



Adler Hostel, Singapore

TOP
5

Posh Hostels

Backpacking in Asia doesn't have to mean contending with flimsy walls, minimal privacy and bedbug infestations. Jane Leung digs the new breed of crash pads.

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The entrance to Singapore's **ADLER HOSTEL** is a bit dated, but the rest of the place is much more contemporary. The roomy, 16-bed dorms come with thick satin privacy curtains and in-bunk light switches. www.adlerhostel.com

Taipei's **MANGO53 INN** – set in a renovated, 50-year-old townhouse – is worth spending a few nights in. The common room in the attic is a cosy spot in which to chat with new found friends. tel: +886 (0)9 8667 7837

Specially designed by the Hong Kong Government Home Affairs Bureau, **Y-LOFT** was built to promote youth development. Towards that end, this roomy hostel provides safe, comfy digs for backpackers. www.youthsquare.hk

The popular bar at **HANOI BACKPACKERS HOSTEL** is a handy icebreaker for those travelling solo. Beyond the appeal of holiday revelry, the en-suite rooms are elegant and the dorms are spacious. tel: +84 (0)4 393 5189

A tourist attraction in itself, the **SILOMART HOSTEL** is splashed with eccentric murals, collages, and plenty of quirk. Rice bag cushions, steal hammocks and chairs with artificial human feet are just a few of the surprises you'll find in this comfort zone. www.silomarthostel.com

OVERNIGHTER

Mysore, Karnataka

It may not wield the influence it once did, but this royal city remains one of India's most compelling destinations. Isabel Putinja relishes its grandeur

Though bustling and cosmopolitan Bangalore is the capital of Karnataka, the much smaller city of Mysore was once the centre of the Mysore Kingdom, which ruled a large part of South India for over 500 years. Today, Mysore's royal legacy lives on in its many majestic palaces and heritage buildings. This is a popular tourist destination, not only thanks to its splendid architecture, but also because of its pleasant, tree-lined streets, relaxed pace and Old World charm. The kingdom was ruled by the Wodeyars almost

without interruption from the 13th century until India's independence in 1947. Thanks to the royal family, Mysore is a planned city, with wide avenues and a modern sewage system. English-language education was introduced here in the early 1800s. The Mysore Kingdom was also the first region on the subcontinent to get electricity.

The Wodeyars were also patrons of the arts and, as a result, Mysore is Karnataka's cultural capital. It's also an important centre for yoga owing to the presence of the late K Pattabhi Jois' Ashtanga Yoga Institute, which draws foreign students in large numbers. Mysore's marquee event is the annual 10-day Dasara Festival,

which takes place in September or October.

WHAT TO DO

Amba Vilas Palace is Mysore's top attraction and remains the royal family's home. Built in the Indo-Saracenic style, which blends elements of Hindu and Moghul architecture with European gothic touches, it's one of India's most-visited sites. A total of 98,260 light bulbs illuminate the palace on Sundays, public holidays and during the Dasara Festival.

Thanks to its wide roads and well-maintained pavements, the best way to see Mysore is on foot. Royal Mysore Walks,

run by a team of locals who are passionate about the city's heritage, offers a variety of city walking tours. These take visitors not only to the city's many key monuments and heritage buildings, but also off the tourist trail, where it's possible to get a glimpse of the many different facets of local life. From the colourful stalls of 125-year-old Devaraja Market to the city's fading art deco cinemas, there's much to explore.

WHERE TO STAY

A former palace built for the Maharajah's three daughters, the Green Hotel has been tastefully restored and converted into a

heritage hotel. There are seven beautifully decorated rooms in the palace, with the Maharani suite being the most exclusive. The 24 rooms for travellers are more modest and set in an annex overlooking an exquisite flower garden. Other good reasons to stay at the Green Hotel include its eco-friendly approach to doing business: there's no air-conditioning (don't worry, it's not required), water is heated via solar panels and rainwater is harvested and reused. Also, all proceeds from the hotel's operations go to local charities. The charming indoor café, run by a women's collective, and garden restaurant add to the hotel's appeal.

FIND IT:

- The fastest and most comfortable way to travel is by train. The Shatabdi Express leaves Bangalore City railway station at 11am, arriving in Mysore two hours later.
- Royal Mysore Walks, tel: +91 (0)96 3204 4188, www.royalmysorewalks.com
- The Green Hotel, tel: +91 (0)821 425 5000, www.greenhotelindia.com

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

- 1 THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**
The majestic Puthenmalika Palace was built in the 18th century by the Maharaja of Travancore. The city has many other examples of Victorian and Indo-Saracenic architecture.
- 2 PHNOM PENH**
The Cambodian capital's broad boulevards are lined with many heritage buildings. The parks along the riverfront and the city's markets are particularly popular with visitors.

