAPPA

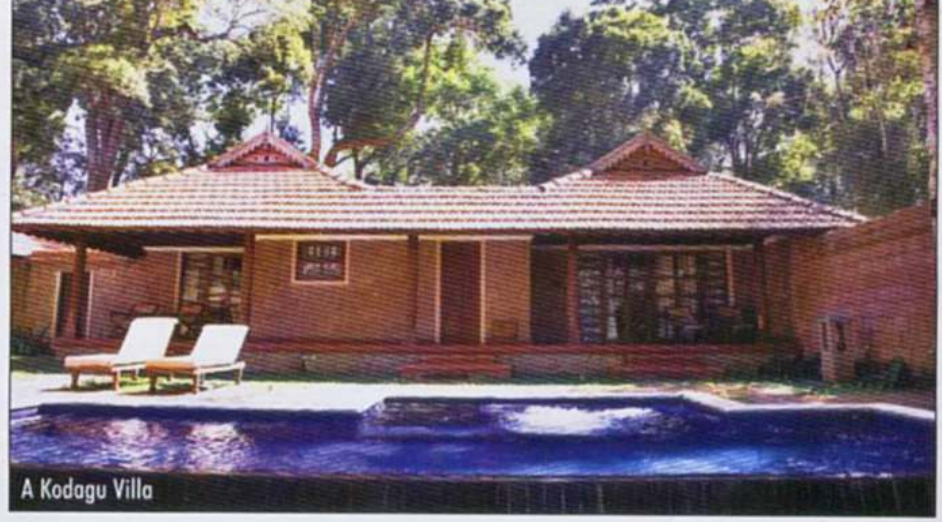
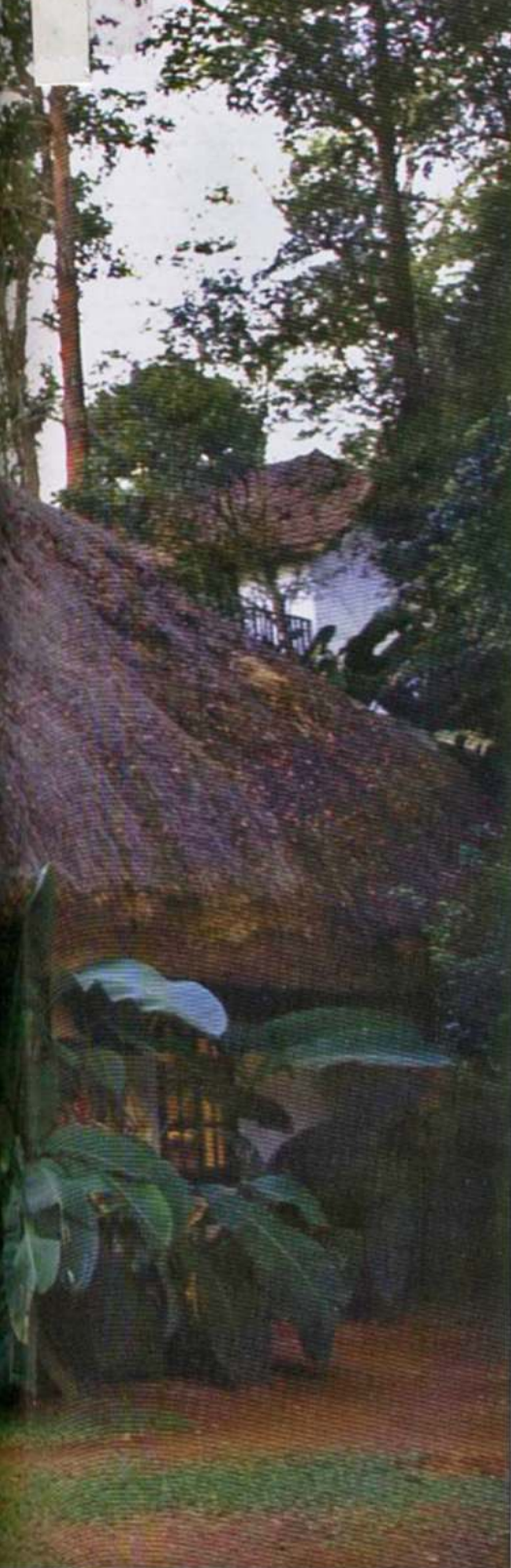




PHOTOGRAPHS BY FARZANA BEHRAM CONTRACTOR

If Coorg is incredible, its resorts are more so. Orange County has an almost spiritual touch to it, says **FARZANA BEHRAM CONTRACTOR**. Go there and experience nirvana, you'll come away feeling 'blissed', she says





A Kodagu Villa



There is interesting history behind it. The seven Ramapuram brothers from Kerala were the first outsiders to come to Coorg to set shop. Before them the only non-Coorgs who owned land were the Europeans.

