

Travel

Hanoi – a rich melting pot of culture, cuisine & heritage P4



Time to get personal

Holidays today are not just about luxury accommodation and ease of accessibility. They are also about locally inspired itineraries, responsible travel, and more, writes **Charukesi Ramadurai**

In the last few years, there has been an increasing preference among leisure travellers in India for boutique over brand. These boutique stay options — what a certain kind of marketing executive would call “hidden gems” — range from mansions where locals have opened up their homes for travellers, with just four rooms, to sprawling tea and coffee plantations offering up over 40.

Experienced Indian travellers themselves talk with enthusiasm about the personal touch offered by boutique properties. They cite a variety of reasons from “a more customised experience” to “more accommodating of your needs and requests.” For some frequent travellers, it is even about supporting small businesses and local economies over faceless chains.

Sowmya Rao Vijaymohan is a co-founder at Rare India, a marketing agency that works to put such properties on the maps of travellers, both Indian and international. She says, “In my mind, boutique properties are synonymous with leisure, design, lifestyle and individuality. In other words, everything the contemporary traveller loves.” As Aparna Karthikeyan, a writer from Mumbai, puts it, “The hosts are around to welcome you, recommend the sights and restaurants, and tell you the local stories. I also like the fact that no two rooms look the same, no two breakfasts are the same.”

Stories these places hold...

Rao also talks about the growing interest in experiential travel among people — where travellers choose a stay option not just for conventional factors like comfort, cost or location, but also for the stories behind the properties and individuals who own and often manage them. Her business partner Shoba Mohan describes it this way, “Boutique owner-run hotels welcome you into a world you will come to value, and if the owners are your hosts, it’s like to visit friends, eat home-cooked food, be a part of their work with the community and understand their ideology.”

Beyond the individual attention and the quirky touches, there is the delight of new, interesting and memorable experiences at the places such travellers choose to stay in. These experiences could take any shape, from cooking classes using local ingredients to mealtime conversations with the host family on the property’s history and heritage. In some cases, it could even be the story of the owners or hosts themselves, and what they bring to the place,

either through their widespread travels or their own experiences of creating the hotel or homestay. And the best thing is, this is a trend seen across stay categories — wildlife lodges and sylvan farms, repurposed palaces and magnificent mansions.

Jai Singh Rathore, the owner of one such property in Rajasthan, Shahpura Bagh says, “Increasingly, travellers want to get under the skin of the local community, learn about social, political, economic and religious mores, and connect with the history and community of that place.”



Heritage is vital

Shahpura Bagh is, in fact, a classic example of experiential stay, ticking all the relevant boxes like family history, conservation focus and outdoorsy activities off the beaten track. With only a handful of luxury suites within nearly 50 acres of serene greenery, this “non-hotel” comes with its own fascinating story.

Shahpura was a princely state founded in 1630 by Jai Singh’s forefathers. And in the early years of the 20th century, another ancestor, Raja Dhiraj Nahar Singh, mortgaged the family’s personal property and jewels in order to raise money to bring water supply to his people. These 200-plus lakes formed a welcome oasis to travellers, and till date, Shahpura Bagh attracts visitors with its unique platter of hospitality — think trips to a private fort, visits to the family farm, birdwatching and cycling expeditions in the area.

Down south and closer home is Windermere Estate in Munnar, set away from the hustle and bustle of the main town, right in the midst of lush tea plantations. The old Planters’ Bungalow, built in the



19th century in classic Indo-English style to serve as the home of the estate manager, offers spectacular views of the valley down below.

While mornings here would begin with a plantation walk or a trip to the nearby Eravikulam National Park, a typical evening at Windermere Estate would include a pre-dinner chat with the owner Dr Simon John or his son. Here, you can listen to stories of the estate’s original British owners and how this spot reminded them of the Lake District back home (hence, the name), before it ended up in the hands of the family who currently own it.

In the town of Karaikudi in Tamil Nadu, The Bangala is another such family home that has been converted into a heritage hotel. This mansion (*bangala* is a Tamil rendition of the word bungalow), built in typical Chettinadu style — red tiles on the floor, sloping roads, large pillars — has been with the family for over 100 years. Once upon a time, the mansion served as a sort of clubhouse for the men in the extended family, an exclusive male leisure territory.

The food here is exquisite, perfectly showcasing the subtle flavours of Chettinadu cuisine — Mrs Meyyappan scoffs at the idea that it is spicy, as widely believed. The town itself, along with the other prominent villages of the region, is a delight for history and architecture buffs. But the real draw here is the octogenarian lady herself, who often chats with guests over the dinner table, and has a wealth of stories from her travels across the world. Her experiences in the process of reviving the crumbling house and the dwindling tourism in the area may not be well-known, but she has shared her knowledge through a couple of books, on the heritage and the cuisine of her beloved Chettinadu.

To the wild

There are also several wildlife lodges across the country now, where the people running the place have stories that are as important as the places themselves. These are usually to do with conservation and community, drawing upon the best practices of sustainability. And according to many of these owners, travellers are

seeking luxury that comes with its own responsibility towards wildlife and commitment towards the environment.

One of the champions of responsible travel is Kipling Camp in Kanha, deep in the heart of Madhya Pradesh. It was set up way back in 1982 by Bob and Anne Wright, a British couple deeply connected to India and the cause of conservation, and is still managed by their daughter Belinda Wright.

The big attraction for families at Kipling Camp — named after Rudyard Kipling, the most famous son of this densely forested area — is Tara, the docile and playful resident elephant. While not heading out on jungle safaris in search of the royal Bengal tiger, children have the option of walking with Tara or seeing her bathed in the nearby river. Belinda’s passion for the forest and the cause of sustainable wildlife tourism is palpable and provides guests with a

deep insight into the subject.

