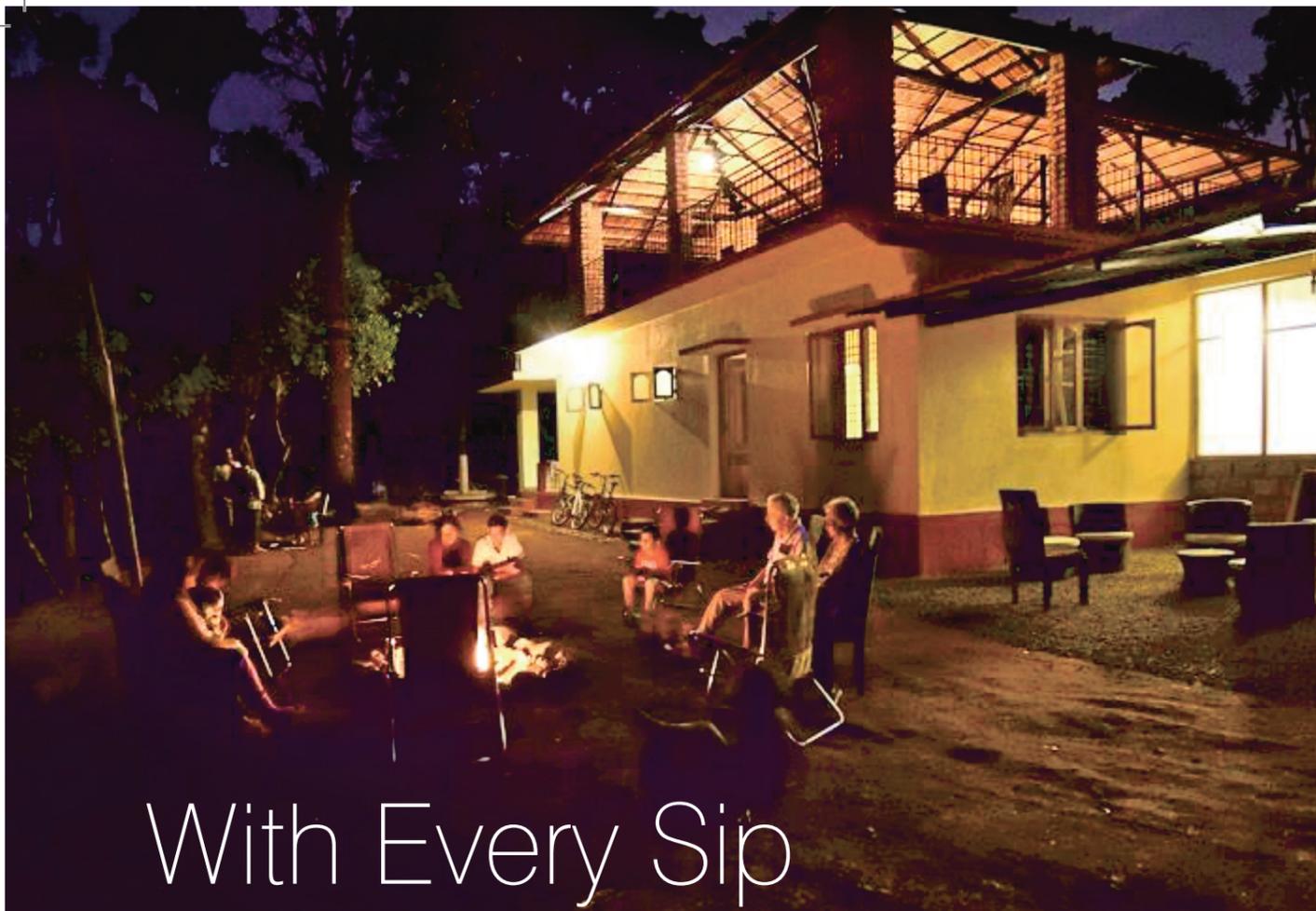


A Love Less Ordinary

If love and intimacy is about all the small, everyday moments you share with each other, then why not celebrate those this Valentine's Day? Consider one of these dates that takes the usual and makes it unusual and exciting again!



air costa
happy flying!



