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VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Siswan forest reserve — a naturalist's delight

Soak in the beauty of blue skies, pristine water as bio-diverse zone opens its doors for tourists

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Boating is among several activities offered in the recreational zone at the Siswan reserve.

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Tribune News Service

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Known to be a cyclist's paradise, the Siswan reserve, located on the foothills of the Shivaliks in New Chandigarh, is now carving out a name for itself in eco-tourism, thanks to the efforts of Department of Forests and Wildlife Preservation, Government of Punjab. Laden with rich natural beauty, Siswan dam and its surrounding forest area had been out of bounds for quite long. However, the eco-sensitive reserve has now got a facelift and opened for sustainable tourism.

A unique ecosystem

In a first-of-its-kind initiative, efforts have been made to convert the site into a recreational zone. A visit to the site is likely to leave one mesmerised. Situated on the Chandigarh-Baddi road, it is a natural habitat to a variety of wildlife, a reason why no development had been undertaken in the area. The area has no residential property apart from an office of the Irrigation Department. It seems largely deserted and had become a heaven for the alcoholics in the past, say the locals.

Home to several animals like sambhar, leopards and even exotic birds, a visit to this place is a naturalist's delight.

A survey conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) recorded 116 bird species at the Siswan reserve. A total of 160 species of native plants were also registered.

Trek trails and more

Away from rampant construction and nestled along the serene Siswan lake, the eco huts make for a beautiful view.

A 6-km trek trail till Mirzapur forests is another attraction. Owing to its serene location and pristine water, recreational activities like nature trails, jungle safari and rappelling will soon be offered to increase the tourist footfall. A herbal garden with more than 20 species of plants like Kapoor tulsi, nirgundi, basuti, satavar, bach, kalmegh, kali tulsi, lemon grass, etc, has also been developed.

Officialspeak

Giving information on the Siswan Community Reserve and its facelift, Monica Yadav, DFO, Ropar wildlife division, said the area was spread across 3,200 acres and was notified as the community reserve in August 2017.

"It is divided into three zones - all nature awareness activities are restricted to the recreational zone only. The activities include nature trails, birding, camping, cycling, boating, etc," she said.

"We have tried to give visitors an immersive experience of the natural setting of the lower Shivalik range. The forest area complements water-side dam view. The facilities and infrastructure have been planned in a way that causes minimal intrusion to the local habitat. The eco lodging huts have been set-up using sustainable fabric and wood," informed Noor Dashmesh Singh, principal, Noor Architects Consultants, who designed various components of the Siswan Eco Tourism project.

Rakesh Bishnoi, a visitor, said: "The revamped Siswan reserve is indeed a nature's retreat. The concept of eco huts along the tranquil Siswan lake is likely to please one's senses. I came here for a picnic with my family. The secluded and calm environs of this area make it an ideal destination to hang out."

"They have not started with boating activities yet, but we got some snacks from the cafeteria here and will be spending some time near the lake," said Bishnoi.

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