

Travel + Leisure

Nature's Symphony



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Clockwise from top left: Urban comfort in nature's womb at the verdant rooftop lounge at Hilton Shillim Estate Retreat & Spa; a section of the bathroom inside a villa; the warmth of the fireplace helps beat the nip in the air; cocooned stretch of the bar near Terrazzo, the multicuisine restaurant; a four poster bed dominates the bedroom inside each Spa Pool Villa.

THE HOTELS ISSUE

Nature's Symphony

Nestled in the Sahyadri Hills, near Pune. The Hilton Shillim Estate Retreat & Spa spells a sheer, satiating communion with nature in its purest form. By Shilpi Madan

It is difficult for me to circle my most extraordinary Shillim moment: I can't decide whether it was the soul-soothing sight of leafy shawls hugging every inch of the unending Sahyadri hills at virtually touching distance, while swimming in the personal spa pool at my villa; or the view of the velvety dark sky spangled with millions of magical constellations as I revelled in the chilly nip at night, or experiencing on my cheeks the golden ascent of the glorious sun as it clambered up stealthily from

behind the hills as I sipped rosehip hibiscus tea. Call it nestling in nature's womb, a balm for the urban weary. The luxurious Hilton Shillim Estate Retreat & Spa is such a self-contained cocoon of sheer solitude.

LINKING IN

It takes a three-hour drive from Mumbai or an hour by road from Pune to reach this all-villa property. Radiant, scenic, with mist tatters floating around soothing green stretches and hundreds

of nodding flowers in an enchanting fusion of purple, pink and yellow. The quiet, unassuming reception area, infused with the smell of sweet basil, sets the mood for my beatific experience. The courteous staff ushers me into a shiny white Nano that takes me across the entire 3,500 lush acres.

DREAMY ABODES

The 99 villas are sectioned as Presidential, Forest, Spa Pool (18), Spa (15), Valley View Deluxe (15) and Valley

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View (21). While finishing touches are being given to the villas in the first two categories, the remaining standalone residential groves raise the bar in premium comfort. At 210 square metres, the Spa Pool Villa in the spa zone unfurls as a airy space. The large living area fringed by wispy curtains links itself to the bedroom. A four-poster bed with carefully held back curtains all around sets the mood for pure relaxation. The long passage behind the bedroom links the closets to the twin washbasins and a pamper zone (with Peter Thomas Roth bathroom essentials), complete with an alfresco shower and a Jacuzzi. The glass walls lie concealed by remote controlled blinds, and uncloak to reveal the temperature-controlled swimming pool. The outdoor shower, a small private garden and lazy recliners complete the picture. The Spa Pool and Spa Villas stand linked to the international spa at one corner of the Hilton Shillim.

TOUCH OF JOY

The spa section offers a global menu of over 150 options in massage and special body treatments together with conventional and infrared saunas; steam rooms, outdoor hot tubs and hydrotherapy tubs. Steeped in the goodness of nature, each of the Sundari oils applied expertly by the masseurs during the deep tissue massage breathes

new life into every cell of my being. The spa area rambles (fringed by the forest), bringing in 17 standalone treatment rooms; a big yoga pavilion where sessions are held in the mornings, and a large, concealed, meditation cave—complete with egg-shaped lights, cinnamon diffusers and meditation beads arranged around the statue of Buddha. I spot a flautist playing outside the reception area, the strains combining with the gentle swishing of water as it flows down the wall.

GREEN GENIES

The mood persists at the Green Table, the neighbouring restaurant serving up organic food according to the body type of the guests. Open for brunch and dinner, it stands linked to the Tea Room, replete with antique urns and *urtis*, and minty greens and blues in the myriad cushions dotting the ivory linen sheathed couches. This rectangular area stands studded with jars of exotic green tea and coffee table books.

The most prized aspect of Hilton Shillim is its unbelievable proximity to nature. Urban comforts interface readily with the natural bounty. More than 2,000 mango trees, bounding squirrels and roving butterflies line my route to Terrazzo, the multicuisine restaurant where executive chef Shaik Aslam Basha spins magic through a medley of Indian

and continental fare. Beyond Terrazzo lies the organic vegetable patch with fresh dill, spring onions, tomatoes and parsley filling up the soil beds. Terrazzo stands linked to a bar at the other end. A well-stocked wine cellar and library make up the rest of the hidden secrets in the indoor space.

FRINGE BENEFITS

I choose to trot on a white pony for a bit, and then cycle my way to the breathtaking Pool Bar. A gigantic turquoise stretch forms the infinity pool. Perfect for throwing parties and living it up with family and friends. There are hundreds of prettily poised nooks where the Shillim staff will serve up a delectable meal for two—by the tiny rivulets that gurgle to life during the monsoon, atop a machan near the forest, in the middle of the pool. A little ahead of the Pool Bar arrives the Shillim Institute area. Strapped with the latest equipment to host conferences the huge banquet area comes linked to a large dance floor. To the rear, in progress is the making of the pottery studio and spaces for conducting cookery and music classes for the resident guests.

Perfect for losing yourself and then rediscovering your soul, this is a drop of heavenly utopia. *Shillim, Pawana Nagar, Taluka Maval, Pune; 91-211/471-2468; shilton.com; doubles from Rs 30,000.*



From left: The limpid blue of the swimming pool in the spa zone; sliding glass doors bring the outside into each villa.

