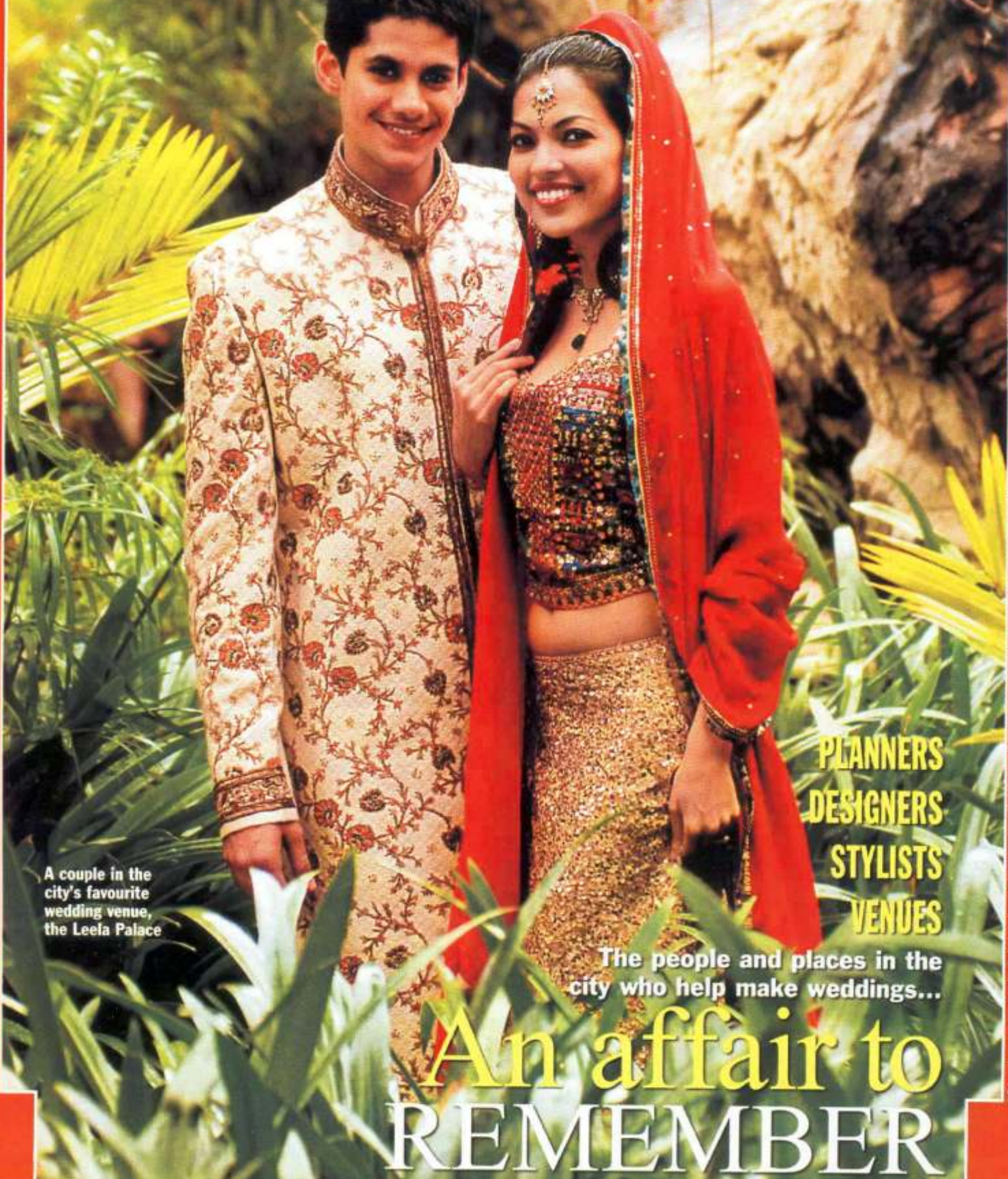


WEDDING SPECIAL

INDIA
TODAY

SIMPLY BANGALORE

A MONTHLY CITY MAGAZINE



A couple in the city's favourite wedding venue, the Leela Palace

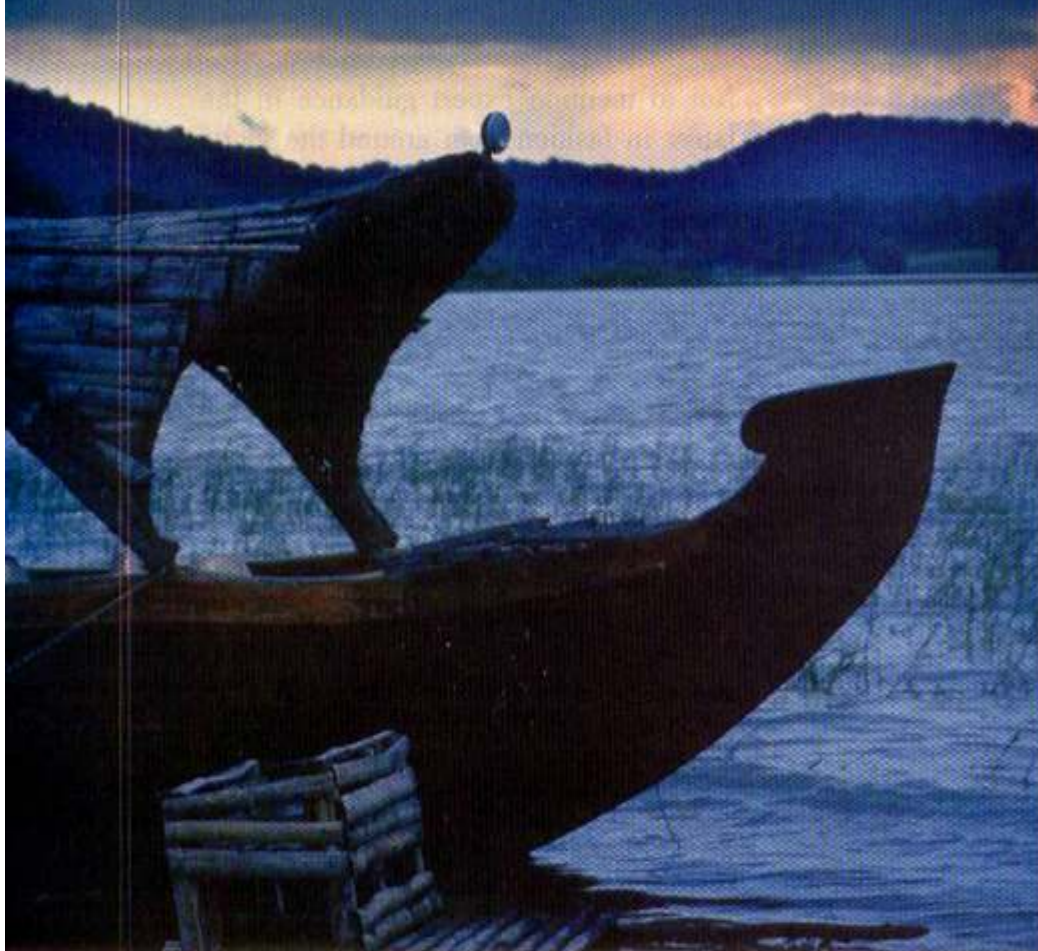
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An affair to REMEMBER

TRIBAL retreat

SEEKING SOME BLISS AND QUIET? HEAD TO KABINI FOR A RELAXING WEEKEND AND SOOTHE YOUR FRAYED NERVES.



Zooming smoothly down the road towards Mysore, it looked like we would make the four-hour plus drive to Orange County Kabini from Bangalore in good time. On a weekend getaway that's been extended by an unexpected holiday tagged to it, every hour is precious. There are no choked up roads, the potholes are few and far between and our SUV is humming like a shrew on serotonin. Pastoral landscapes, lush fields blessed by a good

tribal treats, there is a promise of luxury too, as we are welcomed with tender coconut water and moist cologne towels. The teasing breeze blowing from the Kabini's backwaters is refreshing. We sit in the lounge, taking in the large green courtyard and the almost-painted landscape of mountain, trees, undulating hills and vegetation. You can hear the silence settling around you, even as voices get hushed in reverence of the stillness around.

right armrest of the other are missing; it's like a loveseat for mushy couples. But I'm holidaying alone, with books and a diary I hope to fill with profound notes.

My suite opens into a large open area with a swimming pool, and a deck with two lounge chairs. This leads into a living room, with chairs, a dining table, and a bar. The bar counter is fitted with a reverse osmosis filter which delivers potable water. You can fill it straight into your

ings in tribal motifs, the four-poster bed fringed by white curtains, and the beautiful bathroom with its clear glass shower cubicle overlooks an open-to-the-sky yard.

Activities at Kabini are well spaced. You can take a cultural trail in the morning, where a leisurely boat ride down the Kabini backwaters takes you to the ruins of abandoned temples. The cultural trail is timed after breakfast, so you're not rushed to wake up at the



The resort has 26 jacuzzi huts and eight pool huts; the Kabini's backwaters (left)

monsoon, and the sparkling waters of the Kabini Dam indicate that we're almost there. Well-positioned signboards unravel the final stretch to Orange County Kabini. The resort, with its thatched roof and hand-plastered façade, comes into view across a large watermelon field, dotted with unripe melons. This rustic resort will be our residence for the next two-and-a-half days, in between forest and lake safaris, village biking and communing with nature.

