

October 2016

EASY TRIPS

Romantic  
Break



## Primrose Villas, Chikmagalur, Karnataka

### GLASS-FRONTED GLORY

About two years ago, Sumitra and Ravi Ramu decided that the views at Sumitra's family coffee plantation in Chikmagalur were too beautiful to not be shared. In their first foray into hospitality, they wanted to offer guests a new type of luxury – incorporating all the elements that Ravi had looked for and often never found on his own travels. Chief among his grouses was the fact that hotels bind you down to breakfast from 7am to 10.45am. Which is why time has no relevance at Primrose Villas – your personal butler can serve you breakfast at 2pm, set up a bonfire at 2am, and draw you a bath at any (reasonable) hour.

That bath is another luxury in itself – sunk into the floor before views of the Western Ghats through floor-to-ceiling glass walls. Don't worry about privacy either – each of the six villas is set within its own cocooning volcanic rock cove. Three walls of each villa are all glass too, and the impression is of light and openness.

Luxury comes, too, in the property's commitment to pampering you. You soak in said bath in water steeped with custom-made bath salts, and climb two wooden steps – like royalty of old – into a massive, old-fashioned carved bed. Each piece of the Victorian and Jacobean furniture

Above: Three walls of each villa are floor-to-ceiling glass

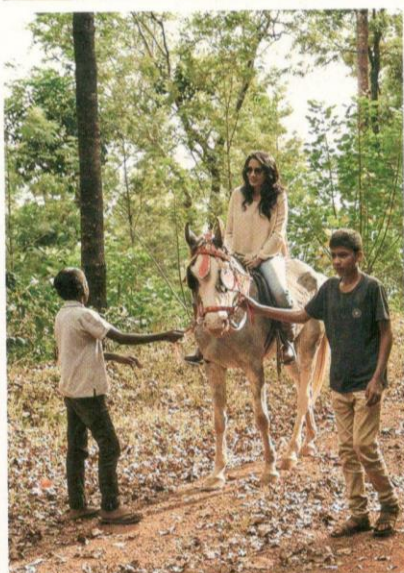
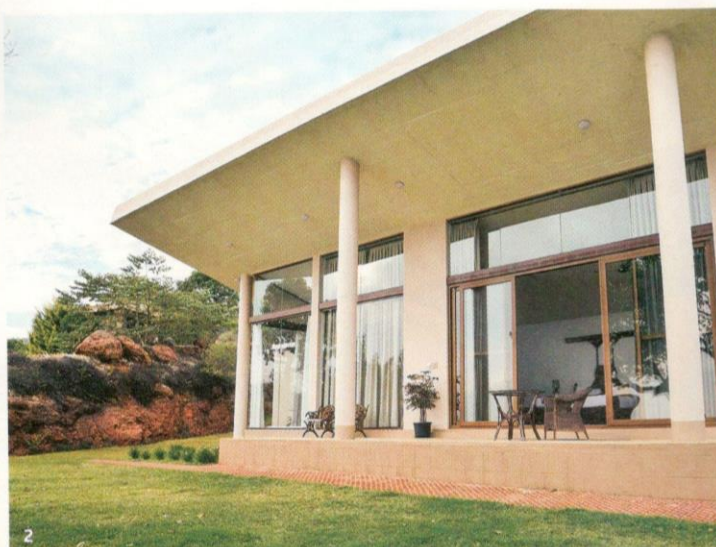
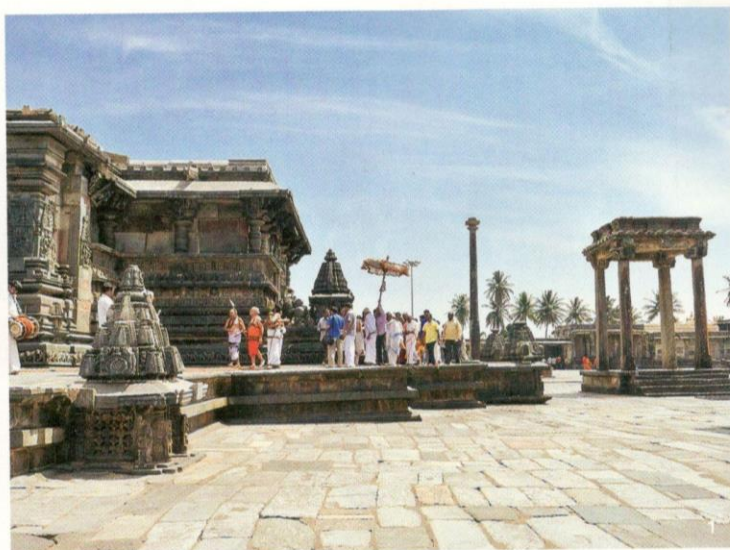
Below: Everything in the villas, down to the locks, has been carefully curated by Sumitra

