



# Sounds of Shillim

HOTEL of the MONTH



King valley view villa



A pristine view

A short drive away from Mumbai or Pune, ensconced in the Sahyadris, lies the **Hilton Shillim Estate Retreat and Spa**, guaranteed to make you forget your urban aches and pains

### EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Do not expect the usual at the Hilton Shillim Estate Retreat and Spa. You could easily drive past the simple gates, seeing nothing but the rolling hills of the Sahyadri Mountain Range in the Western Ghats. This is probably the country's only five-star property without a foyer. The flourishes here are not of ostentation and ornamentation but rather of sheer understated luxury. This, trust me, is an experience just waiting to happen, an amazing new concept, somewhat brave, in a country like India, better known for its resplendent palace hotels and OIT properties.

### LOCATION-WISE

A short drive from Mumbai or Pune, the retreat is spread over 320 acres of pristine wilderness within the 3,500-acre private Shillim Estate. It features all-villa accommodation and a comprehensive spa facility offering over 150 treatments and dining facilities that can rival any. In the making, is what has been visualised as one of the largest wine cellars in the country.

### VILLA MAGIC

Villa 203, where we are led by our butler, Asange, is much like the other 99 that dot the landscape, hardly visible through the wild shrub, seemingly camouflaged by the natural



vistas of the Sahyadris. It is low-slung, with walls of slate that I discover later have been layered perfectly without any cement; the glass doors overlook the rolling hills and a private swimming pool. There is very little landscaping here, none at all actually, with natural shrubs and cactus surrounding the edges. Set amidst rice fields, bamboo plantations and virgin forest, the villas feature private decks and spa treatment areas, together with technology comfort. And for those to whom this makes a difference, there are excellent in-villa coffee and tea making facilities.

### SHILLIM SPA

My muscles are being kneaded into ecstatic mush in the large and comfortable couple's treatment room, beside the large and picturesque pool. I discover later that my husband who had opted for the Scandinavian Massage had the young therapist walk acrobatically on his back, much to his delight. We are both happy after our individual treatments for Shillim Spa integrates the ancient philosophic spiritual and artistic wisdom of South Asia with contemporary international practices and therapies to offer complete wellbeing of the body.

### DELICIOUS OFFERINGS

Chef Shalik Aslam Basha, the young executive chef, loves his food and this makes us love him. Lunch at the Green Table, the spa restaurant with indoor and al fresco eating, is light and full of flavour – a mezze platter followed by a signature chicken shawarma. The hot dessert in small earthen pots is unusual and delicious. The menu includes Asian and Mediterranean health cuisine as well as customised meals.

Dinner is a superb treat outside our private villa, at the poolside. A young chef whips up barbecued lamb chops, steak and seafood, together with a vast assortment of salads. Too full for dessert, we indulge in the tray of homemade chocolate that has been left thoughtfully in the room. The fresh strawberry dipped in chocolate is to die for!

Everything served is fresh, well thought of and very special. The obvious rare that has gone into the breakfast buffet is comforting. Fresh fruit, fruit juice, homemade crunchy muesli, crisp nuts and seeds, oven-baked



Tea Room delicacies



King deluxe villas view villa



Couple's treatment room

croissants and muffins, homemade jams, line the table. We order a portion of scrambled eggs and discover nirvana. Chef beams at our appreciation and reveals some of the ingredients – mascarpone cheese, a dash of cream and a pinch of chives...

### OUT TO TEA

We cannot resist the Tea Room with its low-slung seating and large glass doors with extended views of the Sahyadris. The rose and French vanilla tea that I chose is recommended with litchi honey from a selection before me, together with lime and ginger slivers. As we bite into our pistachio biscotti, Chef arrives holding aloft a mouth-watering selection of pastries – Oh my!

Probably completed by now are the indoor Shillim Bar; the poolside Mountain Bar and Bistro; the wine cellars, The Reserve. You can also avail of the Chef's Table facilities where you may dine at any unique venue of your choice including by a waterfall or overlooking the valley. Besides, meetings and banqueting facilities make for the perfect corporate getaway, guaranteed to take away the stress and strain of city living. So, go indulge!

– SHIRIN MEHTA



Chef Shalik Aslam Basha