

HAVELI HARI GANGA, Haridwar ▼

A mere 500 metres walk through the bazaar from the sacred Har-Ki-Pauri in Haridwar lands you at this beautiful haveli on the banks of the Ganga. Acquired 90 years ago by the Maharaja of Pilibhit, it blends old-world charm with modern-day hospitality. The rooms come with antique arabesque, regal beds made of stone and matching upholstery. The haveli extends to a private bathing ghat for those looking to take a holy dip in the pious waters. The well right in the middle of the hotel is the chief source of water here. The restaurant on the ground level serves one of the best vegetarian thalis in Uttarakhand.

After your take in the spiritually enlightening and fantastically photogenic morning aarti take the cable car to the hilltop temple of Mansa Devi. You can even walk up (1.5 km) but beware of prasad-stealing monkeys. Wildlife enthusiasts can enrol for the five-hour safaris to Rajaji National Park or an overnight trip to Corbett Tiger Reserve. Come back to a relaxing massage at the hotel or a session of yoga.



TAJ LAKE PALACE, Udaipur ▲

This marble fantasy built in 1746 as the pleasure palace of Maharana Jagat Singh II floats magically on the still blue waters of Lake Pichola. Restored to its pristine glory, this spectacular palace became world-renowned when the James Bond film *Octopussy* was filmed here. (Much earlier, some songs of the hit Sunil Dutt-Sadhana starrer *Mera Saaya* were shot here).

Set against the majestic Aravalli Hills on one side and lofty palaces on the other, Taj Lake Palace is probably the most romantic hotel in the world complete with lily-filled ponds, gurgling fountains and objets d'art.

The journey begins with a boat ride to the hotel and a charming flower shower

welcome. Each of the 66 rooms and 17 suites capture a different mood and period — with walls adorned with ornate glasswork and intricate miniature paintings and ceilings with bohemian crystal chandeliers. Everywhere you go, the waters follow — never letting you forget that you live on an island of marble on a pristine lake.

Dining options include an array of wood-fired delicacies and dishes from around the world with some of the most awe-inspiring views in the world. Enjoy vintage wines, spirits, cigars and sheeshas at Amrit Sagar, a dramatic lounge decorated with over two centuries-old glass inlay work. The Mewar Terrace sets an amorous tone for a romantic dinner.

