

Incredible Adventures

Rajasthan's offer of adventure is unique. Unlike a gush of adrenalin into the veins as in the case of white water rafting or mountaineering, what the state offers is its wilderness. As you traverse the



landscape riding a camel, horse or jeep, you will find yourself in a communion with nature. You will want to come back to the state again and again.

Camel Safari

The camel, popularly known as the ship of the desert, is not only common in the Thar Desert, but often they are also the only means of transportation in remote areas. The desert safari is an ideal way to witness how people live in the far flung desert villages. The options also include



stay in a tented accommodation at night and having a campfire to the accompaniment of folk music. It is one of the best ways to experience Rajasthan's hinterlands.

Horse Safari

There is an old saying, "If God didn't create the horse, He wouldn't have created the Rajputs." The two have been inseparable elements in the saga of bravery and valour of Rajasthan's martial people. Great care was taken to breed horses and to keep their lineage pure. Some of the well-known breeds include Marwari, Kathiawadi and the Sindhi, each having its own distinct characteristics.



Since the wars are no more fought these incredible creatures have been put on service to take travellers on a ride far away from civilisations. But well if you don't have time and want to rush through the state than a jeep safari on pre-determined routes makes for the best option.

Rajasthan - The Wonder Land



Be prepared to be stunned in the amazing land of Rajasthan. The sheer variety this state offers to the travellers is difficult to comprehend until one has actually set ones foot and explored its multi-faceted vista. Perhaps nowhere in the world you would come across such a panorama of scenic beauty, spectacular landscapes, captivating forts, amazing dances, exhilarating music, colourful costumes, innumerable cattle fairs and charming population as in this western state of India. Together they make this part scorching and part forested landscape a veritable cauldron of colours speckled with tales of valour, death and forlorn love.

Rajasthan is a mystique. Rajasthan is India's tourist paradise.

Rajasthan beckons you...



The Desert & Beyond



Think of Rajasthan and what comes first to your mind is its desert. So much it has become associated with the Great Indian Thar Desert that almost every introduction to this fabled land begins with its desert moorings. But as any avid Rajasthan traveller will tell you that this description hardly presents a true picture of its multi-faceted topography.

The spectacle is varied and comprises not only of the Thar Desert (in the west) but it also includes the Arrivals (amongst the world's oldest mountain ranges) covering the entire south to north expanse of the state before tapering off in Delhi, in the east. Rajasthan, quite interestingly for all its desert moorings, has its own hill station, Mt. Abu (1720 m).

At Bharatpur it has a huge man made lake (a hunting ground for the birds in the erstwhile times) which today is one of the world's largest nesting grounds for migratory birds coming from the far off corners of the earth. The state has a number of famous wildlife parks known for their tigers and other animals. The heavily eroded barren hilltops, jagged mountain edges and high ledges are known for their impregnable forts. While its hills, mainly made of granite and quartzite stones, are also known for white Makrana marble, used by Shahjahan in building the world-famous monument of love, Taj Mahal in Agra.

Rajasthan, as archaeologists have discovered, was once drained by now dried up Saraswati

River, a highly revered waterway, which holds a very important place in the Hindu mythology. The Thar Desert, as the fossil finds have shown, was once entirely under sea. The change in the climate is a much recent phenomena, which amongst other things, also points out towards the advance and retreat of the desert.

The best way to explore this variegated landscape is to travel in the east to west direction. The forested tract on the eastern border, that you notice first, gives way to semi-arid regions, and from there on changes to arid zones before culminating in the sandy desert. What adds to the charms is the change in flora and fauna along with the topography. It is not only highly captivating but also, as you watch the saga unfold, you will truly be able to understand the physiological dynamics that have gone into shaping the character of this colourful state.



The Valour & The Trade



The pre-historic antecedents of the state dates back to c. 2750 BC, when the region formed a part of the grand chain of Indus Valley Civilisation. Rajasthan has the rare honour of having one of the major sites of the Harappan Civilisation, Kalibangan, which is located in its northwestern part.

