



The revolving restaurant atop the hotel is its main talking point

ROOMS WITH A VIEW

TUCKED AWAY NEAR THE MAJESTIC DHAULADHAR MOUNTAINS, RS SAROVAR PORTICO, PALAMPUR IN HIMACHAL PRADESH IS AN IDEAL GETAWAY FOR COOL LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Growing up in Bombay (now Mumbai), one remembers going to the Ambassador hotel alongside the beautiful Marine Drive, and enjoy dinner at The Pearl of the Orient, its legendary revolving restaurant. It was not the first one in the country – the credit goes to Kandeel atop the Tex Palazzo Hotel in Surat, which also happened to be Asia's first revolving restaurant. Later on, 18 other revolving restaurants sprung up, majority of them in the northern part of the country.

I have been to many of them. But last month, as I sat enjoying a chicken and mushroom dinner at the Cloud 7 revolving restaurant in Palampur, Himachal Pradesh, I was reminded only of the now-defunct The Pearl. The reason? Their amazing views. While The Pearl gradually unveiled a stunning south Mumbai to you, Could 7 at the RS Sarovar

Portico, Palampur opened up to the gargantuan Dhauladhars, a part of the Himalayan range of mountains.

“Yes, you can say that the revolving restaurant is our USP,” declares Rohit Verma, RS Sarovar's much-travelled General Manager. “It stands out like a ATC tower and can be spotted from about anywhere – a hotel guest just cannot get lost in the bylanes of Palampur.”

The one-year-old hotel gets spillover guests visiting Bir and Billing, the world-famous paragliding sites, 29 km and 43 km away respectively, as well as from Dharamshala, headquarter of His Holiness the Dalai Lama 40 km away. Most of them are avoiding fancy room rates at these three more expensive locations. But RS Sarovar also attracts leisure travellers, mainly from Delhi, Jammu, Chandigarh, Ludhiana and Amritsar. The property clocked 85 per cent occupancy last summer and this spilled over to July too.

There are numerous leisure activities

SpiceJet flies to Dharamshala, 40 km away. Log on to www.spicejet.com for flight details



Andretta

POPULAR IN PALAMPUR

Located in an idyllic valley full of pine trees, Palampur enjoys a year-round pleasant climate. The municipal council in the Kangra Valley gets its name from Pulum meaning 'abundant water' and is the gateway to numerous tourist and pilgrimage destinations in Himachal Pradesh. An Agricultural University and a Central Scientific Research Institute's IHBT are pride of the town. There are also several places of tourist interest over here.

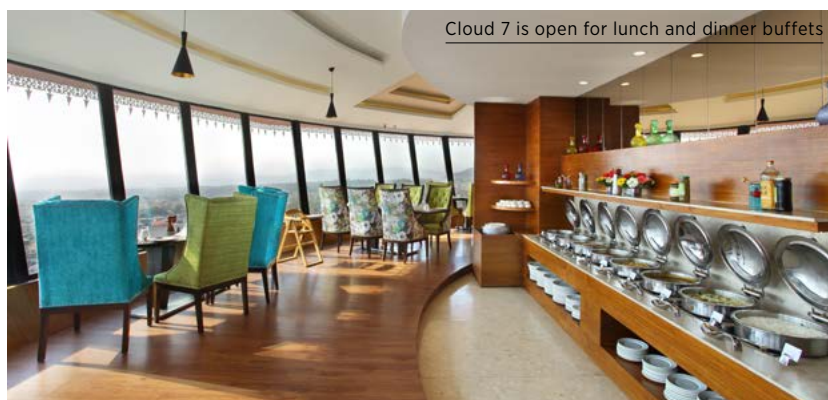
Saurabh Van Vihar: This nature park, encompassing 13 hectares, is located near the Kandi bridge. It is named after Kargil martyr Saurabh Kalia, who was born in Palampur in June 1976.

Maharana Pratap Sagar: Also known as the Pong Lake, it is situated at an altitude of 450 metres above sea level. This lake sanctuary attracts Siberian birds during winter. The best season to visit the lake is between September and March.

Chamunda Devi Temple: Just 24 km from Kangra and 15 km from Dharamsala is the famous temple of goddess Chamunda Devi (Chamunda Nandikeshwar Dham). The temple complex is an enchanting spot with glorious views of Dhauladhar, the Baner Khad and Dadh. A vast running water pool houses the statues of Shiva and Saraswati.

Andretta: This is the home of well-known artist late Sobha Singh and late playwright Nora Richards. The place is famous for the Shobha Singh art gallery. There are beautiful paintings in their private houses.

Kangra Fort: The Kangra Fort is about three kilometres from town and is also known as Nagarkot. The fort is historically significant; its massive size and the beauty of its structure lend to it an added charm. At the entrance is a museum containing valuable old photographs of the fort prior to the devastating earthquake of 1905 and some exquisite stone sculptures, carvings, idols and other artefacts.



Cloud 7 is open for lunch and dinner buffets

that the hotel can arrange. A rugged jeep safari to a breath-taking oak and pine-laden spot near a Devi temple 6,500 feet up the Dhauladhar, is quite popular. The temple is managed by 53-year-old Baba Mahender Prasad Joshi, a member of the Niranjana Akhara (an ascetic sect) who had run away in his younger days from home in Kirtinagar, Uttarakhand, when he was known as Digambar Parihar Rajbharti. With thick matted hair and clad in saffron robes, the Baba regales guests with his travel tales, rustic homilies and an infectious sense of humour.

Equally popular is a visit to the Wah Tea Estate, spread over 575 acres and now run by Surya J Prakash, a fourth generation scion of the founding family, originally from Lucknow. Both the outings — along with numerous others — have been contracted by the hotel to Palampur-based Exsul Travels. Says its gregarious US-returned CEO Harmit 'Harry' Singh, "Many of the guests hear about the beautiful locales much before reaching here. Our aim is to put not just Palampur, but also the entire Kangra region, on the global adventure tourism map."

Having had their fill of the outdoors (see box), guests can enjoy the numerous facilities back at the four star deluxe RS Sarovar. There are 42 spacious and smartly furnished rooms and suites. Each of them offers a magnificent view of the

Dhauladhar mountain range. The hotel's USP, Cloud 7, is on the seventh floor and is open for lunch and dinner buffets. For the discerning foodie, the revolving restaurant also has a menu of authentic local dishes alongside an international cuisine. The 360 Degree Bar a floor below exudes warmth both in its decor and service and is the perfect space to unwind after a day's adventure and travel.

RS Sarovar also has a well-equipped fitness centre and provides 24 hours in-room dining as well as free hi-speed internet access. In addition, the hotel has the largest banqueting and conferencing facilities in Palampur in terms of both size and capacity to host weddings and other social events.

Having seen a steady rise in the number of leisure travellers, Verma now has set his sights on increased footfalls to RS Sarovar's Banquet Hall, Conference Hall and Lawn, totally measuring 12,500 sq. ft. Towards this end, his marketing team is keen on tapping corporate travellers from Chandigarh and cities in Punjab like Ludhiana, Jalandhar and Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar, better known as Mohali, famous for their hosiery, sports goods and IT industries, respectively.

"As the first branded chic hotel in town, we are already a household name in Palampur," says Verma. "Now we want to be equally known in neighbouring states too. We will get there soon." ■