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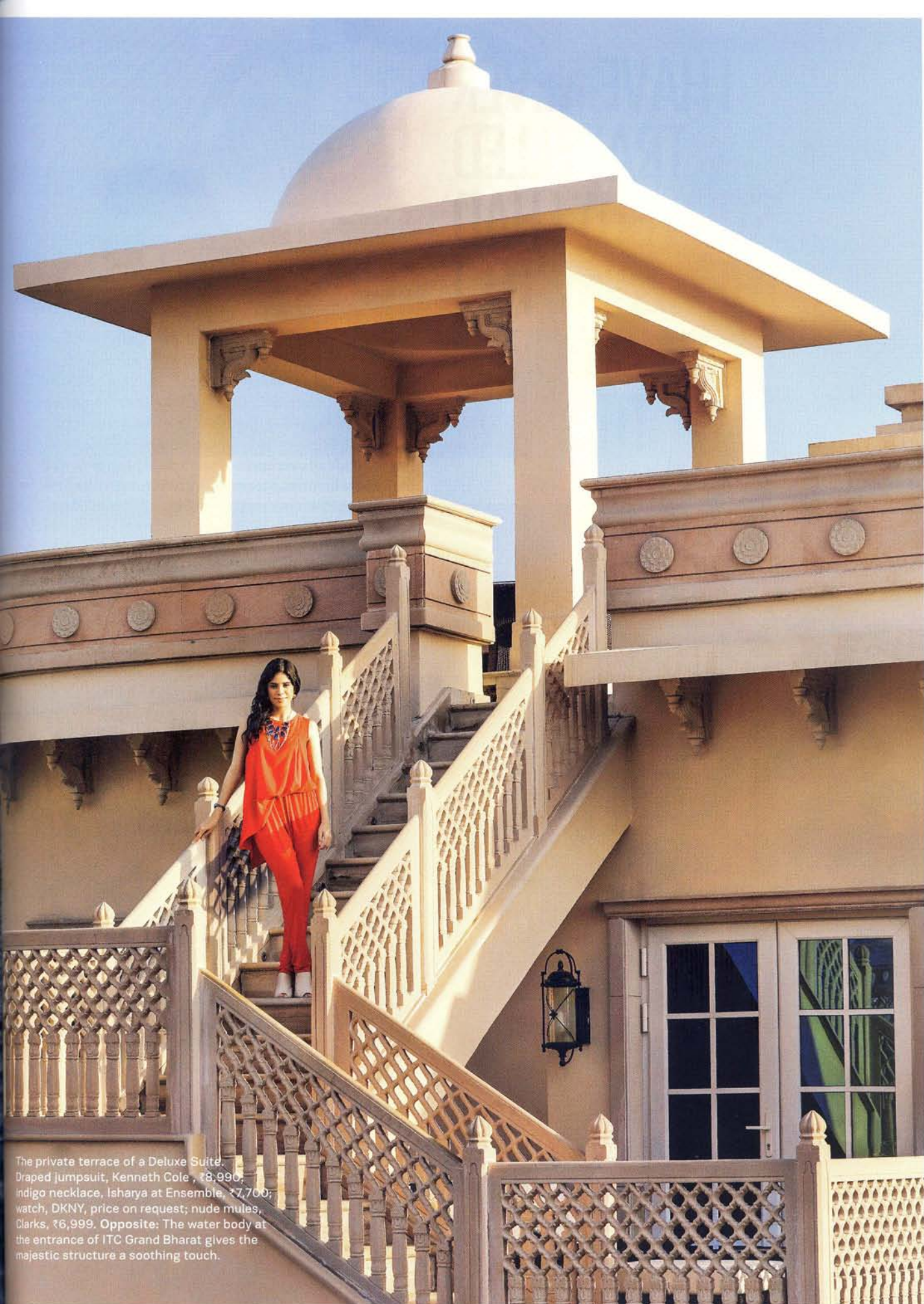
A photograph of a grand, classical-style building with a long colonnade of columns and a fountain in the foreground. The building is made of light-colored stone or concrete, with ornate capitals and a series of arches. The fountain in the foreground has several jets of water spraying upwards. The sky is clear and blue.

