

Exploring **Romance**

Honeymoon destinations to fall for
– with a big, big difference

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GREAT ROMANTIC IDEAS

For India and South-East
Asian destinations



Time is well spent in Shaheen Bagh's living room. The library is overhead



4 Shaheen Bagh, A romantic treat

WHY GO

If you arrive at Shaheen Bagh expecting to have sundowners with the ornithologist and graphic designer couple who built it as their country retreat, you're in for a disappointment. But if you come to spend time discovering every nook and cranny of this labour of love, you're in for unexpected treats.

From the moment you park and descend to the main building, Shaheen Bagh opens up in welcome like the myriad blossoms lining your way. Set

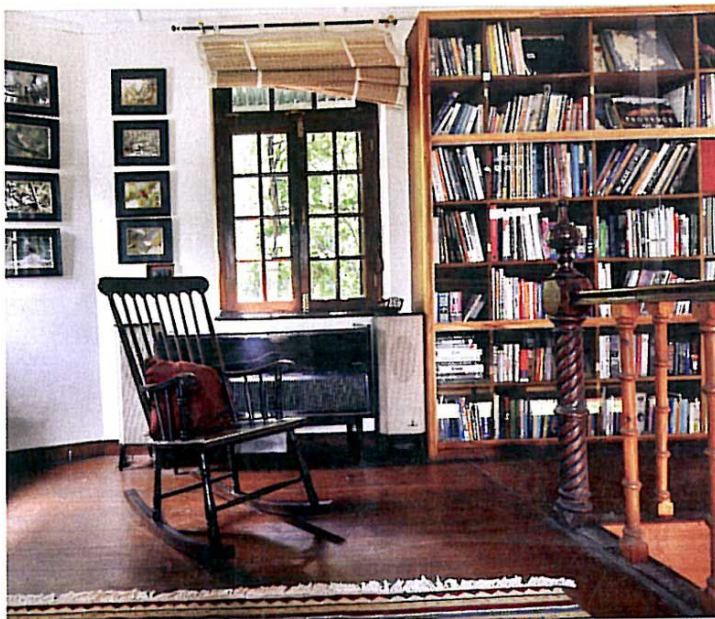
on a seven-acre estate on the banks of the Tons River near Dehradun in Uttarakhand, the property includes an eye-catching nursery, orchards and landscaped gardens spread over five levels. The main house is built like a colonial country bungalow and boasts a sprawling verandah, where you can savour breakfast amidst blooms. An aesthete's delight, the house begs exploration. Art deco and plantation-style furniture,

wardrobes in Chinoiserie themes, carved fireplaces, even a dramatic temple entrance – art is part of this building's being. The walls are covered with sketches of the bird and plant species that can be sighted on the grounds, though strangely, a few of the centrepieces belong more in Karol Bagh than in Shaheen Bagh. It all comes together in a unique style that can be best described as colonial-meets-kitsch.

**GREAT FROM
Delhi**

You have four well-appointed rooms to choose from, each named for its colour theme or location, featuring four-poster beds that let even six-footers sink into comfort. The rooms come with LCD TVs, cable TV, air-conditioning and DVD players and the plush bathrooms have shower cabins perfect for washing away a lazy day.

