

A female tiger stretches out in Bandhavgarh National Park, where guest cottages at the Nature Heritage Resort (below) echo earth's hues.



## Tiger Parks. They're Grrreat!

See India's mighty cat at these jungle lodges. By LISA ARMSTRONG

**T**he latest safari hot spots are far from Africa's sun-swept savannas; they're deep in the verdant jungles of India. Where Africa has its Big Five must-see animals, India has just one—the tiger. Though India's national animal remains high on the list of endangered species, its estimated tiger population—just 3,600—is the single largest in the world. Nevertheless, chances of seeing a tiger in the wild are slim, and perhaps that's what makes catching even a glimpse of the telltale amber and black

stripes so exhilarating. These lodges, situated in and around India's major wildlife reserves, are among the best places to stay for spotting the elusive tiger.

### Baghvan

**PENCH** The newly opened Baghvan is the result of a collaboration between India's Taj Hotels and CC Africa, a South Africa-based eco-lodge company. Built on the fringe of Pench National Park, the area that was Rudyard Kipling's inspiration for *The Jungle Book*, Baghvan is luxurious but still has a comfortable, kitschy feel. Designer Chris Brown, director of CC Africa, chose quirky objets d'art to decorate the rooms. Chefs prepare meals in a 1950s-style kitchen that opens out into a dining room, where guests share traditional Indian cuisine at a single table. After enjoying a breakfast served on your private veranda, head into the park on elephant back in search of tigers. From \$650 per person, all inclusive; [www.tajsafaris.com](http://www.tajsafaris.com).

### Bamboo Grove

**THEKKADY, KERALA** Located in the Periyar Tiger Reserve, this eco-lodge was built in the style of traditional tribal village structures. Locals helped to construct the simply furnished huts using natural elements like bamboo and grass. Cooks from the village prepare Hindu meals based on the blend of the six *shastrik* flavors: sweet, sour, pungent, salty, bitter, and astringent. Explore the reserve on foot on an overnight trek along the Periyar Tiger Trail. The guides, who are former poachers now dedicated to preserving wildlife, prepare vegetarian meals and pitch tents at night. From \$50; [www.periyartigerreserve.org](http://www.periyartigerreserve.org).

### Nature Heritage Resort

**MADHYA PRADESH** The 20 colorfully appointed cottages of this resort are nestled among the Vindhya Hills of Madhya Pradesh, in the middle of Bandhavgarh

National Park in central India. The hotel is in walking distance of a traditional village as well as the Baghel museum, which houses belongings of the Maharaja of Rewa, who once owned Bandhavgarh. Don't miss: the 2,000-year-old Bandhavgarh fort, a site of religious significance that sits in the center of the park. From \$300; includes meals and two daily safaris; [www.natureheritageresort.com](http://www.natureheritageresort.com).

### The Corbett Hideaway

**UTTARAKHAND** This lodge is hidden in the thick of a mango grove on the periphery of Corbett National Park, in the outer Himalayas. The 52 cottages, with cool stone floors and wood furniture, are linked to the swimming pool, spa, and other buildings by pebbled paths. You can head into Corbett National Park, which has one of the largest tiger populations in the country, in a jeep or on elephant. The hotel's Ghirney House restaurant features traditional Mughlai cuisine (mainly meat dishes introduced by the Mughals). From \$350 per cottage, including meals and two jeep safaris; [www.leisurehotels.co.in](http://www.leisurehotels.co.in).

### Dhikala Forest Lodge

**UTTAR PRADESH** Located within Corbett National Park, the lodge provides a range of basic accommodations, including tents, cabins, and rustic rooms. Vegetarian meals are served at the canteen; park staff also use the facilities, so guests can listen to their stories over a meal or watch as they feed and care for the elephants that are used for safaris. The lodge overlooks the Ramganga River, where tigers, sambar, and monkeys occasionally come to drink and bathe during the hot summer months. The best rooms are in the old forest lodge, where you can view wildlife right from your veranda. From \$20 a day; [www.dhikalaforestlodge.com](http://www.dhikalaforestlodge.com).

