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## A very small hotel

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If you thought the only place you could find an Italian pensione in Delhi was in the well-worn pages of a copy of *A Room with a View*, think again. Tucked into a little lane off Flagstaff Road in Civil Lines is the diminutive Petite Hotel, with a pocket handkerchief garden and ten bedrooms. The garden is shaded by a bowler of flowers. Set with cane stools and tables, it can actually accommodate 28 people and despite its flowery appearance can be used as a conference site. In the driveway lounges a not-so-petite Labrador wearing an oversize superman nightshirt.

The hotel was started about three years ago by playwright Arun Kuckreja, whose grandfather had started a hotel in Chandni Chowk in 1911. This house and land was apparently sold to Kuckreja's father by Salman Rushdie's father, adding to the historical charm of the locale.

Each room is slightly different. There are two suites: one has a jacuzzi and the other a piano. One room is on the roof and two open out into a miniature kitchen garden.

This particular hotel is still a quiet and affordable getaway, with rooms starting at Rs 2,000 per night. In the Tourism Ministry's "gold" category of properties, the quality of service is good enough that the Oberoi Maidens often sends overflow clients to stay here. Other guests mostly include foreign tourists and occasionally business travellers. The nicest thing about the hotel is that it is com-

pletely free of noise pollution. "This is heaven," says Kuckreja, "compared to the crowded lanes of Chandni Chowk or Paharganj."

Appropriately enough – another secret for those who long for an authentic (and air-conditioned) Chandni Chowk experience – Kuckreja has plans to convert three rooms in a haveli in the market into another petite hotel. 4-A Flagstaff Road, Civil Lines (6519-0511). ☉ Civil Lines.

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## India Islamic Cultural Centre café

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A relatively new entrant to the Lodhi Road culturefest, the India Islamic Cultural Centre has a 300-seater auditorium, two conference rooms, 30 guest rooms and a library with "books of all religions and cultures". All this is only to be expected from a place that's been 22 years in the making (construction was flagged off by Indira Gandhi in 1981). But what you might not know is that the grand ornamental façade hides a charming and rather self-effacing restaurant. The delectable Rampur-style food here is less spicy and less oily than you might expect. The mutton korma (Rs 150) melts in your mouth, and the fragrant mutton biryani (a steal at Rs 125) is simply divine. End with the perfectly textured firni (Rs 50). And you get a view of the lawn. Dilli Dastarkhwan, India Islamic Cultural Centre, 87-88 Lodhi Road (4353-5345). Daily noon-3.30pm, 7-10.30pm.