

Privy Corners of the Privileged

By-invite-only private clubs, ushered in by five star hotels, offer rarefied spaces that are perfect for Covid-adjacent playgrounds.

By SANDEEP ARORA

TOP FIVE

SERVICE | PRIVATE CLUBS

Exclusivity has long been the preserve of luxury, but it is as much about access as it is about exclusion. This is where the private members club becomes an extension of your playground. In the 90's, if you wanted to nip down for a quiet business meeting, The Belvedere at The Oberoi, New Delhi was the obvious choice that breathed elegance and privacy.

The noughties introduced more clubs but also with it the routine of sameness—same ambience, wood and glass panels and private areas, uniformed service, similar décor, with different cuisines. With no personalised engagement, the category dangled obtusely as a familiar old product but with well-defined service standards.

But it offered a space where recognition was key and privacy and cache were written into the By-Invite-Only access cards that came loaded with the memory of many a historic deal being sealed

in these hallowed corridors. But private clubs have evolved over the years and embraced newer ways to adapt to changing lifestyle preferences.

As the ground rules for New Normal socialising gain credence, people are more keen to engage in spaces where safety and hygiene are paramount and the highest premium is placed on privacy and intimacy. So evenings are likely to get busier than the days, which was the norm. Factors such as quality of service, a well-stocked bar offering global spirits at great prices complemented by fine cuisine curated by a talented chef besides a cigar collection, are the new focus areas. Of course, personalisation that's big on small gestures and discretion remains the tipping point. Interestingly, the demographic algorithm seems to be tilting in favour of a younger audience. Spice goes on a whirlwind tour of some of the best clubs to see how things have changed. The recent launch of The Chambers at The Taj Mahal, New Delhi, has been a game changer and

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THE CHAMBERS 2.0

The recently launched, re-imagined restaurant, Albero, at The Chambers, The Taj Mahal, New Delhi





DISCRETION IS THE BETTER PART OF LUXURY

Olive dust chicken, potato ratatouille gratin and natural jus at Albero; The Cigar Lounge at the Chambers (above right)

market mover for private members clubs in India.

The Chambers, The Taj Hotels

India's first and foremost business club, launched in 1975, holds its 46-year-old legacy as calling card. Justifiably so, with access to some of the most rarefied spaces, enhanced privileges and ultra-niche experiences, membership to The Chambers is by invitation only and open to a select few. Right from the launch party in 1975, for which one of the world's top chef was flown in, to its recently revamped avatar, The Chambers concierge does not outline what services it provides because it truly tries to deliver everything to its members. The storied history of The Chambers is woven with legendary tales of service that set new standards everytime. From curating unique personalised menus for each guest sitting on a single table and having two sets of menus ready to be served to guests depending upon the outcome of a business meeting, to an old anecdote that recounts how the entire Chambers team was blowing balloons for hours for a member's yacht party, the service saga is in a league of its own. Sarabjeet Singh, Head, Expressions, IHCL says "We have re-imagined The Chambers to add more facets to the brand and its offering, whilst retaining its aura and stature. With its presence in the most exclusive spaces, augmented benefits and its global presence, the renewed



proposition of The Chambers remains unrivalled."

Reimagining the Glory Days

As part of the company's holistic rebranding initiative, The Chambers was also re-launched recently, adding new codes of luxury. The new Chambers Global Membership is a global and elevated offering that allows its members to enjoy a host of privileges, across the globe, at Taj, Vivanta and SeleQtions hotels making it an ideal offering for the jetset. Among other benefits is a unique opportunity to own a lifetime membership and make a one-time transfer to the next of kin.

The membership also offers exclusive "Chambers" room rates, complimentary upgrades, access to pool and fitness centres apart from instant Platinum membership to the Taj Inner Circle and vouchers for spa and restaurant usage on initiation, curated experiences, and niche events. The Chambers has a presence across seven Taj hotels and six cities, including Dubai, and is all set to expand to other hubs such as London and Bangalore as well.

USP: Redefined evening engagement as opposed to daytime soirees that were the norm. A younger breed of members, The JW Blue Label Bar as well as the The Davidoff Cigar Lounge, is a first for the country.

TOP FIVE

SERVICE | PRIVATE CLUBS

The ITC Club Prive

The ITC Club Privé, launched in 2015, offers exclusive services to conduct business or socialise within the acknowledged warmth characteristic of ITC Hotels. The tasteful comfort of privacy, the tranquil grace of opulent design and the silence of ease are a testament to the ITC brand of hospitality.

A rights of admission reserved membership, for which the privileges include exclusive boardrooms outfitted with plush interiors. Club Privé also offers an exquisite menu, handcrafted especially for members. The Modern Indian Mosaics is a confluence of traditional and contemporary culinary ingenuity that exemplifies a unique expression of India's regional cuisine.

ITC Club Privé is currently open at ITC Maurya, New Delhi; ITC Maratha, Mumbai; ITC Windsor, Bengaluru; and ITC Kohenu, Hyderabad and is soon to open at ITC Grand Chola, Chennai and ITC Royal Bengal, Kolkata. Members can enjoy the facilities in their home cities and nationwide.

At participating ITC Hotels, members and their spouses get access to the Club's private lounge, the exclusive dining area, board rooms and meeting

rooms along with access to exclusive events, where members can enjoy an evening with Michelin star chefs. Post pandemic, the teams at ITC Hotels have designed and implemented their new initiative We-Assure, which is the brand's commitment towards health, hygiene and safety, designed in collaboration with medical professionals and disinfection experts to further enhance the existing hygiene and cleaning protocols.

