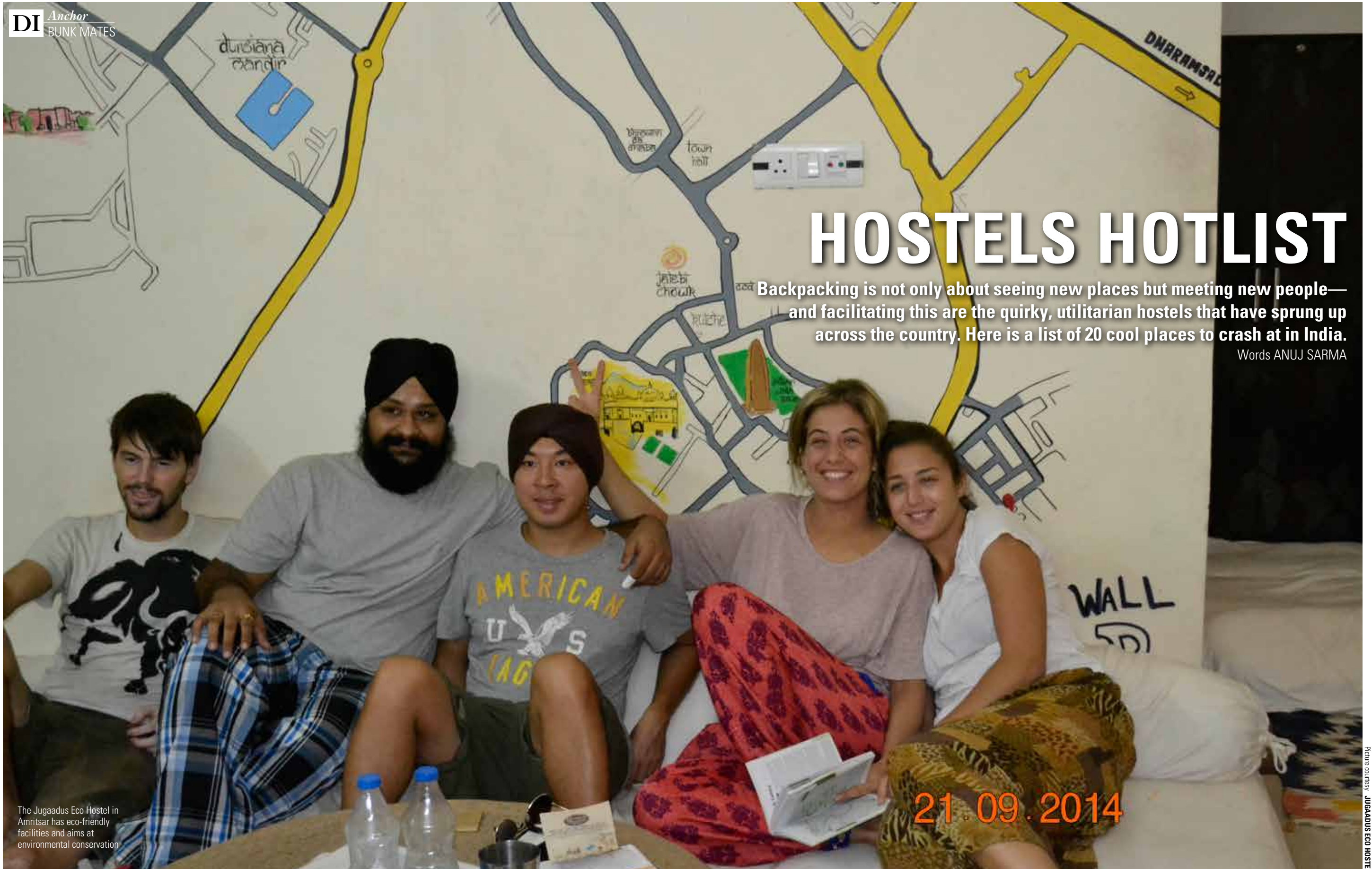


HOSTELS HOTLIST

Backpacking is not only about seeing new places but meeting new people—and facilitating this are the quirky, utilitarian hostels that have sprung up across the country. Here is a list of 20 cool places to crash at in India.

