

# Heritage n Hills

## —a reel world view

Agra and Kufri may be miles apart, but they share an uncanny link—the silver screen.

Text: Supriya Sehgal

*She is a freelance writer, and curator of Mint's 'Weekend Getaways' column.*

Though the lure of seeing the Taj Mahal on a misty morning remained undiminished, I also wanted to add parts of the old city of Agra to my itinerary. You see, a fleeting visit makes one miss the subtleties of the city's many hues. Contrary to what the 'Golden Triangle in a flash' itineraries would suggest, Agra offers so much more than the Mughal monuments along River Yamuna. While it is exciting to imagine how much wealth the royal coffers would have emptied on grand structures, an equal charm lies in the parts that look far from imposing.

I could not have found a better companion than Waseem Khan, as he pedalled me on his rickshaw through the slim lanes of Taj Ganj. I had arrived the same morning and climbed to the rooftop restaurant of my hotel, Sterling's Regal Vista, for a bird's-eye view. The city sprawled in colourful Lego-like blocks below me. The Taj rose from the labyrinth of these unexceptional buildings, occupying most of my camera memory. But now, bobbing along the narrow lanes on a rickety rickshaw, I was wedged right in the middle of this modest topography; however, I was way more

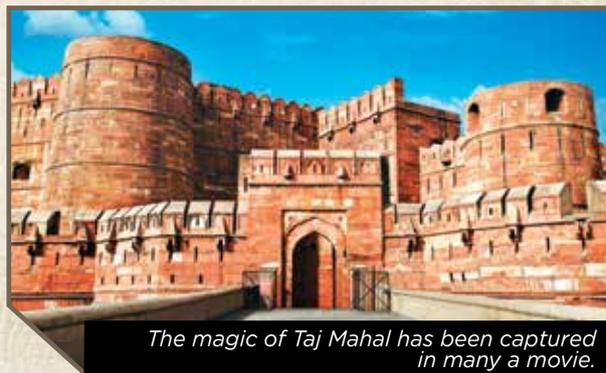
trigger-happy than in the morning. Each building seemed boundlessly characterful. The narrow lanes were like capillaries that made way through seemingly impenetrable swathes of old crumbling homes.

We stopped and climbed the terrace of one such home to survey the area from a vantage point. Waseem proclaimed how he was the first to spot Arjun Kapoor amongst the chaos of the shooting of the 2015 movie, *Tevar*, in this area. He wistfully remembered how he almost got a chance to be an extra on the set, but then missed it as he arrived late. He momentarily drifted into the world of glitz and glamour, but then snapped back with a fresh agenda for me. "Why don't I take you through all the places where Bollywood movies have been shot?" Now I am the most hesitating Bollywood student ever, but it seemed heartless to kill Waseem's idea. After all, I wanted to keep away from the expected itinerary and sure, this would allow me to have a filter that I never imagined.

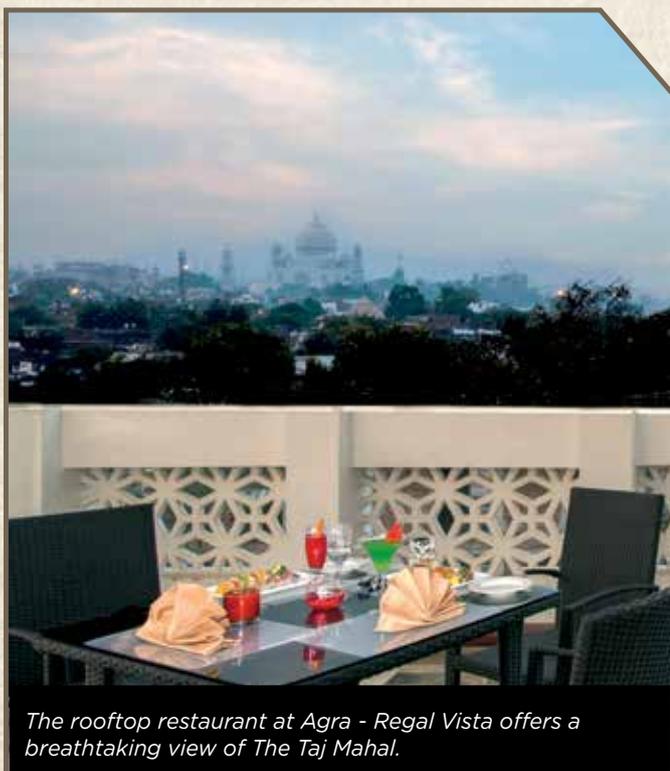
I would imagine that the Taj has been a celebrated backdrop to cement the commemoration of many a love story. Waseem corroborated that it was true for not only films like *Youngistaan*, starring Jackky Bhagnani and Neha Sharma, but also Hollywood blockbusters. No surprises there. We went about town

