

MEANDERING THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS

Tammie Anjali Tolani and her friends recently returned from Uttarakhand with hearts full of doggie love and tales of the mighty mountains!



Some people choose to always visit new lands on their holidays; others like to keep going back to their favourite holiday spots to ensure their holidays are familiarly perfect. Then, some like me like to revisit certain destinations during different seasons to discover new facets.

While I have always lived in coastal cities and towns, for my vacations, I have been partial to the mountains. Any holiday that affords views of the mighty Himalayas and unhindered playtime with furry Bhutias is time supremely well spent for me.

Having had a tough 2023 and not having had the opportunity for a proper break, I began planning my Feb 2024 break in October of the previous year itself. Three other friends decided to join in and allowed me the liberty of planning the itinerary. Having been to some lovely boutique stays in Uttarakhand in warmer climes previously, I had been dreaming of seeing them again in winter after they had experienced a bit of snowfall. A big driver for this desire were these adorable dogs – Chanda and Tara whom I had met in the spring of 2022. Their Instagram stories of rolling about on a thick carpet of snow seemed so alluring, especially in the sultry Mumbai months of October and May that I knew I had to join them in this action. Dogs and snow, therefore, had to be non-negotiable in the choice of our itinerary.



Abbotsford Nainital

Abbotsford (<https://www.abbotsfordnainital.com>) in Nainital has the grand dame Chica- an adorable pug who we had missed meeting on our previous visit. Located in bustling Nainital, Abbotsford or Prasada Bhawan as it is locally recognised is set quite apart from the frenzy that takes over this hill station over the weekends. Managed by the very efficient and graceful Mrs. Aleem, it has just the perfect balance of rooms to staff to ensure every quirk and preference of yours is catered to mindfully. So, two rooms at Apsley House with its very cozy and well-placed sitting room was the start of our Himalayan holiday. This sitting room has an enviable collection of first-edition books, across a wide literary spectrum and most of them are original autographed copies. Yet, incredibly, as Janhavi Prasada who owns Abbotsford, claims, not one book has ever been taken away and not returned!!! I believe the collection evokes such a strong sense of reverence among Janhavi's guests that they are disinclined to remove anything from it. The culinary repertoire at Abbotsford is quite wide and masterful, from the laden Kumaoni Thali to their Tibetan momos and the egg selection for breakfast. Abbotsford also has an open-air café called Café Chica which is also open to non-residential guests and serves up a wide selection of light lunches and snacks. I think for all four of us, breakfast here was special – for more reasons than one!



Breakfast Table - Abbotsford



French Toast- Abbotsford



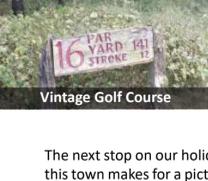
Turkish eggs-Abbotsford

1. The breakfast table is set up in the sunniest part of their lawns
2. They have the most amazing egg selection – Turkish eggs, Nainital aloo egg toast, Akuri, Rumble Tumble eggs, French toast with cheddar/ Nutella, cheese omelette and of course the sunny side up and boiled versions
3. They serve endless jugs of freshly squeezed Malta juice!!!



Mattresses at Abbotsford

Our mornings at Abbotsford used to start with a gentle hike up the mountain for a view of Nainital town as the sun rose over the hills, followed by the lavish aforementioned breakfast. The Malta juice however became our undoing; we took to pouring generous quantities of Goan gin and sipping on this breakfast cocktail, which necessitated a languorous post-breakfast siesta on mattresses thoughtfully laid out by the staff in gentle patches of sun.



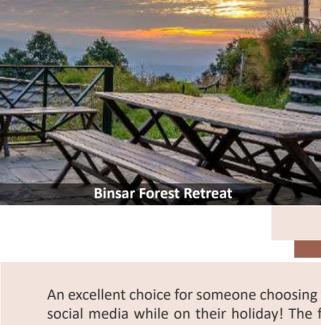
Vintage Golf Course

Our afternoons were more relaxed and involved exploring some of the colonial marvels of Nainital. The Raj Bhawan Golf Course is one of the oldest and vintage golf courses in the country. Set in the lush greens of the hilly landscape, this 18-hole golf course is quite a challenge for golfers. Another afternoon, we decided to walk through the narrow streets of Mall Road to head to the Boat House Club- another British-era building. Their rooftop restaurant overlooks the massive Naini Lake dotted with boats on hire and serves the usual club fare of tandoori tikkas, masala papads and peanuts.



