

the travel

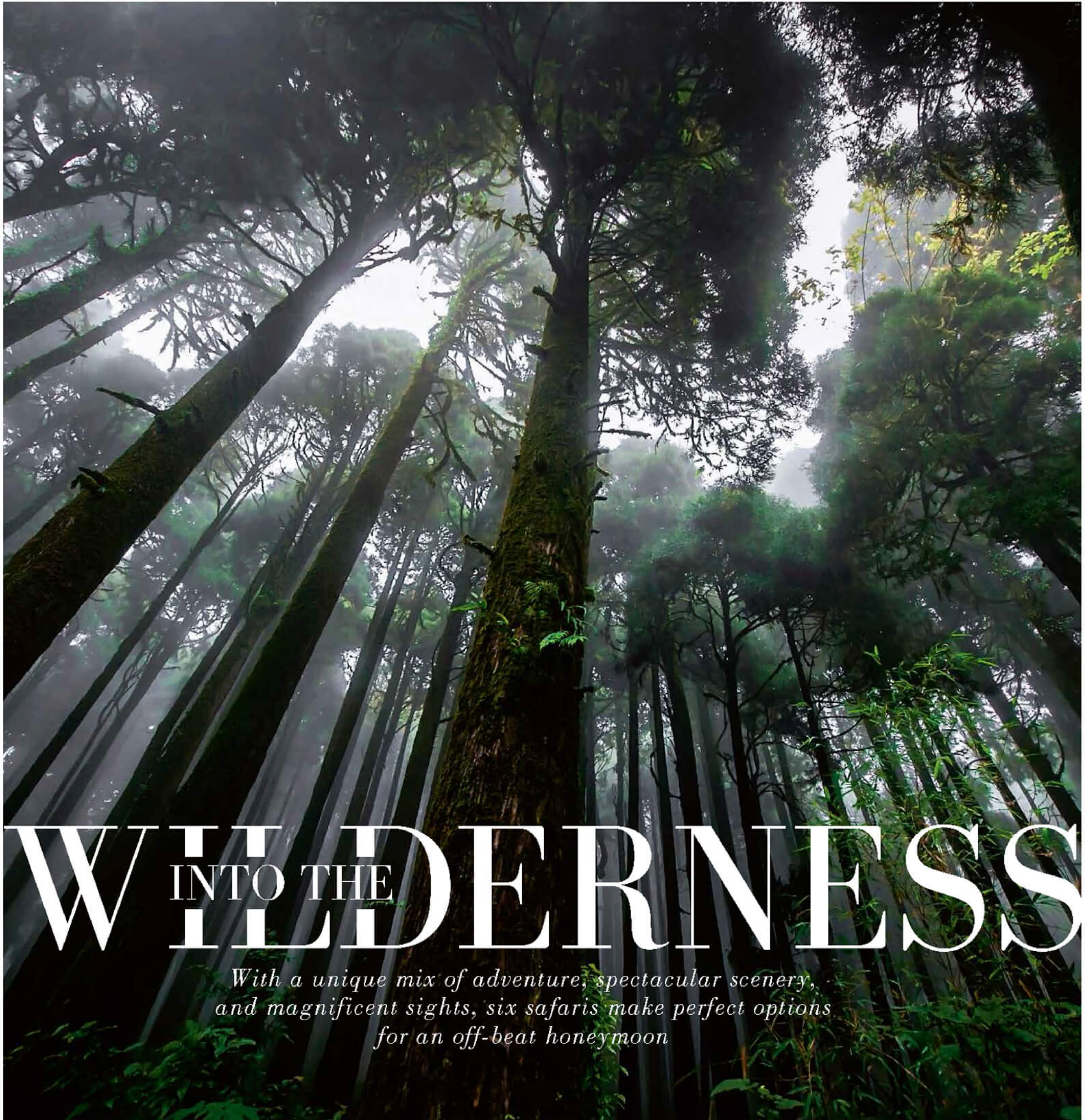


IMAGE: COURTESY SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

WILD INTO THE WILDERNESS

*With a unique mix of adventure, spectacular scenery,
and magnificent sights, six safaris make perfect options
for an off-beat honeymoon*

Plus, discover the 15th-century fort-palace in Rajasthan fit for a romantic getaway

BE STILL, MY WILD HEART

Utterly gorgeous safari getaways for those who love with wild abandon

By KALYANI PRASHER

It is pitch dark even at 6:00 A.M. during winter across North and Central India. But on January 1 of every year, we are out and about, showered and ready for the national park to open with sunrise. Our first holiday of the year always begins in the jungle, huddling together in the freezing pre-dawn darkness, making our way in the complete quiet to the park's gate. Even the birds aren't up then. Over the years, I've been to several national parks across India and the world (though India remains a favourite) and each one is different in small ways.

