





SaffronStays The Inner Temple

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

A specially curated compilation of unique homestays across India.

Text **Ananya Bahl**

The modern Indian traveller is like a child at a candy store—confused by the various options before him, yet wanting them all! Hidden in this fear of missing out—which has gripped everyone from millennials to middle-aged travellers—is an irony. A large number of these travellers are constantly seeking ways to slow down, to relax and unwind. However, they want to do so in the comfort of a homely place, far from the commercial and impersonal atmosphere of a hotel. Enter homestays—a novel concept wherein people open up their homes—either partly or wholly—to vacationers. Here’s a look at six of these unique homestays that will indeed make you feel at home.

SPIRITUAL SUSEGADO AT SAFFRONSTAYS THE INNER TEMPLE, GOA

Tucked away in the by-lanes of sleepy Moira is an old Portuguese villa, restored lovingly and with much élan. The luxurious décor—encompassing sculptures of yogis, paintings depicting scenes from mythological stories, three thematic bedrooms (Agni, Prithvi and Akash), and bookshelves brimming with books on literature and spirituality—inspires introspection and is a haven for holistic healing. The upper balcony offers a panoramic view of the compound which has a sprawling garden and an alluring pool. The resident cook can rustle up delectable meals ranging from English breakfast to Goan spreads and even a 'sattvik' meal should you desire.

Come here for: Yoga sessions, delicious food and spa facilities | book@saffronstays.com

Getting there: Jet Airways operates daily flights to Goa from Mumbai, Bengaluru and Kolkata.



Radhika Rathore



Radhika Rathore

RAJPUTANA HOSPITALITY AT KHARWA FORT HOMESTAY, RAJASTHAN

About 37 km from Ajmer stands the imposing 400-year-old Kharwa Fort. Built by Maharaja Rao Sakat Singh Kharwa, it stands on a hill and is surrounded by a lake on one side and the rambling village of Kharwa on the other. Another feather in the fort's glorious past is the fact that it is also



Radhika Rathore

the birthplace of Sawai Jai Singh, the founder of Jaipur. For years, this 40-room property has been home to the Rathore family. They have only recently opened up six exclusive rooms for guests who want to experience the regal Rajput way of life. There are many things that draw visitors to this property—open spaces, courtyards, gorgeous windows and arches, candle-lit dinners, galleries of artefacts belonging to illustrious ancestors of the resident family, bird watching, twilight drives to the neighbouring village of Bar for *dal kachoris* and tales of hunting escapades of yore.

Come here for: A slice of the royal life and delectable Rajasthani cuisine | kharwaforthomestay@gmail.com

Getting there: Jet Airways operates daily flights to Jaipur from Mumbai, Bengaluru, and New Delhi. Kharwa is a 183 km-drive from Jaipur.

