Students and young professionals are escaping temperamental landlords and taking refuge in co-living spaces – the modern and glamorous cousin of the PG digs of the past
News monitored for: Lemon Tree Hotels

Bed, Breakfast & App

Students and young professionals are escaping temperamental landlords and taking refuge in co-living spaces — the modern and glamorous cousin of the PG digs of the past

By Rahul Sachitanand

In a city where the endless hustle and bustle is the norm, there is something of a mecca for millenials working across Bengaluru, who need a cheap place to live. The locality, in the south east of the city, is a warren of narrow, congested roads, with apartment buildings standing cheek by jowl with budget restaurants, grocery stores, salons and realtor’s offices.

At 8 pm on a warm Thursday, working executives and students stroll about grabbing a bite from a corner kebab store, headed to a dive bar for a beer or bought eggs for breakfast the next day. On the streets, residents buzz about amidst the wall of deep fried food and fresh fruit being sold off hand carts.

The locality is a hub of millennial executives and students, being close to Christ University, a large education institute, and just under half an hour from Electronic City, home to the campuses of Infosys and other marquee names in tech. The startup hubs of Koramangala, Iblur Layout and Bellandur are also close by.

At nightfall, they all cram into rooms in one of 500 hotels and paying guest accommodation.

Targeting millennials

% of millennials in total population (projection)

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Stanza Living

Beds: 2,000
Cities: NCR & Bengaluru
Investors: Sequoia Capital, Matrix Partners & Accel Partners
Expansion: Adding 3,000 beds this year

“We want to build a hospitality-led business in the premium student accommodation market”
Anindya Dutta, Cofounder

that cram the neighbourhood. Most of these places offer residents a room and sometimes food, charging upwards of Rs 3,000 per bed per month.

Young professionals and students are at the mercy of owners and agents, who decide amongst themselves who gets in and who’s banned. Rules are arbitrary and often over-bearing for young adults (curfews, no friends or family, vegetarian fare only), making the experience of house hunting for these millennials one long-drawn nightmare.

Bengaluru landlords typically demand 10 months’ rent as deposit, for example, and that’s a heavy burden for someone starting out in their careers while living away from home. It is into this mess of arbitrary demands, unkept promises and all around disarray that a glamorous cousin of hostels and PGs has checked in – the co-living space. A number of hospitality companies are now expanding in this market, offering clean and comfortable dwellings and hygienic food, clear policies and pricing, on-demand services through apps, and a collegiate atmosphere with group activities, performances and that ultimate marker of casual, cheerful spaces – footballs.

If co-working has taken the world of work by storm, the
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Plug & Play Stay
Zolo Stays, one of India’s largest providers of co-living accommodation, is trying to stand out in the Twenties’ decade. There are at least 20 to 25 accommodation options on the road where Zolo Destiny, one of the firm’s units, is located. This five-floor building, a new unisex property, has 200 beds. Current occupancy is 50%. The average Zolo property has 160 beds and the smallest units have 50.

Company executives say another 20% of capacity at Zolo Destiny will be filled in weeks. This is a premium offering, with football, table tennis, carroms and a gym, with an indoor cricket pitch being laid to coincide with the start of the latest edition of the Indian Premier League tournament.

Inside, each flat comes with a refrigerator, kitchenette and basic utensils. The kitchen on premises and menus are constantly tweaked based on resident feedback.

“We have prioritised the previously unorganised market and are streets ahead of the competition,” Nikhil Sikri, Zolo’s CEO and co-founder, said. Two months from now, the company will also launch a community product to give residents more reasons to hang out together and a one-stop platform to socialise.

At Zolo Destiny, Anshuman Jayant, 22, does a quick jog after scoring a goal at the football table. He moved into this property with six of his BITS Pilani classmates nine months ago and loves the plug and play environment. For Jayant, who works at a startup 20 minutes away, this building works well. They initially took the usual route, hunting for a shared apartments or a PG, but found this far more convenient, given their crazy work days.

“Everything here—from booking the room to paying for it and add-on services—are done on the app. So it frees us from the typical headaches of finding utilities, finding help and housekeeping,” he says.

Viral Chhabria, the co-founder of Stay Abode, another co-living player, is putting the final touches to a 1,400 bed in the tech hub of Whitefield. This will more than double the firm’s 1,000-bed capacity. “We want to focus on building a community and give them a place like home,” he says.

Across Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and even in the education hub of Kota, such co-living ventures are taking root. For instance, Hyderabad, with some 400,000 new seats being built out in the outsourcing space, could easily evolve into India’s co-living hub.

For students who arrive in a new city, these facilities are emerging as top options.

Eighteen months ago, Gunjan Bansal arrived in Delhi from her hometown of Chandigarh to start her Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) from Shri Ram College of Commerce. As a newcomer to the city, she did the usual rounds of hotels and PGs, but found little to her liking.

“This is a much more social experience for someone who is new to a big city,” the 19-year-old says. “As a social person, the group activities, including movie nights, music and bonfires are all welcome distractions from classes and course work.”

Bansal has had a good first year at a five-floor facility run by Stanton, rather modestly named Los Angeles. Her roommate is a fellow Chandigarh resident, now a friend, and she has also made other friends at the place. The location, close to Delhi University, means her commute is just five minutes.

In cities bustling with entry-level coders and educators hubs such as Delhi and Pune, there’s something of a co-living boom afoot.

Beyond adding a layer of technology to ease service delivery, these players also focus on the experience, nudging...
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We want to focus on building a community and give people a place like home
Viral Chhajer, Co-founder

Stay Abode
Beds: 1,200
Cities: Bengaluru
Investors: Anupam Mittal and others
Expansion: Another 1,400 bed unit in Bengaluru & foraying into Hyderabad

Co Live
Beds: 11,000
Cities: n.a.
Inventor: Nubate Capital
Expansion: 25,000 beds by March end

By 2022, we largely believe the word co-living will replace phrases such as hostels and PGs in common usage
Suresh Rangarajan, CEO & co-founder

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