Words ANUJ SARMA



The Jugaadus Eco Hostel in Amritsar has eco-friendly facilities and aims at environmental conservation

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Picture courtesy: JUGAADUS ECO HOSTEL



(Facing page) The highest hostel in Asia, Zostel Spiti, offers stunning views of the mountains and valleys; (this page) the International Travellers' Hostel in Varanasi was originally the summer house of the Queen of Nepal

From cheap rooms to stimulating company, hostels are nothing short of a blessing for backpackers in search of novel experiences. Several quality hostels have sprung up in India that are easy on the pocket while also providing decent accommodation. Many of them are striving to create their own persona—some have a reputation for parties, others organise karaoke and movie nights, and so on—but all of them have a distinctiveness that adds greatly to the travel experience. Read on to know more about some of the country's coolest and quirkiest hostels.

ZOSTEL, SPITI

Check into Asia's highest hostel in Kaza—an oasis of comfort in the stark landscape of Spiti. Choose from four different accommodation types—six-bed dorms, deluxe private rooms, alpine tents and outdoor camping facilities. Services include gaming consoles, a restaurant, and common hangout areas to mingle with fellow travellers. Pets are welcome, though why this policy exists is a small mystery since backpackers rarely tend to take their furry friends on their trips. The hostel is part of a pan-India chain committed to providing accommodation at reasonable rates to budget travellers across the country.

USP Visitors can enjoy stunning views of the mountains and valley. The hostel also extends assistance to guests who want to explore the valley.

Tariff ₹599–₹2,199

Contact reservations@zostel.com

STOPS, VARANASI

A place for fellow travellers to meet and have fun the Indian way. Choose from 14-bed, eight-bed or six-bed dorms, and private rooms. All rooms come with air-conditioning—an absolute necessity given Varanasi's stifling summers. The hostel offers a range of facilities including high-speed internet, a free communal breakfast, free *chai* in the evenings, kitchen services, airport transfers, library, safe-deposit box and more. New to the city? Sign up for one of the curated trips organised by the hostel! The Varanasi property is part of a chain of hostels in Delhi, Kolkata and Jaipur.

USP The hostel organises fun events like Bollywood nights, Indian cook-outs, local musical events and festival celebrations for guests.

Tariff ₹400–₹1,500

Contact varanasi@stopshostels.com

INTERNATIONAL TRAVELLERS' HOSTEL, VARANASI

Once the summer house of the Queen of Nepal, this historic property was converted by the family into a lodge

for backpackers. Expect a clean, comfortable and fun stay in the old city of Varanasi. Room choices include cottage-style luxury double bedrooms with a garden view, spacious air-conditioned deluxe mixed and female dorms, a standard mixed dorm with bunk beds, and tents for two. Guests can also avail of modern kitchen facilities, washing machine service, lockers, a cosy common room with TV, DVDs, books and board games, and computer facilities.

USP The bistro menu offers a range of cuisines, some toned down to suit the foreign palate, but you can ask the kitchen to spice it up for a fiery Indian culinary experience.

Tariff ₹390–₹2,990

Contact contact@travellershostel.in

JUGAADUS ECO HOSTEL, AMRITSAR

This hostel seeks to find an ingenious solution to immerse its guests in Punjabi culture and give them a taste of their renowned hospitality. The first backpacker's hostel in Amritsar, it strives at being an eco-friendly establishment. For instance, the tables are made of used tyres, mattresses filled with organic cotton, and power generated from solar panels apart from other green measures.

USP They organise a curated tour for guests to experience authentic Punjabi culture and traditions.

Tariff On request

Contact jugaadu@jugaadus.com

MADPACKERS, DELHI

Ranked among the top hostels by numerous backpackers, Madpackers wins big time when it comes to amenities. Although it is a relatively small hostel, the facilities are top class. It offers 14-bed, 10-bed, eight-bed, six-bed and four-bed dorm accommodations apart from private rooms. There's a provision for unlimited tea and coffee for guests so this is where you should head if you need a regular caffeine fix. Breakfast and wi-fi costs are included in the room tariff.

USP The hostel organises different events, food walks and bar crawls for their guests.

Tariff ₹500–₹3,000

Contact (0) 98186 71874

YOUTH HOSTELS ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

Youth Hostels Association of India (YHAI) runs over 150 hostels across the country. It is a member of Hostelling International, UK, which has over 4,500 hostels in 90 countries across the globe, providing affordable accommodation for budget travellers. YHAI strives to provide hygienic, comfortable and quality accommodations at rock bottom prices. It also offers adventure programmes at the national level, state level, hostel level and more. It's not unusual to find two YHAI hostels in close proximity of one another.

