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Get closer to nature at this boutique hotel in Maharashtra

Coco Shambhala, a luxury boutique property near Sindhudurg in south Maharashtra, is a haven for nature lovers

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Photo Caption: The resort was designed and built by the 42-year-old owner Giles Knapton

Nature is the protagonist at Coco Shambhala, a luxury boutique property near Sindhudurg in south Maharashtra. And she is a drama queen who plays with light and shadow, creating new canvasses, as sunny days melt into cool nights. Stunning views of surf curling on blue seas; a champagne-coloured beach framed by lush vegetation and a para-glider floating in blue skies pour into one's open-sided villa on stilts. A luxury boutique property with four villas that come with their own pools, Coco Shambhala snuggles on a hill overlooking Bhogave Beach. At dusk, the stars and the moon spray their molten light on the villa's private infinity pool, while the sea, just 200m away, glows like an incandescent sapphire.

Indeed, Giles was the architect and project manager rolled into one! His aim was to make his guests feel that nature would be their travel companion during their stay, and to ensure that the land would not be scarred in anyway. With a boutique luxury property of 4 villas in north Goa already under his belt, Giles was bewitched by the Edenesque Sindhudurg coastline and had trekked for close to five years along it, till he alighted on a hillock above the white slash of Bhogave beach. Though just a two-and-half-hour drive from party-hearty Goa, "this is one of world's most bio-diverse places on the planet," he said.



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Coco Shambhala: Villas with a View

As we mounted a series of red laterite steps to our hilltop villa, framed by fragrant frangipani, plumeria, lilies and fecund foliage, we felt the area's healing vibe and realised that each villa exists in its own charmed space. The pitched Mangalore-tiled roofs are visible only when you embark on a boat ride to watch dolphins arch and dive in the sea. The living room of our villa (lyrically called Varenya) was essentially a spacious open pavilion (typical of local homes) flanked by two bedrooms with their own sit-outs which fielded 180-degree views of a blue sea edged by a curved slash of the beach. Everywhere, nature clasped us in a bear hug and refused to let go!

Coco Shambhala has a natural, earthy elegance. The sleek handmade furniture and the slatted wall that frames the entrance to the villas were made on site with local coconut wood. (This wood is recyclable, for the tree has a 70-year-life cycle.) Luxurious linens, recycled lamps, copper glasses, jugs and crockery meld with all the mod cons including a spa with a sea view.



Photo Caption: Nature is the protagonist at Coco Shambhala, a luxury boutique property near Sindhudurg in south Maharashtra

Coco Shambhala: Nestled in Nature

The resort was designed and built by the 42-year-old owner Giles Knapton, a passionate Indophile and a backpacker in his youth. He used local labour, recycled material and coconut wood to create this low-impact retreat on India's first Blue Flag beach. (A Blue Flag beach is an international certification that a beach meets stringent standards of cleanliness and sustainable tourism.)



Photo Caption: A luxury boutique property with four villas that come with their own pools, Coco Shambhala snuggles on a hill overlooking Bhogave Beach



Photo Caption: The steep hillside was not hacked, but construction flowed with the natural topography of the land

Coco Shambhala: Eco-Friendly Construction

The steep hillside was not hacked, but construction flowed with the natural topography of the land. "In keeping with our care for the environment, the villas are technically temporary, as there isn't a single structural weld," said Giles. "The entire frame is joined together with nuts and bolts. In addition, we didn't put a road into the site, we didn't use a JCB, or crane. The entire project was put together manually to reduce the impact on the environment and allow us the flexibility to dismantle the houses at any point; and not leave a footprint on the land." The villa became a dreamy reality after 18 months. The local construction crew who helped the owner realise their vision was subsequently trained to work in housekeeping, gardening and as waitstaff



Photo Caption: A luxury boutique property with four villas that come with their own pools

Coco Shambhala: Local Delicacies

The cuisine – sizzling local Malvani and innovative international fare, based on menus curated by Giles' partner, Shagun, everything is fresh, from homegrown herbs and vegetables to the sizzling catch of the day. Indeed, the cuisine is as much a celebration of local culture as the barefoot staff who pad up to you with ear-to-ear smiles and serve you in your villa with grace. You can also try the cashew nut therapy and a Malvani cooking class in your villa. And as you luxuriate in your private dining experience, the ocean shimmers like a giant LCD screen beaming images of a forgotten utopia.

