

THE MAJESTIC 3,000 KG INDIAN ONE-HORNED RHINO IS ONE OF  
THE PRIME ATTRACTIONS AT GORUMARA NATIONAL PARK

ESOOTLOOF



# Animal Kingdom

**NATURE'S GIFT** A visit to the Gorumara National Park in North Bengal leaves tourists craving for more of the wild

## readers' corner

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Even in the afternoon, sunlight finds it difficult to penetrate the thick canopy and reach the ground here. The silence inside the forest is eerie throughout the day. And it is only the footprints of a wild bison, a leopard or an elephant that reminds this is the world of the wildest in this part of world.

Welcome to Gorumara National Park. The Doars in North Bengal acts like a buffer zone between the Himalayan foothills and the vast Gangetic plains. In the middle, lie dense forests. Still undisturbed by human inhabitation and concrete jungle, the forests of Doars remain an ideal place for solitude.

Doars in Jalpaiguri district has maximum forest coverage in Bengal. Jalapara Wildlife Sanctuary, Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary, Buxa Tiger Reserve and Gorumara National Park all fall in the Doars region. Gorumara National Park is spread over 79 sq km with a variety of flora and fauna. In fact, nowhere in India such a vast dense forest co-exists with so many tea gardens.

Enter Gorumara through Lataguri, a small hamlet about 24 km from Chalsa town. The drive to Lataguri on NH-31 is a sight to behold.



Leopards at Gorumara often invade the adjacent tea gardens.

A plethora of tea gardens and the deep jungle on both sides of the NH31 has turned the area a picturesque green.

"With sun setting and the greenery taking new shades every moment, the journey towards Gorumara is a delight for nature lovers and shutterbugs," said a tourist. "Gorumara forest is very well organised and tourists enjoy the accommodation offered in this wilderness."

At Lataguri Nature Interpretation Centre counter, tourists can get a safari jeep and a nature guide to travel with them inside the forest. As the open jeep crawls inside Gorumara, the guide explains to the tourists what to expect and how to be in the wild. The bumpy, muddy road and the jerks that follow do not rob the tourists of the excitement awaiting inside the national park. Alertness is the key to spotting the wild. For, in the shadow of the towering sal and bamboo trees and the bushes of silk and cotton lurk most dangerous animals.

Gorumara became a reserve forest in 1885.

**CHANDRACHUR WATCHTOWER INSIDE THE FOREST, ALSO CALLED MEDHILA, IS SITUATED BESIDE A SALT PIT AND OFFERS A GOOD SIGHT OF BISON AND RHINOS WHEN THEY COME TO EAT SALT.**



Elephants (top) and one-horned rhinoceros are easily spotted inside the forest.

## FOREST FACTS

- Lataguri is the entry point to Gorumara National Park
- Tickets and guides for jeep safari at Gorumara are available at Lataguri
- WBFD nature resort must be booked in advance
- Many private resorts are also available here. Some resorts are located at Chalsa and Murti
- Smoking is prohibited inside the forest.



of deer or elephants passing by their cottages at night. "Guests can avail an elephant ride from here to go inside the jungle. Tribal dance in evenings is another attraction," said a tourist.

Given its rich flora and fauna and the enchanting experience of living with the wild, Gorumara is a favourite destination in eastern India.

## CLOSE TO GOA

# Exploring Gokarna's beaches by hiking through hills

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It is a place designed by nature to make you forget about the rest of the world. The hills around it seem to rise as a protective cover for the beaches they nestle in the centre. Gokarna is all about beautiful beaches, cliffs and being one with nature.

Located to the south of Goa, in the neighbouring state of Karnataka, you have to be there to believe it. One can take a flight till Bangalore and then take an overnight bus to reach Gokarna or book their flight till Goa and then take a taxi from there.

Still believed to be un-explored and unpolluted like most other popular beaches in the country, Gokarna is a beauty to its core. Gokarna's main attraction is its beaches where people, mostly foreigners, come to relax and enjoy. There are four main beaches: Kudle (also pronounced as Kudlee)



Mahabaleshwar Temple and Om Beach (top) in Gokarna.

Beach, Om Beach, Halmoon Beach and Paradise Beach. Each has its own appeal.

Om beach is the most popular tourist beach. It is named so because the beach is shaped like the 'Om' symbol. It has the famous Namaste Cafe where people visiting usually lodge in. One has access to Internet here, but the beach has no ATM facilities. It is the only beach that can be reachable by car or an auto rickshaw.

The other beaches are a 20-minute hike away from each other through the hills and rocks or a short boat ride. Gokarna is one of the best natural destinations for photographers. Guitars, bonfires and soft music parties define the nightlife of the town. Officially, alcohol is banned here, but having a cold, chilled beer on the beach can never really be a problem.

Gokarna is also known to be one of the most holy towns for Hindus residing in South India. The Mahabaleshwar Temple has a huge lingam of Lord Shiva. Also, make sure that you check out the huge chariots near the Ganpati temple, which carry idols of Lord Shiva through the streets to celebrate the festival of Shivratri that takes place around February-March. People are seen throwing bananas at it for good luck. Visit Gokarna during the Shivratri festival is a great experience.

People can either choose to stay in huts or shacks that are available from a meagre ₹100/- up to ₹800/- per night. Om beach because of its popularity tends to be a little more expensive. There are many local restaurants and you can also try the street food, as it is particularly good there. Starting from fresh coconuts to delicious lassis, Gokarna has it all.