

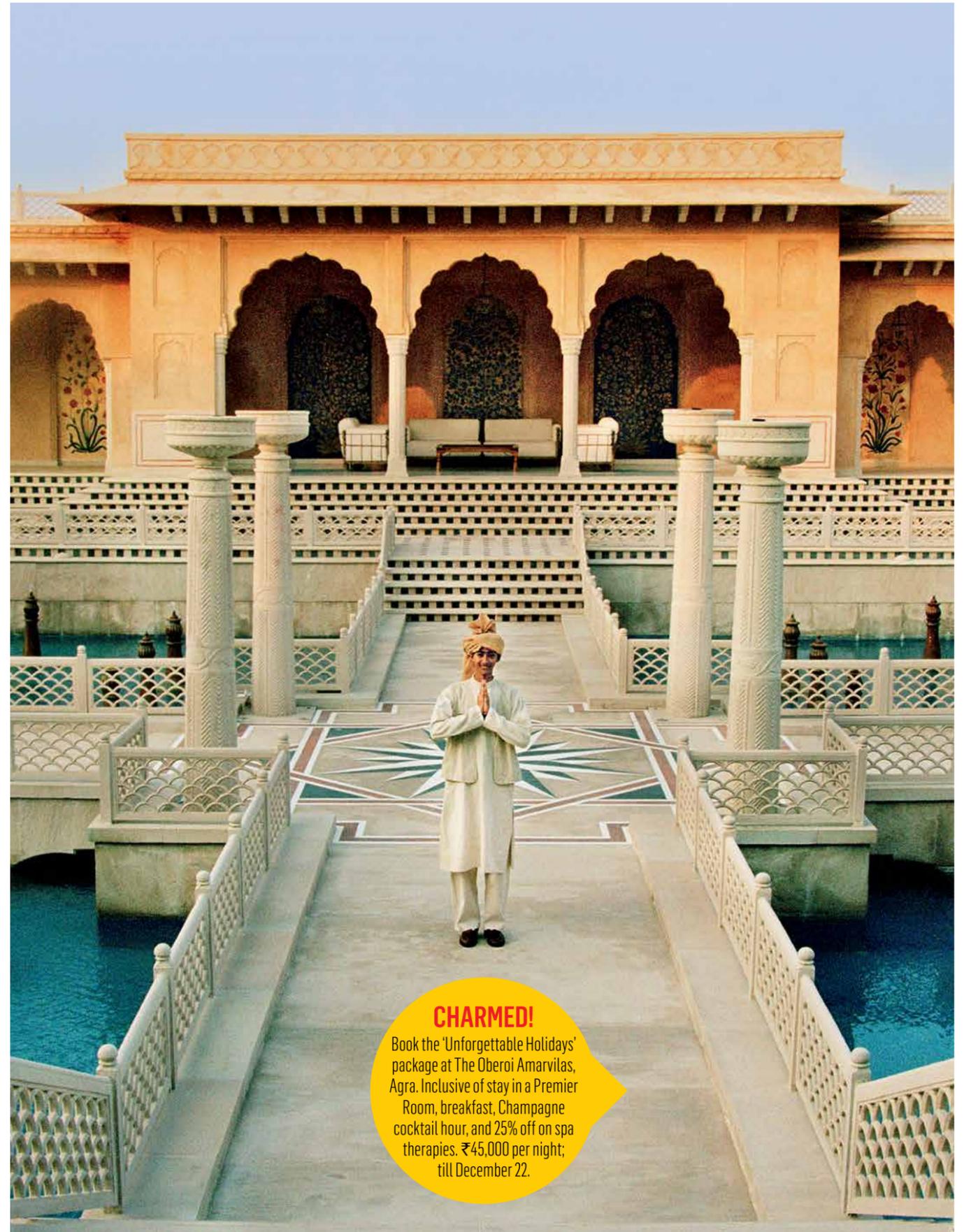
# Time for a Breather

We concede that planning for a holiday takes more time than the actual vacation. So, until teleportation is possible, plan a quick luxury getaway closer to home. **By Rathina Sankari**



A short escape to the Andamans is what you need. *Opposite:* The Oberoi Amarvilas Agra is an architectural marvel.