As it happened, these brothers, basically agriculturalists, owned large acreage of land where they would plant rubber and coffee. But they lost hundreds of acres of ancestral property in Kerala, as a consequence of land reforms (whereby you could not own more than 7 1/2 acres of land) initiated by the first communist party of that state. Plantations of tea, coffee and cardamom one could

own any amount but not cashew and coconut. So when they lost 600 acres of land, they decided to look elsewhere. In Karnataka too the same rule came into being, but the embargo here was 51 acres.

In 1959, the brothers bought their first estate in Coorg. Then in 1974 they bought 800 acres of cardamom land and converted it into rubber plantations. When land became scarce, they diversified into the hospitality business in 1994, converting 300 acres in their ancestral land in Chikkanahally Estate into Orange County. Opening another resort in Nagarhole; Orange County, Kabini, ➤



Orange County in Siddhapur is the most well-known and established resort of Coorg. Set up in 1994 with just 10 cottages it is the oldest here.

It certainly is a beautiful one, spread over a large area touching the dense Dubare forest.

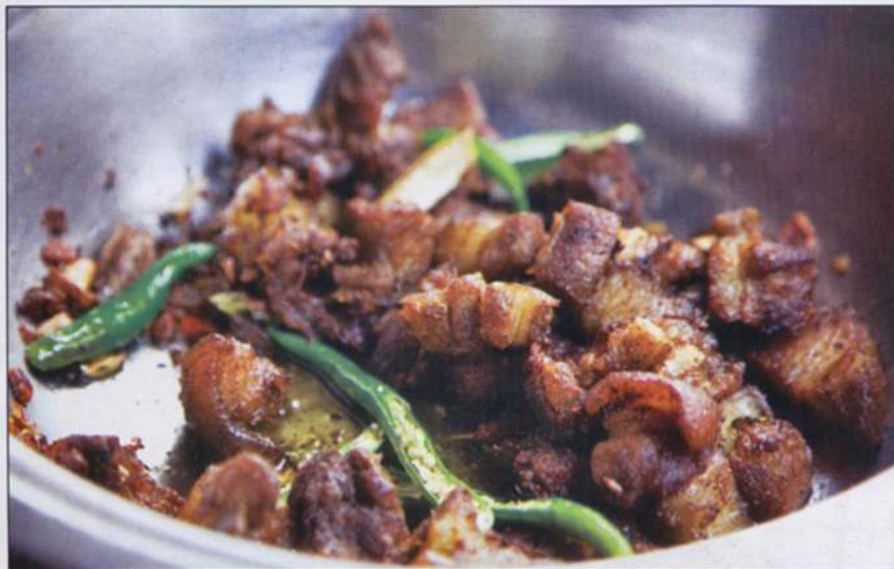
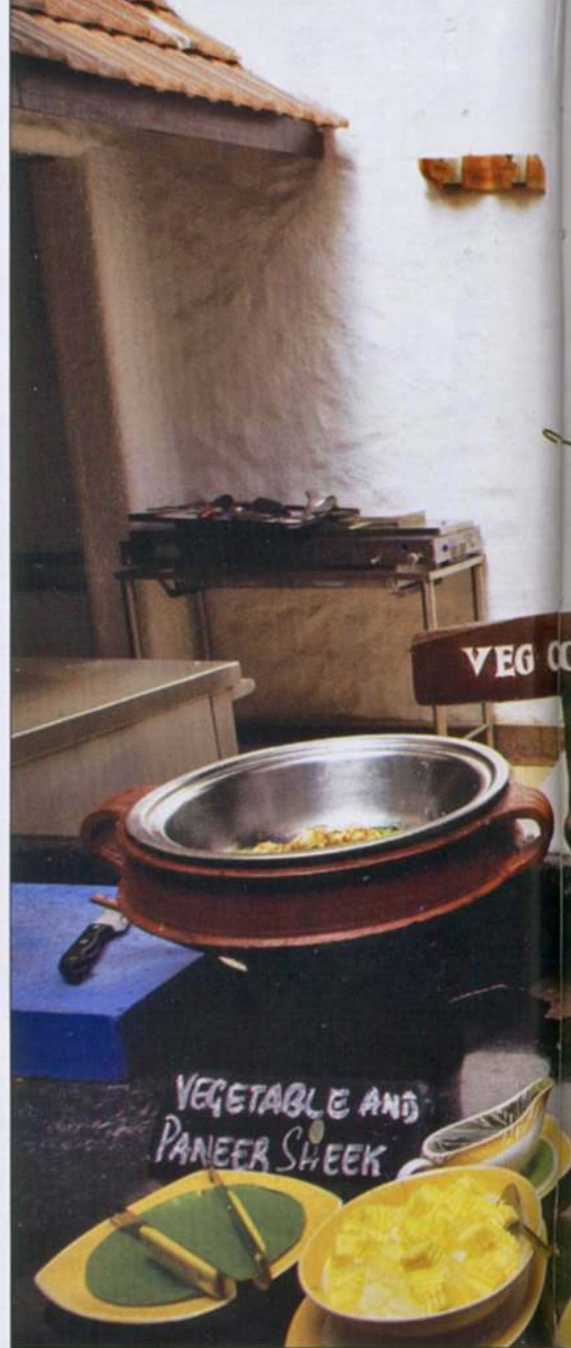




