



Mindful trip

Along with the terms 'eco-friendly' and 'sustainable', there is a new buzzword in tourism—conscious travel

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Machan with lake view at Fazlani

The concept of 'going green' is something many of us are becoming more aware of, but did you know that you can extend eco-awareness to the way you travel? Yes, 'conscious travel' is a real thing. It is an attempt to be more conscious of the world around us, both in terms of preserving what we have and respecting the cultures of the places we visit. Leave the place better than you first saw it—seems to be the mantra.

The fact is—if you travel, you will leave a charcoal smudge in your wake. You can't help it. Planes spew carbon emissions, hotels guzzle gallons of water to launder sheets and towels and thirsty travellers chug plastic bottles. But there are some resorts that don't let the guilt dampen your vacation. Conscious travel practices of these green resorts help lift the remorse and lighten the blemish on Mother Earth.

According to the Pinterest 2018 travel report, eco-friendly hotels gained as much as 125 per cent profit, with people looking to minimise the footprint of their globetrotting. Booking.com's sustainable travel report which looked at 12,000 people from around the world also found that environmentally-conscious travellers are not only choosing eco friendly accommodation to reduce their environmental impact, but also have a local experience. Both backpackers and luxury travellers are more aware of leaving a lighter footprint as they trot the globe. Modern travellers not only expect big sustainability features from their accommodation—like solar power and water-saving bathroom fittings—but also little touches like locally-sourced food and sustainability building materials. "Green is the new black. Conscious travel is a fast-catching trend, especially in the luxury segment. Discerning travellers are growingly concerned about the footprint they leave behind. Sustainable and responsible travel is here to stay," says Srikant Peri, General Manager,



Dharana at Shillim a holistic retreat in Maval, Shillimb.

Greener side

With more travellers citing environmental and social concerns as key considerations in their holiday decisions, some high-end resorts are responding to the demand in spectacular style. As a result of a handful of rustic lodges committed to conservation back in the early 1990s, conscious tourism is now transforming the global travel industry. In the process, it is also safeguarding cultural and natural heritage, supporting environmentally friendly practices and delivering economic and social benefits to local people.

Green travellers no more want to stay at an ecolodge that is only “eco” because it uses organic soap or energy-efficient light bulbs. They want an ecolodge that has low-emission and low-waste practices, involves the local

community in its work and profits and built in a sustainable manner—like Dharana at Hilton Shillim which was born out of a colossal conservation effort. Over 1.5 million trees were planted before the retreat took shape. Apart from focused tree planting activities, 80 per cent of the retreat’s peak electricity load is met by the on-site solar farm while harvested water sustains the water requirement of the retreat for five months of the year. Dispensers for toiletries have replaced pre-packed toiletries and a water bottling plant supplies filtered drinking water on-site. “Guests also use these initiatives to educate their children on the importance of sustainable practices,” says Peri.

The mud, cow dung, husk and cob cottages of Forsyth Jungle Lodge, located near Satpura Tiger Reserve, are not just a huge draw for the green tourists but they also help to regulate





