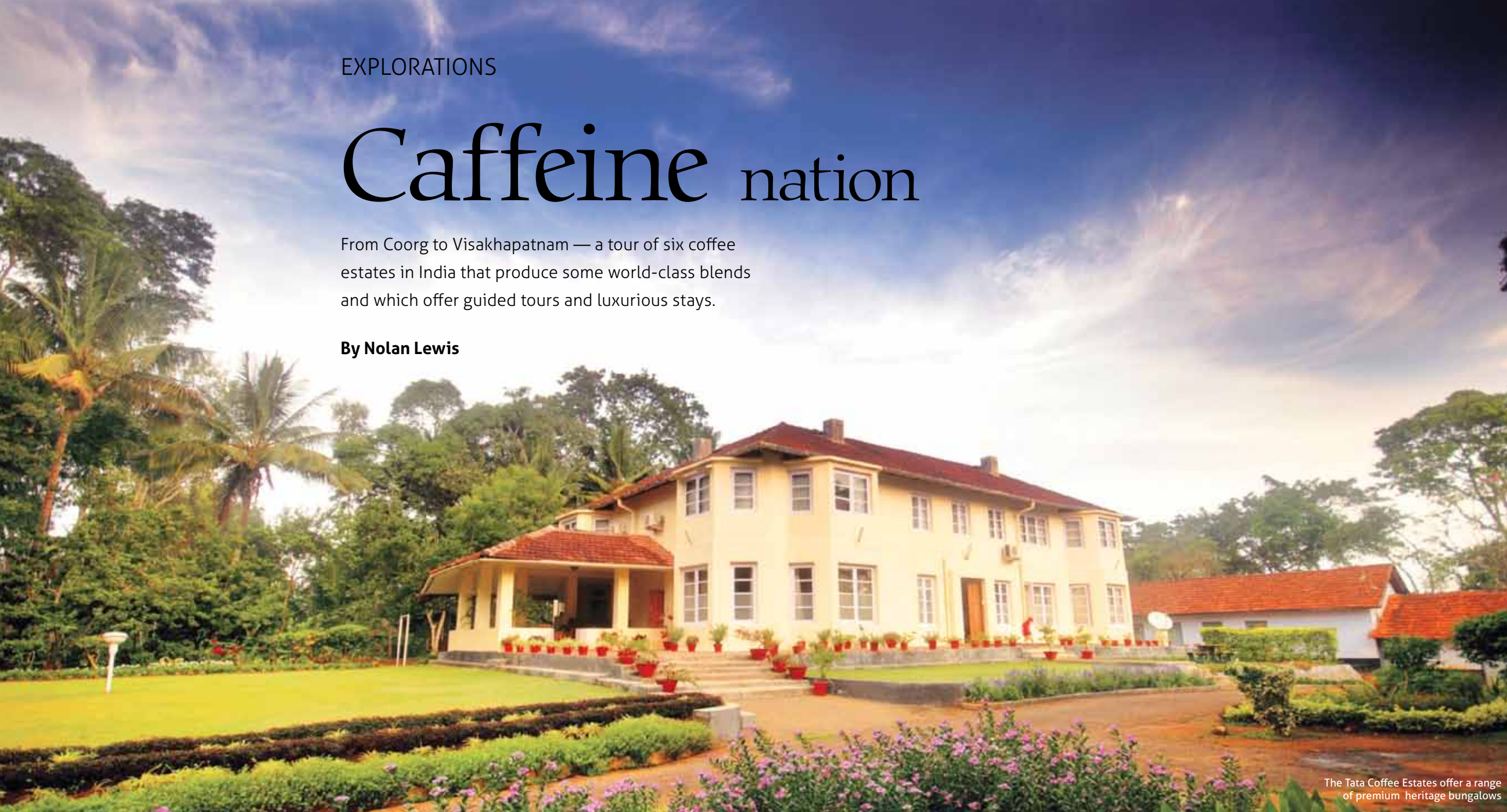


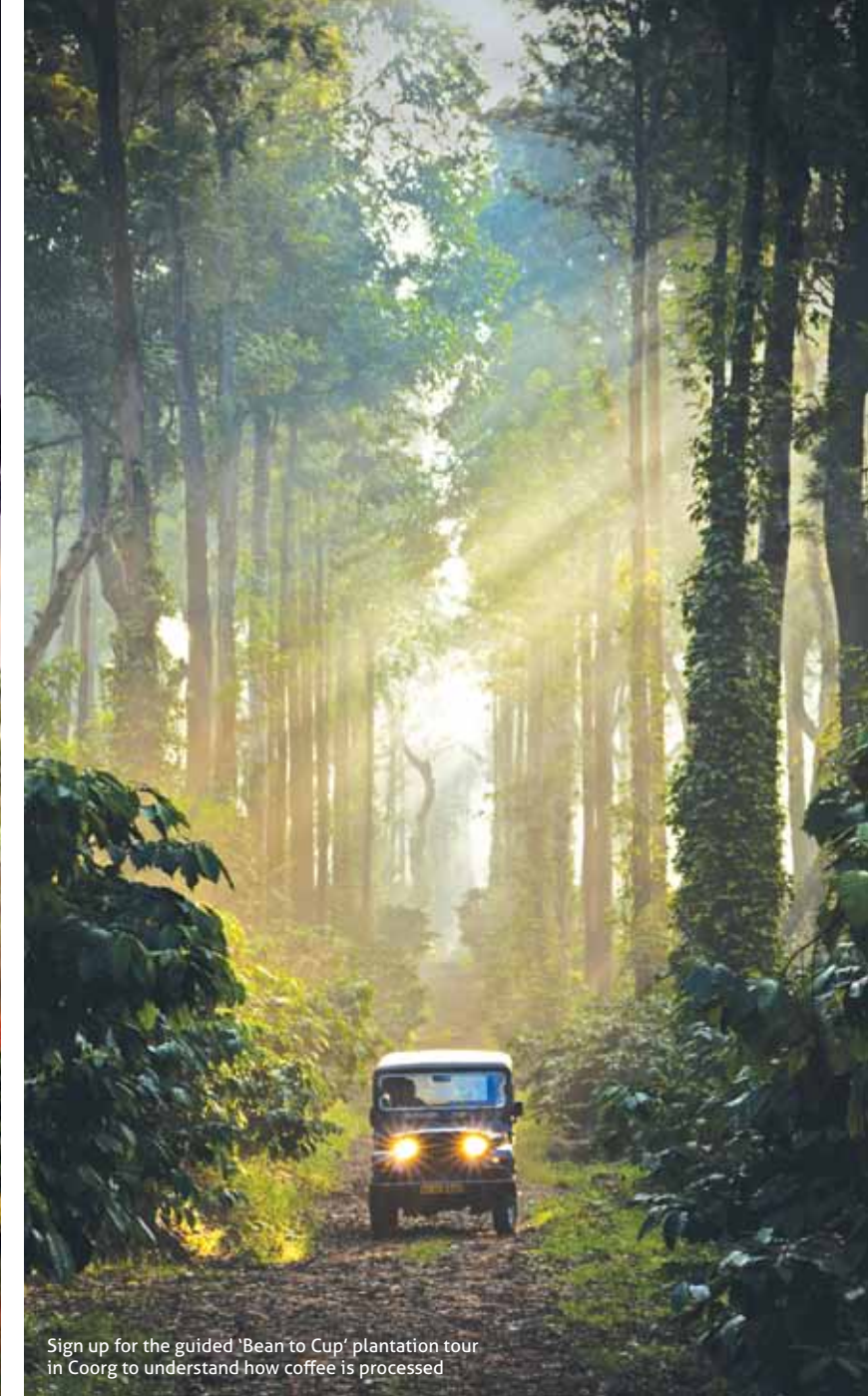
Caffeine nation

From Coorg to Visakhapatnam — a tour of six coffee estates in India that produce some world-class blends and which offer guided tours and luxurious stays.

By Nolan Lewis



The Tata Coffee Estates offer a range of premium heritage bungalows



Sign up for the guided 'Bean to Cup' plantation tour in Coorg to understand how coffee is processed

After spending the first few days of her vacation in Australia, Deepali Nandwani, the Editor-in-Chief of the publishing house that brings out this magazine, started experiencing severe withdrawal symptoms. She started searching the streets of Melbourne for a café that serves, well, the big Indian obsession, tea! In between headaches induced by the deprivation of her favourite tippie, her tourist guide looked at her with astonishment. The Australians, he said, don't drink tea. They drink more discerning brews, like coffee. So, where is Starbucks, she demanded, hoping at least to down some of their dependable cappuccino or even a latte...

She should have known better. Starbucks has not done well in Australia. The café culture Down Under is far more nuanced than what the American chain had expected. Even the smallest Australian stand-alone

has a trademark blend, distinct flavours and a unique texture. Big fish don't always eat small fish.

On her return to India, Deepali, the newly minted artisanal coffee-convert, ensured everyone she knew had heard about Australia's coffee culture. She frowned at the depleting quantities of imported coffees in her kitchen cabinet. She also sent one of the juniors at work on a mission to find the best coffee estates in the country from which she could source new blends — which is what inspired this feature.

