

TWO NEW RESORTS IN UTTARAKHAND SEEK TO BREAK NEW GROUNDS

Resort time in hills

The heydays of Mussoorie were heady times with the crème de la crème of society headed to its stately homes annually in summer. For the discerning traveller, the charms of newly minted hill resort getaway disappeared with the departing English. The town has since lingered on as a popular destination, but the grandeur has long gone.

Well, a new address just might be the spur to a return to its glory days. The J.W. Marriott Mussoorie Walnut Grove Resort & Spa is easily the most ambitious development in this part of the Himalayas in a long while. This is the first JW Marriott resort in India, and Simon Cooper, President and Managing Director Asia Pacific Marriott International, feels this showcasing of a J.W. resort could pave the more such luxury offerings from the group.

The ₹170-crore hotel is spread over 30 acres, and is just around the corner from Kempty Falls. The hotel is a sprawling one, and its architecture strays away from the usual slanted roofed structures common in the hills, instead resembling a contemporary building.

The resort is set a valley a little distance away from the hustle of central Mussoorie, in the charming village of Sia. The hotel has been an eagerly anticipated one, set amidst lush mountains and historic walnut plantations, the hotel's design is inspired by its natural surroundings. A grand view of the multi layered Himalayas as one's front view is impossible to match in sheer spectacle, and that's even before guests have entered.

The resort is designed keeping families in mind. Especially to keep children engaged in activity after another! An entertainment centre, The Den is vast 12,000 sq ft are packed with – well, billiards and pool tables, gaming consoles, library, nap areas and even a two-lane bowling alley. If these get exhausted, inquire about the yoga classes, cooking



Marking a return to favour

sessions with chefs, and craft classes and other activities on offer.

The spa – Cedar Spa by L'Occitane, is right in the middle of the hotel on level 2, and features five treatment rooms and an array of invigorating treatments inspired by the indigenous cedar trees of the region.

Combining business with pleasure is fast becoming a norm and this resort has made ample provisions for meetings and events too. There's 4,200 sq ft of meeting space, including a 3,000 sq ft Grand Orchard Ballroom, three break-out rooms and a spacious pre-function area.

As for that ultimate arbiter of a north Indian resort's quality (!), food, well there's a fair amount of dining choices in-house, with five restaurants on the property, points out Chandrashekhar Joshi, general manager. The spacious and scenic all-day dining J.W. Cafe is the largest with 126 covers, and offers an array of cuisines. The top level has Teppan, a contemporary, plush restaurant serving Asian cuisine. Check out its PDR for a dinner to impress clients.

Perch, next to the reception, is an

inviting tea lounge offering some of the best, single estate teas and coffees, plus a magnificent view that you are unlikely to tire of any time soon. Wisteria Deck is a cozy outdoor Italian trattoria serving wood fired pizzas, wines and sangria, and should be wonderful for summer evenings. The Trout House Grill & Bar, which has both indoor and outdoor seating, is an evening bar offering grills and exclusive cocktails.

The rooms come in four categories – de luxe, de luxe valley view, studio suites and executive suites and are complete with every amenity that the JW guest is used to, with a few additional touches thrown in make a stay more memorable.

The reference to the walnuts in the hotel name of course comes from the walnut groves in the area. Note a couple of these magnificent trees as a steep driveway takes you past a lawn, a greenhouse, installation art and around a corner to the reception – on the fourth level! By the entrance Ma Belle – cast in bronze, sits on a bench – a reminder of the English antecedents of the town. Touches of art dot the lobby as well, while red-yellow-orange-pink geraniums light up many outdoor spaces in the hotel. For those in search of a bit of peace and quiet, this is a wonderful getaway. Just opt for the greenhouse or the spa over the Den!

Villa away from home

How would you like to rent an entire independent home for your entire family in a resort? Aalia, a little outside Haridwar, has designed villas that are perfect for the Great Indian Family on who need to be together in an independent space on a holiday.





The villas at Aalia offer a home away from home

The concept provides the independence that a private house would provide and is large enough to house multiple couples and kids!

