



Issue 3/Feb 2022

# Tadoba

## DIARIES

The official Newsletter of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve

CAVYA VILMAKATHAN

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Conservation Foundation, Chandrapur

Rs. 20/-





## Let's Share & Care

Dear Reader,

**W**e human beings compete with wildlife for space. The increase in human population and associated impact of our lifestyle has put wildlife habitat across the globe under severe stress. It is evident from the fact that in the last 50 years, there have been 68% decline in vertebrate wildlife population (The Living Planet Report, WWF 2020). Major reasons recorded for this decline are habitat destruction, poaching and illicit trade in wildlife among others. Often the habitat destruction happens in the areas that are critical for ensuring connectivity between populations; resulting in their genetic isolation and local extinctions.

As the space for wildlife in the form of the Sanctuaries and the National Parks is limited, our best hope for supporting more wildlife lies in sharing space with them and having positive interaction with forests and wildlife that surrounds human habitations.

In this context, Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve has about 100 villages in its buffer area and over 1500 villages in the district which are located at the interface with forests. Survival of wildlife, in these circumstances, require immense goodwill from the communities. Forest department has consistently made huge efforts in reducing their dependency on forest for livelihood and various other needs by providing alternatives and incentives. Through the implementation of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Jan Van Yojna, all families in buffer area and beyond have been provided with LPG connections reducing their fuel wood dependency drastically. Similarly, parapet walls have been constructed to open wells preventing accidental deaths of wildlife. Skill development training is being provided to local youth to prepare them for alternative livelihoods. Water conservation works have been undertaken to improve water availability in the vicinity of TATR.

Eco-tourism in the buffer areas of TATR has provided livelihood to hundreds of young boys and girls in the local communities. Eco-tourism has generated employment opportunities in the form of naturalists, operators and owners of safari vehicles. The local youths are trained to conduct activities like boating, cycling, nature walks, kayaking and adventure sports among others and they are running these activities successfully. Eco-tourism in buffer has also resulted in decentralization of tourists' in-flow and has helped in reducing the tourism pressure on the core.

An effort is also being made to implement the concept of Community Nature Conservancy as outlined by the Government of Maharashtra in 2015, wherein farmers can be benefitted through eco-tourism while the agricultural practices are made less intensive and result in re-wilding of the farmlands over a period of time. Although the beginning has been made, it is a new concept and will take some time to materialize over larger area.

We are hopeful that all these efforts will result in increasing the capacity of our landscape to support more wildlife including large predators like the tiger and the leopard.

**Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar**

Field Director, TATR  
and Executive Director, TATR Conservation Foundation

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## Celebrity Guest



# Amazing Tadoba

- Soha Ali Khan  
Actress



It is a common phenomenon that if a person visits Tadoba once, he or she keeps coming back again and again. Such is the case with Bollywood actress Soha Ali Khan, a frequent visitor to Tadoba. In an exclusive interview to Tadoba Diaries she spoke about the special relationship she has with this enchanting forest.

**Q: What draws you back to Tadoba?**

**A:** I am a nature lover. A few years ago, I visited Tadoba for the first time. It was a life changing experience. This is an amazing forest. Being here, I felt one with nature. The morning safaris, the beautiful animals, the greenery around...all this makes your life so beautiful! Whenever I get a break, and I yearn to be in forests, Tadoba is the most obvious choice for me.

**Q: You have an option of vacationing out of India. Then why Tadoba?**

**A:** Yes. I have been fortunate to have visited a number of countries. But I find nature more enchanting than visiting cities or any such man-made construction. The natural beauty is anytime far greater than the man-made beautification. Tadoba has that immense natural beauty. The forest here is naturally grown over hundreds of years. The animals you get to see here are in their natural habitat. I just love the beautiful mornings here! They are so refreshing and peaceful! I get an opportunity to meet myself here.