As the time made a transition from ancient to medieval it also changed the state in a big way. With the emergence of Delhi as a major centre of power under the Muslim rulers, Rajasthan also underwent a sea change. What went on to have a long lasting impact on the character of the state was a factor as simple as its location on the trade route between the seaports of Gujarat and Delhi, on which the Muslim imperial army depended for the supply of good quality Arabic horses.

Since this trade route was under the control of the regional kingdoms of the state, it led to a clash with the rulers of Delhi who wanted it under their

command. Amongst the earliest of the conflicts (it also attained almost bardic proportions) was the one in the reign of Alauddin Khilji. Not surprisingly, his opponent was Rana Ratan Singh of Chittaurgarh, one of the most important centres on this the trade route. This pattern kept repeating throughout the medieval times and, depending on the might of the rulers, the forts and the cities also kept changing hands.

It was only with the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 and the consequent weakening of the Mughal rule that twists and turns of the events took a new turn. Not only the rulers of Rajasthan threw away the yoke of Delhi but they also declared themselves independent. But it was a short-lived



affair. Soon a new power emerged in the country in the shape of the British. As they gradually became the paramount power of India, the kings of the princely states started playing a second fiddle.



Places to Visit

Eastern Rajasthan Jaipur (Square N7)



Founded in 1727 by Sawai Jai Singh II, belonging to Kachchwaha clan of Rajputs, Jaipur is the fabled 'Pink City.' It was designed by his Bengali Prime Minister, Vidyadhar Bhattacharya in grid like pattern replicating sacred Hindu principles, and coloured pink in 1853 to celebrate the visit of Prince Albert. Places to see include City Palace, Hawa Mahal and Jantar Mantar. Nearby is the hill fort of Amber, the capital of Kachchwaha Rajputs before they shifted to Jaipur.

Deeg (Square Q6)

The construction of the fort at Deeg was commenced by the Jat ruler Badan Singh (1722-56) as the new capital of his kingdom. His son Suraj Mal added further constructions. In the 18th century it came under Bharatpur, another Jat stronghold. Deeg is a charming monsoon destination and Sawan and Bhadon pavilions are the high points of the visit.



Bharatpur (Square R7)

Known for its famous bird sanctuary situated around a massive artificial lake, ironically developed as the king's hunting ground, the town also has a rarely visited but a spectacular fort and palace. After the decline of the Mughal Empire, Bharatpur had become a force to reckon with and controlled a large tract between Delhi and Mathura.



Alwar (Square P6)

Once an ancient Rajput state known by the name of Mewat, it was closest to Delhi and hence



amongst the first Rajput states to capitulate to the Muslim power in the 13th century. It became independent almost 400 years later in 1771 under Maharaja Pratap Singh, who belonged to the Kachchwaha clan of Jaipur. Amongst its famous sites are the fort and cenotaph of Mussi Maharani. But what makes it really popular is its Sariska wildlife sanctuary known for tigers.

Shekhawati (Square N5)



Shekhawati is the name of a region comprising of places like Jhunjhunu, Mandawa, Fatehpur, Ramgarh and Lachhmangarh amongst others. What makes it unique are its frescoed havelis, prompting many to call the entire expanse as the 'open air art gallery.' These are the ancestral homes of Marwari merchants who made their fortunes after the rise of new commerce in cities like Calcutta (now Kolkata), Surat, Ahmedabad and Bombay (now Mumbai) during the British rule and within no time went on to form some of the biggest companies in India. What they earned they remitted back home and constructed huge mansions and embellished them with frescoes.