USP: It offers premium cuisine from select outlets; multiple locations across India and a complimentary spouse card.

The Lodhi Athletic Club, The Lodhi New Delhi

The Lodhi Club was launched in 2009 when the hotel formerly opened its doors as the Aman, New Delhi and it has been one of the city's most exclusive and sought-after addresses since then. Situated in the heart of Lutyen's Delhi, the club offers unparalleled health, wellness, lifestyle and leisure experiences.

Renowned among the capital's finest spaces

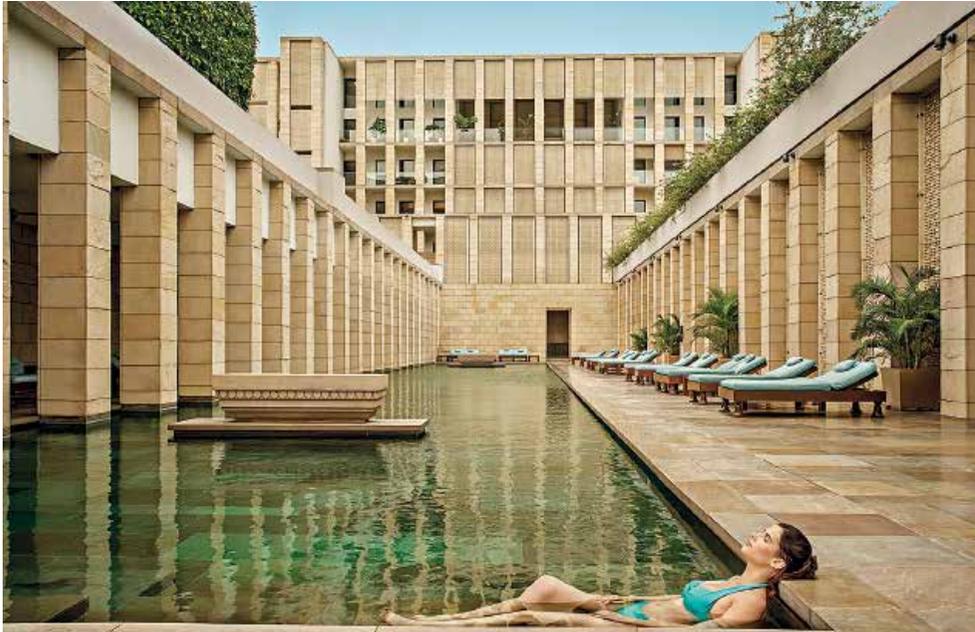


ELEGANCE REDEFINED

ITC Club Prive offers discreet spaces that are as cosy as they are tasteful

TOP FIVE

SERVICE | PRIVATE CLUBS



LUXURY FLOATS ETERNAL

The scenic 50-metre controlled pool at the Lodhi, New Delhi

for fitness and recreation, the club houses a state-of-the-art gym with a best-in-the-class Technogym equipment and a fully-equipped Pilates Studio. The Functional Zone offers endless potential to explore all areas of functional training and the Spinning Studio has cutting-edge indoor cycling bikes for an immersive experience. Personal trainers and yoga experts are always available to assist with customised fitness regimes. Choose to work up a sweat at a game of squash at any of the two indoor air-conditioned courts, or at the three all-weather tennis courts, but the club's pièce de résistance is the scenic 50-meter climate-controlled outdoor lap pool.

Members can also access the Hamman at The Lodhi Spa and complimentary use of the hotel's exquisite Silver Lounge. Other benefits include discounts on accommodation, food & beverage, spa and salon treatments, and transportation services from the hotel along with exclusive invitations to select events at the property.

USP: A home for fitness enthusiasts and lifestyle purveyors at one of the largest athletic clubs in India. This exclusive address also offers unique experiences in health, wellness and leisure.

Equus, The St. Regis Mumbai

The exclusive, members-only business club perched atop Level 36, overlooks the beautiful Mahalakshmi Race Course. The word Equus stems from Equestrian—a code of honour and skill embodying refinement, elegance and the strength of a knight, much like the ethos of the club. Members can enjoy a host of benefits offered by the hotel, apart from the well-

equipped state-of-the-art business club and an office away from office or a home away from home. On offer are innovative food and beverage selections, signature venues, besides special inclusions and privileges offered by The St. Regis Mumbai.

USP: Apart from the fabulous views of the Race Course, it includes an invitation to exclusive events such as the St. Regis Polo Tournament—a must-do social event of the city. It also buys you a seat at exclusive wine-paired sit-down dinners with international celebrity chefs like Daniel Humm and Marco Pierre White.

The Club at the Four Seasons Mumbai

The Club brings a new perspective to Mumbai's business capabilities. From the 33rd floor of the Hotel's gleaming glass tower, The Club showcases 360-degree views of the skyline. It's the city's most inspiring venue, with meeting, dining and lifestyle facilities to match. The 24-hour state-of-the-art fitness facilities include personalised services as well.

USP: The club offers special privileges to members including curated experiences, private showcases, and beverage tastings.

As long as the demand for curated, niche experiences continues to grow, exclusive spaces that engage with personalised offerings will find an audience, especially since its cocooned indulgence is perfectly suited to post-Covid times.