**Q: Any special experience that you would like to share with us?**

**A:** Every visit to Tadoba brings a new, unique experience. Once I was on a safari. It was wonderful as usual. The only thing missing was a sighting of a tiger. We searched for a long time. I was getting tired and hungry. Disappointed, I was sitting in the Gypsy thinking we should head back when we heard a roar. All the fatigue was gone within a fraction of second! I looked—frantically—at the direction of the roar, but couldn't sight the tiger. It was so frustrating, I was almost in tears! But the God was kind to me. Not one, but two tigers emerged from the forest and walked straight towards us. I was thrilled, enchanted, moved—but the royal couple ignored us and kept walking, supremely indifferent to all the excitement! I can never forget that incident.

**Q: How does your family react to your love for Tadoba?**

**A:** My family members are also in love with Tadoba. My husband Kunal Khemu accompanies me to these trips, and is always excited about the safaris. Now our daughter Inaaya has also joined our team. I would like to take this opportunity to suggest something to the park management. Sometimes when the adults in the family want to go to safari, it is not always possible to take young children along for the long drive. So, the big question before them is how to keep their kids engaged. I think, it will be great if there are some nature related activities especially for kids.

**Q: TATR does have facilities like adventure activities, kayaking, butterfly garden etc. which kids can enjoy. You can**  
(continue on page 10)...



## Tadoba Beyond Tigers



SHAHBAJ SHEIKH

### Flying Beauty

January 21 each year is observed worldwide as Squirrel Appreciation Day. On this occasion, I remembered meeting an elusive animal in Tadoba-the flying squirrel! This is a rarely seen animal from our tiger land. It's arboreal and nocturnal behavior keeps it hidden from sight most of the time.

Contrary to their nomenclature, flying squirrels, do not fly, but because of their unique ability to glide. This is made possible by the patagium, the skin membrane between the hind limbs and forelimbs. When the squirrels flatten their bodies and spread their limbs, the membrane expands, allowing them to glide. Otherwise, it is folded in. It's enthralling to watch them glide. They look like a flat parachute with a tail! They are also able to manage to change the direction while gliding, possibly by the deft use of the tail.

Flying squirrels are predominantly arboreal and known to make a nest in tree cavities. They are known to be specialized in eating leaves, fruits, and flowers. Seeds also constitute a good portion of their diet. Hence they are one of the important members of the seed dispersal clan.

In one such instance, we were lucky to see a flying squirrel on a mango tree at Moharli. It was feasting on this delicious fruit during the night.

Sadly, this species hasn't been able to gather so much of attention and has remained a less studied, and less understood animal. Habitat degradation is a major threat, although hunting pressure maybe less owing to nocturnal behavior.

**Prajakta Hushangbadkar**  
Wildlife Biologist, TATR



### Mesmerizing Mahua

I have spent some time growing up in Central India. I have fond memories of village women gathering under the large Mahua trees, early in the summer mornings. The intoxicating sweet aroma is still fixed in my memory.

Gond and other tribals of Central India revere the Mahua tree as a 'Kalpavriksha', as this tree provides very useful leaves, flowers and fruits to them. The tree bark has medicinal properties. Edible oil is extracted from the seeds. The sweet fleshy flowers are dried and used as an alternative for sugar, which is costly. Besides, the Mahua flowers are a healthier alternative! Whenever there are guests at a poor Gond home and a sweet is to be prepared, dried Mahua comes to the rescue.

The flowers are also fermented to make local wine. A Gond saying sums it all. "Heaven is where there are Mahua trees to make wine and hell is where there is no Mahua tree!" Gonds actually consider the Mahua trees holy and protect them.

Among Tamils, there is a belief that wherever there is no cane sugar, Mahua flowers should be used. However, they add a word of caution... "Excessive use can result in imbalance of thinking and also lead to lunacy!"

Normally Mahua flowers pollinate themselves. However, those pollinated by the bats are believed to yield more flowers. One animal, who probably exceeds the love for the Mahua tree more than a Gond, is the Sloth Bear. This often brings the two into conflict in the Mahua flowering season.