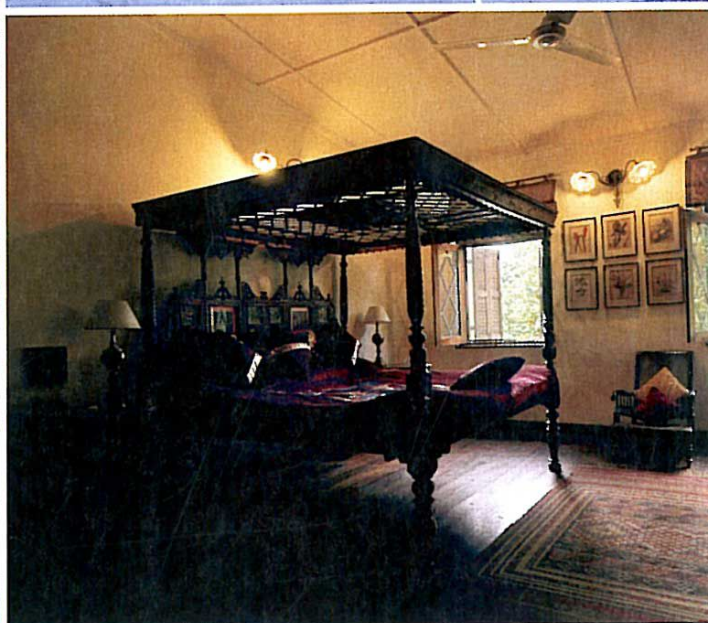
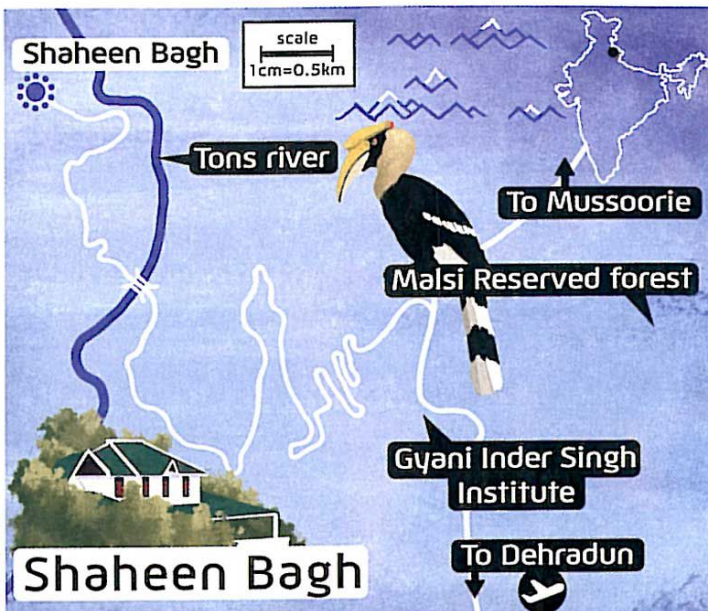
While Shaheen Bagh is the place to do nothing at, it also has a host of interesting things to do *a deux*. The lovingly collected books and films in the



The crimson sunbird is just one of the cool bird species to be seen

Above: The library at Shaheen Bagh is crammed with lovingly-collected books

Right: After a long day of doing nothing, sink into the comfort of a four-poster bed



GO NOW

For romance in the misty hills. The only place in India where one can truly experience autumn is in the hills, which makes this a great time to live in Shaheen Bagh's gardens.

library and the movie collection number in their thousands and are housed in the upper section of the main sitting room – walls of authors and directors to

choose from. So whether you want to soak up the sun on the porch reading Fitzgerald side by side, or watch Fellini after dinner, the climb up the antique spiral staircase will bear fruit.

If you must leave your planter's chairs, do it for a trek along the river. A short walk down from the bungalow takes you to the banks, and the staff will arrange a trek to match fitness and enthusiasm levels. The longer walks also include visits to nearby villages.

Another must-do is a dip in

the swimming pool. Don't be surprised if you feel like you've jumped into the Tons instead, because, in a way, you have. Using the eco-friendly Hydram pump system, river water is used to fill the pool. Since this water is not chemically treated, it is let back into the river and changed regularly. And after working up an appetite in the pool, stroll into the orchards alongside and reward yourself with some fresh fruit.

But perhaps the one thing that makes Shaheen Bagh the

kind of house you wished you called home is the food. It's not served in courses, it doesn't boast *foie gras*, but it is homemade cooking that's made for the soul. From the crispness of the locally-grown salad greens to the heart-warming earthiness of the chicken curry, every dish laid out for you is an uncomplicated yet unforgettable experience. But then, the best things in life usually are.

