A herd of deer catches your attention, imposing antlers extending from graceful bodies of the ones grazing, while those on watch duty, ears perked up, look for any sign of trouble. This could be a scene straight out of a forest, but wait – they don’t try to hide or run away as you walk up to them, your shoes crunching on a gravelly path at Avanti Kalagram in Pune. These lifelike iron sculptures, created by artisan Prabhakar K Singh, are a reason enough to visit.

There’s more though. As a guest at the 3.5-acre property, you can feel the breeze on your face as you speed down a dirt trail on your mountain bike, learn the art of bamboo flower making, warm your hands at a bonfire set up specially for you, or just spend a quiet day reading a book while occasionally glancing up at the serene waters of Khamবল Dam or the surrounding Sahyadri Hills.

It’s almost impossible to imagine a road lined with water bodies, farm houses and rice fields just about 45 minutes from Pune’s infotech hub Hinjewadi, but that’s what the quaint villages of Rihe, Bahirwadi and Katarkhadak around Avanti Kalagram offer you.

Owners Gauri and Deepak Bachal might have foreseen the aesthetic appeal of such a place when they acquired land in these parts. Guided by the vision of Deepak’s father, an artist, this project is aided by funds from Tata Power’s Corporate Social Responsibility programme. The architect and interior designer duo are trustees of this project, which trains villagers in arts and craft. As the project wound up, it transformed into a working space for artisans and is now fast morphing into a hub of activity with a little something for every visitor.

Maharashtrian specialties like pithala and Punjabi ones like chicken masala up his sleeve for the main meals. You’re not thinking about that, though, if you are caught in the antics of squirrels scampering about on the bamboo beams that make up the restaurant’s substructure. After breakfast, kids have the choice of engaging indoor activities like foosball or table tennis, or joining one of the staff on a short trek up a track leading to a seasonal waterfall and an area for adventure activities. Rock climbing, rappelling and zip-lining can be arranged at advance notice (see Good to Know), but are best done in the monsoon or winter when the weather is more amenable.

As the sun moves up into the sky, you retire to the cooler climes of the studios where a charming and enthusiastic local lady, Mukta, introduces you to the simple craft of bamboo flower making and the more complex art of styling pots from natural grey clay, traditionally used to create Ganesh idols. If the kids are feeling artsy, Vishal will help them perfect the proud stance and the defiant eyes of Chhatrapati Shivaji. Else, herd them back to the restaurant where Priyanka spreads out colourful wooden beads on a table to create a keychain that will serve as a memento of your stay.

With work on a swimming pool and Swiss tents in progress, you can be sure there will soon be many more happy memories at this property.

**A crafty retreat**

Avanti Kalagram, Pune, Maharashtra

**Great from Mumbai and Pune**

**Great for A quick getaway with the family**

**Go now**

To make the most of early the summer holidays.

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**Words Vibha Ravi**

**Photographs Jeremiah Christianand Rao**
distance. It serves a set menu of tasty
there are no restaurants within walking
packages, a sensible idea given that
the option of including meals in your
is a good choice. The double rooms
Mulshi Taluka, Pune; twin room from
[Chandrashekhar]; www.avantikalagram.
[Sanjay Sawant], 00-91-9767800505
[Image 34x498 to 419x738]

WHERE TO STAY
Avanti Kalagram: While this
is a great day-tripper, if you decide
to spend the night, Avanti Kalagram
is a good choice. The double rooms
are the only ones with air conditioning.
The property offers package rates
are the only ones with air conditioning.

WHERE TO EAT
Avanti Kalagram gives you
the option of including meals in your
packages, a sensible idea given that
there are no restaurants within walking
distance. It serves a set menu of tasty
Maharashtrian fare or North Indian
food. Select other Indian food items
can be prepared at a day's notice
(breakfast: 8.30am – 10am, lunch: 1.30pm
– 2.30pm, dinner: 8.30pm – 9.30pm,
but timings can be modified to suit
your convenience if you inform
in advance; veg thali: ₹ 350/ person,
non-veg thali: ₹ 550/ person).

SHOPPING
Avanti Kalagram sells lamps
made of bamboo (from ₹ 250), terracotta
figurines and showpieces (from ₹ 25),
bamboo plant holders (from ₹ 250/ set)
and very interesting sculptures
made of M-seal (from ₹ 375).

WHAT TO PACK
Toiletries and a good pair
of walking shoes or sandals,
sun glasses, wide-brimmed
caps, sunscreen lotion,
books or board games

to keep the kids occupied
in the hot afternoons

CLEAN LOO GUIDE
If you're travelling from Mumbai,
the Food Mall right after the Khalapur
Toll Naka has a clean washroom.

SAFETY
Though Katarkhadak and Bahirwadi
villages are close by, the roads
are dark when night falls. Within
the property, pathways are lit at night,
but it's best to stay indoors after dinner.
Snake sightings have been reported,
but no untoward incident has been
reported on the property.

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS
This is a place
made for kids. Apart from
craft and adventure activities, a foosball
table and table tennis facility are enough
to keep them busy. Wide open spaces
offer scope for outdoor sports like
badminton or football if you carry
the gear. For those addicted to Cartoon
Network, cable television with kiddie
channels saves the day. However, stairs
across the property and balconies
in rooms on upper floors mean
you would have to keep an eye
on toddlers.

GOOD TO KNOW
* Zip-lining, rappelling and rock
climbing can be arranged for a group
of 10 or more and with a day’s advance
notice, as a special instructor needs
to be hired for these activities as per
government rules. So, it’s best to call
ahead and confirm availability of these
activities before you plan this trip
(from ₹ 500/ activity, ₹ 1,000 for all
three). The waterfall rappelling takes
place from June to October.
* Only Aircel and Tata Docomo
work here.
* The waterfall on the property
is seasonal (generally through
the monsoon till December).