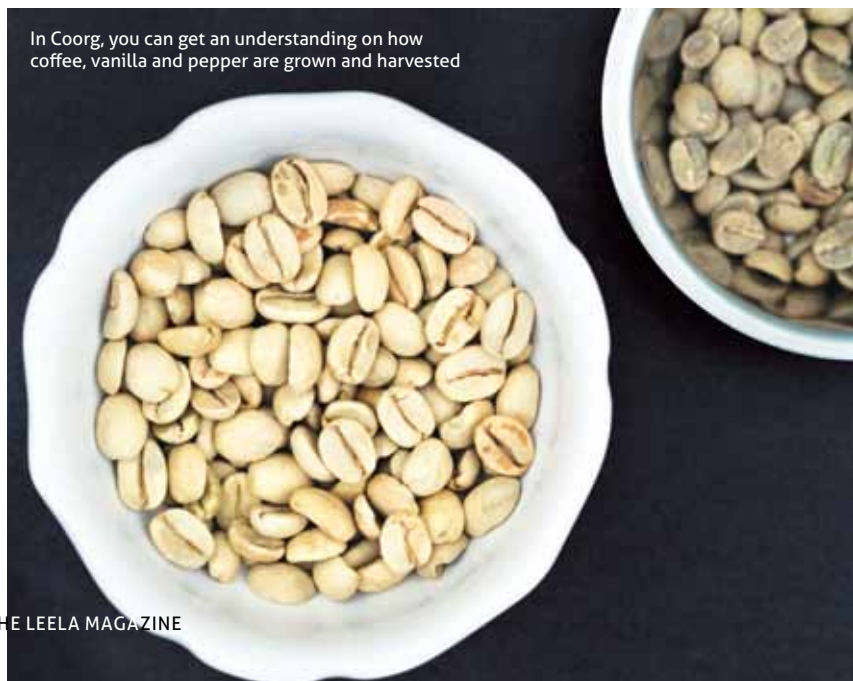
Not many are aware that India produces some of the best coffees in the world — from the creamy Monsooned Malabar to the dark and sinful coffee from Araku Valley. There is a lot more to write about the coffee scene in India: even less known is the fact that the country has some beautiful estates, which are excellent places to explore for travellers.

COORG

Tata Coffee Estates

In the coffee capital of India, the Tata Coffee Estates offer a range of premium heritage bungalows that are over a century old to stay at, while you experience the planter's life. With spacious rooms, cosy fireplaces and Victorian furniture, these bungalows of yore are fit for royalty. Sign up for the guided 'Bean to Cup' plantation tour to understand how coffee is processed from a tiny bean to a piping hot cuppa. Explore the sprawling estates, host a sing-a-long around a crackling bonfire in the evenings or plan a barbecue roast at the side. For the naturalists, get an understanding on how coffee, vanilla and pepper are grown and harvested. You can even find a quiet corner to do some bird-watching as Coorg is home to over 300 species of birds. Wake up early to watch

In Coorg, you can get an understanding on how coffee, vanilla and pepper are grown and harvested





Powered by solar energy and a gobar gas plant, in Coorg, the Mojo plantation is a certified organic spice farm



The Serai, in Chikmagalur, is a five-star ambience with villas

CHIKMAGALUR

The Serai

If you are looking for a plantation combined with a five-star ambience then the Serai is the place for you. Saint Baba Budan brought home, after his travels in the folds of his robe, a handful of coffee beans from Mocha in Yemen, and planted them in the hills around Chikmagalur. The Baba Budan hills are now vibrant with lush coffee plantations, with white blossoms peeking out. Roll up your sleeves and learn to tell through guidance which bud is ready for the picking, and by the time you're back in your room, taste it. Each elegantly furnished two-tiered villa overlooks an expanse of plantations and paddy fields. Upstairs, you sleep with the curtain of stars outside and downstairs, you lounge besides your private pool or gazebo. There's a lot to discover in and around Chikmagalur, right from Sharavanabelagola, the largest monolithic statue in the world, to the twin temple towns of Belur and Halebid, the deemed UNESCO World Heritage Site. If you prefer being close to the resort, opt for the Harley Davidson package or an archery class. Several of the Indian blends available at the Café Coffee Day are sourced from here, with an array of choices to taste and choose from. theserai.in

Halli Berri

Not to be confused with the famous Hollywood actress, the Kannada words loosely translate to 'the hill of berries,' named after the luscious red