But the big things remain the same: Forests across the world are stunning, quiet, healing, and the rules of the animal kingdom never change. When the predator is prowling, the hush of the jungle is palpable, the thrill keeps you on the edge of the seat, and what you see together creates your own special memories, shared only by the two of you. Add to this a beautiful lodge to return to after the safaris, and I am not sure why anyone would spend good money on any other holiday. Here are some of the top safari options to help you begin your wild journey together.



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) Safari at the Pench National Park; outdoor dining setting at the camp; the luxury tent; deer spotting.



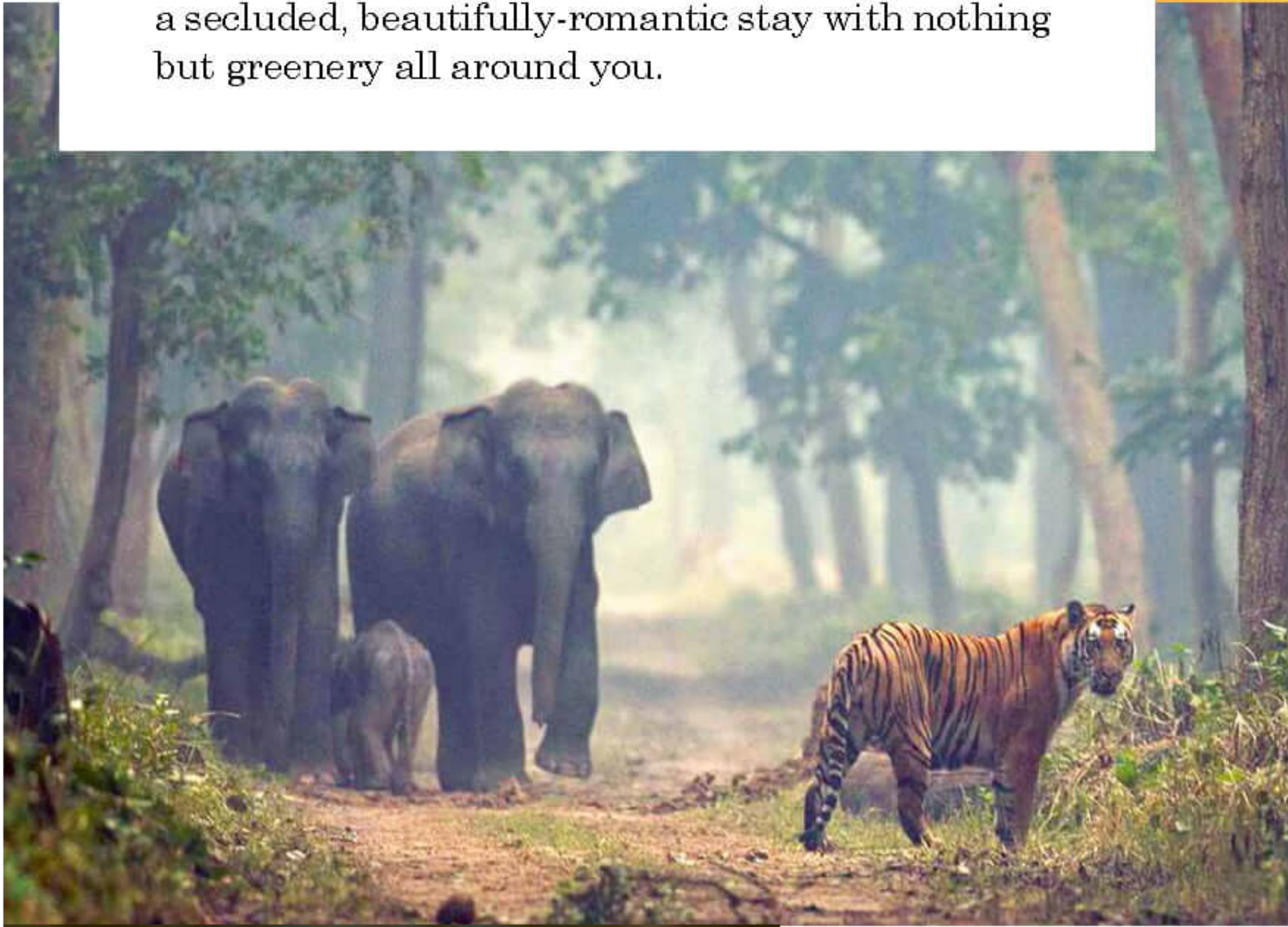
Jamtara Wilderness Camp at Pench

Kanha and Bandhavgarh are Madhya Pradesh's best known national parks but when it comes to something romantic, Pench comes up high on the list. After all, this was the setting for Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, and you can't stop imagining that Mowgli must be around somewhere, hiding from you, protected by his animal friends. Tiger sightings here are fantastic—I saw a mother and cubs and over 60 different birds across my three safaris, including the rarely-sighted rufous woodpecker. Jamtara is an eco-conscious camp with only ten luxury tents (so there's never a crowd) and each tent looks out to the forest. These are beautifully decorated, with large bathrooms that you will never want to leave—except for meals, because the food is to die for!