Picture courtesy: ZOSTEL; INTERNATIONAL TRAVELLERS' HOSTEL



(Facing page) Moustache, Jaipur offers a very vibrant ambience; (this page top) Kolkata Backpackers B&B Homestay strictly hosts only backpackers; (this page bottom) The Hosteller in Delhi is big not only on budget accommodation but also in organising events for guests

USP Travel anywhere in India and there's a good chance you'll find a YHA! hostel there.
Tariff Varies according to the place and hostel.
Contact www.yhaindia.org

MOUSTACHE, JAIPUR

Built at a convenient location, Moustache offers its guests a chance to experience the vibrant culture of Rajasthan while providing quality accommodation at economical rates. You could opt for six-bed or four-bed dorms, or request for a private room. The hostel has a gameroom, a kitchen for guests who like to cook, wi-fi, hot showers and more.

USP The hostel has a reputation for being among the cleanest and safest in the country.
Tariff ₹700-₹1,500
Contact jaipur@moustachehostel.com

THE HOSTELLER, DELHI

Clean and comfortable, the Hosteller is a familiar name among backpackers passing through the capital. Located in South Delhi with high end malls and markets in the vicinity, the hostel offers accommodation at a prime location at very reasonable rates. Choose from 10-bed, eight-bed, six-bed and four-bed dorm options or ask for one of the private rooms. You could use the fully-equipped community kitchen or just sit back, relax and watch a movie in the common room on the projector. The place also hosts weekly events like karaoke

nights and movie nights to up the fun quotient. The Hosteller has a second property in Kasol, Himachal Pradesh.

USP The BOX, as they call it, is an open, green terrace accessible to guests for physical activities like yoga, 'box football,' and 'box cricket.'
Tariff ₹299-₹1,499
Contact booking@thehosteller.com

KOLKATA BACKPACKERS B&B HOMESTAY

Run and managed by a backpacker, this accommodation is not a hostel per se but more of a homestay—and strictly for backpackers. Don't approach them if you're planning a long stopover. There are only five beds, so book early. Residents are entitled to breakfast and free wi-fi. This is an ideal place for a short layover if you are travelling to the Northeast.

USP They only host backpackers, so there's a good chance of finding a travel mate for your next destination.
Tariff ₹500 per bed
Contact indianvoyagers@yahoo.in

BUNKYARD, UDAIPUR

Bunkyard in Udaipur is not only big on comfort and convenience but also has a higher fun quotient than most other hostels. Check into Bunkyard and you will find the place brimming with young travellers from all across the globe eager

Picture courtesy: MOUSTACHE; THE HOSTELLER; KOLKATA BACKPACKERS B&B HOMESTAY



(This page top) Le Pension in Jaipur is a clean, posh and hygienic budget accommodation; (this page bottom) Roadhouse Jaipur offers connectivity to excellent bars and pubs which are at a close proximity; (facing page) Crashpad in Jaipur combines the comfort, services and facilities of a hotel with the casual atmosphere of a hostel



to socialise and meet fellow backpackers. They offer six- and eight-bed dorms and private rooms, some of which have an excellent view of the lake.

USP To make sure you are entertained even during shower time, they've installed waterproof speakers in the washroom that play music throughout the day.

Tariff ₹449-₹2,500

Contact bunkyardhostel@gmail.com

ROADHOUSE HOSTEL, JAIPUR

Surrounded by the coolest restaurants and hippest bars in the city, Roadhouse offers the advantage of an excellent location to backpackers. The hostel offers eight-, six-, four- and two-bed dormitories/rooms apart from private rooms. Guests can unwind with a book or play foosball, pool or PlayStation. Facilities include free wi-fi, lockers and more.

USP Bicycles are available for guests so that they can explore nearby places.

Tariff ₹249-₹1,200

Contact jaipur@roadhousehostels.com

CRASHPAD, JODHPUR

Calling themselves a 'hostotel,' Crashpad was launched with the aim of combining the casual atmosphere of a hostel with the comfort, facilities and services of a hotel. They offer

six-, five- and four-bed dorms but don't have private rooms since the focus is totally on backpackers' wanting to socialise and meet new people. The spacious rooms with traditional Rajasthani décor adds to the native experience for travellers.

USP They organise village safaris and trips for guests including camel rides, cook-outs and a wildlife safari.

Tariff ₹350-₹450

Contact bookmybed@crashpad.in

LE PENSION, JAIPUR

The name translates into 'Bed & Breakfast' in French. Le Pension offers its guests a 'luxury budget' stay in Jaipur. The hostel provides accommodation that is safe, posh, peaceful, clean and hygienic. You could opt to stay in a six-bed dorm, a four-bed dorm, or in the private rooms (females get the option of choosing between females-only and mixed dormitories). They offer a wide range of services and amenities, which include free breakfast, wi-fi, laundry facility, a community kitchen, and free travel assistance.

