

IN-HOUSE EXPERT

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*I think the reader ratings are very sensible. Trident Hilton is a smart brand, and until recently quite underrated. The Gurgaon and Jaipur properties are excellent, but I'd like to add to that list the property in Kochi— it's a bit unglamorously located (doesn't have views like the Taj Malabar) but it's really quite stylish and has a boutique feel to it. Neemrana continues to be a favourite with me. And, of course, comparing Trident Hilton and Neemrana is a bit like comparing apples and oranges. Sarovar has great hotels but I never seem to know which is theirs and which isn't. By the way, I really don't get what the Samode and Bal Samand palaces are doing in this list—that's like comparing apples and the sabziwala. To ignore the hotel-group issue, here are my picks for individual hotels, across all three categories: **LUXURY** Amanbagh (Rajasthan), Udaivilas (Rajasthan), Park Hyatt (Goa), Oberoi's MV Vrinda (Kerala; not a hotel but even better) **MID-RANGE** Malabar House Residency (Kochi), Shahpura Bagh (Rajasthan), Sterling Swamimalai (Tamil Nadu), Sarovar's Poovar Island Resort (Kerala). **BUDGET** BNR hotel (Puri), Villa Helena (Pondicherry), Sitla Estate (Uttaranchal), Cavala (Goa), Camp Forktail Creek (Corbett)*