

Sawantwadi Palace: India's only chefs-owned palace hotel

It's been more than a year since Shraddha and Lakham Sawant Bhonsle transformed a portion of the Sawantwadi royal palace into an art hotel. Situated on the Maharashtra-Goa border and just a 30-minute drive from the newly inaugurated Mopa international airport in Goa, the Sawantwadi Palace is steeped in culture, history, and heritage, embodying the essence of royalty.

Formerly a bustling royal residence, Shraddha and Lakham, the 19th generation of the royal lineage, sought to infuse new life into the palace by imbuing it with a "human touch." This vision materialized a couple of years ago when they converted part of the palace into a hotel. In January 2023, the Sawantwadi Palace opened its doors to guests, offering six suite rooms.

Beyond providing a regal retreat, the hotel offers guests an immersive experience in the rich cultural heritage of the region. The palace is a bastion of Ganjifa art, a traditional card game introduced to India by the Mughals and patronized by the Sawantwadi Bhonsles during the 18th and 19th centuries. Recently bestowed with a Geographical Indication (GI) tag, the Ganjifa Art of Sawantwadi thrives under the royal family's stewardship. Regular workshops on Ganjifa art are conducted at the palace's darbar hall, inviting guests to partake in this cherished tradition.

Each of the hotel's six suites is adorned with Ganjifa paintings, drawing inspiration from Lord Vishnu's Dashavatara. In addition to the accommodations, the palace features a darbar hall, two banquet halls, and a restaurant. Plans are underway to introduce a library and a spa, further enhancing the guest experience.

The culinary expertise of Shraddha and Lakham, both trained and certified chefs from the prestigious Culinary Institute of America in New York, adds an extra layer of distinction to the palace hotel. Despite its location in the quaint town of Sawantwadi, the hotel's restaurant has gained popularity as a culinary destination for travelers journeying between Mumbai and Goa.

Guest feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with a growing number of international visitors joining the domestic clientele. Shradha recommends a stay of three nights and four days to fully experience the destination's natural beauty, culture, and heritage. Guests can indulge in various activities, including picnics to Amboli Ghat, Ganjifa painting workshops, culinary trails, beach visits, and more.