A SUITE TREAT FOR YOU

A FIRST-TIME SOLO TRAVELLER TAKES THE
LUXURIOUS ROUTE INTO THE WORLD OF
SINGULAR ADVENTURES AND EXPERIENCES.

BY AROMA SAH ANANT. PHOTOGRAPHED BY AMIT SHARMA.
PRODUCED BY RAGINI SINGH.

STYLING: HAIR AND MAKEUP BY MANISHA PAUL KUMAR, JESSIE PATIL AND ANITA SHARMA. PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMIT SHARMA. PRODUCTION BY RAGINI SINGH. AND MANEN LONGUMER, ANJELI VECCHI, COURTNEY SULLIVAN, ANDERSON TAYLOR.



The private terrace of a Deluxe Suite. Draped jumpsuit, Kenneth Cole, ₹8,990; Indigo necklace, Isharya at Ensemble, ₹7,700; watch, DKNY, price on request; nude mules, Clarks, ₹6,999. Opposite: The water body at the entrance of ITC Grand Bharat gives the majestic structure a soothing touch.

I HAVE NEVER TRAVELLED SOLO BUT I HAD THE DESIRE TO. I HARBOURED THE SAME

apprehensions as any first timer, which is why the recently opened ITC Grand Bharat seemed like a comfortable choice—it was less than a two-hour drive from home, and didn't require too much planning. Sounded adventurous, while still within a familiar zone. As it soon turned out, the solo experience was like going through different phases of life all over again—I was a child pampered with impressive luxuries, a teenager with more activities lined up than could be undertaken in a day, and I emerged an adult appreciative of the singular experiences of life more than ever before.

Ready to be transported to the resort, I felt no less than a British earl's daughter, sitting in a spanking new Audi Q3 with a neatly-dressed chauffeur and a resort host (or butler, in common parlance) at my service—a tradition the resort is setting for all its guests.

The resort's ritual of a traditional welcome is precise—*chandan tikka* with garland and *aarti*. The lobby is beautifully scented and relaxing to the tired and wary soul.



The India Room with its regal setting. Opposite from left: The entrance lobby; a mouth-watering souffle during lunch.







From top: The Kaya Kalp spa at ITC Grand Bharat; special Forest Essentials amenities are provided for solo lady travellers under Eva Services at the resort. Opposite: The Deluxe Suite with a personalised pillow.

The décor is colourful with cushions with traditional patterns thrown on high-back chairs and comfy sofas. There is much to take in—from the unhindered view of the beautiful hills facing the resort as well as the palatial architecture with a beautifully-painted dome inside the lobby. The emphasis on Indian craftsmanship is evident in the woodwork, rich fabrics, marble flooring, wall hangings, and hand tufted carpets.

It was almost lunchtime and I was escorted to the India Room. The table card had my name on it and so did the menu—a small touch that made me feel special. Salad of Green Asparagus, Vidalia Onion Veloute, Sweet Pea Tortellini, and Minestrone Lasagne...a delectable spread for a vegetarian!

It is a fine dining restaurant and my window-side table has a perfect view of the Aravalis. Barely 45 kilometres from NCR but what lends ITC Grand Bharat a resort-like feel are the beautiful hills it sits amidst. While constructing the property, it was decided not to erect a wall at the entrance and mar the view. A smart decision as that's what kept me company at lunch. As I looked at nothing in particular, I could spot a village lady not too far away. It wasn't a busy afternoon at the restaurant and the chef told me all about local farmers who provide fresh produce to the restaurants at the resort, villagers who were given employment during construction, ways in which the resort is helping in the development of the area, and the sustainable farm within the resort premises growing a variety of herbs, vegetables, and grains.

A family of four arrives and the restaurant is filled with their lively chatter. I was amazed that even their arrival didn't make me feel out of place—I was thoroughly enjoying some me-time. My meals during the duration of my stay went from modern Indian cuisine at the Aravalli Pavilion to poolside marquee lounging (with *ghazals* playing in the background) at Apas Brasserie. But, the best of all experience was at the Peacock Bar. I didn't feel the need to occupy a table and found myself a barstool—the drinks would roll out quicker, I thought, and I could take a close look at the peacock mosaic above the bar cabinet. That's when I met Zac Abbott, the head bar chef. Conversations with the Aussie went from betting on the cricket world cup to the best hangouts nearby, his journeys, my travels, and many more conversations over the wonderful concoctions he'd keep putting in front of me. A standout was the Cigar Smoked Old Fashioned wherein he stirred the Glenlivet 15 Year Old French Oak Cask single malt with sweet orange bitters and then very skillfully blended it with the smoke from a Robusto cigar. Many drinks later, and I was sure I could recreate at least one of the cocktails with equal finesse (the notion was tossed away when one fine evening back home I found myself staring at a big mess; a valuable lesson was learnt).