spotting buildings and hotels where actors had regaled local onlookers and stayed in Agra—*Ek Deewana Tha, Mere Brother Ki Dulhan, Yamla Pagla Deewana, Jhoom Barabar Jhoom*—the list went on. When I asked Waseem of his favourite film that had been shot in his city, "*Bunty aur Babli*," pat came the reply.

At the end of the day, when I flopped onto the comfortable bed at the hotel, the impact of Bollywood and its percolation in the minds of the people really began to sink in. Bollywood orientation must have etched a place in the recesses of my brain more than I imagined, as long after I had left Agra, I inadvertently started noticing some of the spots in the cities that flashed a familiar feeling. "I must have seen it in a movie," I would tell myself.



*The magic of Taj Mahal has been captured in many a movie.*



*The rooftop restaurant at Agra - Regal Vista offers a breathtaking view of The Taj Mahal.*

## AGRA

- Admire the picturesque view of the Taj Mahal while indulging in a delicious buffet spread at our rooftop restaurant, Zaica. Choose from a wide range of affordable meal packages and savour the flavours of India.
- Enjoy à la carte delectable dishes from across the world at our multi-cuisine restaurant.
- Open from 7am to 7pm, the swimming pool is the perfect place to splash around and have a fun family time.
- The in-room dining facility available 24 hours a day lets you relish a scrumptious meal.
- The holiday activities centre offers a thrilling experience for all age groups. One can play games—pool, carom, chess, table tennis, dot shooting, etc.—or choose from a variety of arts and crafts options, such as glass and canvas painting, and paper flower making, among others.
- There is a Kids Corner for our little guests.



**AGRA**  
REGAL VISTA  
a sterling holidays resort



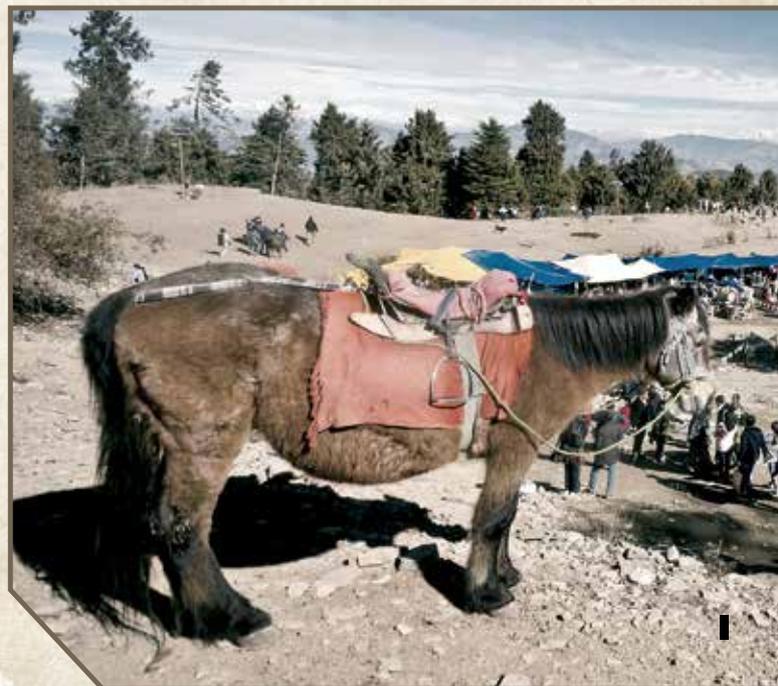
*Kufri, with its cool climes, is an ideal getaway.*