SaffronStays Parsi Manor

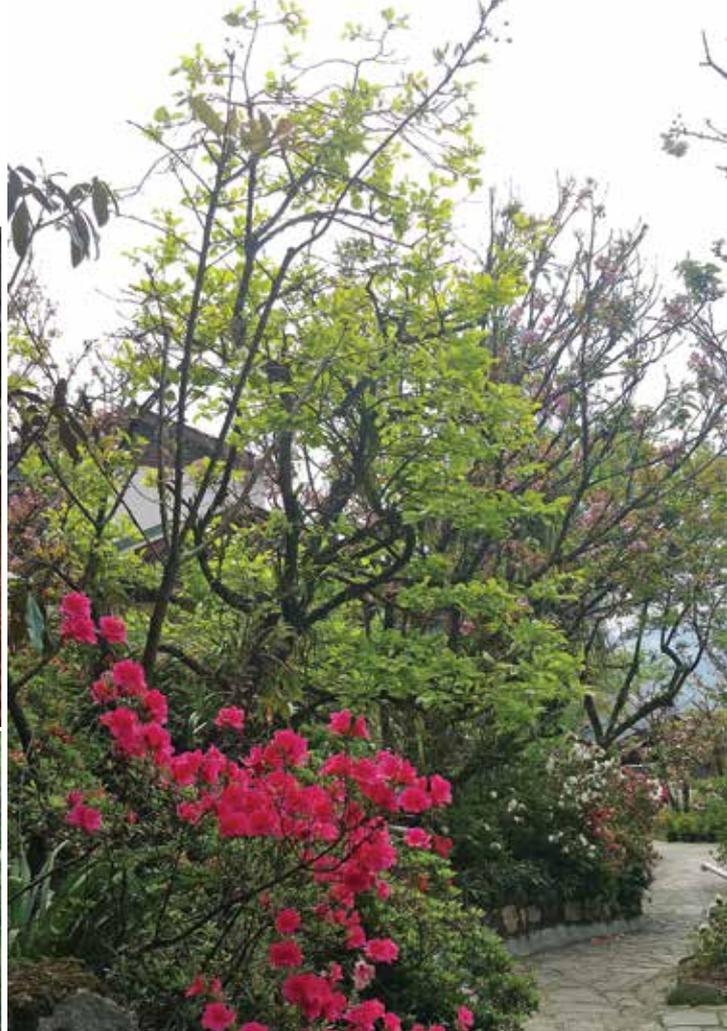


JAMVA CHALO JI! AT SAFFRONSTAYS PARSİ MANOR, MATHERAN

Away from the din of the main market of Matheran lies this 100-year-old Parsi heritage home. Its verandah provides stunning views of the adjoining forest and is the perfect place to lounge on an easy chair and ruminate. With only the chirping birds for company, guests can indeed soak in the serenity of nature which becomes even more inviting during the rains! The décor pays homage to the property’s Parsi legacy with vintage wooden furniture, four poster beds, stained glass windows, ancestral wall clocks and a large dining table. Zoroastrian relics at the property include a stunning photo of the Shah of Iran and a poster of the Clock Tower of Iran which also has an interesting tale of Parsi philanthropy. The property has four rooms and guests can never get enough of the caretakers’ warm hospitality and ‘serve with a smile’ demeanour, an endearing Parsi hallmark.

Come here for: A mix of Parsi and Maharashtrian cuisine and amusing Parsi tales | book@saffronstays.com

Getting there: Jet Airways operates daily flights to Mumbai from all major Indian cities. Matheran is 83 km away from Mumbai.



Hidden Forest Retreat

NATURE’S BOUNTY AT HIDDEN FOREST RETREAT, GANGTOK

The hallmark of this property is its gorgeous garden that’s spread out over three acres. It serves as a live herbarium and comes alive with a burst of colours and aroma thanks to its vibrant flowers like magnolias, Japanese cherry blossoms, junipers, azaleas and a thriving Himalayan orchid nursery. The garden is lined with stone pathways guiding guests through a ‘hidden forest’, wherein there are benches which can be used for quiet contemplation. Among the sprawling foliage, so to speak, are 14 exclusive rooms that at once offer privacy, spectacular views of the hills and the skyline of Gangtok. Its extensive library stores a book for every mood. Guests can savour bespoke and largely organic meals prepared with fresh produce from the garden’s vegetable patch in the comfort of the cosy dining room. The owner Kesang and her family indeed leave no stone unturned in nurturing guests with huge helpings of warm Sikkimese hospitality.

Come here for: Rejuvenation, indulging your inner botanist | kesang27@gmail.com

Getting there: Jet Airways operates daily flights to Bagdogra from New Delhi and Kolkata. Gangtok is 124 km from Bagdogra.



Gratitude Heritage

CREATIVE SOLACE AT GRATITUDE HERITAGE, PUDUCHERRY

This restored Franco-Tamil villa—named after one of the 12 attributes of The Mother—is a peaceful getaway located in the heart of Puducherry’s French Quarter. The owners, in collaboration with Indian National Trust for Art and Culture Heritage, have maintained its inherent French, Tamil and Creole elements—lime wash paint to keep it cool, Madras terrace roofing to shelter it from rain and tall French pillars to provide support. The home exudes a feeling of gratitude and offers privacy and solitude to the guests. It’s a sanctuary for creative thinkers, artists and writers who flock here to complete works of art. They can choose to do so from the comfort of any of the eight luxuriously done-up rooms or in the open courtyard amidst green trees and under natural light. Its simple home-cooked meals provide much-needed creative fuel. The proverbial icing on the cake is their comprehensive ‘writers in residence’ programme for guests wishing to stay longer.



Come here for: Peace, inspiration and a taste of Puducherry’s Franco-Tamil heritage | info@gratitudeheritage.in

Getting there: Jet Airways operates daily flights to Chennai from all major Indian cities. Puducherry is a 170 km drive from Chennai.



COLONIAL LUXURY AT SUNNYMEAD ESTATE, SHIMLA

In 2011, Madhavi Bhatia started Sunnymead—an English-style cottage which she has inherited and took the onus of restoring to its original state. It is perfect for travellers who desire a homely yet luxurious vacation. The property was built on the principles of an English architectural book by RA Briggs and integrates India through the traditional ‘Dhajji’ style of mud plastering—a combination of wood and stone. The property houses four rooms—the Oak Tree, Tara, The Forest Room and The Bay Window—each room deriving its name from the view it commands. Meals here are an eclectic mix of Indian and European cuisine albeit with a tinge of experimentation. You have the option of savouring them, off the antique china and silverware cutlery, in a location of your choice whether it is in the dining area or al fresco in the garden. The home is a treasure trove of antique furniture, objets d’art and books that are best enjoyed curled up by one of its many fireplaces.

Come here for: A taste of the days of yore, gorgeous interiors and great food | sunnymeadshimla@gmail.com

Getting there: Jet Airways operates daily flights to Chandigarh from Mumbai, New Delhi and Chennai. Shimla is 113 km from Chandigarh.

These endearing homestays provide travellers the luxury of choosing from an array of carefully-curated themes and trails. They also go on to prove that one doesn’t need to cross international borders in order to indulge in a thrilling holiday. Whether you choose to fly north, south, east or west, rest assured that there’s something waiting to satisfy every kind of wanderlust, however quirky it may seem. And the best part is that apart from all the other perks, it will feel like a homecoming!



Madhavi Bhatia