



PIC: CHINMAY DESHPANDE

PIC: THINKSTOCK



WILD THINGS: (Clockwise from above) Count yourself lucky if you catch a glimpse of "Collarwali" - the legendary tigress; animal spotting in the park; and put up in a tree lodge for those 'jungle' feels

DID YOU KNOW?

The character Mowgli originated in Pench National Park, but his creator Rudyard Kipling never actually visited the park. It is believed that a 19th century British official wrote about a wolf-boy he found in the jungle. Kipling read his journal and got inspired to pen *The Jungle Book*.

dian Ghost Tree, a beautiful tree with a white trunk and peeling paper-thin skin. It eerily stands out, and yes, it does glow in the dark!

MAN IS AN OUTSIDER

While you are likely to spot a tiger with her cubs by following the alert calls from deer and langurs, leopards and sloth bears are the elusive creatures here. The closest we got to Collarwali (the celebrity tigress of the forest), were fresh pugmarks, but what exhilarated us more was the 15-minute intense jeep chase where our naturalist and the forest guide managed to create a tale full of mystery and suspense.

Make sure to take two or more safaris — morning and evening — to better your chances of sighting a tiger

IN MOWGLI LAND

Brighten your chances of spotting the big cat in the wild by planning a summer safari to the picturesque Pench National Park

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FEELING ALIVE

Having grown up reading *The Jungle Book*, I was excited to traverse the national park, the land of the famed characters – Bagheera, Balloo and Shere Khan.

The guide suggested we also take in the other little pleasures of the jungle while looking for wild cats on our safaris, which are not diffi-

cult to spot in the peak summer season. So, we decided to make the most of the open-jeep jaunt by breathing in fresh air, soaking up the sun, the musty smells of the earth, cacophony of the birds and much more.

INTO THE WILD

Unlike other forests like Kanha and

HOW TO GET THERE

Fly to Nagpur and drive for about two hours or more to your hotel or take a train to Nagpur railway station (94 km) followed by a two-and-a-half hour drive. Since the roads here aren't in great condition, avoid a road trip.

WHEN TO GO

The best months to visit are between Nov and June. Visit during the winter season to enjoy pleasant days and cold mornings and evenings. Summer is sweltering hot, but chances of spotting a tiger are higher. Plus, this is also the time when chitals shed their antlers.

After three hours of a rather bumpy drive from Kanha to Pench, we were about to make it to the enchanting land of Mowgli. As we drove closer to Sarahiri, a hamlet near Karmajhiri gate of Pench National Park, thick grassy lands surrounded us on both sides. The bright green landscape, peppered with tile-roofed mud huts, made for a beautiful pastoral terrain. We checked into our tree lodge, perched on top of a mahua tree and the next few minutes were spent gazing at the deciduous forest from our balcony.