Naini Lake

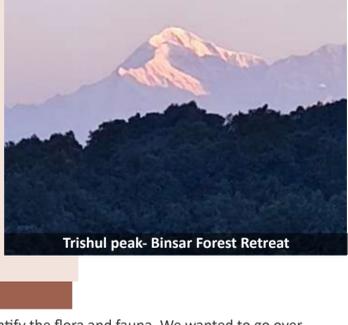
The next stop on our holiday was Binsar; our drive there took us through the densely populated Almora. A distant view of this town makes for a picture postcard because Almora's hillside is dotted with multihued homes; it is also famous for Baal Mithai - a chocolate like fudge coated with tiny sugar balls! We naturally had to stop and sample some!!



Binsar Forest Retreat

We stayed at Binsar Forest Retreat (BFR) (<https://www.binsarforestretreat.com/>) - which is set deep inside the Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary. Run by Pallavi and Preetam, this is a sustainable eco-lodge – that has recently been awarded the Outlook Traveller Responsible Tourism Sustainable Leadership award in the BNB and Guesthouse category! And for a good reason – off the grid, running solely on solar power, using spring water and harvested rainwater, managing waste responsibly, using local produce, serving fresh local cuisine, employing local community, rewilding open areas within the retreat by planting native vegetation, using neutral and chemical free cleaning agents, minimizing single-use plastic, nature hikes to sensitise guests about oak forest ecology and many other conscious choices are at the core of this amazing gem in the forest.

An excellent choice for someone choosing to stay away from work and social media while on their holiday! The forest cover here blocks off cellular network but rewards with nature's bounty in the form of birdsongs, barking deer alarm calls, late-night leaf rustles, shooting stars and pristine views of the Himalayan peaks. On my previous stay as well as on this, our choice of accommodation was Trishul – named so because you wake up to the sight of the majestic Trishul peak on a clear morning! In the kitchen at BFR, there are no appliances like mixer grinders, microwave ovens or refrigerators; all food is prepared manually and served fresh at each meal. Menus incorporate local ingredients like Finger millet, Himalayan black soy, Horse gram, Mountain spinach, Lemons, and Hemp seeds! Meals are served in the common room which is warmed by a roaring fire and holds a collection of books and board games, not to mention charging points for guests to use (there aren't any in guest rooms). Guests invariably spend a lot of time in this room and end up getting to know each other and exchanging stories about their day!



Trishul peak- Binsar Forest Retreat

The team at BFR is happy to take you on walks through the forest and identify the flora and fauna. We wanted to go over to the neighbouring Nine Furlongs for lunch and Sureshji was happy to walk us over. He pointed out the Oak, Cedar, Cypress and Rhododendron trees, the damage left behind by rampaging wild boars and places where he had spotted leopards on his previous walks! When we paused to catch our breath, he promptly opened his magical steel dabba to offer us delicious chocolates made by the resort.



Forest Bungalow- Nine Furlongs

Nine Furlongs (<https://ninefurlongs.com/>) - an estate that was built in the 1800s sits on vast grounds and encloses two beautifully built cottages that are set far apart from each other – the Forest Bungalow and the Writer's Bungalow. Both boast rich views of the Himalayas and the forests around them. The team there had cooked us a huge spread comprising Gahat ki dal, local style chicken curry, Mountain spinach and the quintessentials in any Kumaoni meal- mandua ki roti and bhaang ki chutney. The table was set to ensure each one of us had a ringside view of the glorious mountains that afternoon was a feast for our stomach and eyes simultaneously!



Local lunch - Nine Furlongs



Lunch table with a view- Nine Furlongs



Kumaoni meal at Nine Furlongs

The last time I was at Binsar, I had also walked over to the Mary Budden Estate (<https://www.marybuddenestate.com/>) – a name that I had always found so fascinating, one which had made me curious to visit the dogs and see what lay behind the name. On that visit, I had met the dogs of Mary Budden (MBE) and been bowled over by this pesky little pup that carried the heavy-weight name of Gabbar; I was quite keen to meet him to see what he had grown up to look like. So, the next afternoon, stomachs filled with another amazing meal at BFR, we made our way to MBE; it is a lovely gentle hike through the forests to this estate. Young Sunanda who now manages the MBE is from the region and is quite the expert on the little-known spiritual facet of Almora. We were not aware that several world-renowned personalities like D H Lawrence, George Harrison, Bob Dylan, Cat Stevens, have spent considerable time in her home; Uma Thurman in fact was raised here which explains how she got her name!



The Mary Budden Estate pack



At Mary Budden Estate



Doggie time- Mary Budden Estate



Baby Gabbar



Snoozing Gabbar - Mary Budden Estate



Rufus & Julie - Mary Budden Estate



Chanda & Tara at Binsar Forest Retreat

The drive from Binsar to Jageshwar is quite an interesting one – a village through Kasar Devi which has quite the Hippie vibe. This small settlement is now dotted with very interesting cafes that offer amazing baked goodies and organic food. Baba Cake is one such small café where we had to stop for some freshly squeezed Malta juice (we were quite into it by this time) and their Banoffee Pie and Carrot cake. Kasar Devi has many affordable homestays where visitors come and stay for weeks and use this as a base to chill and sporadically step out from to explore Kumaon!



