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EVOLUTION
OF THE
CONFERENCE
ROOM

**Business
with Class**

Jungle MICE

**Appointment with
South Africa**



Jungle MICE

Many lessons on nature restoration can be learnt from Camp Forktail Creek. It is located on the edge of a small Kumaoni village, just outside the north-eastern boundary of the Corbett Tiger Reserve, Uttarakhand. It is surrounded by a mixed deciduous forest with Sal being the dominant tree. This barren piece of land was restored a decade ago by removing the insidious Lantana bush and building with raw material sourced from the villages around and mud from the land itself.

MICETalk got into a conversation with Minakshi and Ritish who own this campsite. Minakshi tells us about their initial experience, "Our camp was started on a barren patch of farm land. Lantana (*lantana camara*) an invasive weed had overtaken the land. Our first mission was to remove all the lantana but we had to do it all by hand - lantana allows plant life to grow under its web but does not allow it to grow over, so many natural forest trees and indigenous species were saved when we removed the lantana by hand."

They get a lot of guests from the corporate world but always in small numbers and until now people travelling on personal holidays. However, small groups of 15 - 18 people (since they have nine units) would be ideal for a meeting where participants are looking for quiet adventure or peace of mind while working and brainstorming. They can also walk along the many paths created by the reforestation efforts in camp. Both, Ritish and Minakshi explain, "Despite porcupines, wild boar and deer making their presence ever felt and damaging most of the plants, reforestation efforts in camp and around have done extremely well." The decade old trees, the dense lantana bushes and recently created grasslands make it a haven for birds, reptiles, mammals and the like.

People travelling to these pure jungle retreats have to be prepared to rough it out a little. Minakshi takes pride in telling us, "Another advantage is the fact that we do not have electricity and thus do not disturb nocturnal animals. Lighting, wherever possible, is solar powered or with candles." In the initial years the

camp was only accessible by a walk track and anything heavy was either carted up on a donkey or just came up as head load! Today, this track has been named the Silk Road by them and can be used by vehicles with 4WD. So our corporate groups will not need to carry their bags as head load to get to the camp!

The entrance to the camp is a short forest walk (50m) from the Silk Road. On entering the first thing that will hit you is the age old banyan tree. It is a beauty and home to many animal and bird species.

Interior of Large Hut





Blue Throat – A Mud Hut

How the state government can help:

- By laying down some sort of rules and regulations to manage tourism in sensitive areas - like around tiger reserves and wildlife sanctuaries.
- With subsidy on use of solar products.
- With special benefits to places that stress on low impact.
- By better forest management.
- There should be a separate ministry for wildlife.
- An alternate to firewood has to be provided for the local people, else relying on the forest for wood will never stop.
- Hakook has to stop (villagers right to dead wood) which is terribly abused and green trees are cut and sold in the name of hakook. After this, forests are put on fire to disfigure the newly cut stumps and the matter is then history. This happens annually from now to June.
- Garbage disposal and litter is a serious problem in Corbett.



View of Thatch – The Dining Area



Photograph: Mohit Midha

*Above: Bird's-eye view of Camp Forktail Creek
Below: The owners of Forktail Creek – Ritish and Minakshi*



Then comes the Machan, which houses the lounge area on the ground floor and a comfortable library and lookout on the top floor. The structure has no walls making visibility clearer and creature visits plentiful. So don't be surprised if a wild tusker walks right into your brainstorming meeting. Now, that would be an exciting out-of-the-box kind of stormy meeting!

Just north of the Machan is the Thatch, the dining area. The original structure, made of Eucalyptus poles with a thatched roof, almost caved in a few years ago as the termites had a feast on all the wood! Today, the structure has pillars made of stone (exactly the same way as a local home) with a thatched roof. All the mud huts and tents are in a semi-circle to the north of the Thatch. Zig-zag tracks lead to the units, each of which is hidden from the other providing absolute privacy. "All our construction material is either canvas or mud from our own land. Cement has only been used in areas that need to be water resistant. A lot of our raw material is sourced from local women's organisations and self help groups," they explain.

Minakshi says, "We lay immense stress on the wildlife, birds, plants that the forest has to offer. We make our guests aware of all that the forests hold and how important it is to protect and conserve it all. Many have left as budding bird watchers..."

"We are serious about the knowledge we impart and make many conservation efforts in our region."

A workshop at this campsite and the evenings spent just talking, team-building and having fun at the Dhaba and the campfire area over a drink and barbeque are made for memories that will last a lifetime! 🌸

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There is a guest house owned by Karan Bisht called Corbett Motel in Ramnagar, on the outskirts of the Corbett National Park. It is in the midst of his family's 12 acre mango orchard that has more than 2000 mango trees. The sound of the birds under these trees, especially the koyal, is mesmerising. They have 12 nice sized, clean and comfortable rooms, 4 large tents and a large dining hall. There is plenty of space outside under the shade of the huge trees to spend time, even on a warm day, discussing business plans or team building. One tends to forget the existence of the turbulent cities we come from.

There are many lessons to be learnt from Karan himself. Now a naturalist and a successful businessman, he started his life as a normal village boy. "I used to drive a Gypsy inside the park taking visitors around; while doing this I developed a fascination for the birds and wildlife," Karan tells us. He did a course on birds from his father's training centre and is also trained in adventure sports, like parasailing, water and snow skiing and rafting. He makes it a point to personally take his guests on a safari inside the Corbett National Park - and still enjoys it, everytime!

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