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A COTTAGE OF ONE'S OWN

Taradale Cottage, Ramgarh



If you are one of those lucky people who have a home tucked away in the hills, well, congratulations. For the rest of us there is Taradale Cottage. Situated in Ramgarh, in Kumaon's 'fruit bowl', the grey and white stucco façade of this secluded two-storey cottage, with sloping tin roofs, bay windows fringed with flower beds and balconies replete with Victorian trims is reminiscent of the classic British hill home. Facing the Panchchuli peaks, the cottage is surrounded by apple, peach and apricot orchards which merge into the forest of pine and oak below. The interior spaces are strewn with period furniture and antique bric-à-brac. The strongest sense I have by hour three in this place is that this is not just another boutique property done up with faux period objets d'art but a real home that's been thrown open for those desperate for some rest and relaxation in beautiful surroundings. Christened after the aristocrat and diplomat Major General Tara Singh Bal, Taradale is owned by his son Brigadier Amarjeet Singh Bal. Old black-and-white framed prints of the General receiving various salutations and awards, with various dignitaries, a tiger kill and a fox hunt are some of the photos that line the atrium wall along the teakwood staircase.



The foyer, games-cum-dining room and parlour along with a room reserved for the family occupy the lower floor while five en suite doubles, including a charming one in the attic, constitute the second level. All rooms have high wood-panelled ceilings, fireplaces (not in use now for safety reasons, heater and hot water bottle instead) and ancestral antiques. The only renovation Taradale went through when it came under the ITC WelcomHeritage banner was refurbishing, modern loos and training in hotel management imparted to seven local Kumaonis at the chain's hotel in Bhopal. Brig Bal wasn't around when I visited, but the staff coped rather well with their newfound employment. The service was efficient, the staff polite and discreet, the linen squeaky clean.



Meals are served buffet style or à la carte depending on occupancy, with a five-day rotating menu switching between Indian and Continental, with special menus for fussy younger guests. Though the visitor's book is full of praise for the food I would rate it as no more than good North Indian and an in-between Continental. And I would have been better pleased with some Kumaoni fare on the menu.

The cottage is non-smoking but guests may smoke outside and are advised to bring their own liquor. For those who can't live without their daily dose of television, there's one in the parlour but none in the rooms—but do refrain!

Situated at a short three-minute walk from the road, Taradale is a quiet spot. The only sounds are those of tinkling wind chimes and the grandfather clock that sounds a rich gong on the hour. If you really must do something, peer through the old 20x telescope, pick a book from the library or take a walk to Tagore Top leading into the dense Maiskhan forest. Taradale gives you a lovely opportunity to come here with friends and family and luxuriate in a hill home without actually owning one.

—Ahtushi Deshpande

THE INFORMATION

LOCATION PWD Rest House Road, Village Bohrakot, Malla Ramgarh, Dist Nainital, Uttarakhand (325km from Delhi)

ACCOMMODATION Six double rooms

TARIFF Introductory offer of Rs 6,000 for 2N/3D in double room with kids below six free.

INCLUDES breakfast and one meal. Valid till March 2008. Or Rs 2,700 per double on MAP.

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