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A drive through a narrow lane running through perfectly pretty pastoral scenery leads you to the white gates of the Aalia Hotel and Resort. The property, set in the village of Shyampur and 10km from Haridwar, is a great luxurious and peaceful option to stay at while visiting the town or for long weekends from Delhi. Though we might mention, there are other ways to get here than driving down — you can arrive in style in a chopper and land straight on to their private helipad.

Situated right on the banks of the Ganga, the property immediately instills a sense of peace and quietude with its

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The resort offers archery, ATV rides and jungle walks

# A Riverside Romance

Stately villas, Jacuzzis on an open deck, croquet on the lawns — there's nothing quite like the Aalia Resort when it comes to Haridwar.



The property has 12 sprawling villas each with three rooms, a kitchen and a sitting room-cum-library



The restaurant has glass walls looking out to views of both the forest and the river

minimalist beauty. The property has twelve sprawling (read 4,150 sq ft) villas set in an abundance of soothing green bamboo and white flowering shrubs that make for a harmonious backdrop for the stately villas. Each villa has three rooms, a kitchen and a lovely sitting room-cum-library, wooden floors, a garden and a rooftop deck. You have the option of booking the entire villa or just a room, with options being the Chila Suite with a view of the surrounding countryside, the Garden Suite with access to the private garden or the River Suite with a view of the river.

Some of the villas offer really lovely views of the river making them perfect to take in beautiful sunrises and sunsets. While some of the decks come with the added

luxury of private Jacuzzis to give a unique outdoor experience. On request, the hotel can also arrange for a romantic picnic by the river bank, a wonderful treat in the cold winter months.

The well-manicured lawns that run through the property are ideal for a game of croquet. And if you're not quite sure of your skills, the hotel staff will offer to teach you the game. There is also a small but beautiful infinity pool overlooking the river where I spent a whole morning floating, watching dozens of fat golden dragonflies buzzing above.

If a calming, lazing around weekend is not your thing, then the resort offers

other activities like archery, ATV rides, white water rafting and jungle walks with their naturalist to the Rajaji National Park close by. You can also start your day with a yoga and meditation session on the river bank with early morning birdsong for music, or in the meditation room in hot weather, followed by a lovely massage at their spa. For those less actively inclined, there is a luxurious cigar lounge where you can spend a relaxing evening sipping champagne by the fire nestled in leather armchairs.

If you happen to miss the spectacular Ganga aarti at Haridwar, a must-see for a first-time visitor, or want a more intimate experience, the resort has the option of a

puja on the river bank where you can float your offering of wicker baskets filled with flowers into the Ganga.

The resort has only one restaurant, but it is spacious with glass walls looking out to views of both the forest and the river. The food was adequate though not the last word in luxury. That was the only fly in the ointment of this lovely resort where the service is friendly and warm with personal attention given to all guests by the general manager Dhiraj Chauhan.

Whether you are looking for a luxurious option during a spiritual trip or a relaxed long weekend from Delhi, living by the Ganga doesn't get better than this. **S**

Approx. price per night: ₹6,000 for a suite • aalia.net