UNWIND

THE LONG WEEKEND GUIDE

Do you have a plan for the four days off? We help you make the most of them

Adventure in Lonavla

Ees! World may be nostalgic, but Della Adventure Park is new. Located just off the Mumbai-Pune Expressway, cool off with Aqua Zorbing (bubbling on water inside a giant plastic ball). Work off your aggression by taking bumper cars to the water — behold Bumper Boating! If you’re not such a water baby, head to the mini golf course or go milky the New Jersey cows. Some dogsgie or hang with the musk.

CALL: 096444 55000

WEBSITE: www.dellaaadventure.com

PRICE: 1,500

Go fish

Blue Bulb is organizing a day-long fishing event. Base camp is a riverside farmhouse, from where you head to a short training session on the bank and jump right in. A guide shows you how to lay traps in chest-deep water to capture eels and then off to the kitchen to fry them local-style. You can go for a swim in the evening, before heading back home.

WEBSITE: http://bluebulb.in

PRICE: 599

Jump aboard

Four days is just enough time to get a handle on sailing. The Gateway Sailing Club organizes sailing sessions at the Gateway of India, where you can learn the basics. If you don’t care for the hard work and want to only enjoy the breeze, sail out to Mandwa for an overnight stay and spend the day there kayaking, camping or munching the barbecue.

WEBSITE: www.gatewaysailingclub.com

PRICE: 3,000

Be a happy camper

Khopoli, at the foothills of Lonavla is close enough from the city to drive to, but quaint enough to be rural. Big Red Tent is pitching an overnight camp there, and you can be a good Scout or Guide too. Take your children along to build some character by learning how to erect a tent, build a bonfire, spot birds and protect yourself from the elements.

WEBSITE: www.bigredtent.in

PRICE: 900

Tagore relocated

A propos Rabindranath Tagore’s 150th birth anniversary celebrations, Amit Chaudhuri wrote in the Guardian that he felt a surge of sympathy for those who couldn’t read Tagore in Bengali and had to endure his English translations instead, taking on trust that there was “something else there worth calculating”. Europe discovered Tagore with Gitanjali. Ezra Pound wrote to W B Yeats in 1912 that Tagore was “greater than any of us.” A year later, Gitanjali won him the Nobel Prize. And then, within a couple of decades, Europe had tired of him.

I read Gitanjali (Tagore’s translation) in my teens and couldn’t get beyond the first few stanzas. I would have been forced to give it up on trust that there was “something else there worth calculating”. I hadn’t read any other translations which did him a little more justice than he had done to himself. Listening to the two beautifully recital stanzas from Gitanjali in Anita Ratnam’s Avani — a handful of dust at the CNC on Saturday, I wondered whether, simply dropping Tagore’s ‘thous’ and ‘thees’, was half the translation battle won.

Structured around five poems interpreted as handouts of words, flowers, leaves and gold, this piece of dance theatre did what many other interpretations in this season of Tagore failed to do — abstract the sense of the poet’s words to relocate, re-contextualise. The set underlined Avani’s contemporary spirit. Conceived as a backyard with clothes drying on lines (cheeky smarter clothes than generally seen in backyards), it was a way of bringing Tagore home to us. The simple, elegant costuming of the dancers, the impressive choreography of Chaurey and Ahikila Ramnarayan, further cut the distance between the poet and us. And the dance, which Ratnam calls Neo Bharatanatyam, was as wide-ranging in its vocabulary as Tagore’s spirit. It combined the basic kinetics of Bharata Natyam with other dance forms like Kathakali, and martial art forms like Kalaripayattu, without becoming a mish-mash. The Buddy it achieved had much to do with the wholeness of the dancer’s purpose and vision.

Avani means earth, that is land and water both. In Ratnam’s interpretation, earth also included the human race. The five poems she’d chosen to explore, were therefore expressions of natural manifestations and human connections. While the dancer moved to the literal expression of Tagore’s poetry, the poems, the actors made interesting connections for us.

One was the story of how Tagore came to compose his ode to spring — “Enchanting Mohini, your eternal beauty mesmerises the world”. On a visit to Madras, he happened to hear Muthuswami Dikshitar’s composition in praise of goddess Meenakshi, “Regal Meenakshi, you are the sole refuge of all humanity.” So taken up was he by the song that, on his return to Santinketan, he composed his spring song to fit into the same melody. The song so ingeniously interwoven the compositions into a two-pley skin, while the dancer illuminated the idea of spring with what was arguably her most enchanting choreography. Seated on a low seat, with marigold flowers strewn around, she propelled herself around with her feet, using only eyes and delicate hand gestures to express the joy of the season.

Another connection, even more moving, came with the last poem, Prithvi, beautifully translated by Tanik Sen. Ratnam’s interpretation expressed little of the earth, benign, life-giving and destructive. While the earth destroyed through natural disasters, Man, supposedly, Nature’s finest creation, destroyed through greed, killing the environment and millions of humans in the process.

Counterpointing Ratnam’s dance of destruction, Ahikila Ramnarayan recited Yeats’s poem on war: “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold. Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,/The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere/ The ceremony of innocence is drowned.”

When you imbue dance with personal meanings expressed through improvisations, you sometimes lose the spectator. This did happen a couple of times in Avani in the last poem. But they were momentary losses. The huge enthusiasm happened in the first poem about longing and separation, when Ratnam walked off the stage and climbed the steps at the back of the auditorium to dance on the small platform at the top, turning the poignancy of her dance into a crick in the neck for many of us.

Those nits picked, Avani held us with its freshness, so different from the mush that Tagore is often reduced to. Its interwoven textual and richly voiced singing, unobtrusive but effective back projection, and unambiguously modern sensibilities, combined to challenge and charm, and most importantly, to make Tagore sharply relevant.