



Room with a view

by Reema Behl

The night before the first snowfall of the season is the most beautiful one. You can almost feel it in the air before experiencing the tiny flakes on the tip of your nose. For those who are reading this sitting in their air-conditioned rooms and only imagining what it feels like to be a part of those tales that Ruskin Bond wrote of; according to a survey by Yatra.com, an overwhelming 81.6 per cent Indians prefer to stay at hotels on vacation and only 5 per cent look for home stays. This compilation might just reverse the numbers!



Photograph: The White Peaks (Top), Nomad's (bottom)

The Nomad's Cottage, Losar, Spiti valley, Himachal Pradesh

The Nomad's Cottage, is located in the picturesque village of Losar at 13400 ft, 140 km from Manali. Losar is the first inhabitant village in the picturesque valley of Spiti. Immerse in its with spellbinding views and calmness by staying at The Nomad's Cottage. The Nomad's Cottage is a traditional Spiti home converted into a premium cottage and is considered to be one of the most luxurious homestays in the entire Spiti valley. You can also visit the Chandra tal or The Lake of the Moon that is about 40 kms from the cottage.

Getting there: Local bus operates between Losar & Manali and Losar & Kaza/Tabo. Parking at the cottage is available for 10 vehicles. 200 kms from the nearest airport at Bhunter, Kullu and 440 kms from the nearest rail station at Chandigarh.

The White Peaks

Nestled amidst glistening silver oak forests on all three sides, The White Peaks is a charming little private cottage located in the elusive Himalayan hamlet of Gagar in Uttarakhand. The crisp mountain air and the serene atmosphere of the place slowly ebbs away stress, making it an ideal place to slow down and enjoy the simple things of life. The two rooms in the cottage are cozy, intimate and exude a subtle elegance. Sit by the fireplace and enjoy endless conversations or just lounge in the courtyard, admiring the stunning vista. For yoga junkies, there's a small, private balcony which could be their own yoga space, overlooking the valley and if that's not enough, the endless walking trails in the adjoining oak forests will surely urge you to stay outdoors. The White Peaks has a good collection of books and is just the right companion for idling away winter evenings along with simple, home cooked food, prepared with fresh, local ingredients. Promising an idyllic experience of staying in hills you could just sit soak in the serenity of nature and get enchanted every moment during your stay here

Getting there: The nearest station is Haldwani, you can take a bus or a train. From Haldwani, you can hire a cab to reach Gagar. Trains are also available to the nearest station Haldwani.



La Villa Bethany, Landour, Uttarakhand

If idyllic walks amidst a ridge of Deodar and Pines overlooking snow peaked mountains or curling up on a hammock with a book or spending long overdue "family time" is your idea of holiday, La Villa Bethany beckons you. Nestled in an acre of wooded area, La Villa Bethany, is an old English Cottage, located in the serene environs of Landour. Being run as a boutique home-stay, each of its seven tastefully done up rooms pay tribute to the founders of Landour. Capt. Young's Dining Hall and Mackinnon's study recreate the magic of the Colonial era.

Getting there: Dehradun is the nearest railway station and Jolly Grant the nearest airport. Cabs and buses from Dehradun to Mussorie are easily available. From Mussorie, cabs to landour can be taken.



Darang Tea Estate, Kangra Valley, Himachal Pradesh

Wrapped in silence, and in a pashmina of mist, hides a cottage amid the trees drooping with heady lychees and the towering pines, Darang Tea Estate is a family-owned estate, dating back over 150 years and one of the first plantations to be planted by an Indian. Its rustic charm lovingly preserved over the years and its soul-nourishing tranquillity make it a perfect pick. Nestled among the 70-acre estate are four cosy cottages, each one with a direct view of the snow-capped Dhauladhar range of the Himalayas. Serenaded by the gurgling waters of a khud (mountain stream) and enveloped by acres of tea garden, guests get to experience the comforts of a home stay and the solitude of an exclusive resort at a single place. You can also take a day trip to Bir and Billing for paragliding.

Getting there: Darang Tea Estate is a 45-minute drive from McLeod Ganj, which is well-connected by buses and flights.



Himalaica, Kumaon Hills, Uttarakhand

Himalaica is the vacation home of Shalini and Uttam Dave', created with painstaking care over the past thirteen years. Built mostly by local craftsmen, the property achieves a unique character that seamlessly meshes a traditional country style with modern comfort – drawing its inspiration from the past, living in the present, and looking into the future. A short drive up from the road leads to the Estate that is surrounded by Protected Forests to the East, North and West. Tall crags exist to the North, while there is a valley to the South. The setting is a significant watershed in the area and fresh-water springs that emerge from the Himalaica feed the villages below. Seasonal nalas (seasonal streams) are located on either edge of the estate. Things to do: Forest walks and treks, bird-watching in the garden, exploring the garden which is replete with a wide variety of plants and flowers, a wide selection of movies, meditation at the temple under the old Oaktree, music on the Bose surround-sound system in the Conservatory, reading a book from the library – or do just nothing!

Getting there: The nearest airport is Jolly Grant and nearest railway station is Dehradun.

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