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Inside Hilton Shillim's villa

# THE WOODS ARE LOVELY, DARK AND DEEP...

And just around the corner too, says Amy Fernandes of the Hilton Shillim spa retreat



What better way to spend a rainy weekend than cruising the expressway to Pune and climbing the ghats with emerald green hills, trillions of tiny waterfalls and clouds overhead. You'll even enjoy the short-but-rough patch of bad road from Lonavla to a little village in Shillim (a 40 minute drive from Lonavla) dotted with huts and thickets. It leads to a large, unassuming gate and on the other side, a clearing that reveals the cleverly hidden Hilton Shillim Estate Retreat.

Retreats suggest just that. And yet, for restless city-slickers plagued with a never-do-nothing conscience, there's more to do. The village is situated near the historic forts of Tungi, Tikona, Lohagad and Visapur, and the ancient Buddhist rock caves of Karla and Bhaja enroute Lonavla. The hotel recommends trekking, fishing and biking, as well as pottery, dance and cooking in their studio. My suggestion—do nothing. Feast your eyes on the greenery, breathe in deeply the oxygen so abundantly available, watch the rain pouring on the parched earth, see it come alive with fresh streams springing through cracked rock-faces. Nature presents so much drama that it would be foolish not to ask for an encore.

The resort spread across 320 acres is a boon for trekkers and a bane for the lazy. I belong to the latter group, but luckily, Nanos and golf carts are always ready to ferry you around the estate, right from your villa. Spartan on the outside and stylishly minimalistic inside, the villas come attached with pools or have private gardens. On a spa weekend, the only other place you want to foray into are restaurants. The Hilton Shillim, has a choice here. There's the all day diner Terrazzo for à la carte or buffet meals, the organic restaurant The Green Table, and for Ital-

ian there's the Mountain Bar and Bistro, which is outfitted with an infinity pool facing the wide mountain range. My favourite, the meditation cave allows for even more quiet and peace. But this retreat makes it possible for you to meditate anywhere. Adjacent to the cave is the spa centre, a luxurious spread with numerous therapy rooms, a spa restaurant, an outdoor heated pool and relaxations terraces overlooking the green expanse. The vast spa menu list a 100-odd therapies, so we



View from the villa

leave it to the in-house doctor, who recommends the curious sounding, 'Escape Sundari'. At first, I'm reminded of the time I would get my toddler sons to walk on my back; only this time, it's a firm and careful hand walking all over my body, pressing to release pressure points. It feels good and I drift off somewhere over the mountains, into the caves. My thoughts dip into the pool, spring out, trot into the woods and return to the massage table to note that I am being pummelled, briskly stroked and massaged with unguents and oils. By the end, I feel like a new born baby; all I want to do is sleep some more and eat. I look around and wonder why we don't do this more often.

On my way back to Mumbai, a mere 2.5-hour drive (sometimes, the time taken to cover the 3km distance from home to office), I promise myself I will recharge, rejuvenate and renew as often as possible. A promise that may not materialise until, perhaps, another rainy day next year.