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BRUNO EHRS/GETTYIMAGES

## CHARMED!

Book the 'Unforgettable Holidays' package at The Oberoi Amarvilas, Agra. Inclusive of stay in a Premier Room, breakfast, Champagne cocktail hour, and 25% off on spa therapies. ₹45,000 per night; till December 22.

A HOLIDAY BEFORE A HOLIDAY SOUNDS LIKE A GOOD PLAN— ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN SO CAUGHT UP WITH ALL THE WEDDING AND HONEYMOON PLANNING. GET AWAY FROM ALL THAT STRESS AND CHECK INTO THESE HOMEBOUND LUXURY RESORTS FOR A MINI-MOON. YOU BOTH DESERVE A TIME OUT!



with cascading fountains, charming pavilions, and arched passageway. All guestrooms and suites overlook the monument of love, but for a closer look, the hotel provides private golf buggies to the Taj Mahal. Indian specialities with Mughal influences and continental dishes with fine-dining menus are served at the restaurants. You can choose from a four-course candlelit private dinner on the terrace of your room or dine under the stars with the soft traditional music playing in the background and the silhouette of the Taj Mahal making the ambience magical. Exclusive couple spa therapies and Hindu renewal of vows ceremony are some of the other interesting experiences here. To explore the monuments of Agra which are relics of the bygone era, include a visit to the Fatehpur Sikri, Kinari Bazaar, Akbar's tomb, and the Agra Fort in your itinerary. ₹48,000 upwards; [oberoihotels.com](http://oberoihotels.com)

**FAIRMONT JAIPUR** The only Fairmont hotel in India, this one sure takes you on a royal ride. Nestled amidst the Aravali Hills, the opulent resort features traditional Rajasthani and Mughal décor with modern amenities in its 199 rooms and suites. The all-day dining restaurant gives you a taste of Rajasthan, while Zarin interlaces Persian and Indian cuisines. Head to the rooftop restaurant, Aza, to try Raj Era cuisine, or spend an evening in the regal Aza library bar with classic spirits like the Private whisky collection of the Maharaja from its exquisite menu. Moreover, the resort is a favoured destination for weddings as their specialists handle special moments with care, so you can may be host your big day here. Romance the skies on a hot air balloon ride, embark on elephant picnics, visit the historical forts, gardens, temples, palaces, or zip around on a BMW bike—the Fairmont Jaipur will be a memorable holiday. ₹10,000 upwards; [fairmont.com](http://fairmont.com)

**THE OBEROI AMARVILAS, AGRA** Just 600 metres from the iconic symbol of love, Taj Mahal, this hotel spells romance the moment you walk into the Mughal-styled quadrant surrounded

**LE MÉRIDIEN MAHABALESHWAR RESORT & SPA** Hemmed in by dense evergreen forests of the Western Ghats, the resort is the perfect spot for an unhurried vacation. Spread over 27 acres, it is the only international hotel in Mahabaleshwar and ensures tranquility in the close quarters of nature. Their Serenity Suite is a haven of comfort with an outdoor shower to bathe under the sun or stars, and an exclusive spa massage bed for private massage treatments. The resort's three-hour couple package of body polish, Swedish massage, and European facial would definitely pamper you and your partner. Set out to explore the hill station, its wonderful waterfalls, temples and local markets peppered around the property—the Unlock Destination programme is a signature Méridien experience that allows guest to discover local gems. Go trekking, horseback riding, boating, and fishing; or visit a strawberry farm when you're here. ₹13,000 upwards; [lemeridienmahabaleshwar.com](http://lemeridienmahabaleshwar.com)

COURTESY OF FAIRMONT



From above: The Glenburn Tea Estate in Darjeeling is a cosy abode; a tea trail is a must-have experience in Darjeeling. Opposite: The Fairmont Jaipur.