My suite, with an elaborate living and dining space, a walk-in closet, a dressing room, separate shower and tub areas, is 70 square metres of pure elegance. The traditional divan in the room is well cushioned and ideal for settling in with a book—*Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand in my case—and for the occasional peek outside the window. In the living room, a handwritten note by Anand Rao, the general manager, is a touching gesture. I am happy to find in the living space



From left: Zac Abbott, the head bar chef, preparing the Cigar Smoked Old Fashioned at the Peacock Bar; way to the terrace suite. Opposite: Enjoying a drink at the bar. Ikat embroidered shift dress, Hemant and Nandita, price on request; earrings, Accessorize, ₹1999; ring, Silverline, ₹1,299; flats, Steve Madden, ₹4,500.



a coffee table book on Indian architecture, a basket of fresh fruits, and colourful Indian sweets. The bedside table has aromatherapy oils to ensure I have undisturbed sleep.

After a good night's sleep, the pool glistening in the morning sun seemed perfect for a quick dip. It is semi-private, I share it with guests in the adjoining suite. An hour in the private sit out deck and I'm ready to explore. Every guest is accompanied by a resort host who looks after all requirements, appointments, ferrying around, and everything else. I ring for Anshul Arora, my gracious host, who is ready with a buggy in no time. The resort also extends Eva services to its solo lady travellers—this includes amenities such as nail polish remover, nail file, de-tangling comb, and safety pins. More importantly, the suite is serviced by lady associates and a lady resort host.

Spread over 1.2 square kilometres with only 100 deluxe suites and four presidential villas, it is a massive estate with a variety of activities to its credit. The resort is built around the principles of slow tourism and unhurried luxury. I was a part of it, and wanted it to stay that way, which meant making a tough choice—the resort has too many activities and I had little time. Call me greedy but I wanted to make the most of it and do almost everything—take a spa therapy, go for a golfing lesson, enjoy a quiet picnic with the peacocks nearby, take a Segway tour, undertake adventure sports, go birdwatching and cycling, follow a nature trail, and plant a sapling in the organic garden. It required deliberation

but no compromise on what my heart desired most—it boiled down to the Segway, a golf lesson, and a spa treatment.

With no preoccupations on my mind, I had all the time in the world to learn a new skill and I chose golf. Arjun Bartwal, manager - marketing and golf operations at the resort, helped me pick the right club for my first lesson and off we went on the buggy to the golf course. ITC Grand Bharat is South Asia's only 27-hole signature Jack Nicklaus Golf Course with a golf academy for budding golfers. Bartwal enlightened me about the sport, taught me putting, and also the nuances that go into designing and maintaining a golf course—the internal irrigation system, the quality of grass, the bunkers, and what not. The golf course is also home to peacocks that wait for the sprinklers to go off before they step out for a prance, you can spot bald white eagles, and a variety of flora, too. The Segway tour was a thrill and after a day well spent under the sun, the evening demanded a relaxing therapy at Kaya Kalp.

Epitomising the ideals of India's rich heritage and culture, ITC's bespoke services coupled with varied experiences in a world-class ambience made it the perfect destination for a revelation. The feeling of being the daughter of an English earl faded by the time I reached home, what stayed on was a pillow with my name sewn on it (a token every guest receives from the resort) and more importantly, the spirit of travelling solo and the desire to take off again sometime soon.

ITC Grand Bharat, PO Hasanpur, Tauru, Mewat, Gurgaon; 91-1267/285-500; itchotels.in; doubles from ₹50,000 per night. +

AT THE PEACOCK BAR, I DIDN'T FEEL THE NEED TO OCCUPY A TABLE AND FOUND MYSELF A BARSTOOL—THE DRINKS WOULD ROLL OUT QUICKER, I THOUGHT.

