

HALCYON DAYS

ENJOYING THE HEALING POWERS OF A SPECTACULAR VIEW | BY NEHA DARA



There's something therapeutic about a great view. It makes my mind relax, all my worries fall away, and only the present matters. My stay at Itmenaan Estate, a hotel located in the one-lane village of Chalni Chheena in Uttarakhand, was about such a view. A short, steep downhill hike from the village leads to the 10-acre estate's restored century-old Kumaoni house. Perched on a mountainside, it overlooks cascading slopes draped with pine trees and terraced green fields.

Over two days, I felt restored by that unhindered vista—not barred by high-rise buildings, electricity poles, or a tumult of vehicles. Each morning, the sun coaxed away dawn's misty veil, revealing the snow-brushed Nanda Devi and Trishul peaks. As the day wore on, different shades of green appeared as far as the eye could see. Plumes of smoke rose up from a faraway village, and the mooing of cattle and chime of a temple bell carried in the wind. At night, distant ridges lit up with clusters of light, revealing the locations of little villages.

A friendly mutt accompanied us on a short hike to a little stream. He'd run ahead, patiently wait for us to catch up, and then lead us along the path. It was one of a number of trails in and around the

Estate perfect for 2 to 4-hour hikes. For those who like longer treks, Itmenaan organises village walks with overnight stays in village homes.

When the evening grew cool, retreating into the stone house was a delight. Its walls are built by tightly dry-stacking stones, while the pinewood roof is layered with slate. Even when it's cold and windy outside, it is cosy enough to strip down to a

T-shirt indoors. Rooms are comfortably and simply furnished, while bathrooms are spacious, with high skylights that let in the sunshine during the day.

Most staff hail from nearby villages and share a wealth of local knowledge. Their warm, unassuming service made me feel at home. Set meals are served al fresco in garden-facing terraces,

and chef Navin Adhikari rustles up delicious dishes using fresh, local ingredients. His repertoire includes traditional Kumaoni, North Indian, and Western cuisines. I particularly enjoyed his *bhat dupka*, a delicious curd based dal preparation of the Kumaoni *bhat*, a locally grown lentil.

Itmenaan is a wonderful Urdu word that means much more than a simple translation can explain. It's about a sense of peaceful ease that is best understood with a stay at this gorgeous spot. ●



MOUNTAINS



ROMANTIC



THE VITALS

Accommodation Itmenaan Estate has three rooms in the restored Kumaoni house and a duplex in Deodar Cottage, which is a new structure built in traditional style. (98187 05508; itmenaanlodes.com; doubles from ₹6,630, including breakfast and all taxes; meals ₹537 per meal per head).

Getting There

Itmenaan Estate is in Chalni Chheena village in Uttarakhand's Almora district. It is 375 km/9 hr northeast of Delhi and 72 km/2 hr northeast of Bhimtal. The closest major railway station is Kathgodam (91 km/2.5 hr away), which is connected with Delhi by a daily Shatabdi train. Pantnagar is the closest airport (125 km/3 hr).