Besides the promise of such

Unlike most hotels, there is no formal checking in here, no signing forms in triplicate or waiting for the check-out guest to finish his formalities. After the drink and traditional tikka and flower welcome, we're led to our rooms via a quick tour of the resort. The 20-acre property has 26 jacuzzi huts and eight pool huts. Mine is a pool hut on the edge of the resort, with the river a few yards away from the veranda, which has two lounge chairs. I notice that the left armrest of one chair and the

At Kabini, visitors learn to slow down. Nature and forest life are in no hurry to please anyone, certainly not groups of city tourists who want wildlife experiences distilled and decanted over a weekend.

glass and drink it. Kabini does not encourage packaged drinking water and with the RO devices, hopes to save 50,000 bottles of plastic a year. The room is outfitted with furnish-

crack of dawn. The cruise over the gently lapping waters takes you to the Gopalaswamy, Padmavati and Mahadeshwara temples. A short walk around the ruins and you can feel time weave its tapestry of worship, celebration and toll of temple bells. The temples lie close to the Karapura village. It's most famous export is Saboo, the elephant boy who was cast in Hollywood movies and became quite a rage in the '30s. This sleepy village, with one main road that climbs and slopes



A pack of wild dogs block the path of tourists in jeeps

over the varying levels of land, is ideal if you want to take off on a bike on your own.

The villagers are friendly and smile and wave shyly as you wobble unsteadily on the bicycle dodging a hen and her family, two bulls engaged in a fight and a little pup straying onto the road unmindful of treacherous road traffic. The jeep safari through the jungle is most exciting. Kabini sits on the fringes of the 644-km Nagarahole National Park filled with deciduous forests on one side and the Bandipur forest reserve on the other. Together with some of the forested areas, they are part of the 5,500 sq km Nilgiri biosphere reserve, the largest habitat for elephants in South East Asia. Our guide Vikram told us that the forests are home to cats (tigers and leopards, commonly seen in summer), the langur and deer. Sloth bears,

wild dogs and elephants are also commonly seen.

We set out at around 5 in the evening on a Saturday, first on a boat which took us to the close-by Jungle Lodges. Here, you can see the hunting lodge used by the Viceroy, during the British Raj. Nonagenarian Col John Wakefield, the mascot of this place and an old hunting aficionado, still lives here. Our open jeep with seven people looks innocuously unprepared for a jungle safari. I ask, in all my city-slicker naivete, if our guide does not feel the need for a firearm, just to scare away beasts of prey. I think he wished to laugh in my face, but all he said was, "It's quite safe, trust me." I held on closer to my pepper spray and prayed that we would not see the cats. And we didn't, much to the disappointment of my fellow travellers, but I was not about to confess that my prayers had



Spotted deer (right); pool at Orange County Kabini

HOW TO GET THERE

Kabini is located near Bheeramballi village, at a distance of 245 km from Bangalore by road via Mysore. The road route out of the city is: Bangalore—Ramnagaram—Maddur—Mandya—Srirangapatna—Mysore—(take Maanthavaadi Road)—Handpost (continue straight towards Maanthavaadi)—Turn left after 3 km towards Kabini Dam—Bheeramballi Village (Orange County, Kabini).
Nearest international airport: Bangalore

For bookings at Orange County, call: 080-41901000 /40/45.
Rates: Rs 17,000 for the jacuzzi hut and Rs 20,000 for the pool hut. Prices include a safari and all meals.

even when our jeep driver honked to get them to budge. Finally, one of them got the hint and the rest followed him into the thick undergrowth. As we drove away, we heard the low whistle from the wild dogs that settled over the forest as did the darkness.

We were back to watch a movie on wildlife and a tribal dance by the kadu kurubas by the fire. After a dinner where the chef plied us with traditional *ragi mudde* (ragi balls) and mutton chops, and a host of dishes, I sat down by what will soon be a coffee lounge. In a few weeks, you'll find a telescope here for stargazing but even without one, the sky is extremely clear here and presents an amazing night vista. At Kabini, one learns to slow down. Nature and



been answered. Discretion is always the better part of valour.

We did, however, see three elephants having a late evening feast of leaves. They kept coming closer and closer to our jeep, looking for vegetation and I wondered when it was going to be too close for comfort. But they were more mindful of not entering our space, and came about 10 feet close and stopped. We saw plenty of spotted deer and langur, a group of wild dogs who blocked our path and found no need to clear out

forest life are in no hurry to please anyone, certainly not city tourists who want wildlife experiences distilled and decanted over a weekend. The hue and light show over sunset is measuredly slow, the spewing gradations in light over sunrise dreamy and indolent. The meandering river has a loitering lyricism and the languorous rural rhythm of life at Orange County Kabini thumbs its nose at digital-age denizens from the city. You're loath to leave. It's addictive. ■ **by Divya Rao**