Further up in the same state, Joanna Van Gruisen and Raghu Chundawat, who created Sarai at Toria in Panna, a forest that had been severely diminished by tiger poaching, feel that the definition of luxury travel itself seems to be changing. “Our experience suggests that the focus on material aspects, the somewhat wasteful excessiveness of luxury, has evolved into a desire for a more unique, authentic personal experience,” they say, elaborating on their decision to eschew traditional luxury that was antithetical to sustainability and ecological consciousness.

Even the guests who arrive there without knowing what to expect are initially unnerved, but soon “become seduced by the natural atmosphere and the experiences that bring them closer to their surroundings.” This could be a paddleboat cruise down the river, a walk to Toria village to

meet the local community or bicycle ride to the nearby temple. Joanna also says that guests, especially those from foreign countries, enjoy talking to and learning from the staff about their lives and local customs.

“We had also worked in the region for several years before starting Sarai, and Raghu (who is a conservation biologist by training) did a 10-year study on tigers in Panna Tiger Reserve, so many guests are particularly interested in questioning us for details about the area and views on India in general,” she continues. Sarai at Toria opened in 2010 with just four guest rooms, but has now expanded to eight, so that all guests get to enjoy a personalised experience.

So, the next time you are looking for somewhere exciting to stay, take the time to consider both the place and the people behind the place.

BOUTIQUE PROPERTIES ARE SYNONYMOUS WITH LEISURE, DESIGN, LIFESTYLE AND INDIVIDUALITY.

RECOVER FROM YOUR INFERTILITY AND CONCEIVE NATURALLY



Dr. Srikant Morlawar
CMD,
Homeocare International

Problems with fertility seem to be becoming more common. Inability to become pregnant, recurrent miscarriage occur frequently nowadays. Infertility is a condition that affects approximately 1 out of every 10 couples. An infertility diagnosis is given to a couple that has been unsuccessful in efforts to conceive after having regular unprotected intercourse for at least a year. Infertility may result from an issue with either female or male partner, or different issues with both.

Infertility causes can affect one or both partners. In general, in about one-third of cases, there is an issue with the male. In other one-third of cases, there is an issue with the female. In the remaining cases, there are issues with both the male and female, or no cause can be identified, which is called unexplained infertility.

- All of the steps during ovulation and fertilization need to happen correctly in order to get pregnant. Pregnancy is the result of a process that has many steps. To get pregnant -
- ◀ A woman’s body must release an egg from one of her ovaries (ovulation).
 - ◀ A man’s sperm must join with the egg along the way (fertilization).
 - ◀ The fertilized egg must go through a fallopian tube toward the uterus (womb).
 - ◀ The fertilized egg must attach to the inside of the uterus (implantation).

Infertility may result from a problem with any or several of these steps. Common causes for infertility are hormonal imbalance in conditions like polycystic ovary syndrome, hyper as well

MY DREAM OF BEING A MOTHER CAME TRUE WITH HOMEOCARE

A young lady aged 25 yrs, married 3 years back came to our clinic with complaint of irregular menses since last 6 months. She was having prolonged menstrual bleeding nearly for 15-20 days and heavy bleeding and was very weak. Along with this she was having body pains and fatigue. She took all the possible treatments but every treatment ended with disappointment. She had done all the tests and ultrasound of pelvis which showed that she was having multiple peripheral tiny cysts in both right and left ovaries. Her uterus was anteverted, normal in shape and size. Endometrium measured 7mm and her haemoglobin(Hb) was 8 gm/dL.

During her case study we found that she was having some mental stress from last 6 months which she didn’t want to share. This mental stress acted as her risk factor for infertility and as a result she developed irregular menses. Considering the presenting complaints and the symptoms along with the unique mental and genetic make-up and her physical constitution, we started

her treatment with our constitutional homeopathic medicines.

She was very positive towards the treatment and was continuing the treatment with patience. In 4 months her heavy bleeding was decreased and her cycle was not that much prolonged and decreased to 12 days. She was feeling better and her weakness was also getting better every month. We continued her treatment further to make her menses normal so that she can conceive naturally.

Within 9 months of continuous treatment and by following proper diet and regimen methods; her menses became completely normal naturally, without any hormonal pills. We continued her treatment to overcome her weakness as a result of which her haemoglobin(Hb) was increased to 12 gm/dL and help her conceive.

After complete 20 months treatment she conceived for the first time and was very happy with the fact that she had it naturally without undergoing any complicated procedures like In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF), Intrauterine Insemination (IUI) and Artificial Insemination.

Now she is pregnant and her latest scan showed single live intrauterine foetus with 20 weeks 5 days of gestational age and

as hypothyroidism, fibroids, tubal blockage, endometriosis, endometrial polyps, etc.

Alcohol or tobacco consumption, being overweight or underweight, lack of physical activity, mental stress are the risk factors of infertility. Most affecting risk factor is age; woman’s fertility gradually declines with age, especially in between 30-40yrs age, and it drops rapidly after 37yrs of age.

There are 2 types of infertility:

- 1. Primary infertility-** When a woman is unable to ever bear a child, either due to the inability to become pregnant or the inability to carry a pregnancy to a live birth; she would be classified as having primary infertility.
- 2. Secondary infertility-** When a woman had previously given birth to a child but is unable to conceive for the next one; she would be classified as having secondary infertility.

Abnormal periods, Irregular periods, No periods or Painful periods; any one can be the symptom of Infertility. Sometimes, infertility is related to a hormone problem; in this case, symptoms can include: skin changes like acne, hair growth on face, weight gain, etc.



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