Aalia is a spacious resort, and it is about 10 kilometres from the crowded confines of Haridwar. Best of all, it is by the Ganga – or rather one of its channels as the river in this area is a braided river with multiple channels. One can be by the river any time one wishes.

“The resort has villas where rooms can be hired individually, but the entire villa can be hired too,” says Dheeraj Chauhan, general manager. This implies a family for example, or any group can essentially have a house where they can be very comfortable, with friends and family around them instead of strangers just outside their rooms as it would usually be in a hotel. “Also unlike resorts with individual cottages, here a single villa has three rooms so multiple members of a family get to stay together,” says Chauhan.

While there are four categories of rooms, the Aalia Villas can be booked as an entire villa which means

getting 4,150 sq ft of spacious luxury with three bedrooms, reading room, living room and kitchen. The villas are unlike the region’s predominant traditional architecture of slanted roofs and flimsy structures. Instead you have villas that would not be out of place in a Scandinavian resort – strikingly contemporary in design and colour palate. Large grassy lawns occupy most of the resort, interspersed by manicured hedges.

All the 12 villas have three rooms each. For an extended family, this could easily be an independent house. Especially as each villa comes with a common living room, complete with tasteful seating arrangements and even a work desk. Books and board games add to the charm. The rooms themselves are spacious and come with every creature comfort. The ground floor rooms have a private garden, while the upper floors have balconies. Some of the balconies have Jacuzzis.

The resort is serene and makes for a great getaway from the urban crowds. It is just as equally good as a family weekend getaway. The resort is full of activities for children to spend time in. There are many options for play time provided in the resort – from table tennis to pool, volleyball, badminton, and even archery and trampoline! Even the younger kids have a space dedicated for them, with lots of entertainment options. For the more adventurous, there’s mountain biking and nature walks nearby.

Of course the adults have their

own niches too. Spending leisurely hours by the Ganga is perfect. When you have tired of that, there’s a lot to choose from within the resort – a quiet (or indeed chatty) evening by the pool or a quaffing your drink at the bar, browsing in the library, indulging in a spot of self indulgence at the two spa rooms, there’s a lot on offer.

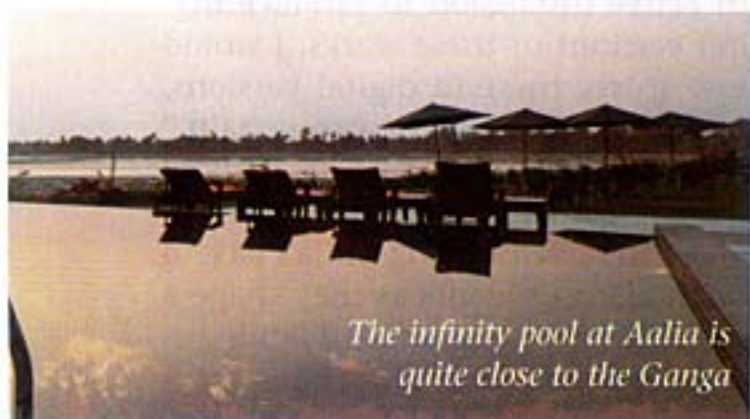
A huge attraction for the resort is its close proximity to the Rajaji National Park, which in season (from 15 November to 15 June) is a magnet for tourists, and is a great option to some of the magnificent Indian wildlife. For a scenic route, do take the canal road to the park gate, even if the park is closed!

Of course, Haridwar’s main attraction for most remains its connection to ancient traditions. While the evening *aarti* at Haridwar is well attended on any day, the town has hundreds of other temples. Interacting with thousands of people who make their living out of religion is an experience in itself.

What is likely to extend your stay however is the charming yet unpretentious service at the resort, which is round the clock. Indeed Chauhan, a former Oberoi former hand, and his team, have the resort functioning perfectly. Catering perfectly to an emerging middle class, the resort has a quality of luxury has a timelessness about it.

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The infinity pool at Aalia is quite close to the Ganga