Kasar Devi

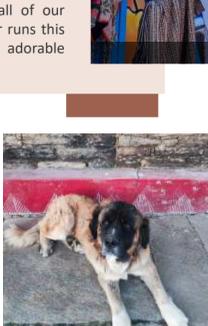
Kot Kailash (<https://kotkailash.com>) perched on the mountainside, is an intimate experiential retreat that offers 4 rooms in a 100-year-old home and is expertly managed by Pushkar – a Kumaoni local with several years of experience in the hospitality space. We occupied their family suite which has 2 bedrooms, a spacious living area, and a cosy dining space. The absolute highlight of the suite, however, is the glass-encased lounge that overlooks the valley, almost all of our waking hours were spent in that part of the suite! Pushkar runs this place ably aided by a team of three humans and three adorable furballs.



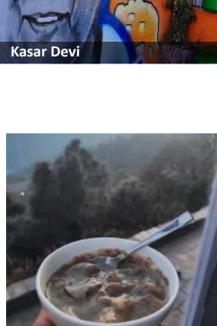
Kot Kailash



Glass Lounge - Kot Kailash



Bhaloo- Kot Kailash



Bhaang Chaat at Kot Kailash

The youngest is the bear-like mastiff aptly named Bhaloo who tries hard to be part of the pack led by Julie and Mick! By this point, we thought we had tasted all that Kumaoni cuisine had to offer but Pushkar and team surprised our tasting with barnyard millet/Jhangora (an excellent alternative to rice) served with kadi for our picnic lunch and Bhaang ki chaat – diced lemons, radish and apple in a velvety base of hemp seeds chutney and beaten yogurt; absolute pleasure devouring it as we sat in the warmth of the setting sun! Just across the road from Kot Kailash is the ideal viewing spot of the Himalayan peaks- Kedarnath to Panchchuli and beyond into Nepal! We were lucky to have the sky clear out our first evening there and get an unhindered view.



Picnic Lunch - Kot Kailash



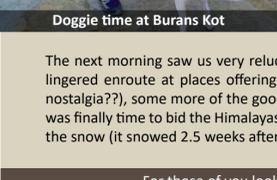
Julie & Micky at Kot Kailash



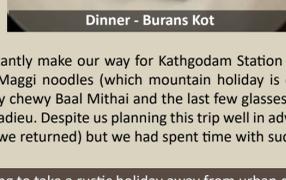
Dinner - Kot Kailash

While in Jageshwar, we had an invitation to visit another quaint village stay – Burans Kot which translates to "a place amidst the rhododendrons". This charming estate currently has 4 rooms with sweeping views of the Himalayas; they are in the process of adding more accommodation. The team here offers lovely 3-7 day walking experiences through the mountains with overnight stays in traditional local homes fitted with all modern conveniences, meals served in the kitchen straight from the cooking fires and opportunities for the guests to try their hand at farming and cooking!

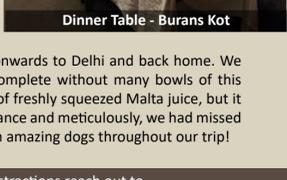
We were treated to a 5 course continental selection for dinner and the culinary prowess really shone through with the pasta and chicken choices! The team had decked out the restaurant with fairy lights and rhododendron blooms creating a magical evening! Burans Kot is a great option for those seeking active holidays in the mountains as the team has a vast repertoire of walking itineraries and village stay options to offer.



Doggie time at Burans Kot



Dinner - Burans Kot



Dinner Table - Burans Kot

The next morning saw us very reluctantly make our way for Kathgodam Station onwards to Delhi and back home. We lingered enroute at places offering Maggi noodles (which mountain holiday is complete without many bowls of this nostalgia??), some more of the gooey chewy Baal Mithai and the last few glasses of freshly squeezed Malta juice, but it was finally time to bid the Himalayas adieu. Despite us planning this trip well in advance and meticulously, we had missed the snow (it snowed 2.5 weeks after we returned) but we had spent time with such amazing dogs throughout our trip!

For those of you looking to take a rustic holiday away from urban distractions reach out to your Tamarind Global representative today!

FROM THE TABLE OF THE CEO – WELCOMHERITAGE: ABINASH MANGHANI

LEADERSPEAK



WelcomHeritage Hotels is in a space whose time has come. The covid years thrust the “experiential travel” category into the mainstream with Indians choosing to take to road travel, to get away from cities to destinations as diverse as Rajasthan’s fabled Forts & Palaces, or to be with nature in India’s fledgling Wildlife destinations and hill stations amongst others. When borders reopened, inbound tourism further fuelled this demand albeit to select destinations.