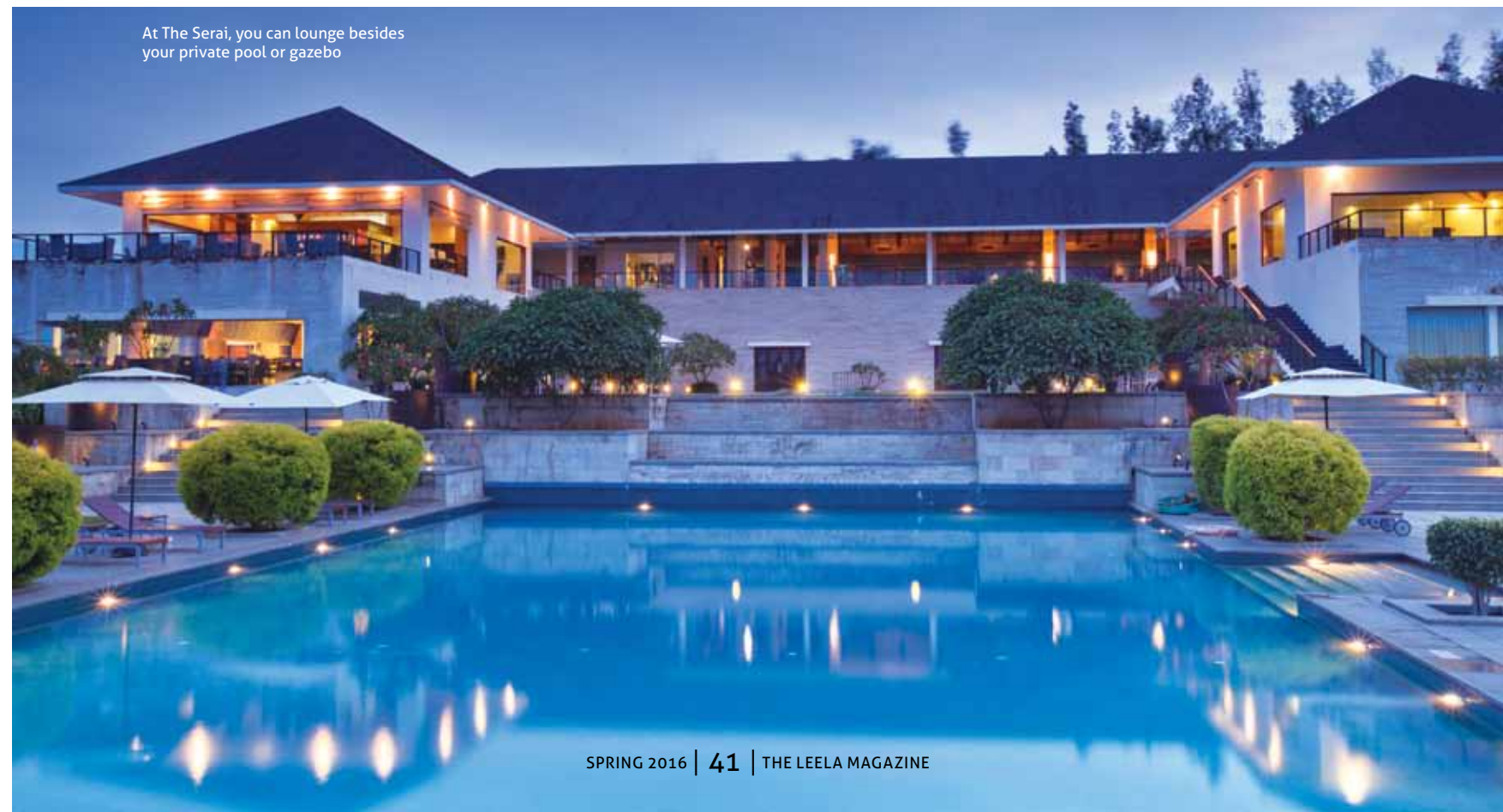
the mahouts give their elephants a bath at the Dubare Elephant Camp or even volunteer to give them a scrub. You can hop onto their backs and get a tour of the Nagarahole National Park, where you may spot the elusive Royal Bengal Tiger if you are lucky! Take home some Monsooned Malabar Coffee, which is unique to India. Discovered by accident in the 1950s when coffee beans shipped from the ports of Malabar coast travelled to Europe during the wet monsoon months, and were found to have swollen in size due to absorption of moisture in the air. This produced a coffee with distinctive lingering mellow flavour, a blend of Arabica and Robusta beans, which has since become extremely popular. plantationtrails.net