**Anirudh Chaoji**  
Senior Naturalist



## Safari

### Thirsty Cats



They were followed by the legendary tigress. But within a minute all of them again disappeared in the bushes. I was disappointed thinking I had missed an opportunity to click a family photo. We kept on waiting. And finally, they obliged. First Madhuri and then all the four cubs came out one by one. The thirsty cats started drinking water. I noticed that Madhuri was extremely cautious and did not remove her eyes from us even while drinking the water. The inexperienced cubs were playful, but did not leave their mother for a second. While observing their body language, I kept on clicking the pictures, thanking Tadoba for this lifetime experience.

**Ricky Patel**  
Tourist, Kolkata

## Gypsy

### Life & Death

**W**inter is the season of new life at Tadoba. This is the time when the forest is fecund with the young of various animals and birds. I can never forget a lifetime experience Tadoba gave me in the winter of 2018.

On a safari with tourists, I took a round at Pandharpauli looking for the Queen of Tadoba-Maya. During the round, suddenly I noticed a spotted deer standing under a bush, in an odd position. The female deer had folded her rear legs and was visibly in great pain. I was extremely excited as soon as realized what it was! She was giving birth her baby- a very rare sight in the forest. A very rare moment in the jungle.

The mother deer was folding her rear legs so that the new born doesn't get hurt by falling on the ground. Slowly the baby came out and the mother started licking it lovingly. The fawn was trying to get on its feet, but failed repeatedly. It went on for half-an-hour. Finally, the fawn could stand on her trembling legs! My guests were very happy to witness the whole episode. Meanwhile, other tourist gypsies came, saw the mother and the baby for a few minutes and went away in search of tigers. Ours was the only gypsy glued there for an hour.



While we were enjoying the birth of the fawn, I saw something very exciting! Two wild dogs were walking towards us! I prayed to God, "Please make them change their direction." But alas! They walked straight towards their prey. They strategically started approaching the fawn from both directions. The poor mother, not yet in best of her health, tried protecting her fawn. When a wild dog tried coming close, she ran after him. The other wild dog took this opportunity, and grabbed the fawn in its jaws and ran. I Next moment, both of them were seen feasting on the fawn! Tears started rolling down my cheeks. My guests' condition was no different. Somebody may ask me why didn't you intervene and save the baby deer. I would reply whatever happened was a natural process-the cycle of life.

**Vinod Uike**  
Safari Guide, Kolara Gate





# The First Kill





The evening safari on May 31, 2012 was unlike any of the thousand odd trips to the park that I have been on. The evening started with regular herbivorous sightings, and by the end of our safari, we reached a waterhole where a tigress used to hang out along with her four cubs. We spotted a tigress cub enjoying in the pool of water. While we were patiently waiting, a large boar wandered towards the waterhole. It was a mature boar, and the tigress would have been barely 18 months old with a few hunting lessons she might have learnt from her mother.

After realizing the boar was approaching the water, she prepared for the attack and took a classic attacking stance while still in water. She waited until the boar was within her range, and with lightning speed leaped out of the water, and struck. The boar screamed and tried to escape, but she was proving to be stronger than him. Despite the boar's struggle, the tigress didn't relent. It was to be her first independent kill. However it was not an easy task. She encountered a strong resistance as the boar was much heavier than her. He fought tooth and nail to survive. We were stunned watching the live drama unfolding in front of us. The tigress used all her power and skills to keep him grounded while he attempted to shake her off. The battle lasted for two and a half hours. Finally, the tigress got her well-deserved meal! The boar surrendered!

Two of my friends and I were in awe of Mother Nature's universal lesson - Survival of the Fittest. All I could do was to snap a few photos and be grateful to God for letting us witness such a rare and memorable experience.

Later when I checked my camera, I was extremely delighted! I had got the entire sequence of the event captured. A cub making a kill in its mother's absence made the event a real special one! I would never forget this experience.