DAVE PATTISON/ALAMY; GAVIN GOUGH/GETTY IMAGES

**GLENBURN TEA ESTATE, DARJEELING** A colonial planter's bungalow built by the Scottish tea company in 1859, this tea plantation retreat overlooks the Kanchenjunga mountain range. Guests can wake up to the magnificent views of the rolling tea fields enveloped in mist and a sunrise over Mount Kanchenjunga. Go hiking, bird watching, or set out on a tea trail and sight colourful butterflies. The natural surroundings attract a variety of birds and are a treat for bird watchers. A picnic in the tea gardens, roasting marshmallows in the bonfire, and river rafting on the Teesta are some of the experiences to enjoy with your partner. Local dishes, Indian fare, South East Asian specialities and European dishes are produced in their kitchen. Try the tea-leaf *pakor*s, chocolate brownies, Tibetan momos, and Burmese khow suey served with a Glenburn touch. Hiking with a resident naturalist through the Simbong Forest area to enjoy the mesmerizing views of Sikkim is a must-do. A Darjeeling Green Tea Oil massage followed by a Green Tea Bath Soak is invigorating and a perfect end to a day of hiking. ₹22,000 upwards; [glenburnteaestate.com](http://glenburnteaestate.com)



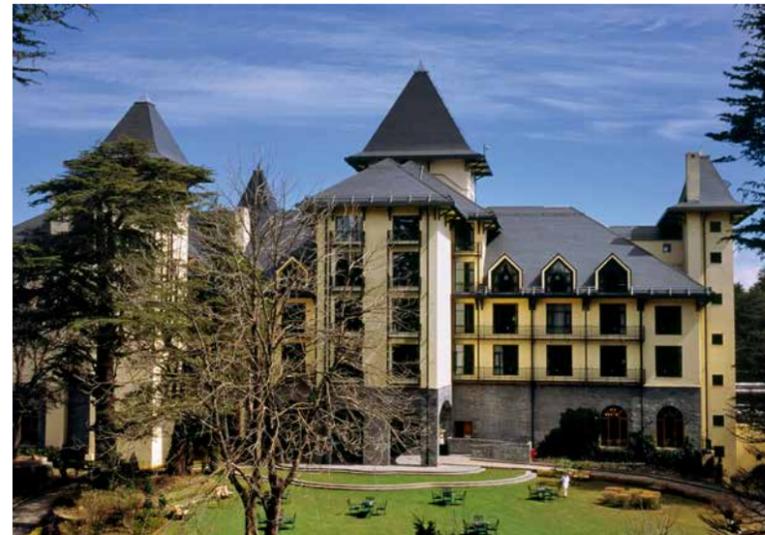
From above: Inside a houseboat at Butt's Clermont; The Lalit Resort & Spa in Bekal is a green paradise. Opposite: Wildflower Hall in Shimla.

**BUTT'S CLERMONT HOUSEBOATS, SRINAGAR** Moored in a secluded location on the Dal Lake surrounded by snowcapped mountains, the view from the five houseboats of Butt's Clermont is breathtaking. The hospitality and the charisma of the staff are noteworthy. Butt's Clermont houseboats have received many prominent guests over the years like the last Viceroy of India Lord Mountbatten, George Harrison of The Beatles, Michael Palin of BBC, US Senator John McCain, and numerous other state guests and ambassadors. Sunbath on the deck with a cup of *kahwa* (Kashmiri tea made of almonds, cardamom, and saffron)—it is very relaxing to watch exotic birds gliding in the skies. Step out of the houseboat and you could walk hand in hand with your partner through the Mughal garden, Naseem Bagh, lined with *chinar* trees; visit the floating market; go on a leisurely *shikara* ride; or buy beautiful Kashmiri handicrafts like the pashmina from the purveyors. ₹10,000 upwards; [buttsclermonthouseboat.com](http://buttsclermonthouseboat.com)

**BAREFOOT AT HAVELOCK ISLAND** In the midst of white sandy beaches and beautiful rainforests with exotic birds and



TRAVELIB INDIA/ALAMY; YASHAS CHANDRA



## THE WILDFLOWER HALL IN SHIMLA IS NESTLED AMIDST CEDAR AND PINE FORESTS WITH MESMERISING VIEWS OF THE MIGHTY HIMALAYAS.