has been collected by Sumitra over 20-odd years, and the decor is a meticulously-curated selection of unusual artefacts.

You can totally ask to be driven to your meals in the main house, because it is a hard climb just to eat, but also because it is part of the indulgent experience. It's easy to forget in all this coddling that Primrose Villas is part of the 700-acre Baganeheddal Coffee Estate, but the presence of the working dogs – Puppy 1, Puppy 2, Mother and New Dog – and of Sumitra's geese is a hint. Having your letter of welcome and the daily menu handwritten on paper dipped in coffee decoction is another. Being on an estate also means that you can go on coffee trail







#### GREAT FROM

Bangalore, Mangalore, Chennai

#### GREAT FOR

A luxurious break

#### GO NOW

While the hills are a glorious green.

walks (free) with the very sweet but shy Mohan, or wander the plantation on horseback (free, but inform in advance), your steeds brought in from the family farmhouse near Chikmagalur City...

If you'd rather do something active, an early-morning trek up Rudragiri,

the mountain behind the property, is ideal (free). The climb is steep, but the summit offers lovely views of the two valleys on either side and of the Western Ghats. If you're lucky, Puppy 1 will accompany you and your guide, and sit around while you enjoy your sandwiches and juice. Other activities include a visit to the Belur and Halebidu Temples, about an hour away, and a safari into Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary, about an hour-and-a-half away.

Or you could do nothing but lie back, gaze at the view of the hills beyond the bougainvillea in your personal garden, feel the wind whooshing around the tops of the mountains – and eat. Eating is an important part of the

1. The Hoysala Temples at Belur are an easy drive away

2. Each villa is a cocoon of privacy – important since your sunken tub is in a glass-walled bathroom (you can draw the curtains, if you like)

3 & 5. Horse-riding and climbing Rudragiri are on the menu for active holidayers

4. The retinue of chefs turns out an impressive variety of great food

experience here. Sumitra has four chefs on call for Mediterranean, Awadhi, Italian and the local Malenadu food, and the menus are mind-blowing. The staff also tends to push your capacity to the limit, and you will rise from each meal in the huge glass-fronted dining room feeling very rotund indeed. Evenings are for barbecue, and conversations with Sumitra. Sure, you can have the barbecue at your villa, but it's so beautiful at the main bonfire area, with oil lamps set in the rock wall, that you should not isolate yourself so much.

WORDS PRIMROSE MONTEIRO-D'SOUZA  
PHOTOGRAPHS APARNA NORI



## EASY TRIPS PRIMROSE VILLAS, CHIKMAGALUR, KARNATAKA



### FACT SHEET

#### GETTING THERE

**Closest metro:** Bangalore (245km)

**Closest city:** Mangalore (154km)

**Closest airports:** Though Mangalore Airport (161km) is the closest airport, due to the bad condition of the road, it is advisable to drive down from Kempegowda Bengaluru International Airport (265km), a five-hour drive away. Leave Bangalore early to cheat the city's notorious traffic. Air India, IndiGo, Jet Airways and SpiceJet fly to Bangalore from most major Indian cities (return fares from ₹ 5,100).

