

15 Trip Ideas For The Entire Family

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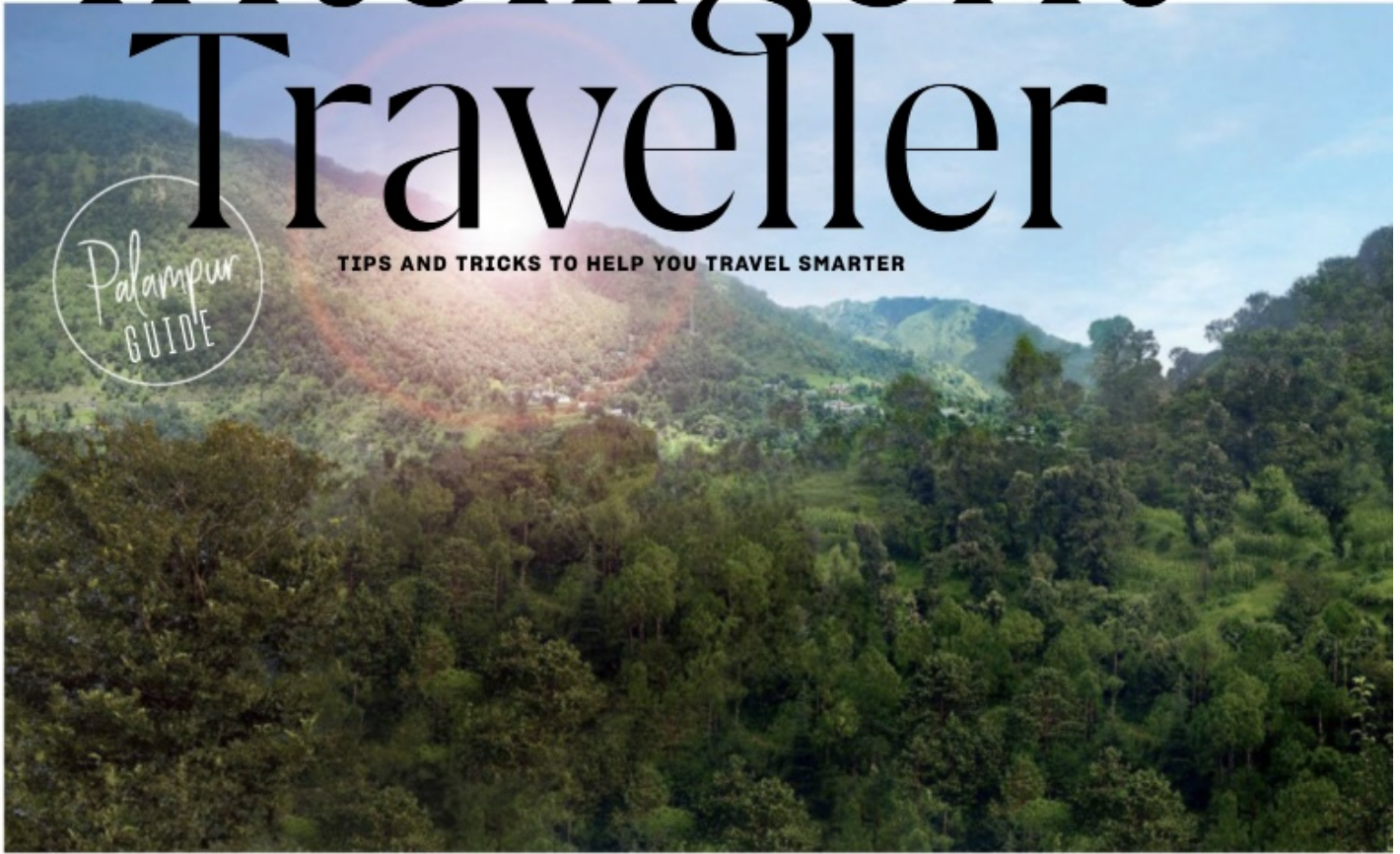


*Travel + Leisure*  
*India & South Asia*

# The Intelligent Traveller

Palampur  
GUIDE

TIPS AND TRICKS TO HELP YOU TRAVEL SMARTER





# MOUNTAIN HIGH

On a weekend getaway to Palampur, **RASHIMA NAGPAL** ventures into the heart of the beautiful hill station nestled in the Kangra Valley of Himachal Pradesh and finds a destination fit for the entire family.



COURTESY OF ARAIYA PALAMPUK 132

IT TAKES A 10-HOUR DRIVE from Delhi to reach but Palampur is worth the wait. The sun has set by the time I arrive at Araiya Palampur - A Norwood Heights Resort. I hear nothing but the silence of the mountains surrounding the sleepy little village of Kandi, where the 25-room boutique resort is set. With a deluxe suite perched at the far end of the 2.7-acre property, I feel blissfully away from the clutches of city life. Not from creature comforts, though.

My chic suite flaunts European and Victorian influences, with artsy portraits of Prague and delicate chandeliers hanging in the living room. The bedroom is spacious yet cosy. And the views that greet me in the morning are a treat—I can see the Dhauladhar range from my bedroom window, the living room balcony, and the patio in front of my room. The golden hour adds magic to the snow-capped peaks. I simply stand there for a few minutes, gazing at the mountains and wondering how long they've stood there. I see the goats of the village are up and about. So, I get going too, for a day full of adventures.

