

soared overhead like totem poles to unseen gods. We stopped to examine fresh elephant dung because a behemoth had passed that way in the night even as our guide kept an eye out for a bison or Indian gaur that might lope across what is essentially their domain. A furry-tailed Giant Malabar Squirrel slithered up a tree and the Great Indian

Hornbill swooped in the sky in an excess of joy even as a softly awakening forest invited us to foray deeper into its depths.

THE TRIBAL GUIDE

Our guide was a Kurumba tribal, one of the five ancient tribes of the Nilgiris (like the Todas, and Badugas) and the ones who were most intimately connected with

nature and the forest. Many work in the resort as wait staff and as forest guides.

After a two-hour trek, we trudged along a toffee-coloured pathway back to the resort. Later, we explored the waterfall-streaked vales and scenic spots around the hill station of Coonoor.

A scenic joy ride up into the mountains on the

Nilgiri Mountain Railway, the steam engine toy train now on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites, is a virtual must-do.

Reluctantly, we left the world-apart tranquility of Kurumbadi, the mist-smudged Nilgiris, the tangled forest and the perky call of the whistling thrush as it welcomed yet another lovely day.



FACT FILE

Coimbatore, the nearest airport is 56 km away. Buses and taxis ply to Kurumbadi. Alternatively, take the toy train from Mettapulayam to Ooty, which goes via Coonoor. The Nilgiris are studded with everything from farmhouses, home stays, guest houses to five star resorts. However, Kurumba Village Resort (www.natureresorts.in/kurumba) is the only deluxe outpost in Kurumbadi and is located on the Ooty-Mettapulayam road.

For more information visit Tamil Nadu Tourism at: www.tamilnadutourism.org