Executive Chef Anuj Kumar Bhagat



Chef Dinesh Chandru



inspired by a tribal village, and now they have acquired land for a 3rd one in Hampi, right on the Karwa Beach.

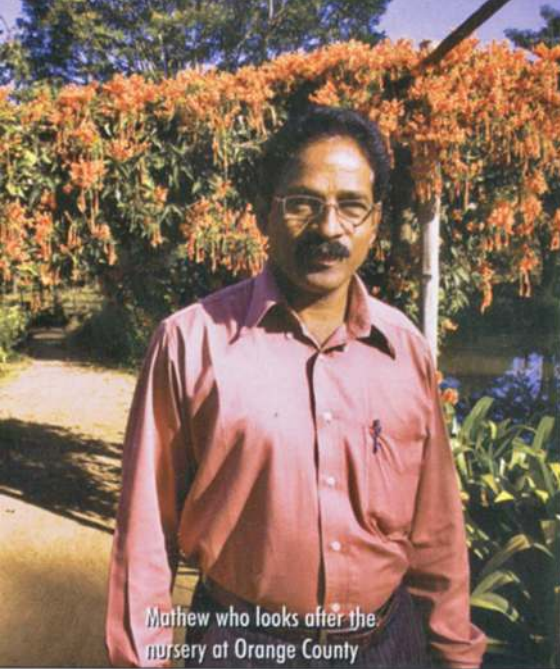
All this I learned from the Chairman of Orange County, Emmanuel Thomas Ramapuram, who got married in 1978 and shifted from Kerala to Coorg with his bride, Sheela.

Says he, "In 1994, Coorg was not a



destination. There were no hotels and resorts. The concept of homestays did not exist either. But we started, with just 10 cottages and grew. Today, we have 70 cottages."

Not just cottages but exclusive living spaces, in plantation style as well as Kodagu, villas with private pools. With terracotta tiles, courtyard baths ➤



Mathew who looks after the nursery at Orange County



and balconies.

The tastes of the owners are reflected in various ways. The nicest being the simplest. Meaningful quotations, thoughts that make you ponder, inscribed on wood and hung on trees on the many pathways, making it compulsive reading as you move around in the buggy.

The spa at Orange County is unpretentious and offers good services. The two girls who worked their Ayurvedic magic on me left me so relaxed I slept like a baby that night. So much so, that on my way out the next morning I even went and bought some of that magic oil.

Orange County has a rustic yet refined charm about it. It comes through in many ways. The water body on the edge of which are more cottages, its organic nursery and vegetable garden, its thatched roof cottages, its bar, called *Hunter's Lodge*.

The restaurants are also well laid

out. *Granary*, overlooking the pool serves ethnic Kodava dishes, including the famous *Pandi* curry. For the vegetarians there is *Plantain Leaf* and for those who loves *kebabs* and grills, there is *Peppercorn*.

I am generally quite active when I go on these working trips, but Orange County put me in a lazy mood, or maybe soulful mood. So instead of getting up early morning and going on a plantation walk, discovering the sights and sounds, I lay by the pool in my villa, happy to be alone. But I did go outside the property and enjoyed a pleasant walk by the river side. The environment was so meditative. Being in sync with nature came easy.

Though the food was fabulous and the chefs very willingly to go the extra mile, food was just not on my mind, surprisingly. I even skipped breakfast on the morning I was leaving. My colleagues raved about the large breakfast spread





Sheela Ramapuram

they had tucked into and would not let me hear the last of it.

Foodies that they are, it fell on deaf ears. But I was feeling light, bright and happy. Nirvana does not happen everyday or every place.

Besides, there is always a next time. Orange County Nagahole, here I come. A combination of animals and nature is just what the doctor ordered.

ORANGE COUNTY

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Chairman of Orange County, Emmanuel Thomas Ramapuram