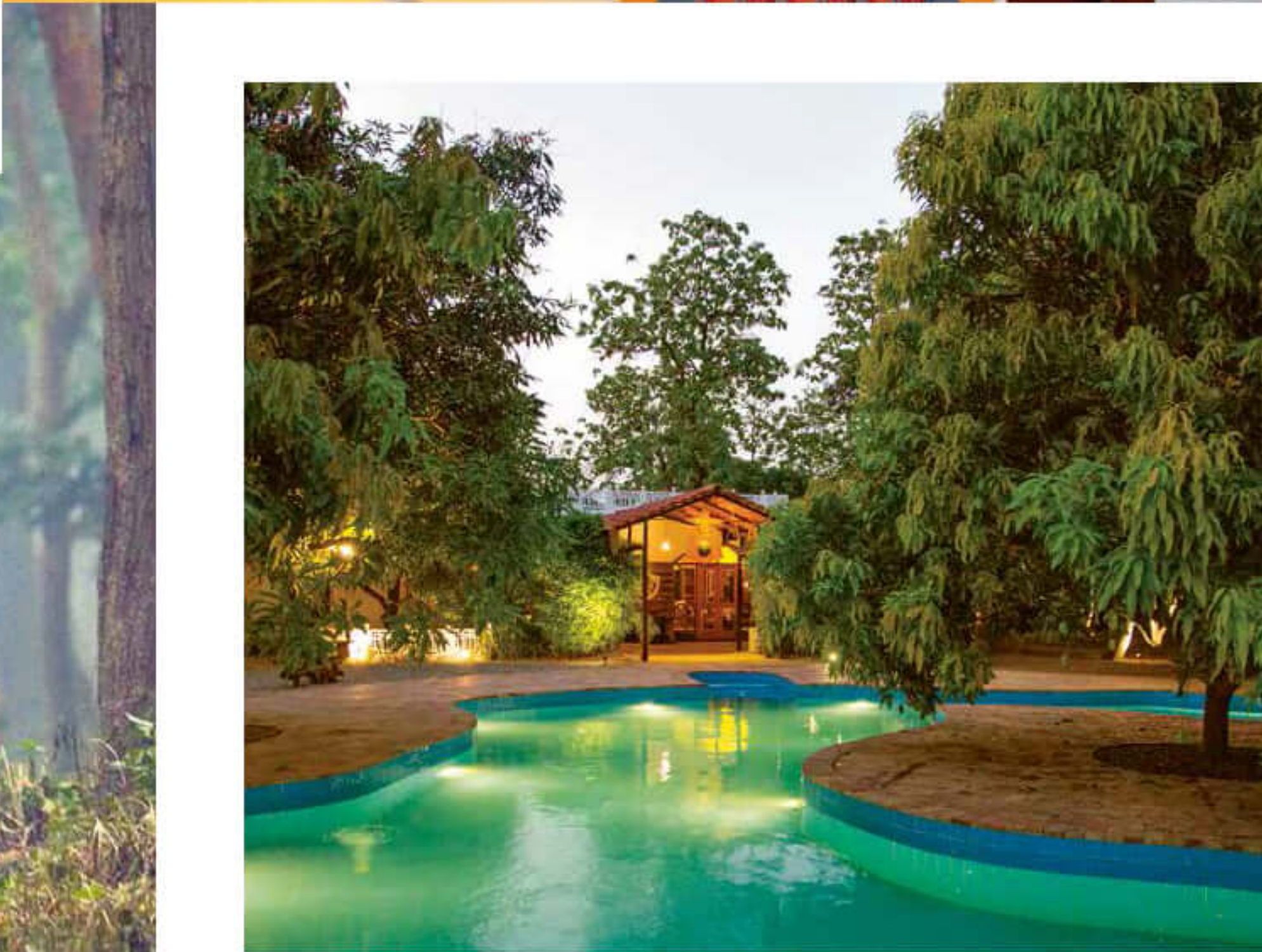
IMAGES: COURTESY JAMTARA WILDERNESS CAMP

Jaagir Lodge at Dudhwa

Dudhwa National Park in Uttar Pradesh has been the talk of the wildlife circuit recently for its many fantastic tiger sightings. Located in the Terai region means the park's landscape is quite unlike any other in India, and some of the bird and animal species here are not found anywhere else in the country. Jaagir Lodge is the best stay option here with luxurious rooms dating to the 1940s. Soak in the old world charm of the lodge and book yourself into one of the newly built Pavilion Villas. These are elevated rooms built on stilts amid bamboo plantations and dense orchards, and you will have a secluded, beautifully-romantic stay with nothing but greenery all around you.



IMAGES: COURTESY JAAIGIR LODGE AND THE BRANDS



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) The Pavilion Villa; pool by the dining area; a picnic set-up; amid sightings at Dudhwa National Park.

BRIDES TODAY RECOMMENDS



A.W.A.K.E. Mode coat, ₹80,000 (approx).

Etro earrings, ₹24,000 (approx).

Chloé sunglasses, ₹18,000 (approx).

Jacquemus bag, ₹27,000 (approx).

Maison Michel hat, ₹41,000 (approx).

