

VOGUE

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Deepika

**Onwards
and Upwards**



ALL THE WAY UP

The women of Sitara hand-pick the flowers that end up in beautiful displays all over the 10-room property in the Himalayas

pale blue and unfettered 360-degree views of the mountains, I felt like the bridle around my head and heart had been released. I was floating. I could see clearly. I felt love.

Anita Lal is not a hotelier and you cannot find Sitara on Instagram. Quite frankly, there's a chance you may not even get into the exquisite 10-room property. This is not a place for brash group events or unruly children. If you want big-screen TVs or a stale margherita pizza at 2am, in the politest possible way, you are not welcome.

At Sitara, Lal is welcoming you into her home. This land is one she has been coming to for decades; her residence, where she designs the Good Earth pieces we'll be coveting in due course, is a stone's throw away. Sitara isn't simply an extension of her creative vision but, in my opinion, her love for India itself.

I too fell in love with India over and over again at Sitara. The rooms are cocooned in deep blue and claret Banarasi silk wallpaper. There are copper balis in the bathroom to fill with hot, mineral-rich mountain water to bathe. There is an oil for the morning and an oil at your bedside to help you sleep. Tables are artfully set with a rotating curation of Good Earth linens and tableware past and present, a scene which is always inspired by the mood of the mountains that day—from crisp sunlight dancing off tinted glasses in the morning to the amber glow of candelabras flickering on your negroni as the clouds roll in dramatically.

In many ways, Sitara is forged in the spirit of Anita Lal and her daughter Simran Lal coming together. I've visited twice now in the span of a few months and it's a place I will keep coming to (I hope to bring my mother next). This duality of the outward offering of a distinctly Indian brand of warmth and the studied inward reflection of the soul is a thread that can be woven through all my experiences, from deeply inhaling the fragrance of the flowers and the aroma of the food to being treated to restorative

The Holy Mountain

What is it about looking at nature's striking panorama straight in the eye that puts the world into perspective for even the most stolid among us? Elevated above the clouds at Sitara Himalaya, MEGHA KAPOOR finds the answer

IN THE SPIRITUAL cradle of the Himalayas, some 8,500 feet above sea level, I came to, soaked in tears. A gentle woman by the name of Ms Naveen Chauhan (healer, wellness practitioner, wizard) had just guided me through a sequence

of stretching, marma therapy and reiki. She looked down at me with a knowing smile and handed me some tissues and cool water in a silver cup.

Sitting up in Sitara Himalaya's elegant Paro Svasthi spa, with its tonal accents in





POSTCARD PERFECT

Snapshots from Sitara Himalaya paint a lovely picture of a time spent slowing down and washing city life off one's mind and body

healing practices. Have you ever seen hollyhocks as tall as buildings or hydrangeas that could eclipse a puppy? Each morning, the women of Sitara head out with their baskets and scissors to hand-pick the flowers that will end up in vivid displays dotting the property. Apparently, the soil here is so rich that everything just grows, well, better.

A passionate young chef by the name of Aman Singhal heads the kitchen under Lal's guidance—a testament to her knack for attracting talent. His food is seasonal, healthy and stylish. Whether you've missed lunch (a true tragedy) and he's fixed you a snack of some version of an avocado toast that even an Australian like me has never experienced (an anomaly

VIEW FOR THOUGHT

The Starlight room is designed for guests to kick back and gaze at the cosmos through the glass roof

considering Australia is the spiritual homeland of the avocado toast), or you are sitting down to chaat elevated in a stunning silver thali to dizzying heights, sustenance at Sitara is a heavenly affair. There's pani puri, dahi vada, aloo tikki and channa bhatura to be washed down with cool goblets of chaas. Pure love. Don't come to lose weight.

The alchemy of this place and the treatments provided within the walls of the Svasthi are akin to those life-altering experiences one seeks in life. As a longtime editor who has been—without a hint of hyperbole—kneaded and slathered by the best, this place is on another level. In a way, one has to respect the power of the practices on offer: on my first visit, I sat with a friend after she had spent an afternoon at Svasthi and she wept. “I miss my mother,” she said. “She would have loved it here. I feel her here.” As one walks up the stone steps to Svasthi, there is a beautiful room with seating designed to stare up at the stars through a glass ceiling. It has fittingly been christened the Starlight room. Sitting here, Vijay Laxmi Goyal, a practitioner at Svasthi, reads my cards and takes me on meditative journeys to places I hadn't dared to go. At one point, Lal took us to the spot at the Rohtang Pass where Rishi Ved Vyas had sat for 12 years and canonicalised the four Vedas. It wasn't an ornate temple, but simple rocks and a water source in the mountains. Curious, and with no expectation or religious inclination, I got out of the car and was immediately hit with its power. Lal touched my shoulder in a gesture of unspoken understanding. These are experiences you can't find on any spa menu.

In an industry where notions of ‘luxury’ are constantly defined and redefined, if I were to try and describe it, it's that sweet spot where time—that most precious and rarest of resources—intersects with an experience that has the power to imprint on us. Like when a mountain can turn your soul to love. To travel is the greatest luxury of all.