Ajmer (Square L8)

Capital of Prithviraj Chauhan, whose rule extended as far as Delhi. When he died fighting the Muslim attack under Md. Ghori, it led to the establishment of Muslim rule in India. Soon after the capture of Delhi they overran Ajmer and built Adhai Din ka Jhompra, formerly a Sanskrit College. And it was at Ajmer that Sir Thomas Roe, the Ambassador of the East India Company was granted firman by Jahangir allowing the English to trade in India. However, today it is the Dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, one of the most revered Sufi saints that draws people of all faiths from all over the world to this holy city.



Pushkar (Square L8)

About 11 km from Ajmer is Pushkar, situated in a deep valley. The lake here is one of the most sacred destinations for Hindus in India. What



makes Pushkar unique is the presence of the world's only temple dedicated to the god Brahma. A walk around the ghats, numbering 52, in the morning is a mesmeric experience. The best time to visit Pushkar is October-November when one of the biggest cattle fairs in India is held.

Southern Rajasthan

Kota & Bundi (Square N11)

Known for its impressive fortifications and tranquil waters of the Chambal River, Kota though not high on the tourist map, is a charming destination. Another 37 km away is the quaint town of Bundi, the site of yet another highly impressive Taragarh Fort. In earlier times these twin towns were also famous centres of miniature paintings.



Chittaurgarh (Square L12)

One of the oldest cities of Rajasthan, Chittaurgarh was founded in AD 728 by Bappa Rawal. It is one

of the most romantic of Rajasthan's fortifications and control over it was fiercely contested by the rulers of Delhi. Site of massive jauhar (self-immolation) by the Rajput women, and fight till finish for the Rajput men folk, not many places on earth invokes the imagery of valour as Chittaurgarh.

Udaipur (Square J12)

The city of the lakes and considered by many to be one of the most romantic cities of India, Udaipur is where the rich and famous of the world flock for marriages, shooting films or honeymooning. The City Palace is amongst the most visited places and the Lake Palace, now converted into a luxury



hotel, situated in the middle of a lake, is the most yearned after place for those who can't afford it. A not to be missed is the impregnable Kumbhalgarh Fort and enchanting Ranakpur Temple.

Mount Abu (Square G12)

Apart from its cool climate what makes for a compulsory visit to this only hill station of Rajasthan is its immaculately carved Jain Temple



of Delwada. The fine carvings, their sheer number and variety make it amongst the most unforgettable sights in the state. Adding to the romantic escapade is the boating in Nakki Lake.

Western Rajasthan

Jodhpur (Square H9)

The most spectacular of all tourist destinations in Rajasthan, Jodhpur is the last frontier from where the desert takes over. Commandeering the sight is the mighty Mehrangarh Fort built on a 122 m sandstone bluff. Umaid Bhawan palace, now a



luxury hotel, is another magnificent building. Places to see include Jaswant Thada, Mandore Garh and Osian.

Jaisalmer (Square D7)

Visit Jaisalmer to have the very best of experience of Indian desert. The architecture is such that the golden hues of the sand merge with the exquisitely carved mansions, which make for some of the most beautiful buildings in the state. The fort, situated high on a ledge and often referred to as Golden Fort due to the colour of the sandstone used in its construction, towers over



the houses and from thereon to miles of emptiness relieved only by the Gadi Sagar Lake.



One of the most popular excursions is the Khuri village and Sam Sand Dunes.

Bikaner (Square J5)

Developed as a medieval centre of trade across the desert, Bikaner, like Jaisalmer, is one of the famous desert cities of Rajasthan. Dominating this spectacular landscape is the indomitable Junagadh Fort. Another famous building is the 20th century red sandstone Lalgarh Palace.

Live Life Maharaja Style

The erstwhile Maharajas of Rajasthan, after India's independence, metamorphosed into hoteliers and converted their former palaces into luxury heritage hotels, which provide the wealthy tourists with an opportunity to live Maharaja style.