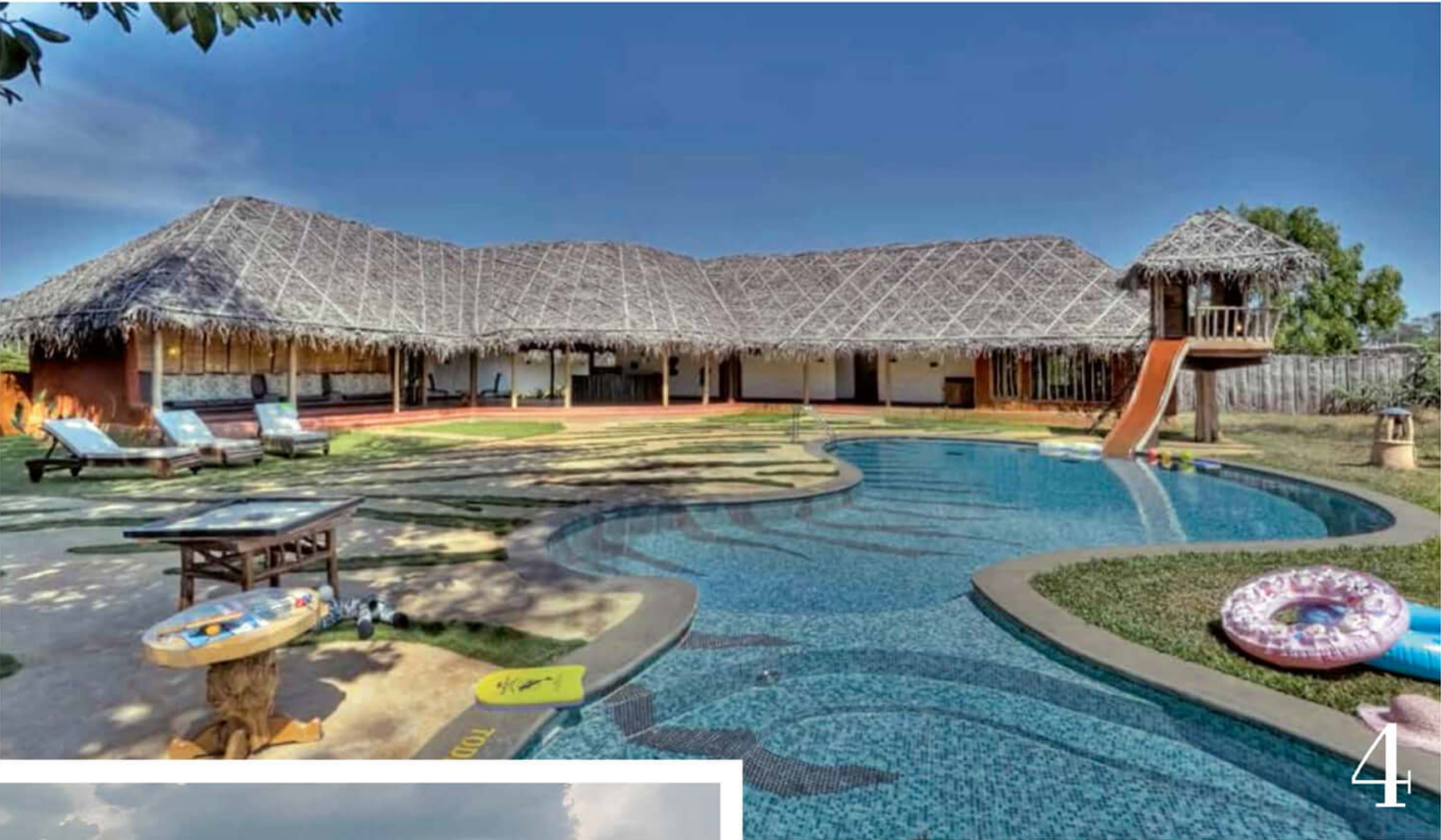


(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP)
Front façade; Gol Ghar dining
area; the Luxury tent.

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Reni Pani Jungle Lodge at Satpura

One of the least crowded parks in Madhya Pradesh, Satpura Tiger Reserve is also one of its most beautiful. The tigers here have recently adopted this park and are still unaccustomed to safari vehicles, which make the sightings all the more thrilling. Satpura is also famous among wildlife lovers for sloth bear sightings, canoe rides, and, night and walking safaris. Reni Pani is a beautiful jungle lodge, which is a member of Rare India, an elite list of conscious luxury hotels. Designed by celebrated architect Dean D'Cruz, it features big, spacious cottages made with local materials that keep them warm in the winter without heating. The best part? On our free day, sipping pink champagne at our sit-out, we watched spotted deer running about and over 20 different birds, right from our room!



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Kuruba Safari Lodge at Kabini

An unmissable safari experience awaits wildlifera at Kabini, in the jungles of Bandipur and Nagarhole in Karnataka. As you cross the river and board your jeep, watch out for the elusive black panther that has been sighted here for a couple of years now. The river becomes the most romantic element on this holiday as you take a stroll hand in hand watching the evening sky turn orange and pink with the setting sun. Evolve Back's Kuruba Safari Lodge is the most luxurious stay option here, located right on the edge of the Kabini river, with stunning palatial cottages that come with private swimming pools. Ask for a special dinner by the river to celebrate your love.



BRIDES TODAY RECOMMENDS



Misho necklace, ₹18,800.

Vivienne Westwood jacket,
₹64,500 (approx).

Missoni scarf,
₹45,000 (approx).

Ganni shoes,
₹42,000 (approx).

Burberry jeans,
₹42,500 (approx).



IMAGES COURTESY RENI PANI JUNGLE LODGE AND THE BRANDS

IMAGES COURTESY KURUBA SAFARI LODGE



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP)
Family pool; Jacuzzi Hut
bedroom; The Kuruba Grill;
the boat safari.



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) Tents by the lake; a picnic break by the Kanha National Park lake; the pool and spa rooms; a private verandah.



