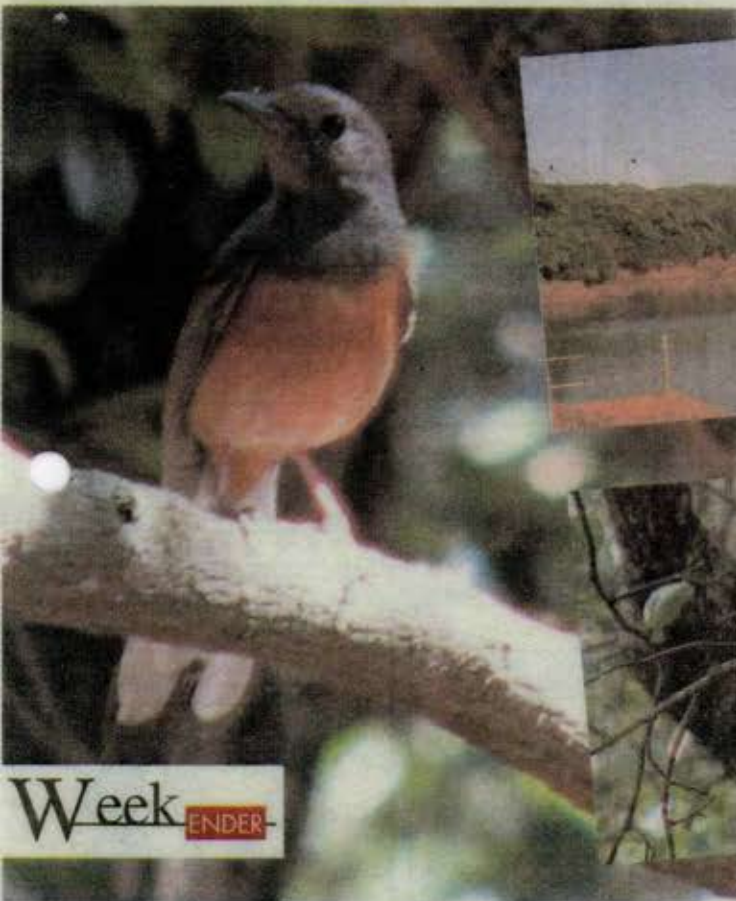


wanderlust

On the trail of Nature at Matheran



Free falling vacation

ATEEQ SHAIKH

THE ASIAN AGE

So you're an adrenaline junkie who dreams of having a host of adventure activities under one roof? Then head for Della Adventures at Kune village.

Situated a stone's throw from Lonavala, you would need at least two days to experience the thrills at Della. The list includes paragliding, parasailing, zorbing, dirt biking, radio-controlled planes, virtual gaming, golf, paintball, rock climbing, rappelling, milking Jersey cows,

mountain cycling, speed boat, jet ski, trekking, flying fox, wooden obstacles, archery, net cricket, Burma bridge, Tarzan swing and a lot more.

For parents who want their children to learn from fun activities, there are workshops in pottery and creative painting, cooking classes, dance classes, yoga and meditation classes. And for those who want to relax after the day's exertions, the spa and salon beckon.

How to get there?

On the Mumbai-Pune Expressway, follow the Lonavala exit towards Pune. Drive on the Old Mumbai-Pune Highway, till you find a left turn ahead of Lonavala.



Matheran has much to offer nature lovers, including a variety of flora, fauna and scenic beauty

PHOTOS: YC

Rare butterflies, birds and flowers — the hill station of Matheran offers plenty to the observant

YOGESH CHAVAN

It had been a long time since I'd last had a getaway, so when a chance to go to Matheran presented itself, I pounced. Just the thought of being far away from Mumbai's heat and pollution made my heart sing. I set off one early morning, boarding a Karjat fast local

from Mumbai CST. After getting off at Neral, we took a shared cab, and halfway up the serpentine road that leads to Matheran, we felt it: The climate had changed. The air was already several degrees cooler and extremely pleasant.

Within 20 minutes, we had reached Dasturi Naka. As we walked to our hotel, we were

greeted by groups of monkeys. We sighted a cute little baby monkey clinging to the underbelly of its mother and looking at us curiously from an upside down angle. We also had a variety of birds like the red whiskered bulbul and the jungle mynah pointed out to us. We could hear the calls of the brown-headed barbet, but could barely get a glimpse of it.

Surprisingly not a single crow can be seen in Matheran. Lost in such interesting sights and some fresh lemonade that we were treated to along the way, we didn't feel any exhaustion during the 30-minute long walk to our lodgings.

Our hotel was away from the hustle bustle of the main market and the premises had a profusion of towering trees, lawns, flowering shrubs, butterflies and chirping birds. At teatime, we set off for the nature trail cum mini-trek. We visited various scenic points like the

Honeymoon Point, Echo Point and then headed to Charlotte Lake. The vast expanse of the lake surrounded by dense greenery is a soothing sight indeed, and the monkeys gave us company wherever we went. The vibrant colours dispersed by the setting sun as it set behind the Prabhal fort in the west, made for a

fitting end to the day.

The next day, we awoke early and set off for some bird watching. The white-rumped Shama was a treat to watch and listen to, with its distinct, sweet singsong tone. We also caught sight of a rare Nilgiri wood pigeon and the high point — a couple of Asian paradise flycatchers. The female is

a small brownish bird, but the male is a glowing white, with an almost four-foot long feathery tail, much like a flowing ribbon. It reminded me of the wedding gown that Kate Middleton wore recently!

A short stop for breakfast later, we undertook another nature trail, this time, spotting some are flowers, plants and butterflies. The Common Rose, Blue Mormon, Common Sailor and Blue Tiger were some of the pretty winged creatures we observed.

Soon it was time to leave, but not before I made a firm decision to visit Matheran again — and at leisure.

Rainbow Adventures will conduct a camp for nature lovers from May 10 to 13. Call 9324716956 for registration.

The writer is a wildlife enthusiast



Jolted off the beaten track



If hurtling down a mountain at breakneck speed is your idea of fun, then try downhill mountain biking. Regan Rodricks (9870966910) organises rides.

Travel TRAIL