It is worth noting that there is an interesting footnote to this story. That fierce tigress cub, who proved her mettle in probably her first successful kill, later became the focal point of many heroic tales. She emerged as the most powerful and popular tigress in Tadoba - T-12, lovingly known as Mayal.



**Himanshu Bagde**

General Manager  
Tadoba Jungle Camp, Moharli Gate, TATR



## Trapped in Camera



**Selfie Time!** The camera traps installed by the forest department capture many amazing moments in the jungle. Occasionally, it appears that the animals have posed for the camera for a selfie, just like this night watchman Barn Owl spreading its wings in front a camera trap.

# Tadoba

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## Notice Board

### Support from ICICI Foundation



In a gesture that reinforced the commitment of ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth (IFIG) towards the cause of conservation and protection of forests and wildlife, the IFIG provided three forest patrolling vehicles to Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Conservation Foundation. This marks the second phase of vehicle support by IFIG to TATR. The first batch of two patrolling vehicles were handed over to the tiger reserve on the occasion of Global Tiger Day on July 29, 2021 at Moharli.

The function of handing over these Mahindra Bolero Camper 4x4 vehicles was held at Camp Office of TATR in the presence of Sunil Limaye, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) and Chief Wildlife Warden, Maharashtra State, Naveen Kapoor, Project Manager, ICICI Foundation, Rasool Sheikh and Mayur Yeola, Development Officers, ICICI Foundation, Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar, Field Director, TATR, G. Guruprasad, Deputy Director, Buffer, N.K. Kale, Deputy Director, Core, Mahesh Khore, ACF, Core and other forest officers.

ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth has entered into a wide-ranging MoU with the Forest Department for supporting skill development of communities dependent on forest for livelihood, for protection of forests and for supporting renewable energy solutions within the tiger reserve. Work on all identified areas are progressing and the first batch of trainees from ICICI Skill Development Academy, Pangadi graduated on 15 January 2022.

## Eco-Tourism Cycling

Ever imagined cycling on traffic free roads? Not possible in cities anymore. However you can enjoy this luxury at TATR. Of course, the cycling through the jungle roads comes with great perks – an opportunity to watch beautiful birds, butterflies and trees on the way.

Our trained guides will help you exploring our unspoilt wilderness. So next time you visit TATR, please spare some time to enjoy the cycling in nature.

**Location:** Agarzari – Adegaon – Devada (15 kms one way)

**Booking:** On the spot | **Contact:** 9579160778/8010539472





## On Duty

# A Fight Back !

It was only the second month of my posting at Tadoba. On September 24, 2020 morning, I received information that a tiger had killed cattle near Arjuni village in Mudholi beat. I was aware that an adult male tiger T-126, popularly known as 'Chhota Matka' was seen in that area for last few days. Hence, it was an easy guess that he had done the kill. As a Round Officer, it was my duty to visit the spot and do the Panchanama. Hence I left for the spot with Forest Guard S.S. Latkar. The owner of the cattle that was killed and two other villagers accompanied us as witnesses.

When we reached the spot, we saw that a cow was killed by the tiger at a nallah near the village. The spot was surrounded by bamboo thickets and there was only one approach road. Considering that it was likely that the tiger was hovering close to its kill, we moved slowly towards the carcass. We could not see any sign of the tiger around. A portion of the cow was eaten and it was likely that the tiger would come back to have the rest. Hence, we needed to complete our task and get out from the spot quickly. We followed the protocol and completed the process of Panchanama in 10 minutes. As the last part of the process, I clicked a selfie of our team with the kill and instructed the team to begin the return journey.

I started walking. Behind me were the three villagers including the owner of the cattle and the Forest Guard Latkar was the last man in the row. No sooner had we started walking, we heard the tiger roaring. Before we could process what it meant, a huge tiger appeared from the bamboo. It was Chhota Matka! With a lightning speed, he jumped towards us and grabbed Latkar's toe in his mouth! Latkar screamed with pain and collapsed on the spot.