**Closest railhead:** Kadur Railway Station (DRU; 35km). Take the 12725 Intercity Express (leaves KSR Bengaluru [SBC] 1pm, arrives DRU

4.20pm; ₹ 385 AC Chair Car) and return by the 12726 Intercity Express (leaves DRU 10.20pm, arrives SBC 2.05pm; ₹ 385 AC Chair Car).

#### GETTING AROUND

Having a car at your disposal is a good idea, since you will need transport to get you from Bangalore, the airport or railway station, and if you want to visit the temples, wildlife reserve or nearest town, Chikmagalur. The property can organise transfers (railway station: ₹ 3,900 return, airport: ₹ 16,000 return) and transport to go to the sites around. We travelled with and liked the services of Travel Zone (00-91-9980222022; anthony.travelzone@gmail.com; ₹ 8,000/ one-way from Bangalore Airport).



### WHERE TO STAY

**Primrose Villas:** Five years in the making, the six villas are a labour of love. They are set at cliff-edge, and two are higher up, but the views remain amazing (00-80-22122238; www.primrosevillas.com, kb@primrosevillas.com; near Check Post, Kaimara; villas: ₹ 17,000, Primrose Residence Room: ₹ 11,000).



### WHAT TO EAT

Meals are served in the dining hall at the main house, set above most of the villas (from ₹ 2,500/ person for all meals). You dine to beautiful views and the swooping of birds on the other side of the glass walls. There are no set timings, and you only need to inform your butler of the approximate time you would like to eat. You can either

climb up to dine or ask for a butler pick-up. Meals can also be served at your villa with advance notice. The bonfire and barbecue dinner is priced at ₹ 1,650/ person. You can also have the bonfire and dinner set up at your villa.



### WHAT TO PACK

A good book or two, walking shoes, insect repellent, long pants for the coffee estate walk or horse ride, a hat, motion sickness pills for the winding roads up from Chikmagalur if you usually need them



### CLEAN LOO GUIDE

**Café Coffee Day** at Bellur Cross Road on NH 17, about 127km into your drive from Bangalore Airport, is good for a loo break with clean toilets

An artefact of painted tiles in the villas



and a range of food options (24X7; coffee from ₹ 75, idli-sambar: ₹ 45).



### MEDICAL AID

The nearest medical facility is **Ashraya Hospital** in Chikmagalur (3km; 00-91-8262-230574; www.ashrayahospital.in; PB No 77, Naidu St). For serious issues, you will need to travel to Bangalore.



### SHOPPING

The bath and body products custom-made for Primrose Villas can be purchased at ₹ 150 each. Also enquire about buying the coffee and spices grown on the estate (coffee from ₹ 400).

### SAFETY

Although the property is within the coffee plantation, it is very dark at night, so do call the butler for a car to take you up to dinner each night.

### CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Primrose Villas has lots for children to do – including board games, carrom, toys, bicycles and the opportunity to go horse-riding. Do, however, supervise kids at all time, as there is forest all around, and the villas are perched at the edge of a cliff.

### GOOD TO KNOW

- \* The villas are well suited for solitude – mobile networks are spotty, and there is no television or wi-fi.
- \* On the 2.5-hour walk through the coffee plantation (free), you'll see pretty butterflies, giant Malabar squirrels, waterfalls by the wayside, wild fig, jackfruit, pepper and *elaichi* trees, and, of course, coffee bushes on slopes – all the better for the rain water to drain off. The mountain trek, also free, takes an hour and a half; you start off at 6.30am, while the horse-riding activity needs a little advance notice, but is also free.
- \* The resort can arrange for safaris at **Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary** (53.6km), which is a Project Tiger reserve, on advance notice (safari timings: 6.30am – 9am, 4pm – 7pm; transfers: ₹ 1,900, safari: ₹ 400/ person).
- \* The temples at **Halebid** (35.5km) and **Belur** (26.5km) are great examples of Hoysala architecture. The resort can arrange for a trip to these sites (₹ 2,900).