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How India's wildlife lodges are placing conservation above tourism

Hospitality providers on the fringes of the forests are doing their bit, from eliminating single-use plastic to even blowing the whistle on intruders

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At the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve near Nagpur, visitors are not happy. Tiger sightings are plentiful, with the occasional leopard and sloth bear thrown in. But in a landmark decision taken last November, the forest department has banned the use of mobile phones inside the forest, a move prompted by selfie attempts with the big cats while on safari.

This is just a small step taken by those in the wildlife sector to put the environment and animals before humans. If local governments are slowly waking up to the idea of sustainable tourism, hospitality providers on the fringes of forests are doing their bit for eco-friendliness. These measures range from small steps like eliminating single-use plastic to involving the local community in the daily functioning of the lodge. In some cases, it goes as far as blowing the whistle on intruders, be it poachers in Panna or mining magnates in [Jawai](#).

The Jawai story is a prime example of how an individual—who went on to set up a lodge in the same land he fought to preserve for the endangered Indian leopard—can stand up to the powerful forces of commerce and greed. Midway between Jodhpur and Udaipur in Rajasthan, the Aravalli hills of Jawai have been home to the shy and elusive Indian leopard for centuries. However, about a decade ago, the state mining department sanctioned stone quarries in the region, threatening the destruction of their habitat.

Shatrunjay Singh Pratap, who had been working with Sula Wines in Nashik, decided to take up the cause of the animals, and lobbied with the state government—with help from local villagers and politicians—to get the mining licences cancelled. What followed was a three-year court battle, after which the government gave in. Instead of the quarries, there now stands the Bera Safari Lodge, set up in 2015 in the small village of Bera in the Jawai region.