

The Parsiana Lodge

## A safe haven for people who transcend boundaries

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The happy crowd at the lodge

I have always believed that emigrants are a bunch of terribly brave people. To begin with, they are ready to commit professional suicide in exchange of a mouthful of sky and are willing to transcend boundaries and divorce their close-knit families back home for a lungful of fresh air. Starting from scratch, suffering from an identity crisis, coping with a huge dent in their self-esteem when they grab the first job available, adjusting to cultural differences in the way they dress, speak and present themselves, the list is endless...

Cushioning the fall and making it easier for emigrants to come to terms with living in a new country where rugby rules the roost and recession is now well, a way of life, have been Dolly and Aspi Shahlori. Meet the feisty and friendly couple (if you haven't known them already) who built Parsiana lodge in the late 1990s only because they didn't want others to go through the same bitter experiences that they have had, when they first migrated to New Zealand nineteen years ago. ??Anyone who has lived or walked into the Parsiana lodge, almost a landmark in the suburb of Pakuranga, would know that it makes perfect fodder for a television script.

Be it `Shortland Street' or a `Saas bhi kabhi bahu thi...' there are lots of interesting goings-on with each resident at the lodge. It's a home away from home to a merry-mix of students, couples, families, tourists on a pit stop to Auckland and sometimes even elderly parents who may have had major disagreements with their family and walked out of the house!

From a lonely hearts club where boy meets girl and gets married under the keen eye of Dolly and Aspi – but not without the usual soap opera of their life unfolding – to families making the lodge their home because they find comfort and solace in community living, it's a meeting ground for people of all ethnicities, culture and age.??

There have also been those long standing residents at the Parsiana Lodge who have gone around helping other new migrants by driving them around for their first job interview, guiding them and providing support to new comers. Strange as it may

sound, it's almost like a welcoming committee, which is there to shield you from the rough and tumble of finding your way in a new city.??

Dolly Shahlori, who has a Masters in Public Health and is also an immigration agent, has always been able to keep everyone abreast with the latest goings on in the government agencies and what's expected of them when they enter a new country – since she has been a patron of a lot of agencies and organisations. She, along with her husband Aspi and their lovely kids, Zeeba and Darian have always rolled out a warm welcome to make migrants feel at home. It's almost a flame of hope for those who have taken the leap of faith and moved bag and baggage to a foreign country! ??In short, it's due to Dolly and Aspi's nurturing nature that the Parsiana lodge is happy place to be in – mainly because it drives away the clouds of gloom even in a wet and dreary clime. At any given time, there is a potluck or a movie night happening, if not there are picnics, parties or long drives being planned. What sets it apart from other commercial living places is that it's enveloped with a sense of bonhomie and joie de vivre. ??“Like now, we have with us an elderly Kashmiri lady who needs constant observation due to seizures. But her daughter-in-law who is doing her PhD is secure with the knowledge that there are people at the lodge who will take care of her in case of an emergency, just in case she is not there,” says Dolly who has currently moved to Sydney with her family but frequently visits home to make sure every one is well looked after. ??Then there have been times when Aspi has been guardian to some of the international students staying at the lodge who are doing their engineering or hospitality degree in Auckland. And that includes trips to the principal's office when the students wag college. He tries to play the dutiful father at the best of times. And the worst! For the girl students they have early curfew timings! ??

From newly married couples who are trying to settle down to a new life, to being there for an individual who had a sex- change operation and getting everyone to accept him and support him through out the transitional period, both Dolly and Aspi have played a central character in the script that is waiting to be staged. ??Or then converted into a short comedy film based on Parsiana lodge.