The runaway success of the concept led to a revival of sorts of 'Heritage Hotels' in Rajasthan. Soon enough lesser mansions joined the bandwagon, thereby starting a category of 'Budget Heritage Hotels.' Together, what they offer is a unique experience, a glimpse of the life of the Maharajas, in case of palaces turned heritage hotels; and a peek into the life of rich traders, where mansions have been turned into heritage hotels. It is truly incredible.

Love, Valour & Separation

Music and dance are an intrinsic part of Rajasthan's hardy people. Amongst the professional performers are communities like Bhaats, Dholis, Mirasis, Nats, Bhopas and Bhandis who in the times yore led a nomadic life and wandered all over the region entertaining people and earning their livelihood. The emergence of the modern forms of entertainment affected their lot in a big way and had it not been for tourism, they would have been wiped out from the collective mindset.



Some of the most popular dance and music forms of the state are:

Ghoomar Dance

A communal dance of women, it is known for its pirouette movement.

Gait Ghoomar

Performed during Holi festival by Bhils, it is one of the rare tribal dances where both men and women participate in large numbers.

Chari Dance

Involves dancing with a chari, or pot, on one's head on top of which a lamp is kept.

Kachhi Ghodi

In this dance men ride dummy horses moving rhythmically to the drumbeats while a singer narrates the exploits of the Bavaria bandits of Shekhawati.

Fire Dance

In this dance grown up men and boys walk

rhythmically on fire to the accompaniment of drums.

Teerah Taali

Performed by the Kamad community, this dance is in honour of their folk deity, Baba Ramdeo.

Pabuji ki Phach

Pabuji was a 14th century folk hero highly revered by the Bhopa community who sing his heroic deeds.

Maand

It is Rajasthan's most sophisticated style of folk music that found its way into royal courts and today is highly popular amongst the tourists.

Qawwali

A form of singing which when it is spiritual speaks of yearning of the soul for the divine. Practised and popularised by Sufi saints, the best of live performances can be seen at the Dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer.

Principle Singing Communities

Mirasis, Jogis, Manganiyars and Langas.

Popular Performances

Kuchamani Khayal, Maach, Tamasha, Rammat, Nautanki and Raasleela.

Traditional Musical Instruments

Morchang, Naad, Sarangi, Kamayacha, Rawanhattha, Algoza, Khartal, Poongi, Bankia.



Revel in the Revelry

For people watching nothing beats the fairs and festivals of Rajasthan. Celebrated with gay abandon these are mostly timed with auspicious days in the calendar and are also the time when buyers and sellers from far flung areas gather together for brisk commerce. Apart from the traditional ones, there have also been some new additions for the benefit of the tourists who prefer to visit this hot state in the winter months.



Elephant and Desert Festivals fall into this category.

Some of the most celebrated fairs and festivals of the state are:

Nagaur Fair, Nagaur (Jan-Feb): Essentially a cattle fair.

Desert Festival, Jaisalmer (Jan-Feb): One of the most popular ones, started with tourism in mind, takes place in the heart of the desert.

Baneshwar Fair, Baneshwar (Jan-Feb): Basically a religious festival of the tribals also attended by those from the neighbouring states of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.

Rajasthan Day Celebrations (24-30 Mar): A week long festivity to commemorate the Foundation Day of the state.

Gangaur, Jaipur (Mar-Apr): A festival devoted to Goddess Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva. It is time for young girls to dress up in their finery and pray for grooms of their choice while the married women pray for the well being of their husbands.



Mewar Festival, Udaipur (Mar-Apr): A festival to welcome the spring season. It is marked by singing, dancing, religious processions, devotional music and fireworks participated by one and all.

Elephant Festival, Jaipur (Mar-Apr): A festival to celebrate Holi. This is a great occasion for the visitor to watch several elephant sports and also take part in the celebration of colours. The show of gaudily decorated elephants is a big draw.

Urs, Ajmer (Seventh month of the Lunar calendar): Held at the Dargah of the Sufi saint, Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, it is an occasion for thousands of believers to congregate at the shrine and offer their prayers.