There's more to Palampur than tea estates, and the resort does a good job of showing its guests around. There is a wide range of activities on the portfolio of Araiya Experiences. From active excursions and cultural immersions to soulful experiences of self-discovery, there is something for everybody. The property has partnered with local experience provider Himalayan Adrenaline ([himalayanadrenaline.com](http://himalayanadrenaline.com)), which curates an array of activities for adventure enthusiasts. They run a huge, private ATV park in Palampur, where you can easily spend a day off-roading through curvy forest trails with family or friends. They also have dedicated spaces for paintball, archery, and a suspended rope-bridge trail.

◀  
*Clockwise: Araiya Palampur has an all-day dining restaurant and a bar; the rooms are chic with European and Victorian influences; the 25-room boutique resort is set in the village of Kandi in Palampur, Himachal Pradesh.*





4

Late theatre artiste Norah Richard's home in the village of Andretta. Below: Palampur is known for its tea estates.

If you're a cycling enthusiast, get hold of one of their mountain bikes and sign up for a guided trail through tea gardens, forests, and temples. Giving a thrilling spin to conventional tea tours, they organise jeep safaris with a pit stop at a tea factory—this is what I sign up for. I land at their cafe cum office space, nestled between tea estates in the Thakurdwara neighbourhood of Palampur. I find a group of local youths, who work for Himalayan Adrenaline, and a dog waiting for me. Before the safari

begins, they treat me to a traditional Kangri *dham*. For the uninitiated, a Kangri *dham* is a feast of local dishes that are usually prepared for an auspicious occasion such as a wedding, or as prasad in temples. It is marked by an array of curd-based dishes—I relish rich curries of kidney beans and chickpeas, a thick dal, *kadhi*, and a tangy tamarind-based preparation with black gram (called *khatta*), served with rice on a brass *thali*.

After the wholesome meal on a cold winter afternoon, it is time to

get my feet dirty. I hop on to an open jeep that snakes past endless beds of tea plants (*camellia sinensis*) and takes me to the heart of Raipur Tea Estate. In the middle of the 150-year-old tea estate lies the Himalayan Brew Tea Factory, which makes a variety of black and green teas. Unlike the relatively popular teas of Assam and Darjeeling that are produced with the more common CTC (crush, tear, curl) method, Kangra Tea is processed in four steps, namely withering, rolling, fermentation, and drying. Hence, the final product retains the look of dried tea leaves rather than the granular form of CTC tea. In terms of flavour, Kangra Tea is more subtle. At the tea factory, I am taken on a tasting tour of some of their bestsellers. I sample refreshing green teas with undertones







▲ From left: Shubham Sankhyan helms the historic Andretta Pottery studio in Palampur; a trip to the hill station is incomplete without Kangri dham, a feast of traditional dishes.



#### GETTING THERE

The nearest domestic airport is Kangra Airport, also known as Dharamshala or Gaggal Airport, 12 kilometres from Dharamshala and an hour's drive from Palampur. **Air India** ([airindia.in](http://airindia.in)) and **SpiceJet** ([spicejet.com](http://spicejet.com)) have direct flights from Delhi and connecting flights from Mumbai. Road-trip enthusiasts can hit the road from Delhi and reach Palampur via Anandpur Sahib; the journey takes about 10 hours.

#### STAY

**Araiya Palampur - A Norwood Heights Resort**, set in a sylvan setting in the village of Kandri, is a new boutique resort that makes for a beautiful stay complete with modern comforts. Starts from ₹7,800 per night; [araiyahotels.com](http://araiyahotels.com)

of rose, hibiscus, mango, and lemongrass, and my first cup of a freshly brewed orange pekoe. After seven odd cups, I expect to feel some effects. But to my surprise, there are none. I am told that Himalayan Brew teas have little to no caffeine. The drive ahead does what the tea couldn't. With a bright blue sky with wisps of clouds overhead, I am whizzed past bumpy, steep trails through lush greenery, holding on to dear life, to arrive at a vantage point within the estate that induces a mesmerising kind of high.

If you are in Palampur and staying at Araiya, you must sign up for a visit to Andretta, which is an hour's drive from the resort. This small village was established as an artist's colony back in the 1920s, with the arrival of late Irish theatre artiste Norah Richards. Owing to her immense contribution to Punjabi literature and the region, her old mudhouse-like home in Andretta has been preserved lovingly. Famous 20<sup>th</sup>-century painter Sardar Sobha Singh, a good friend of Richards, also belonged to Andretta, and travellers can visit his old house and art gallery-turned-museum as well. One of their contemporaries and closest friends was Sardar Gurcharan Singh, a Srinagar-born geologist who went on to become the father of studio pottery in India. His work led to the beginning of Andretta Pottery ([andretta-pottery.business.site](http://andretta-pottery.business.site)), one of India's oldest working pottery studios, established and developed by his son Mansimran Singh and his wife Mary in 1983. A

close friend of Mansimran Singh, Jugal Kishore Sankhyan, joined hands with them and dedicated his life to the art of pottery until his demise five years ago. Since then, Andretta Pottery has been managed by his son, Shubham Sankhyan, who left aeronautical engineering to carry on his father's legacy. In an unassuming, rustic setting that includes a handful of small rooms and a shed for potters and their wheels, Andretta Pottery takes pride in each piece it makes. What makes it stand out from other pottery studios in India is a special 1,000-year-old technique called slip designing, where diluted clay is used to create unique patterns. I find myself spoilt for choice, browsing through bowls, plates, mugs, and dervishes (Sankhyan loves making these). With a touch of modern glaze—rusty red, cobalt blue, pepper grey, lavender—Andretta's clay now travels the world.

After a long but insightful day, a deep-tissue massage at the Araiya Spa, followed by a restful night's sleep, feels like heaven. It has just begun to feel like my own little mountain home, when it's time to leave—with a bag full of Andretta's pottery and Kangra's tea. ✦