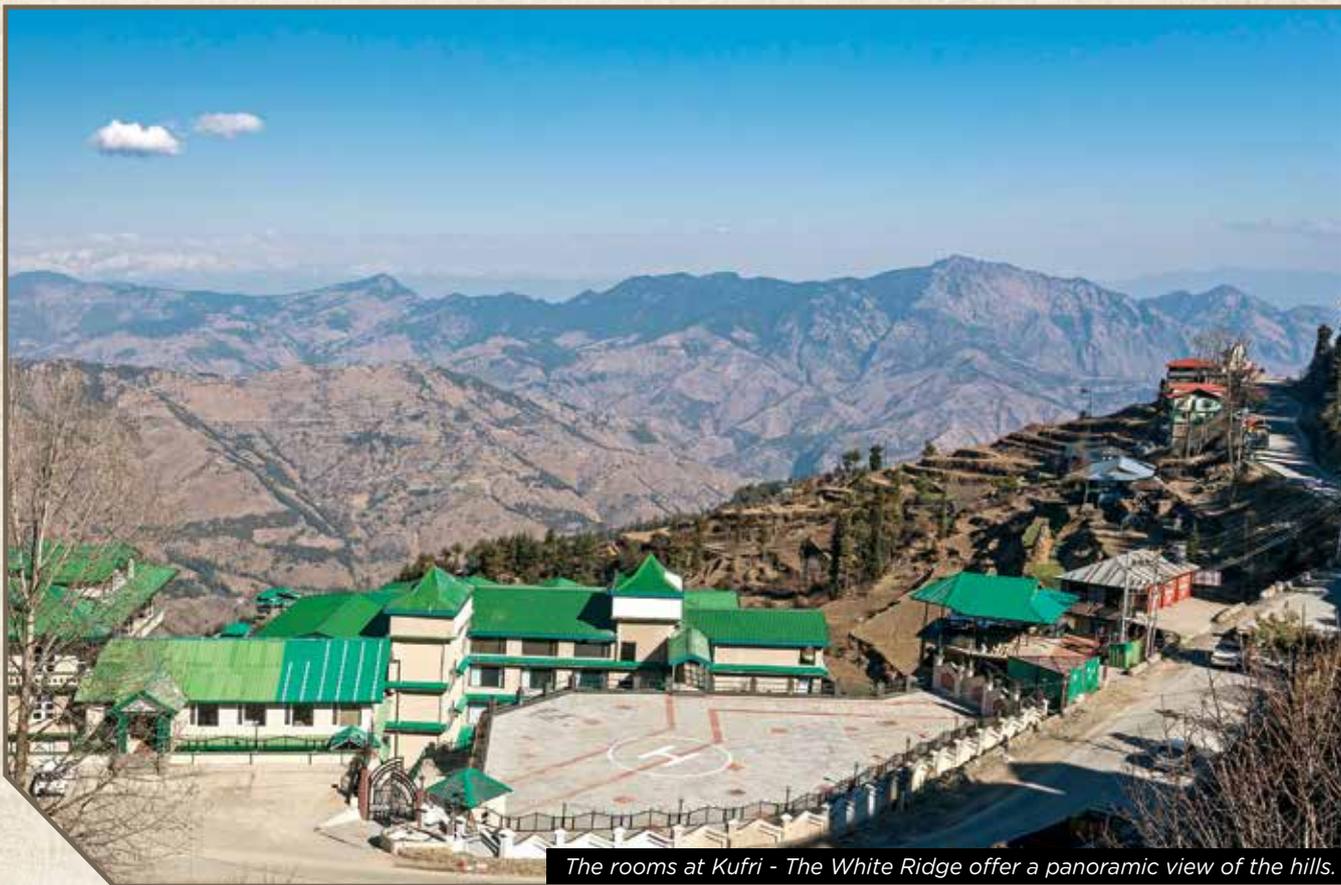
When the searing summers descended on the capital, it was time to rush to the hills. I chose Shimla and Kufri, over other lesser known destinations, to relive the memories of my childhood holidays. I settled in at Sterling's resort, Kufri - The White Ridge to stay at a safe distance from the throngs of crowd in Shimla, yet close enough to visit when I wanted to. Discovered by the British in 1819 as a veritable way to escape the plains in the summers, Kufri offers quieter confines in the company of hills. Though skiing, yak and horseback rides, and the highest go-karting facility in the country are a large draw for tourists in different seasons, there are plenty of nature walk trails that can occupy the more aloof travellers. I was out on one such trail by myself when I bumped into Ganga. He lay on a hill looking up at the sky with Tom Sawyer-esque abandon, whistling Bollywood numbers, while his yak munched on the green pastures, not glancing up even once to see who had intruded into their space. I must have huffed louder than I intended to, as it convulsed Ganga from his Zen-like bubble.