WORDS MANAN DHULHOYA
PHOTOGRAPHS VISHAL SABHARWAL



When it comes to bathing at Shaheen Bagh, you can choose from a shower and bucket bath – or a hot tub!

FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: New Delhi (290km, a five-six hour drive).

Leave early in the morning to avoid traffic and you should make it by afternoon.

Closest city: Dehradun (8km) is a 20-minute drive away.

Closest railhead: Dehradun. (13km) has quite a few trains connecting it to New Delhi. Take the daily 2017 **Dehradun Shatabdi** (leaves New Delhi 6.50am, arrives Dehradun 12.40pm, ₹ 470 AC Chair car) and return by the 2018 **Dehradun Shatabdi** (leaves Dehradun at 5pm, arrives New Delhi 10.45pm, ₹ 545 AC Chair Car). Get in touch with Shaheen Bagh for a pick-up

(₹ 550 onwards).

Closest airport: Jolly Grant Airport, Dehradun (40km). Kingfisher, Jet Airways and Air India all fly in from New Delhi. Return economy fares start from ₹ 7,200. Shaheen Bagh will arrange a pick-up from the airport at ₹ 1,500 onwards.

GETTING AROUND

Shaheen Bagh is a short drive from Dehradun, but a world away in every other way. It's advisable to have a car to get around, especially if you want to sample Dehradun's distractions. We got a car from India Highlights Tour (00-91-11-25163775; 4/107, 3rd floor Ramesh Nagar, New Delhi; ₹ 1,250 per day for an AC Indigo).

WHERE TO STAY

Shaheen Bagh: 00-91-9897046353; shaheenbagh.in; shaheenbagh.arungupta@gmail.com; '18 Bigha' Village, on the Shigally School Road, Dehradun; ₹ 5,000 onwards including all meals; nominal rate (around ₹ 300 per day) for driver's boarding and lodging.

WHAT TO PACK

Winter is setting in and nights can get nippy; carry woollens. Don't forget to take swimwear. Also, take enough memory cards for your camera because you're sure to have a case of shutterfinger. Floaters and shorts will come handy for exploring the gardens and orchards and the riverside.

WHAT TO EAT

Anything that Kundan, the cook, whips up is a treat, but try his finger-licking chicken curry for sure.



CLEAN LOO GUIDE

The journey from Dehradun is completed at a canter, so you won't need to visit loos on the way. If you're flying in, use the airport loos.



SAFETY

Thanks to the Bhotias (See Good to Know) and the discreet but vigilant staff, Shaheen Bagh is as safe as it is serene.

MEDICAL AID

Medical facilities are only a few kilometres away in Dehradun (**Doon Paramedical College & Hospital:** 00-91-135-2629375; dpmc.in; 28, Chakrata Road, Behind Bindal Petrol Pump), but do carry any specific medication your family needs.



CHILD FRIENDLINESS

With puppies, orchards, flower nurseries, a river, library, DVD collection and a pool, Shaheen Bagh keeps your kids busy so you don't have to be.

GOOD TO KNOW

◆ Shaheen Bagh's larder is full, but its bar can seem depleted. Beer is usually available. If you prefer the harder stuff, we recommend you carry it.

◆ *Ganga Descends*, or anything by Ruskin Bond, Uttarakhand's most famous resident, is a good way to familiarise yourself with life here. Jim Corbett's *Man Eaters of Kumaon* is perfect in that setting, but read it indoors at night.

◆ Ask Darshanji, the gardener, to take you on a trek along the Tons, and listen carefully to his descriptions of the sights.

◆ Shaheen Bagh has resident Bhotias, a handsome breed of indigenous mountain dogs.

The adults are as playful as the three puppies.

◆ A day trip to the Rajaji Wildlife Sanctuary, an hour's drive away in the foothills of the Shivaliks, might bring sightings of elephants, deer or even a tiger.

