

BEYOND MERE FOUR WALLS

Travellers are increasingly becoming selective about where they stay while on the move. Cookie-cutter hotel rooms don't cut it anymore, which is why the demand for speciality accommodation is on the rise.

By SATARUPA PAUL



At Della Adventure and Resorts, hardcore adventure infrastructure shares space with luxurious camps and all modern facilities

A two-hour drive from Delhi to Samar Gopalpur village near Rohtak in Haryana brings you to Banni Khera Farm. It is not just any rural farm with acres of land ripe with the crop of the season stretching into the horizon and a farmhouse perched in the midst of it all. Banni Khera is, in fact, a pioneering farmstay accommodation in India that was started as a sustainable and community-based rural tourism project in collaboration with Haryana Tourism. “We’re real

farmers, living on a live farm and offering personalised hospitality—authentic farm life experiences with stays in a grand *haveli* or plush tents, coupled with interactive real-time activities, including farming!” says Kr K.V. Singh, Founder and CEO, Banni Khera Farm.

Most of the services here are provided by the local villagers, including yoga and meditation classes, workshops on pottery, painting, cooking, activities such as horse-riding, tractor rides, folk dance shows and more. Singh says, “The main motto

of the project is to promote our village as a sustainable tourism destination and open new economic opportunities for the locals, while promoting our culture and heritage and offering an authentic rural life experience to the visitors.”

Farmstay accommodation such as this is gaining popularity in India and abroad, as are many other kinds of speciality stays—from castles, forts, monasteries and convents to cave hotels, quirky hostels and homestays, university lodging, and many more. Travellers today are devoting

as much interest to their stays as to their destinations. Cookie-cutter hotel rooms have been relegated to the most regular travel—business, quick trips, stopovers, etc. For any other holiday even a little extraordinary, the stay too needs to be out of the ordinary.

CREATING MEMORIES

“To the modern traveller, a hotel is no longer simply a place to stay while you explore a new destination,” says Ankita Mittal, Co-founder, PlushEscapes. “It is a destination in itself.” Offbeat, boutique

hotels offer not just a comfortable spacious room but also an entire experience. “Whether it is living on a tea plantation and picking tea leaves, sleeping under the stars on a charpoy in a farmstay or surrounded by sounds of wildlife in a safari lodge, a hotel stay is all these and much more now,” she says. PlushEscapes features a handpicked selection of such speciality stays around India, including glamping, treehouses, houseboats, safari lodges, tea estates, farmstays and homestays.

Mittal points out that living in an

offbeat accommodation doesn’t necessarily translate into roughing it out. “In fact, the comfort and luxury provided at speciality accommodations is on a par with the best hotels, and this has led to more and more travellers opting for these stays.” For instance, at Della Adventure and Resorts, a first-of-its-kind adventure resort in India, hardcore adventure infrastructure setups such as obstacle courses, ziplining, paintball, etc, share space with a 24-hour spa and salon, and a fine dining restaurant. “Our USP is that we offer over 70 activities



From homestays in remote locations to treehouses set in jungles and plantations, the modern traveller is opting for the quirky in their stay on the move



PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK



Banni Khera Farm in Haryana is a pioneering farmstay which started as a community-based rural tourism project

for team building along with all modern, luxurious amenities under one roof,” says Jimmy Mistry, Founder, Della Group. “This makes the property not only very popular with families and groups of friends but also with corporates as a MICE destination.”

Spread over Karnataka, Jungle Lodges & Resorts Ltd operates 21 resorts in and around forest areas. The accommodation in these can vary from tents and log huts to treehouses and wooden chalets. “Regardless of what kind of accommodation you choose, every stay includes activities and the focus is largely on giving guests an experience to cherish and one which is not typical of a regular hotel,” says Vijay Sharma, Managing Director, Jungle Lodges & Resorts Ltd. The activities differ according to the landscape the resort is located in, but most commonly include wildlife safaris, birdwatching, ziplining, mountain biking, canoeing, kayaking, treks and more.

STAY DIFFERENT

Mittal of PlushEscapes says that speciality accommodation is most sought after by modern-age discerning travellers who are open to newer experiences. “This can range from young professionals to retired

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individuals out to make the most of their travels.” Sharma adds that it is primarily the ambience and the overall experience that brings the modern traveller to such speciality accommodation. “We have witnessed an increase in the number of travellers in the age group of 25-45. But overall, we receive guests across demography—from kids to adults, families, Fully Independent Travellers (FITs), special interest groups, corporates, Indians as well as foreigners.”

Bengaluru-based HR consultant Nayana Gohain travels often. When it’s for work, she’s usually put up in business hotels, which by virtue of the uniformity of their interiors, inclusions and services across brands, can get very monotonous and utterly unexciting. Which is why, when she’s travelling for leisure with her husband or friends, Gohain makes it a point to stay in a place that offers much more than just four walls, a comfortable bed, a mini-bar and a plush bathroom with toiletries.

“My husband and I went to Coorg over the last long weekend, and we stayed in a treehouse. It was a cosy wooden cottage perched atop a tree, which you could climb via a ladder. It had a beautiful four-poster bed with drapes, all modern amenities and a bathtub even,” she says, adding, “But what excited me most was simply being up there, sitting in the little verandah and looking out at the coffee plantation spread below. To live in a treehouse was like a childhood dream come true!” In her many travels across India and abroad, Gohain has so far stayed in a palace, a castle, a houseboat, a farmstay and now, a treehouse. And she’s only one of the many modern travellers who are choosing an accommodation that is offbeat, quirky and memorably special. ■