One of the villagers had already fled the scene. Now it was just me and two villagers. We raised our sticks in our hands and started shouting frantically. The old villager was one brave man. He started hitting the tiger with his stick, and this distracted the tiger. I seized the opportunity to pull



Latkar and freed him from the clutches of the tiger and dragged him to an open place.

Perhaps, shocked by our aggressive response, the tiger stepped back. He was still angry, though, and continued to look at us. However, now we were in the open space, possibly away from his safe zone i.e. bamboo thickets. And, we were ready to fight back. Thankfully, the tiger let things be, and did not attack again. We quickly lifted Latkar who was unconscious and bleeding profusely. Immediately, I called my RFO and rushed Latkar to hospital.

I shiver with fear, whenever I recount this incident. But I don't blame the tiger. How can I? Indeed, the tiger was restrained. I think the tiger was there on the spot ever since we reached there, and watched us doing the Panchanama of his dinner! He must have felt insecure with the thought that we were stealing his kill. He reacted instinctively to defend his kill, and hence, attacked us.

Latkar lost his toe; but he was back on duty, after eight months.

**Akash Mallelwar**  
Round Officer, Moharli Buffer

## Contribute to 'Tadoba Diaries'

Are you a forest department staff, tourist, guide, driver, working with a resort, managing a homestay or a community member from TATR vicinity? Do you want to join our effort to spread awareness on forest and wildlife conservation through 'Tadoba Diaries'? Please share your interesting photographs (not less than 4 MB) and experiences (not more than 250 words) on [tadobadiaries2021@gmail.com](mailto:tadobadiaries2021@gmail.com). Your photograph/experience must be related to TATR only. The best content will be published with due credit.





.... continued from page 3



have a look at them the next time you visit.

A: Sure. We would love to do that. I wish the forest of Tadoba stays pristine, providing a safe haven for birds, animals and other wildlife, and that people live in harmony with nature.

## Amazing Tadoba



**Rafiq Mulla**

Senior Journalist, Mumbai

## Special



PRANAY CAPILA

## Mama The Foot Soldier

"Aapka naam?" Your name? "Ramaji Verbe Tadoba, van major," pat comes the reply. Evidently, this 'forest worker' identifies with the park, Tadoba that he has walked and protected for over 30 years! He has served Tadoba in every which way—done foot patrols, tracked tigers, assisted in tiger census, been part of teams to rescue injured wildlife and helped in the process of village relocation, particularly of Jamni and Navegaon.

He came to Tadoba when barely out of his teens and spent the first few months in abject fear of wildlife, and even

more of the sudden loneliness of living, and working, in a remote forest.

Over the years, that changed. Now, 'Mama' as he is called affectionately, feels more at home here than even in his own house on the Warora highway. "It's too noisy," he grumbles. He misses the silence and the stillness of the jungle. And the tigers he is well-acquainted with and has seen grow up from tiny cubs to mothering their own litters, even more than his own children!

Wild animals have never harmed him, nor does he fear them. Caution, yes. Reading their language. Respecting their space. And while he has a healthy respect for camera-traps and drones (udne walla camera!), he swears by foot patrol which can never replace even the best technology. Walking, he says, keeps you alert, in sync with the language and the rhythm of the forest, and its animals. It keeps your eyes and ears attuned to any change in the forest, alerts you to any intrusion. "When we walk, we notice all wildlife signs, it helps monitor tigers on a regular basis. It helps us 'read' the forest, the wildlife," he says, adding that this understanding and boots on the ground, "ultimately, keeps the forest, and its protectors safe."

What I treasure in my trips to the forest is meeting such foot soldiers of the wild, and hearing their stories and their earthy wisdom.

**Purna Singh Bindra**

Wildlife Conservationist,  
PhD Candidate, University of Cambridge



## Super Click



SIDDHESH MUNGEKAR

**THE GHOST** You get to see the elusive black leopard - a melanistic colour variant of the leopard - if you are very lucky!