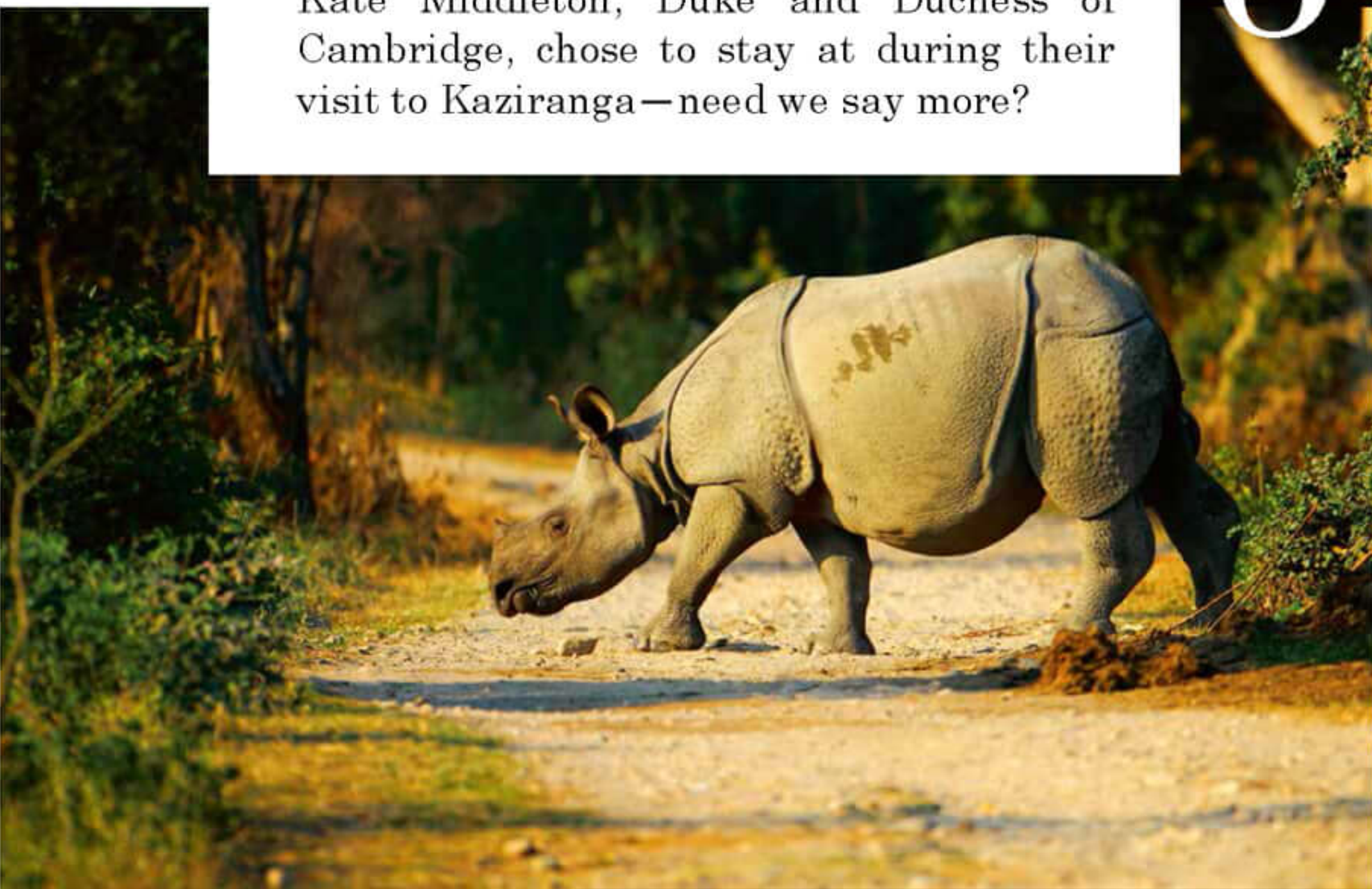
IMAGES: COURTESY BAGH VILLAS

Bagh Villas at Kanha

When talking of wildlife holidays, one can hardly leave Kanha National Park out of the list. My personal favourite, as well as the one that offers the best tiger sightings in the country, this is a must on your wild itinerary. Bagh Villas is a charming little jungle lodge with luxury tents that overlook the lodge's own waterbody. Sitting outside your tent together, you can watch birds and take in the magical, silent, and serene atmosphere that only comes from travelling to the wild.

Iora-The Retreat at Kaziranga

When I finally went to Kaziranga in 2019, it lived up to all the hype I had heard over the years. Truly stunning, expansive, and teeming with animals like the endangered one-horned rhino, a trip to Kaziranga is a delight for any wildlife lover. Iora, named after the beautiful bird, is the sprawling luxury resort that Prince William and Kate Middleton, Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, chose to stay at during their visit to Kaziranga—need we say more?



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(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) The retreat; tourists explore Kaziranga National Park; entrance of the retreat; the Indian one-horned Rhino.



KEEP IN MIND

- Wear comfortable, loose clothes as you'll be out for long hours—morning safaris are five to six hours and evening safaris are three or four.
- Wear long-sleeved tops and pants even in the summer, as there are creepy crawlies in the jungle.
- A camera is optional but binoculars are a must to see animals and birds properly.
- When you see big animals, try to focus on them rather than taking photographs. They pass too quickly, and later you'll regret it, so pull out your camera only once you've had a proper look.
- Safari holidays are hectic, so keep a day in between to rest and perhaps one at the end to enjoy the lodge and its luxuries.
- Most wildlife parks are shut for the rainy season so check the dates before you plan your travel. ■

BRIDES TODAY RECOMMENDS



Acne Studios bag, price upon request.

Salvatore Ferragamo earrings, price upon request.

Loewe cardigan, ₹60,000 (approx).

Cult Gaia shoes, ₹38,500 (approx).

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PR wing of grasshoppers