restaurant, guests can blend and roast their own coffee at the Custom Coffee section. This blend can be carried back home as a testament to your coffee making skills. ₹18,000 upwards; [thetamara.com](http://thetamara.com)

**WILDFLOWER HALL, SHIMLA** Nestled amidst 20 acres of cedar and pine forest with mesmerising views of the mighty Himalayas, this resort is situated in the summer capital of British Raj, Shimla. Once Lord Kitchener's home, it is now run by The Oberoi Group. Winding roads will take you to this resort that sits daintily at Chharabra, a little away from the bustle of the hill station. An hour's walk along the strawberry trail through the greenery and fresh mountain air that ends with a breakfast at a picnic spot is truly revitalising. A romantic candlelit dinner (a five-course meal) in a hillside gazebo served by a personal waiter and cooked live by a dedicated chef is indeed one of those experiences that shouldn't be missed. Also take a two-and-a-half hour bicycle ride from the hotel to the Sutlej River through the enchanting countryside or book the Romance of Wildflower Hall experience, which is all about Ayurvedic therapies. If you are interested to know about the history of Shimla in the British Era, embark on the Colonial Heritage Tour conducted by the resort that will take you to visit sites such as the Viceregal Lodge, Gorton Castle, St Michael's Cathedral, and the Mall Road. ₹21,000 upwards; [oberoihotels.com](http://oberoihotels.com)

animals, stands the Barefoot resort on the pristine Beach No 7 of Andaman Islands. This eco-friendly resort made of environmentally-sensitive and indigenous materials like bamboo, wood, and palm leaves features a variety of villas and tented cottages. The philosophy of the Oma Spa at the resort is back to earth wellness and beautification. Their different therapies work on the physical and psychological levels and the Oma signature coffee massage, coffee scrub and coffee facial, work magic on your skin. Head to the waters with your partner for diving, snorkeling, and kayaking—the underwater world with tropical reef fishes, and coral formations would definitely enchant you. Breathe in the fresh air and explore the beautiful islands, and savour the international delicacies cooked by the chefs at the resort's restaurant with fresh seafood from the waters. ₹13,500 upwards; [barefoot-andaman.com](http://barefoot-andaman.com)

**THE TAMARA, COORG** This paradise amidst greenery and sun-dappled mountains features spacious cottages with spectacular views and private sun decks. The Eden Lotus cottage with a Jacuzzi on the sun deck offers panoramic views and utter seclusion—it is the perfect spot to soak in the sun with a cup of coffee or book in hand. A guided tour of the coffee plantation with cardamom, pepper vines, and rosewood trees with a large variety of birds filling the air with their songs, is an experience that is bound to make you feel closer to nature. Watching the feathered beauties take flight; practise yoga in the surreal surroundings under the guidance of their resident facilitator; or pamper yourself and your better half with rejuvenating treatments at The Elevation - Studio Spa. The open barbeque deck at their Falls restaurant offers multi-course meals with vegetables sourced from their organic garden. At the Verandah

PANORAMIC IMAGES/GETTYIMAGES

**THE LALIT RESORT & SPA, BEKAL** In the tropical paradise of Kerala, the Lalit Resort in Bekal is an ultimate spa destination. It is surrounded by River Nombilli on three sides and is truly located in the lap of nature. With 37 suites, a Presidential suite, and a *Kettuvallom* (house boat), the resort offers a wide range of choices for its guests. The houseboat, or floating cottage, has separate living and dining spaces with a sit out and sun deck area. Watching the sun set from its deck as the sky turns a riot of colours would be one of the most memorable experiences on this holiday. The resort provides Ayurvedic and international beauty therapies besides Rejuvenation, Detox and Weight management programmes. For an enchanting cultural experience of Kerala, you can witness traditional dance performances like Theyyam, Yakshgana, Mohiniyattam, Bharatanatyam, and Kathakali at the resort. ₹15,000 upwards; [thelalit.com](http://thelalit.com) ■