



LUXURY
HOTELS GROUP

THE *luxurist* BLOG

The Mountains are Calling & I Must Go

Author : Pushpa Nair December 26, 2016



Diwali was dusted over and New Delhi lay gasping like an old woman wheezing her lungs choked. Wither my city?

I decided to call time on work and head for the hills, Manali to be precise. I was intrigued by the snippets of information that I had on ShivAdya Resort and Spa. Packing my stuff I headed for Chandigarh a 4 1/2 or 5 hours drive depending on how one drove on wide roads but filled with traffic of all shaped and sizes. An overnight halt at Chandigarh and I was ready to move. Next day early morning I set off up winding roads inching higher as the mighty Himalayas beckoned. You can also do the trip in one stretch with the Volvo semi deluxe buses or fly into Buntar from New Delhi and catch a taxi to Manali.

It was still early when I reached Manali so blessedly no mad traffic. ShivAdya is located in the village Karajan about 20 minutes outside Manali. I followed the directions given and soon came to a discreet sign that announced I had reached ShivAdya. Caution, keep your eyes open or you could miss the turnoff.

First impressions it lives blending seamlessly into the environment, the colors are of nature itself the earthy browns mud and stone walls, the green of natural grass all blended into a harmonious note. A warm welcome by Ritesh Sood the owner of ShivAdya, an 18 year industry veteran in the travel sector, whose experience has taught people yearn for that extra mojo. Gone are the days of soulless hotel buildings most sticking conspicuously like sore thumbs to a place that talks, relaxes you ShivAdya ticks all the boxes. A quick check in by super courteous staff and one was escorted to a warm fire where over a cup of coffee Ritesh elaborated on his vision of creating a place in the mountain inspired from the local architecture of Kullu, Kangra, Mandi and Kinnaur valleys. These houses known as “**Kath Koni**” are not only earthquake-proof but also follow the tradition of allocating different floors on the basis of use. Ground floor is known as “**Khud**”; people use this section for cattle rearing. First floor is known as “**Bouri**” generally designed as a living room to welcome guests. The top most floor is known as “**Taala**” and must be used as a kitchen only.



Fortified by coffee and biscuits I decided to freshen up before stepping out. The room was toasty warm and simply luxurious. The colors were simple and soothing the browns of the wood, the earthy green of nature and the pure white of fresh snow all combined to inspire one to just relax. The room had every modern amenity to keep your stay comfortable. Like the beautifully arranged toiletries in the bathroom or the cookie, fruit platter on the coffee table. Resolutely not giving in to temptation I stepped out and met Baxter, a five year old Labrador, the resident mascot, with an innate awareness of how to pose. A quick sniff and welcome and off he went. Totally awake I took deep breaths letting the freshness of the mountain air clear my fresh oxygen starved system and looked around. Set amidst apple orchards, gentle slopes of the valley to the majesty of the snowcapped peaks of the mighty Himalayas it was a visual treat. How much time is spent by man in creating a masterpiece whereas nature does it all the time in its myriad moods.

Warmly encased the rasping freshness and cutting feel of the wind not to be ignored I set out to explore the property with Ritesh whose enjoyment in what he has created was infectious. The name ShivAdya is a combination of the names of his two children Shivansh and Adya. The whole property has been

constructed using mud, wood and stone and minimal paint work. The wood in the rooms has been locally sourced, from is walnut, fir or sheesham. No extra wood finish only preservants have been used on the wood to help it retain its original properties. The flooring, the ceiling, the outer walls, everything has been made by hand. All the 15 guest rooms at ShivAdya pay homage to the valleys, passes of mighty Himalayan range in Himachal Pradesh with names like Kaza, Kalpa, Zanskar, Hamta to name a few.

All rooms have earth colors ranging from mustard yellow, lavender or olive green. The artwork in the lounge the rooms and the multi cuisine restaurant pay acknowledgement to the art of the local populace. Kullu rumaal (handkerchief), which has Lord Krishna knitted and it looks the same from both the sides of cloth, adorns many a walls and side tables in the property. There are wall hangings of pattu (local fabric) that lend a very distinct character to the interiors of the rooms.



The whole resort is zero wastage and eco friendly all the material left over after construction was used for land filling. A gentle meandering walk across the property and it was time to listen to the increasingly hard to ignore rumblings of a starved stomach I along with the other guests headed over to the restaurant and was pleasantly surprised. Waiting for a menu you will be disappointed it all left to you. Menus change depending on what you want to eat and not what the hotel expects you to eat. Refreshing idea takes courage to implement with guests of different mindsets. Ritesh explained this anomaly by saying that when he went on holidays he was always told 'what he could eat' as against 'what you want to eat' something that he vowed he would implement. During my stay at ShivAdya at the restaurant I had Indian, Chinese, Continental and the local Himachali cuisine. In line with this philosophy is also the fact that there is no Room Service. The resort encourages you to interact with each other and the owners.



A quick siesta and I was ready for the evening where we had a barbeque over a roaring bonfire and a view that was hard to beat, it was a full moon the stars beckoned to be plucked seeming to be just an arms distance away. Here I met Neelam, Ritesh's charming wife who completely seconded the ethos behind ShivAdya and what they were doing. A quick dinner followed by a hasty retreat to my bed where I was fast asleep in five minutes. The next morning I woke up to a glorious sunrise feeling completely refreshed. The next day Ritesh suggested a hike in the nearby Karjan village. Post a quick breakfast we set off across charming streams chased by the mountains surrounded by thick Deodar trees and rice fields where time seemed to stand still. I couldn't help but remember Manali is also one of the places where the Ark was supposed to have finally come to rest. Strange religions seem to have common singularities and in a time where intolerance is rife perhaps one needs to consider. Ah! but these thoughts flew out of my head as I clambered up and down slopes came across a charming villager who proved to be a super salesperson resulting in the group buying her out of her clarified butter and black berry jam. That evening we had a session of local cuisine taught to us by Neelam Sood and enjoyed the local alcoholic brew provided. It was yet another eye opener about how much of Indian cuisine is still relatively unknown and waiting to be sampled. My time at ShivAdya was coming to an end and it was time to pack up.

A number of the guests post the walk decided to use Spa I choose to opt out and just laze in the sun. The multi-sensorial spa focuses on nature and pleasure, combining the energies of five natural elements, including wood, fire, stone, plants and water, to enhance well-being.

Next day as I got ready to depart I thought why ShivAdya? It's easy ShivAdya is unique in the options it provides you can choose to jostle into the Manali madness or just stay away. I did a bit of both saw a few of the obligatory musts like the '**Hadimba**', '**Vashisht**' and '**Manu**' temples. That aside its perfect for the number of treks of all grades that you can undertake, perfect gateway for Leh Ladakh, camp out in the open, adventure junkies in fact one of the big names of the '**Great Himalayan Race**', stays next door. It's a perfect getaway for an exclusive wedding or bachelorette party or just a superb place to renew one

relationship with nature in her glory. Plan to go again in the New Year to a pine tree caressed by fresh snow and ring in 2017.
On my return to Delhi I was pleased to see my city no longer so dull and grey but how much longer I wonder.