With Every Sip



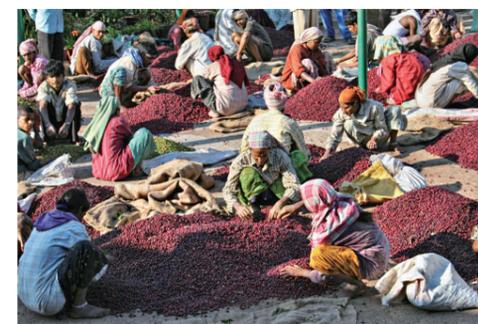
Even something as mundane as sharing a morning cup of coffee becomes special if you create a meaningful experience around it. **Bindu Gopal Rao** discovers a one-of-its kind coffee experience in Sakleshpur, Karnataka, at the 150-year-old Harley Estate, Classic Coffee and Golden Wood Eco Holiday Homes, spread out over a whopping 500 acres!

HEAD OUT TO THE ESTATE

A mere 3.5 hour drive from Bengaluru, the coffee town of Sakleshpur is beautiful and verdant. It helps that we are here in the middle of the season and picking is in full swing with Arabica coffee plants ready to be picked first, followed by the Robusta plants. The bright red coffee beans make for a stunning visual against the dark green leaves of the shrub. At the Harley Estate, Chandini D.P. (Director of Marketing and Administration) and her father, D.M. Purnesh (the Managing Director) explain how tending to coffee plants can be a tedious process, as the crop is delicate and needs controlled

shade that they provide with jungle trees (that need regular cropping themselves). "It takes a generation to develop the estate which the next generation can enjoy and then nurture," Purnesh tells us.

After looking at the plants, I also tried my hand picking a few beans and was told that in the season each worker can actually harvest a whopping 80 kgs of beans per day! The harvested ripened berries are manually and mechanically sorted to remove any green and non speciality beans. These are then pre-washed using state of the art machines to pre-wash and pulp the coffee. After this, the beans



are soaked in fermentation vats and washed in fresh water. After this, the beans are sun dried on raised African beds and then on barbeque tiles so that they dry evenly and retain moisture as per international speciality coffee standards. These are then stored and packaged after passing through extensive quality checks.

THE CUP THAT CHEERS

As part of the coffee experience on the Harley Estate, there's the chance to be part of a structured coffee tasting session where everyone can learn to appreciate coffee even more. Branded as

classic speciality coffees, these coffees are created over five generations and are wholesome, pure, and single-origin with fine terroir (the environment influencing the taste) and finer technique. The coffee tasting session demonstrates how the taste varies using three different coffee filters—the Pour Over filter, the French Press, and the Aeropress. The Pour Over uses a filter paper that is first washed with damp water and has a light body and tastes mild. We're told this pairs best with fruits and meringues. The French Press has a medium body and is slightly heavier, pairing well with soft cheese, custards and mild citrus. The Aeropress is a full bodied coffee that is a thick decoction. This pairs with caramel, chocolate and nuts—in short, anything creamy and rich. The sweet aftertaste, though, is hard to miss, and it's obvious immediately why their aptly-named Classic Synergy Coffee has been winning the best Arabica at the international Flavour of India – Fine Cup Award for the last 4 consecutive years.

STAY AND REST A WHILE

The estate has rustic style cottages known as the Golden Wood Eco Holiday Homes. Currently the estate has three different types of homes spread across a couple of kilometres, each of which provides a different experience that reflects different aspects of a planter's life on an estate. All rooms have a large double bed and can house a spare bed. We stayed at the Brick Cottage—a rustic brick home that is roomy and has a verandah. The cottage comes with a huge shower area which is sky lit and has a tree growing through it! We were located next to the three Whispering Trees rooms that also house the central kitchen for the estate and a dining space on the first floor. The Hilltop Courtyard has two rooms and has stunning views of the woodlands, surrounded by a large garden. There is also a 100+ year-old earth house called The Farmer's Home, which is surrounded by paddy fields and a stream. The two rooms retain an old-world charm with red oxide flooring, fire-wood heated water in copper handles, and a sky-lit attic. A British style bungalow is to be added soon as well. If you want to spend some time outdoors to justify all that delicious coffee, then you can have lunch at a location close to the Waterfalls. (The chefs here dish up some excellent authentic Malnad food!) The resort is ecologically sensitive and electricity is generated hydraulically at one of the gushing waterfalls on the estate alongside their use of solar energy. Even the food served is made from produce grown organically on the plantation.

HEAD OUTSIDE FOR THE DAY

Apart from the waterfalls, a natural stream and four manmade lakes are a part of the estate. Being a self confessed bird lover, I fell in love with this place as there is a profusion of avian species here, though you need to be patient to spot the varieties of birds. (A naturalist has recorded a whopping 200 species here!) The area is also part of the Elephant Corridor. If you wish to cycle, there are bicycles on the estate as well. But at its heart, this is the sort of place where you can simply sit back and relax over board games, coffee, and the crackle of the bonfire. And isn't that what spending quality time together is all about? ■

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