With a byline “Redefining Experiences” and with 38 operational hotels and many more to open across the country, WelcomHeritage has truly a national footprint. I asked Abinash Manghani, to share his views in his capacity as the CEO of WelcomHeritage.

- a. **With 38 Hotels across the country, how do you manage such a diverse portfolio of Hotels, Resorts, Palaces? How would you characterize the WelcomHeritage Brand?**

WelcomHeritage has adapted and evolved over the years into an “Experiential Brand” incorporating Culture & Heritage and folded in the Natural Heritage components of being close to Nature, Wildlife and Wellness as they truly represent India’s bounty of authentic offerings. Correspondingly, we now have a 50:50 split with Nature, Wildlife & Wellness resorts at varied destinations, coupled with our focus on Heritage Palaces, Forts & Havelis with an eye to attract travelers from outside India.



WelcomHeritage Shivavilas Palace, Sandur (Hampi)

Much of this is primarily due to consumer demand from within the country.

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NEW HOTEL OPENINGS

Bedzzz Xclusiv, Morjim, Goa



Where? Morjim, Goa

What is Unique? Bedzzz Xclusiv stands out in the heart of Morjim, where the Chapora River converges with the sea. Just a short stroll away lies Turtle Beach, renowned for its tranquil ambiance and as a nesting ground for Olive Ridley Sea turtles. Travel Diaries Café on the 4th floor overlooks the Chapora river, offering a diverse menu of Indian, Mediterranean, and Himalayan cuisine. The culinary journey caters to various preferences, from private dinners to lively gatherings among friends. At Himmaleh Bar, guests can indulge in premium cocktails amidst a vibrant ambiance, accompanied by live entertainment, creating an unforgettable evening experience.

Why? Experience the quintessence of Goa at Bedzzz Xclusiv, where each room is meticulously furnished with modern amenities,

[Read more...](#)

The Essentia Luxury Resort & Spa Udaipur



Where? Udaipur, Rajasthan

What is Unique? Introducing Essentia Luxury Resort & Spa Udaipur, where opulence seamlessly merges with tranquility amidst the majestic Aravali Hills. Guests are invited to indulge in the unique offerings. From the exquisite Presidential Suite boasting panoramic views and a private pool to the expansive event spaces spanning 100,000 square feet, including a grand ballroom and lush lawns accommodating up to 1,000 guests, every aspect is meticulously crafted for unforgettable experiences.

Why? Guests seeking rejuvenation can immerse themselves in sports activities, find inner peace at the meditation and yoga center, or indulge in pampering spa treatments and state-of-the-art gym facilities.

[Read more...](#)

Storii By ITC Hotels, The Kaba Retreat, Solan



Where? Solan, Himachal Pradesh

What is Unique? Want to ditch the cookie-cutter hotel experience? Storii by ITC Hotels redefines luxury with nature as the architect. Embracing the surrounding flora and fauna, the retreat seamlessly integrates nature into your stay. Wander through an arboretum adorned with Himalayan Cherry Blossoms, Deodhars, and more, or savour the fruits of the orchards right outside your door. Embark on ecotherapy hikes into ancient forests, enjoy Mahadev Darshan at Bhurshing Temple, or explore the historic Kuthar Fort. For a digital detox, camp amidst the lush woods or enhance your culinary skills with a masterclass from the Executive Chef. And don't miss the chance to picnic among 100 trees, surrounded by the scent of pine and wildflowers.

Why? Imagine waking up to unobstructed valley views or soaking in a hot tub on your private balcony, all nestled amidst the Himalayas.

[Read more...](#)

Ronil Goa - JdV by Hyatt



Where? Calangute, Goa

What is Unique? Looking for a Goa escape that's equal parts fun and relaxation? Look no further than Ronil Goa. Ronil Goa is the first JdV by Hyatt hotel in India, offering a fresh take on hospitality. This unique JdV by Hyatt brings the brand's spirit of joy of life to Goa with poolside BBQs, firepits with s'mores, and an on-site DJ. Check-in with a shot at the bar, then head to The Hub, open till 2 am, for a swim-up drink or wood-fired oven pizza. Unique experiences include poolside BBQs, movie nights under the stars, and a "Lazy Boozy Breakfast. They even have a 24/7 bar and a "Soul Station" for relaxation with noise-canceling headphones.

Why? At Ronil Goa, the experience is unmatched. With 135 rooms and suites nestled within 12 guest houses, each with private balconies, the resort offers a cozy retreat infused with Goan charm.

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