USP Cafe Machaan, the rooftop café lounge, is a great place to unwind under the dim lights of lanterns and enjoy a cold beer.

Tariff ₹300-₹1,500

Contact vatsal@lepension.com

Picture courtesy: ROADHOUSE HOSTEL; CRASHPAD; LE PENSION

(This page) Jugaad Hostel in Delhi lives up to its name. It provides a fun and creative solution for finding affordable accommodation; (facing page) Backpacker Panda in Goa is famous for the impeccable behaviour of its staff



PRISON, GOA

Dubbed India's first and only 'party hostel,' Prison at Anjuna is the opposite of what its name suggests. It is owned by the Hostel Crowd group which owns a number of other properties in Goa. It has an easy-going air about it and the parties never end. The in-house 'bus bar' never runs out of beer and you often find good company there. The hostel offers 10-, five- and four-bed 'cells,' a separate female 'cell,' and private 'cells.'

USP There's a 'party bus' that takes guests to the best parties after the hostel's bar is closed. They also organise a 'pub quiz' where the prize is a lot of booze.

Tariff ₹300-₹1,800 (off-season rates)

Contact prison@thehostelcrowd.com

JUGAAD HOSTEL, DELHI

Jugaad—the Hindi slang for a low-cost, intelligent solution to a difficult and persistent problem—is an apt name for this Delhi hostel which attempts to solve the problem of finding affordable accommodation for travellers through its creatively designed hostel spaces. It is not merely a place to stay but a veritable confluence of backpackers travelling to different destinations with Delhi as their hub. The hostel offers 10-, eight- and six-bed dorms, apart from private rooms.

USP The hostel offers free wi-fi, a kitchen if you like cooking, and has a separate dorm for women.

Tariff ₹500-₹2,200

Contact stay@jugaadhostels.com

WANDERER'S HOSTEL, GOA

Located only five minutes away from Morjim beach, this hostel offers a stay amid nature without compromising on the comfort factor. The hostel offers ten-, six- and four-bed dorms and private tents. It also houses a library, a huge common room and a communal kitchen among other amenities. Guests can avail of personal lockers to secure their belongings.

USP The hostel is only 5 minutes away from the secluded Olive Ridley turtle nesting site at Morjim.

Tariff On request

Contact bookings@wandershstl.com

JUNGLE HOSTEL, GOA

Another property of The Hostel Crowd, it gives its guests a chance to experience a different Goa surrounded by jungles. It is situated near Vagator Beach which comprises three separate beaches, two of them inaccessible by road. Choose from ten-,

eight-, six- and four-bed dorms and private rooms. A barbecue night is held every week while rooftop movie screenings are organised for those who want to take a break from the parties.

USP Located in Vagator, it is walking distance from some first-rate eateries that boast a wide selection of cuisines.

Tariff ₹300-₹1,400 (changes on a daily basis)

Contact jungle@thehostelcrowd.com

OLD QUARTER, GOA

Located in the old Portuguese quarter, Fontainhas, in Panaji, Old Quarter is another iconic hostel from the Hostel Crowd group. It is an old Portuguese house converted into a boarding lodge with four-bed dorm accommodations and private rooms. They also rent out bicycles so that the guests can explore the alleyways of Fontainhas and Panjim. You'll also find a café, arty murals, and high speed wi-fi internet to help you stay connected.

USP A short bus ride will take you to the churches of Old Goa, one of which (Basilica of Bom Jesus) is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Tariff ₹450-₹1,500

Contact oldquarter@thehostelcrowd.com

BACKPACKER PANDA, GOA

Among the first things you'll notice at Backpacker Panda is the impeccable behaviour of its staff. Its location just 100 metres away from the main road on the Calangute-Candolim border keeps it well connected to airports, railheads and bus stops. This four-storey property has four dorms, a coffee shop and bookshop and offers complimentary wi-fi to its guests.

USP Its ease of access is a major plus point.

Tariff On request

Contact (0) 9172313995

SOCIAL REHAB, BENGALURU

Social Rehab was born out of numerous travelling endeavours—after meeting different kinds of people, and from stays that induced an idea to start something similar. The hostel provides six-bed dorms and private suites with free wi-fi. Breakfast is complimentary and on some days, so is dinner and nibbles.

USP Social Rehab hosts artists from around the world who come and stay at the hostel for free in exchange for displaying their artwork or contributing some art to the hostel.

Tariff ₹700-Rs 2,500

Contact connect@socialrehab.in ◆

Picture courtesy: JUGAAD HOSTEL; BACKPACKER PANDA