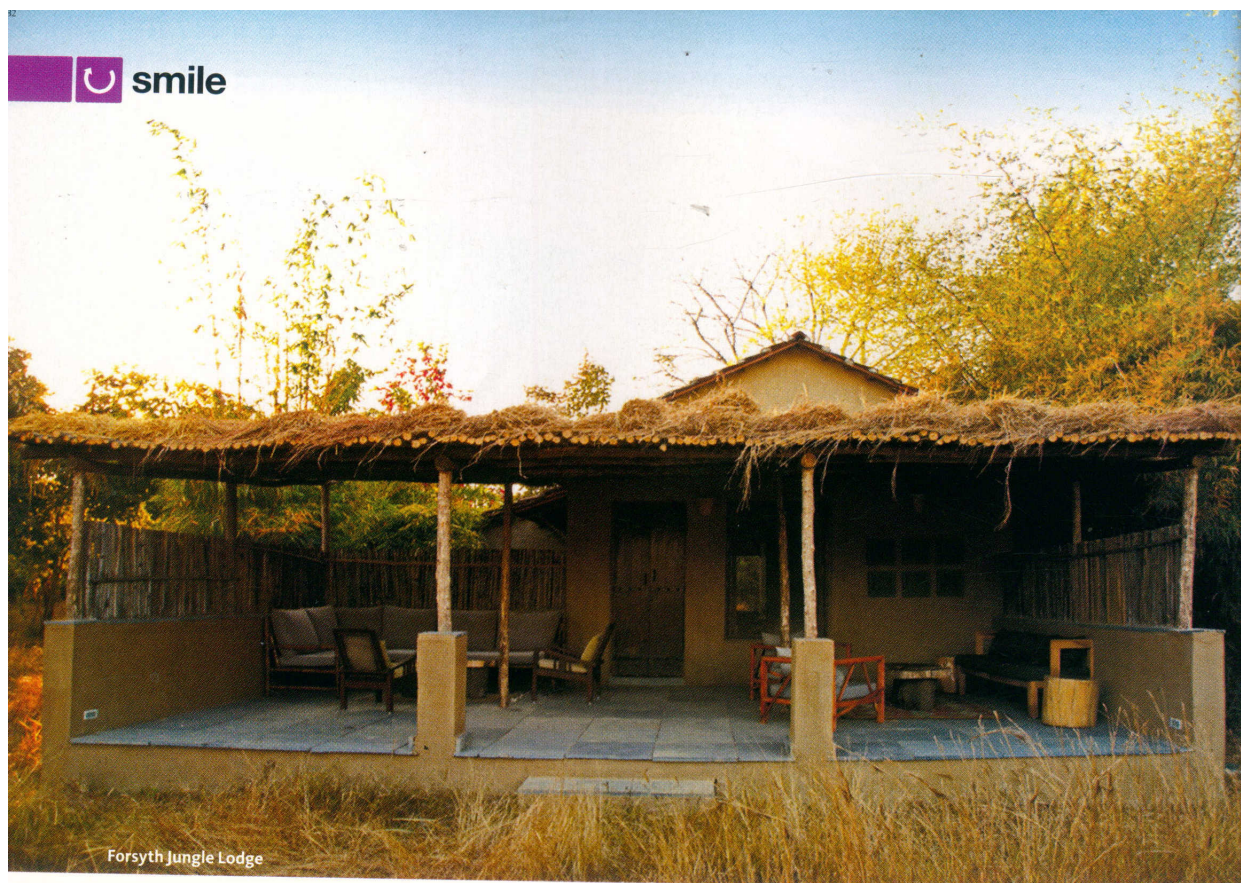
The meditation cave at Hilton Shillim



Organic farm at Hilton Shillim

How to be a greener guest

- ◆ Shop at a local market rather than a chain store.
- ◆ Eat at local restaurants instead of international chain restaurants.
- ◆ Don't buy superfluous or cheap made-in-china souvenirs. Opt for locally made goods. It might just be accompanied by a priceless story.
- ◆ Don't participate in tourism that forces people or animals to perform demeaning or painful tasks just for the sake of entertaining you (no riding elephants or going to tiger temples)
- ◆ Refuse bottled water if your hotel is in an area where the tap water is safe to drink, though be sure to allow the water to run for a little while before drinking, to flush out any lead.
- ◆ Drive around less and walk more.
- ◆ Leave the shells on the beach and the litter in the garage bin. Take only photographs and leave only footprints.
- ◆ Always travel with a reusable bottle. Coffee and tea drinkers can help when it comes to saving paper by carrying reusable travel mugs instead of to-go cups.
- ◆ Travel light. The heavier your luggage, the more fuel is needed. Besides, it's easier and more fun to travel when you are not loaded down with bags.



Forsyth Jungle Lodge

temperatures better thus reducing the use of ACs in the summer and heaters in winters. The property is lined by a natural fence of lantana and thicket which stops cattle but allows wildlife to come and go unhindered.

The newest property to join the conscious brigade is Fazlani Natures Nest—a wellness resort in Takwe, Maharashtra. This eco-sensitive resort irrigates its organic farms using recycled water from the hospitality units and the food wastes go into making fertilisers through vermiculture. Electric cars for commuting within the 70-acre property along with a rescue centre for horses are some of the other highlights of this resort. “Conscious traveller is more than a trend but a way of life for travellers these days. Guests are always open-minded to sustainable measures and encourage us through positive testimonials,” says Hemant Bagga, CEO, Fazlani Natures Nest.



Local woman cooking at Forsyth Jungle Lodge



Locals engaged in housekeeping at Forsyth Jungle Lodge



Beyond the bamboo

Environmentally-conscious travellers are not only choosing eco-friendly accommodation to reduce their environmental impact, but to have a local experience as well. These include hiring guides from the local community, picking restaurants that source food locally and buying products from local artisans. Guests at Forsyth can rest easy knowing that the lodge's foundation works to educate the community with sustainable living initiatives and is serious about preserving both nature and local culture. Women from the neighbouring villages are engaged in cooking a local meal for the guests while the men are roped in as guides and labour for maintaining the mud cottages and thicket fence around the property. "We encourage our guests to walk in the park and buffer and use non-motorized safaris like canoe. Grey water from

cottages is used to irrigate lily ponds," says Deepanker Mukherji, general manager and naturalist at Forsyth Jungle Lodge.

Food plays an important role in sustainability. Many of the eco-resorts are now sourcing their produce from a 30km-radius of the property. At Dharana, most of the produce for the wellness restaurant, Green Table, is sourced from the organic farm at the retreat. The menu has a special Ayurveda focus and is carved minus white sugar, white salt and refined flour. The retreat also employs people from the neighbouring villages who take guests for treks and excursions around the property.

The ultimate goal of conscious travel is to create a sustainable travel economy that gives something back to the community and provides the traveller with an authentic experience—not just a holiday. □