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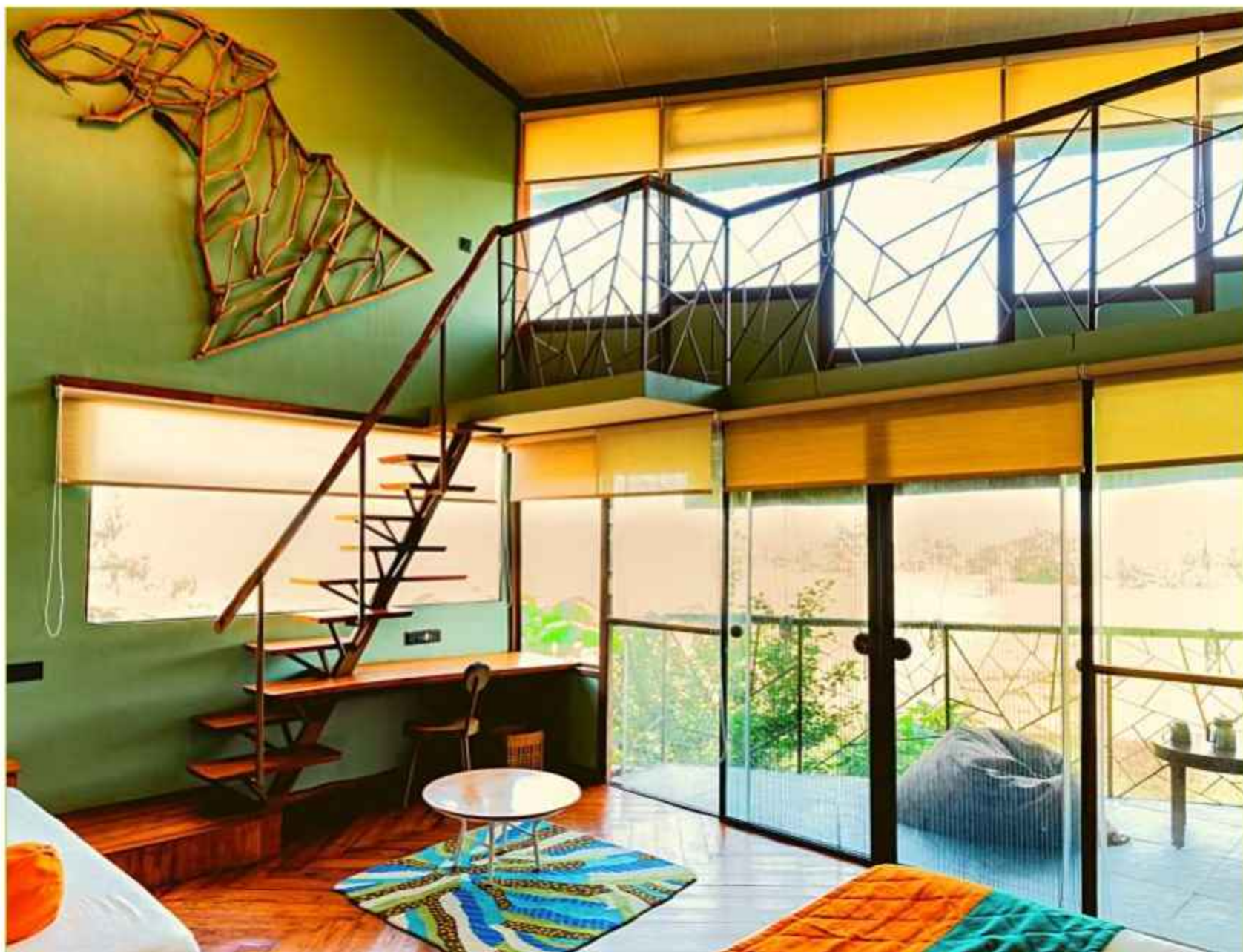
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