Teej, Jaipur (Jul-Aug): A festival for the women, Teej marks the advent of monsoon.

Pushkar Fair, Pushkar (Oct-Nov): One of the most famous cattle fairs in the state.



Colours of Craftsmanship



The lack of colour in the landscape of Rajasthan has amply been made up by those in its costumes, turbans and in its various arts and crafts. Some of the popular ones include:

Carpets & Durries

Includes floor coverings like carpets, hand-woven durries and namdas or soft woollen druggets. While Jaipur is famous for the durries, Bikaner and Jaisalmer are known for woollen durries made of camel hair. Jaipur and Bikaner are main centres of carpet weaving.

Fabrics

Rajasthan has made its unique imprint in the art of printing. It includes block printing, batik and tie and dye. Each region has its own motif, choice of colours and the way they are used. For example Sangneri clothes have bright colours and floral patterns, Barmer and Jaisalmer are famous for their batik or reverse printing work, and Sikar and Jodhpur are famous for intricate tie and dye or bandhani pattern

Furniture and woodcarving

It is difficult to take the eyes off the beautiful furniture and woodcarving works of Rajasthan. While Shekhawati and Bikaner are famous for their woodwork, Jodhpur and Kishangarh are known for their painted wooden furniture, and Barmer has a tradition of carving in wood the images of gods and goddesses, elephants, parrots, human and animal figures. The speciality

of Tiloniya is leather embroidered chairs.

Pottery

Delicacy is its hallmark and best of the blue glazed pottery can be had at Jaipur, which is also a very important centre for this craft.

Paintings

Rajasthan is known for its Rajput School of Miniature Paintings, which, during the late medieval period, reached its zenith in the tiny kingdom of Kishangarh. The themes are from the sacred epics. Phads or scrolls in which shows the tales of the folk-hero Pabuji, and Nathdwara's Pichwai paintings, which depict scenes from the life of Lord Krishna, are two other remarkable styles.

Puppets

Cloth puppets with stuffed heads and painted expressions, eyebrows, and moustache for men and nose ring for women is another extremely popular craft in the state.



The Call of the Wild

Perhaps no other state in India offers such a wide variety of wildlife as Rajasthan. Feline creatures, animals and a plethora of birds make the state a veritable paradise for the lovers of the wild.

Bhensrodgarh Wildlife Sanctuary (Square O13)

Covers an area of 229 sq km of scrub and dry deciduous forest. Leopard, chinkara, sloth bear can be spotted.



Desert National Sanctuary (Square C7)

A sprawling park occupying an area of 3162 sq km the wildlife comprises of fox, desert cat, hare and sand fish.

Keoladeo Ghana National Park (Square Q7)

A world heritage site, this 29 sq km park is known for the migratory birds escaping the cold Arctic climes for nesting and laying eggs. During high season, which is winters in India, there are over 10,000 nests of egrets, darters, cormorants, grey herons and storks hatching nearly 20,000 to 30,000 chicks every year. Mammals like sambhar, blackbuck, chital, nilgai, fishing cat, otter and mongoose are also present in significant numbers.

Mount Abu Sanctuary (Square G12)

Located at the highest point in the Aravalli mountain range, the Guru Shikhar, it spreads over an area of 289 sq km sanctuary. One can see langur, wild boar, sambhar, grey jungle fowl and leopard.

Ranthambhor National Park

This is the state's most well known tiger reserve. One can also spot sambhar, cheetal, wild boar, sloth bear, jackal and hyena among others. Artificial lakes, dense forests and a fort nearby make it a very enchanting place.

Sariska Tiger Reserve

Rajasthan's another famous tiger land, it is surrounded by Aravalli Mountains and lies in a wooded valley. Other animals present include tiger, sambhar, nilgai, wild dog and chinkara. Kankwari Fort, Neelkantheshwar Temple and the deserted but well-preserved 17th century city of Bhangarh are other prominent sites.

