

MUMBAI'S LE SUTRA BINDS HOSPITALITY AND ART TO CREATE AN ARTISTIC GETAWAY

STROKES OF SPIRITUALITY



VINCENT & BAZ PAINT THE WALL

For the seriously well-travelled, the predictable five-star can seem so very stale. To break the monotony, taking the concept of the boutique hotel one step further is Le Sutra, an art hotel in Bandra in Mumbai.

Vintage yet contemporary, simple yet quirky, you don't have to be an artist or art connoisseur to enjoy the Le Sutra experience. Billed as the 'first Indian art hotel', there's much more to the property than merely paintings hanging on the walls. Every room has been used as a canvas, telling a story through a unique mix of paintings, frescos and artefacts.

In keeping with its name — *sutra* meaning thread — Le Sutra uses artwork as a tool to display some of India's history, culture and mythology to its guests.

A bright orange mural on the front wall greets you before you step into the hotel. There's more than one reason to take a quick look again at this work, for it was painted by *Moulin Rouge*-maker Baz Luhrmann when he visited with his painter friend Vincent Fantauzzo early this year. Le Sutra was unveiled on January 19 with a live painting of the mural by the two Australian stars with help from children from a local NGO.

HANDCRAFTED

More than a hundred designers, artists, curators and visualisers from a range of disciplines — installation, video and fine arts appointed from the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad and Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in Mumbai — are behind the transformation of the 30-year-old property that was previously known as Hotel Pali Hills.

The address is home to two favourite Mumbai restaurants — Out of the Blue and Olive Bar & Kitchen — within easy reach as you step out of the foyer.

"It took us three years to conceptualise and execute the project. In the recent past the industry has moved from boutique to personalised hotels and we think Le Sutra is an evolved option for those looking for newer experiences," feels Mitali Bajaj, whose family owns the



DYUUTA ROOM MODELLED ON CHESS

hotel. "The hotel is targeted at individual travellers on business or leisure trips. We're also looking at tie-ups with corporate houses. The art theme we feel could be very rejuvenating for those on business," she adds.

WALK THROUGH

The tone of your stay is set as you traverse the various levels of the hotel, beginning in the foyer and unfolding in each of the 16 rooms, with stories that fit the larger narrative.

A walk through the hotel's five levels has been designed as a spiritual ride. The reception, with its grey shades and abstract decor, bears a coiled lamp with steel tentacles and a glass table resting on a twisted spine of tiny human figurines, striking a balance between art and kitsch.

A decidedly literal interpretation of Indian mythology awaits you in the elevator, with an opening revealing an art installation of a snake winding its way up through all the floors. "It's the *kundalini* rising up the seven chakras or energy centres in the body. It represents the experience of climbing the ladder of spiritual awakening," explains Mitali.

The first floor Tamas that is still being completed promises to be a portrait of opulence and sensuality while the second floor, called Rajas

and with splashes of red and gold, is designed to project a regal charm. The third or Sattva level with more minimal rooms in pale shades stands in sharp contrast to the dark and passionate colours of the floors below.

The subtle compositions help the rooms retain their stately or dramatic charm without becoming too imposing. And the rooms pack in all the luxuries expected from a top-end hotel, offering comforts including personalised butler service, wi-fi and interactive television.

With all rooms tagged at Rs 9,200 per night, guests can pick any floor or chamber to match their mood. "To make their stay a memorable one, we'd like to hand out memorabilia such as a yoga *danda* stick, *khadau* (wooden chappals) or a *rudraksha* to our guests, depending on the theme of their floor," adds Mitali.

ROOMS WITH A VIEW

Every floor personifies a *guna* (character trait), making each room distinctly different. Shringar portrays the aura of a woman's face with a large *nathni* lamp mounted on one side of the wall, facing a giant red bindi on the other. Dyuuta reflects the royal pastimes of the rajas with a *chaupar* on the wall, chequered chessboard, knots-and-crosses artwork outside the room's window



KARNA ROOM WITH WHEELCHAIR



NIRVAN ROOM WITH FRESCO & STUPA CHAIR

and bedposts in the shape of a horse's head.

The narrow staircase and corridors make it easy to forget that you are still in Mumbai, with names for rooms such as Prakriti, Shuddhi, Nirvan or Mandala adding to the calm and tranquil charm.

Don't miss the wooden basins, leaf-encrusted headboards, cottonseed cupboards or *khadaus* on the bathroom walls. Adding a whimsical touch are art installations outside the windows of some rooms, especially one with colourful birds perched on a living tree. Make time to linger at the study desk where you can sit on unusually-shaped chairs — a blue peacock, a chariot wheel, a *sarangi*, a lotus — that chronicle the theme of each room.

Finally, watch out for Gallery Le Sutra, an art space on the third floor that can open up to the sky and showcase works of art and sculpture. "Although none of the artworks on display in the hotel are on sale, we'll have exhibitions from time to time," signs off Mitali.

Mohua Das

Which is your favourite hotel? Tell t2@abpmail.com