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A giant leap: the moon and beyond

On the move with Nimrat Kaur

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### Beautifully bespoke

Boutique hotels and resorts in India are raising the hospitality bar with unique experiences. We pick the best, carefully-curated stays for your guiltless pleasure...  
Anurag Mallick & Priya Ganapathy (copy)



**Suryagarh, Jaisalmer (Rajasthan)** An open jeep with flags aflutter welcomes guests to the fort-like entrance. A Manganiyar troupe greets you with song, a priest applies a *tilak* on your forehead as a flower petals rain from above. Suryagarh offers beautifully-curated, diverse dining experiences – breakfast with peacocks, *halwai* breakfast in the courtyard or dining on the dunes. Its bespoke desert trails present the Thar desert's lesser-known history – Bhil settlements, ruins of caravanserais, rainwater harvesting techniques of Paliwal Brahmins (who prospered from the Silk Route), cenotaphs of merchants and travellers, ancient stepwells and the sweet water wells of Mundari. Retrace old trade routes on camel safaris or go on a midnight "witch" trail at Kuldhara. They even have your photos printed and placed in customised frames in your room as a personal touch. Each day, *halwai* Gatta Ram sends a mithai platter with descriptive historical nuggets about the sweets on scrolls. Surrender to specially designed therapies at Rait Spa that uses locally sourced Thar sand and Luni river salt. //

The regal luxury in every room recalls Thar-inspired motifs, stone lattices and arches from Jaisalmer, Khaba Fort and the ruins of Kuldhara.



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**Coco Shambhala, Nerul (Goa)** No matter whether you're in Bengaluru or Burkina Faso, a friendly phone call one day prior to your arrival at Coco Shambhala notes your dietary preferences in detail. Spread over an acre near Coco Beach, the secluded villas – named Bharani, Aslesha, Ashwini and Rohini – come with two rooms, a treetop living room, a private plunge pool, a well-equipped kitchen and complimentary mini-bar stocked with beer, wine and Champagne. Panchvati-style interiors by Belgian designer Lou Lou Isla Maria Van Damme use colonial furniture in a tropical jungle-style garden with ethnic accents. Savour the exclusive menu and gustatory experiences curated by India's top wine and food specialist Shagun Mehra, with signature dishes like prawn and chorizo bruschetta and basil prawns with lemon served in your villa. Guests get a cellphone pre-fed with staff details, including a complimentary cab and driver. No wonder Coco Shambhala was ranked among the world's top beach villas! //



01 Each private pool villa has a tropical jungle setting with treetop living rooms. 02 Distress-finish furniture and Panchvati-style interiors by Belgian designer Lou Lou Isla Maria Van Damme.



**The Ibnii, Madikeri, Coorg (Karnataka)** Opened in February 2016 after an extensive 10-year development project, the Ibnii (literally 'dew') offers true-to-nature holidays. The check-in is paperless and a welcome drink of *bellath* (jaggery) coffee is served at the Kaadu, a wooden machan overlooking the property. The Ibnii takes great pride in having no phone network or room service (though wi-fi is available). Ten Balinese wooden cottages on stilts overlook a rainwater harvesting lake and 22 private pool villas called Kapi Luwak come with a jacuzzi and an outdoor pool. Guests can savour diverse dining options: the Fig for multicuisine dining, Baalelle for pure-vegetarian fare, and Masi Kande for outdoor barbecues, as well as create their own coffee (after a plantation tour) at Kaldi Kaapee, the coffee shop. Duck feeding, responsible fishing, interactive kitchen with baking classes at the Boulangerie - there's plenty to do here. Don't forget to try the signature coffee-and-sugar scrub at the spa. //



01 Enjoy dew-drenched mornings at the plush villa overlooking a four-tiered cascade swimming pool. 02 Manja Spa, named after 'turmeric', offers treatments with ingredients sourced from nature.

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01 The pergola-style open dining area offers Ladakhi and continental cuisine, besides stunning Himalayan views 02 From the luxurious rooms, catch panoramic views of the Stok Kangri range or the play of light on Shanti Stupa. //



**Chamba Camp & The Grand Dragon Ladakh (J&K)** Could a high altitude cold desert like Ladakh offer comfort you've never imagined? Experience 'glamping' or glamour camping at Chamba Camp Thiksey, part of Cox & Kings' the Ultimate Travelling Camp. Individually-designed luxury tents come with en-suite bathrooms, colonial furniture, a private deck and a personal butler. Experienced guides accompany you on personalised cultural trips to monasteries and oracles, regaling you with folk tales by campfire. The only hitch? Just a four-month season. Thankfully, the Grand Dragon Ladakh is open all year round, offering great winter packages besides swanky new suites. The centrally-heated rooms afford impressive views of the Stok Kangri range, and the terrific cuisine includes skiu (wheat pasta stew), timstuk (wheat strips and black gram soup), nang (Ladakhi sausage), phingsha (keema with phing or glass noodles), taint (Ladakhi spinach) and tingmo (Tibetan steamed buns). Unique cultural experiences like learning calligraphy, tea by the Indus and Zaskar rivers and witnessing prayer sessions in monasteries make your stay special. //



**Rokey Manor, Landour (Uttarakhand)** A colonial era boutique hotel located between the Shivaliks and the Himalayas, Rokey Manor was built in Landour in 1840 by Captain GN Cauchy and named after the writings of Sir Walter Scott. With stone walls, wooden floors and quaint niches and nooks, the renovated rooms overlook the valley and tea gardens. The restaurant Emily's serves gourmet cuisine and house specials like mustard chicken. The most interesting part? The Rokey Residences, a cluster of 19th century colonial cottages, each with 2-3 bedrooms and its own Mr Jeeves. Highlights include spacious gardens, stone-clad log cabins with knotty pine wood décor, original fireplaces, kitchen, barbecue and outdoor jacuzzis, a private deck lined with herbs, Scandinavian architecture with patchwork stools, vintage lamps and Finnish artwork. Exclusivity is guaranteed, with the Swiss-style Stubli Café, Ale House English pub and Little Salon & Spa Shed bound to keep you occupied. //



01 The stone- and wood-infused country-style dining adds a warm, cosy feel to Pine Tree Lodge. 02 The Little Salon & Spa Shed offers a range of treatments in a setting reminiscent of Scandinavian spas. //

