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.
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

Rahul Sachitanand

Avalaere is something of a mecca for millennials 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 to jowl with budget restaurants, grocery stores, salons and realtors’ 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 wraft 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 under half an hour from Electronic City, home to the campuses of Infosys and other marquee names in tech. The startup hubs of Koramangala, HSR Layout and Bellandur are also close by.

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

Targeting millennials

% of millennials in total population (projection)

Stanza Living

Beds: 2,000
Cities: NCR & Bengaluru
Investor: 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”
Anindy Dutta, Cofounder

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I was so troubled by the fact that I didn’t know my mind (whether to enter politics or not in 1999), I just disappeared and went for 10 days of rather than what other people want.

Plug & Play Stay
Zolo Stays, one of India’s largest providers of co-living accommodation, is trying to stand out in the Twarrower din. 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 unseized property, has 200 beds. Current occupancy is 50%. The average Zolo property has 150 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. There’s a kitchen on premises and men are constantly tweaked based on resident feedback.

“We have premised 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 Juyal, 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 Juyal, 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 Chhabra, the co-founder of Stay Above, another co-living player, putting the final touches to a 1,400 sq ft in the tech hub of Whitefield. This will more than double the firm’s 1,200-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 hostels 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 an excellent first year at a five-floor facility run by Suman, rather modestly named Los Angeles. Her roommate is a fellow Chandigarh resident, now a friend, and she has also made other friends at the location. The location, close to Delhi University, means her commute is just five minutes.

In cities bustling with entry-level coders and educations 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:
Investor: Nucube 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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