A cheery grin and an introduction followed soon. Ganga doubled up as a ski instructor in the winters, offered yak rides in the summers, and was the 'best guide in Shimla' by his own admission. Since I had another day in the town, he appointed himself as my guide who would show parts of the city that others did not know about. The next morning was nothing short of déjà vu when Ganga rattled off the films that had been shot in the region. *Bang Bang* was his favourite; *3 Idiots*, *Jab We Met*, and *Black* held equal sway for

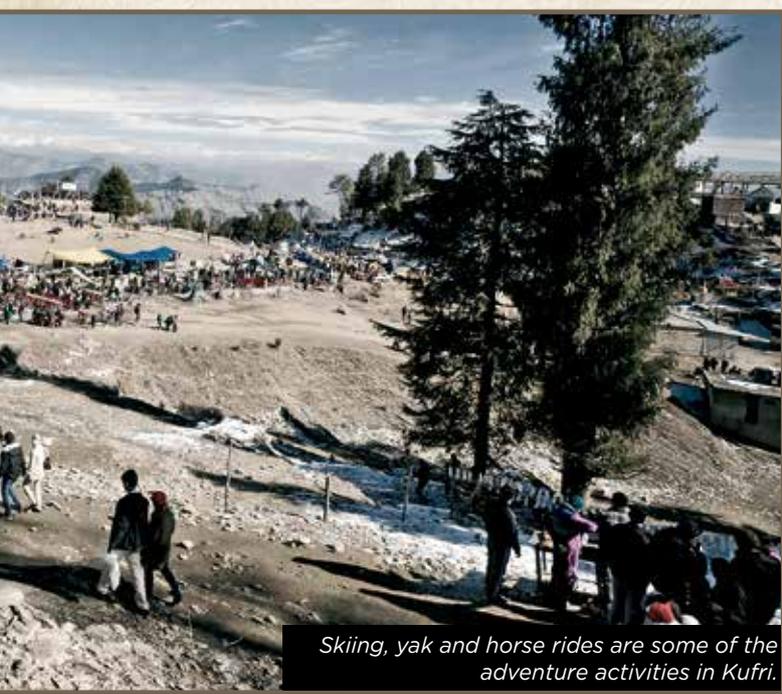
those who cared to listen. We walked around in Kufri spotting exact spots where actors had etched a mark and craned our necks to peep into buildings where scintillating scenes were shot.

My mind immediately travelled back to Agra. Though divided by distance and culture, Waseem and Ganga had an uncanny resemblance—not in their features, but in Bollywood blessings in their hometowns.





The rooms at Kufri - The White Ridge offer a panoramic view of the hills.



Skiing, yak and horse rides are some of the adventure activities in Kufri.

### KUFRI



- ❖ The buffet spread 'Flavours' is sure to tantalise your taste buds without burning a hole in your pocket.
- ❖ The multi-cuisine restaurant offers a variety fare—Pan-Indian, Asian, and Continental.
- ❖ In-room dining facility gives you the pleasure of enjoying their meals from the comfort of their rooms.
- ❖ The in-house bar, Pint O' Fun, offers a wide selection of drinks and cocktails.
- ❖ Enjoy a range of activities, from games such as pool, carom, badminton, chess, arrow-shooting, etc., to painting and video games.
- ❖ The Kid's Corner has been designed to cater to our young guests. There is a football play zone too.