

Unexplored Corbett National Park

The famed National Park gets a new lease of life with uncharted zones and less “tiger-crazy” crowds

SUPRIYA SHARMA

It is such a welcome change to have visitors not hankering for the big cat alone. Perhaps now they realise that the moment you keep the tiger fixation aside, Corbett throws up endless unimagined vistas at you,” says Rao Dheeraj Singh, a wildlife safari expert based in the Jim Corbett National Park, whose endeavour is to familiarise travellers with the ‘other side’ of Corbett.

While the king of the jungle will show up at a whim, there’s plenty more you could do on a safari in the fabled Jim Corbett territory. The gorgeous forests of Sitabani and Pawalgarh lie comfortably away from the frenzy of core safari areas, namely Dhikala, Jhirna and Bajrani. Sitabani—believed to be one of the stopovers for Sita during her days of exile in the epic Ramayana—makes for an ideal birder’s haven with sunlight streaming through its quintessential Sal trees. Then there is Dhela, the latest zone to be opened for tourism, that boasts of picturesque tall grasslands, easily comparable with the iconic ones in Dhikala. These unconventional safari zones are good to circumvent that touristy madness. They spread out the crowds and give you a better shot at spotting wildlife. “The idea is to spend longer hours in the forest and not be in a rush to finish the standard safari time. Take alternative routes, wait and watch, take in the forest smells and sounds and gradually retreat,” adds Singh.

Verdant Forest

Over 15 km beyond Ramnagar, Pawalgarh in an untouched habitat. It consists of a combination of hills and plains, with a mixed milieu of moist and dry Sal forests, terai grasslands and riverine forests. It is home to tigers, elephants, nilgai, wild boars and langurs and over 350 species of birds.

Harryman’s Homestay is a great stopover to understand organic farming. One can get safari permits from the Pawalgarh gate, but need to book in advance.

Gold Grassland

Dhela falls in the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) but hasn’t been visited much since it has only recently opened gates for tourists. It has one of the best gold grasslands in Corbett and is also outstanding for bird photography. The main USP of a safari here is that it is 4 hours long (longer than most others), so make sure to be the first one to enter and the last one to leave to maximise your experience. There have been some great elephant and tiger sightings in this area too! One needs to book 45 days in advance through CTR.

Jungle By the Night

Spend two nights at the beautiful rest house in Halduparao for a thrilling jungle experience. The rest house, which was built about a hundred years ago, is located between the Palain and Sonanadi rivers, a short distance before they drain into the Ramganga reservoir. It lies under the Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary and is known for its quiet, peaceful surroundings. Halduparao is a good place to watch wild elephants from close quarters, apart from gharials and tigers. Carry raw food inside since there is a cook to rustle up simple meals for you. Book 45 days in advance through CTR.

Go Fish

Durgadevi is farthest from Ramnagar, at 30 km. It is famous for long elephant safaris and makes direct access to the Ramganga River, where tourists can enjoy fishing and angling. It is also known for great otter sightings and seeing the Mahaseer up close. Book 45 days in advance through CTR.

Ancient Abode

Sitabani is dreamlike. The forest itself is so pretty that you don’t really yearn for much more. The surrounding mixed Sal forest is a perfect habitat for tigers, leopards, wild elephants, spotted deer, barking deer, sambar and wild boars. But the real treat is for bird lovers with an unfathomable variety of birds nesting in this jungle—from 17 species of owls to the magnificent Great Hornbill, Laughing Thrushes and various raptors.

P.S: Sitabani is part of the buffer zone, not CTR, and hence there isn’t really a limit to the number of vehicles here. So brace up for the crowds.

Brazilian Bat Fastest Flyer

Brazilian free-tailed bats are the fastest flyers in the animal kingdom, gliding at record speeds of over 160 kmph, a study at the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology in Germany has found. Up to now, the speed record was held by birds from the swift family: the common swift can reach speeds of over 100 kilometres per hour.

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