Rainforest Retreat

Powered by harnessing solar energy and a gobar gas plant, the Mojo plantation is a certified organic spice farm. Two deluxe cottages powered by 12V solar lighting are set in a rustic surrounding, of bamboo, banana, coffee, and orange plants, and surrounded by a crystal-clear stream. If you are planning a longer stay, opt for the Faraway Cottage, which works on self-service and has a weekly and monthly tariff plan. For a more authentic camping experience, you can also choose to live in semi-furnished tents amidst fruit orchards. You can spot close over 40 species of endemic wild orchids blossoming in the rainforests nearby during the winters. Among the animals occasionally spotted here are wild boar, jackal, civet cats, Malabar giant squirrel, mongoose, porcupine, slender loris, barking deer, king cobra, scorpions, and many rare amphibians such as caecelians and tree frogs. All of the premises' produce is organic, using a variety of techniques such as panchakavya, permaculture and biodynamic farming. Mojo's 'Organic' Civet Coffee is one of the world's most exclusive varieties of civet coffee, which is produced from the beans of coffee berries that have been eaten by wild brown palm civets. After collecting and manual processing, these beans yield an aromatic coffee widely recognised as one of the most exotic in the world. rainforests.com



Monsooned Malabar was discovered in the 1950s



At The Serai, you can lounge besides your private pool or gazebo



Not to be confused with the Hollywood actress, the Kannada words loosely translate to 'the hill of berries'



"The Adivasis of Araku have been brewing coffee long before it became an urban staple."

fruit that abundantly dots its landscape. The luxurious homestay, run by a matrilineal family from the Kambihalli estate, has been growing coffee in their plantation since 1948. Choose from three old English cottages with just a touch of Zen, on the borders of the Bhadra Tiger Reserve. Two of the four walls are made entirely of glass and offer you a 180 degree view of the jungles around. Don't be surprised if you wake up to a muster of peacocks strutting outside your windows. There is no food menu at the estate; whatever is on sale at the local markets and what can be foraged from the estate is served at the table. The choices will put a buffet to shame, though. Most planters blend their Arabica coffee beans with the milder Robusta; Halli Berri keeps its poison intense and sinful. Their crushed coffee powder is 100% Arabica, a culinary risk that would make most cuppers shiver. Halli Berri's garden café attracts bikers from the Harley Davidson club in Bengaluru, Russians from Goa and hippies driving around the country in trailer-parks, curious to sample what makes their signature brew legendary. halliberri.in

VISAKHAPATNAM

Araku Valley Coffee House

The Adivasis of Araku have been brewing coffee long before it became an urban staple. In fact, coffee is not a food product; it has been the world's most widely accepted and socially-sanctioned drug. Tribes from Ethiopia to Amazon have always used it as a psychoactive ingredient. The epicurean cuppers of the world always make a mention of Araku in their list of the world's best coffees. While the Araku Valley Coffee House doesn't offer accommodation, they do offer fantastic insights into the origins, history and spread of coffee. The coffee museum thematically tracks the history of world coffee, the legends and traditions associated with it and the modern research and technology on the subject. Choose from variety of blends including ethnic, single-blends, Arabica, Robusta or their cinnamon, pepper, vanilla or cardamom-flavoured coffees at their souvenir store. They also have an interesting collection of coffee-infused chocolates and coffee-coated nuts. Wander around Araku Valley and get firsthand views



Tasteful colonial and art deco furniture has been used to decorate each of the bungalows in Elephant Valley

of the tribal way of life. The production of Araku organic coffee is part of the Tribal Livelihoods Programme, being facilitated by Naandi foundation in collaboration with the Integrated Tribal Development Agency. arakuvalleycoffeehouse.com

The Elephant Valley Coffee is a mix of organically grown Arabica from the finest coffee growing regions of South India.

TAMIL NADU

Elephant Valley

Located on an old elephant pass next to the border of the national forest which extends into the wildlife sanctuaries of Kerala, Elephant Valley offers 20 uniquely designed bungalows which have been tastefully and artistically created using local products — locally-sourced granite, reclaimed doors, windows and wood. Tasteful colonial and art deco furniture have been used to decorate each bungalow in a unique way. Each cottage has its own private garden overlooking the Gangavaar River and the coffee plantation. The Valley restaurant serves gourmet cuisine using organically-farmed vegetables. The Valley lounge next to the restaurant is a clubhouse with a collection of entertaining games, such as wooden backgammon, a traditional game played with seashells, carrom, scrabble and an extensive book and DVD library. The Elephant Valley Coffee is a mix of organically grown Arabica beans from the finest coffee growing regions of South India. Grown amongst indigenous trees, fruit trees and exotic species, their produce is environmental-friendly. dunecogroup.com



The coffee museum thematically tracks the history of world coffee, the legends and traditions associated with it

Araku