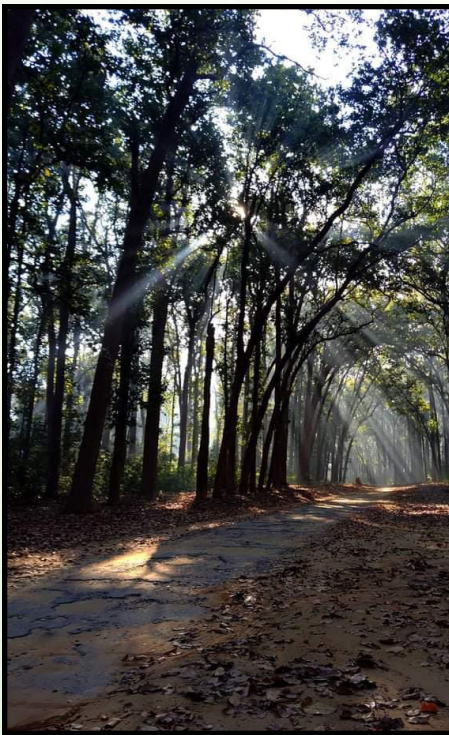


My Adventure along the Horizon



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Tucked at the foothills of the Himalayas in the Indian state of Uttarakhand stands Corbett National Park—a green oasis of wildlife that captures the essence and ecological diversity of untamed beauty. Named after the legendary hunter-turned-conservationist Jim Corbett, this park is not just a sanctuary for wildlife but a haven for those who seek shelter in the lap of nature. The air of Corbett seems to be vibrating with promise of new discoveries the very moment one steps into it. This park, established in 1936 as the first national park in India, spreads over an approximate area of 1,318 square kilometres and forms a part of the larger Corbett Tiger Reserve.



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It is here that, in unison, history, conservation, and natural beauty come to present a visitor with a truly Indian experience of the wilderness. But it is in fact reaching the Corbett National Park that actually introduces one to the tantalisingly romantic adventures lying ahead. The travel through the hillocks transitions from the bustle to the towns down into serene, lush greenery. As we go deeper into the heart of the park, winding roads with thick forests and sparkling rivers flank us. It is as if you are slowly sinking into an alternative universe, in which the whir and whirl of people's lives in the great metropolis soak away as nature's drumbeat gets louder and louder.



The visitor's first encounter on entering is said to be the park gate, which is of a rustic kind, most of the time reflecting its traditional Uttarakhand architecture. This is supplemented by the soft purring of the cicadas and the pleasant chirping of other exotic birds, creating an auditory delight to complement the visual feast. Grassy meadows, dense forests, riverine belts, and steep hills manifest different faces of its ecology—diverse topography sets in. The park area is divided into several zones—Bijrani, Dhikala, Jhirna, and Durgadevi—each with specific characteristics and different sightings of wildlife. One of them is the jewel of Corbett, which is the Dhikala zone located on the southeastern edge of the park.



Moving further into Dhikala, the inescapable attractions reveal a lot of grasslands, which are interspersed by really dense sal and bamboo forests. One of the major rivers, the Ramganga River, majestically meanders through this zone, further adding to the beauty of the area and providing a vital water source for the myriad species that inhabit the area. A stay in the Dhikala Guest House, right on the edge of this enormous lawn, gives a ringside view of such wild drama. The first light exudes a golden hue over the landscape, just breathtaking. Early morning fogs rise off the meadows.

A visit to Corbett is much more than an experience; it is a journey that can quickly turn into an adventure with the prospect of wildlife sightings and fun amidst the purest surroundings of nature. Famous for its Bengal tigers, although there are no guarantees about their appearance, the basic premise of searching for them is lifted with elements of suspense and anticipation. It alone forms the haunts of over 600 avian species, more than 50 species of mammals, along with a rich diversity of reptiles and insects. The Indian elephant, the Himalayan black bear, and the elusive leopard also add to the charm of Corbett.





What is truly exciting about the jungle safari is the thrill of expertise: park guides and naturalists are people whose knowledge and enthusiasm for wildlife are infectious. Each safari is like stepping into the unknown because one has an anticipation of coming upon some kind of action or happening at almost every rustle of leaves or a far-off roar. Their keen eyes and sharp ears register every scant sign of activity, which heightens the safari experience to the point where it almost makes every sighting seem like a special reward.

A birdwatcher's paradise-Corbett unfolds much in terms of the different varieties of avifauna and, therefore, endless observation opportunities. From the vibrant plumage of the Indian roller to the elusive crested serpent eagle, the park reveals bird life with colours as descriptive as their tales. The park supports a wide range of bird species because it offers varied habitats like riverside, forest canopies, and open meadows-a place of everybody's dreams, starting from ornithologists to casual bird enthusiasts.



Pictures: Noor Ali, Jim Corbett National Park