

# India



## Rajasthan (PDF Chapter)

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- Jodhpur
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- Pushkar
- Bikaner
- Ranthambhore National Park
- Bundi
- Chittorgarh (Chittor)
- Udaipur
- Mt Abu



# Rajasthan

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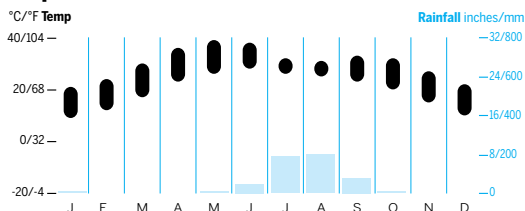
## Why Go?

It is said there is more history in Rajasthan than in the rest of India put together. Welcome to the Land of the Kings – a realm of maharajas, majestic forts and lavish palaces. India is littered with splendid architecture, but nowhere will you find fortresses quite as magnificent as those in Rajasthan, rising up imperiously from the landscape like fairy-tale mirages or adventure movie sets.

As enchanting as they are, though, there is more to this most royal of regions than its architectural wonders. This is also a land of sand dunes and jungle, of camel trains and wild tigers, of glittering jewels, vivid colours and vibrant culture. There are enough colourful festivals here to fill a calendar, while the shopping and cuisine are nothing short of spectacular. In truth, Rajasthan just about has it all – it is the must-see state of India, brimming with startling, thought-provoking and, ultimately, unforgettable attractions.

## When to Go

### Jaipur



### Dec–Feb

Pleasant daytime temperatures, but can get cold at night. Peak tourists, peak prices.

### Sep–Nov, Feb & Mar

Warm nights suit many visitors fleeing colder climes.

### Apr–Aug

April and June are hot awaiting the monsoon, which brings the rain in July and August.

## History

Rajasthan is the ancestral home of the Rajputs, warrior clans who claim to originate from the sun, moon and fire, and who have controlled this part of India for more than 1000 years. While they forged marriages of convenience and temporary alliances, pride and independence were always paramount, and this lack of unity led to the Rajputs becoming vassals of the Mughal empire.

Mughal rule of Rajasthan was marked by rebellion, uprisings and tragedy, as whole cities committed *jauhar* (ritual mass suicide) rather than submit to the Mughals. Nevertheless, As the Mughal empire declined, the Rajputs clawed back their independence and signed treaties with the British allowing individual Rajput kingdoms to operate as independent princely states under the umbrella of British rule.

At Independence, Rajasthan's many maharajas were allowed to keep their titles and property holdings and were paid an annual stipend commensurate with their status to secure their participation in the union. However, this favourable arrangement lapsed in the 1970s and Rajasthan submitted fully to central control.

## EASTERN RAJASTHAN

### Jaipur

📍 0141 / POP 3.05 MILLION

Enthralling, historical Jaipur, Rajasthan's capital, is the gateway to India's most flamboyant state.

The city's colourful, chaotic streets ebb and flow with a heady brew of old and new. Careering buses dodge dawdling camels, leisurely cycle-rickshaws frustrate swarms of motorbikes, and everywhere buzzing autorickshaws watch for easy prey. In the midst of this mayhem, the splendours of Jaipur's majestic past are islands of relative calm evoking a different pace and another world.

At the city's heart, the City Palace continues to house the former royal family; the Jantar Mantar, the royal observatory, maintains a heavenly aspect; and the honeycomb Hawa Mahal gazes on the bazaar below. And just out of sight, in the arid hill country surrounding the city, is the fairy-tale grandeur of Amber Fort, Jaipur's star attraction.

## History

Jaipur is named after its founder, the great warrior-astronomer Jai Singh II (1688–1743), who came to power at age 11 after the death of his father, Maharaja Bishan Singh. Jai Singh could trace his lineage back to the Rajput clan of Kachhwahas, who consolidated their power in the 12th century. Their capital was at Amber (pronounced 'amer'), about 11km northeast of present-day Jaipur, where they built the impressive Amber Fort.

The kingdom grew wealthier and wealthier, and this, plus the need to accommodate the burgeoning population and a paucity of water at the old capital at Amber, prompted the maharaja in 1727 to commence work on a new city – Jaipur.

Northern India's first planned city, it was a collaborative effort using Singh's vision and the impressive expertise of his chief architect, Vidyadhar Bhattacharya. Jai Singh's grounding in the sciences is reflected in the precise symmetry of the new city.

In 1876 Maharaja Ram Singh had the entire Old City painted pink (traditionally the colour of hospitality) to welcome the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII). Today all residents of the Old City are compelled by law to preserve the pink facade.

## 👁 Sights

### 👁 Old City (Pink City)

The Old City (often referred to as the Pink City) is both a marvel of 18th-century town planning, and a place you could spend days exploring – it's the beating heart of Jaipur.

Avenues divide the Pink City into neat rectangles, each specialising in certain crafts, as ordained in the Shilpa Shastra (ancient Hindu texts). The main bazaars in the Old City include Johari Bazaar, Tripolia Bazaar, Babu Bazaar and Chandpol Bazaar.

The whole is partially encircled by a crenellated wall punctuated at intervals by grand gateways. The major gates are Chandpol (*pol* means 'gate'), Ajmer Gate and Sanganeri Gate.

### ★ City Palace

PALACE

📍 0141-4088888; www.royaljaipur.in; Indian/foreigner incl camera ₹130/500, guide from ₹300, audio guide free, Royal Grandeur tour Indian/foreigner ₹2000/2500; 🕒 9.30am–5pm A complex of courtyards, gardens and buildings, the impressive City Palace is right in the centre of the Old City. The outer wall was built by Jai

# Rajasthan Highlights

## 1 Jaisalmer (p184)

Wandering the bustling alleys of the honey-coloured fort, then riding a camel among desert dunes.

## 2 Pushkar (p136)

Making a lakeside pilgrimage to Rajasthan's holiest town.

## 3 Ranthambhore National Park (p141)

Searching for tigers in the ravines and forests.

## 4 Mehrangarh (p175)

Taking in the views of the Blue City from the imposing ramparts of Jodhpur's mighty fortress.

## 5 Udaipur (p152)

Kicking back in Rajasthan's romantic idyll with palaces and a picturesque lake.

## 6 Pink City (p105)

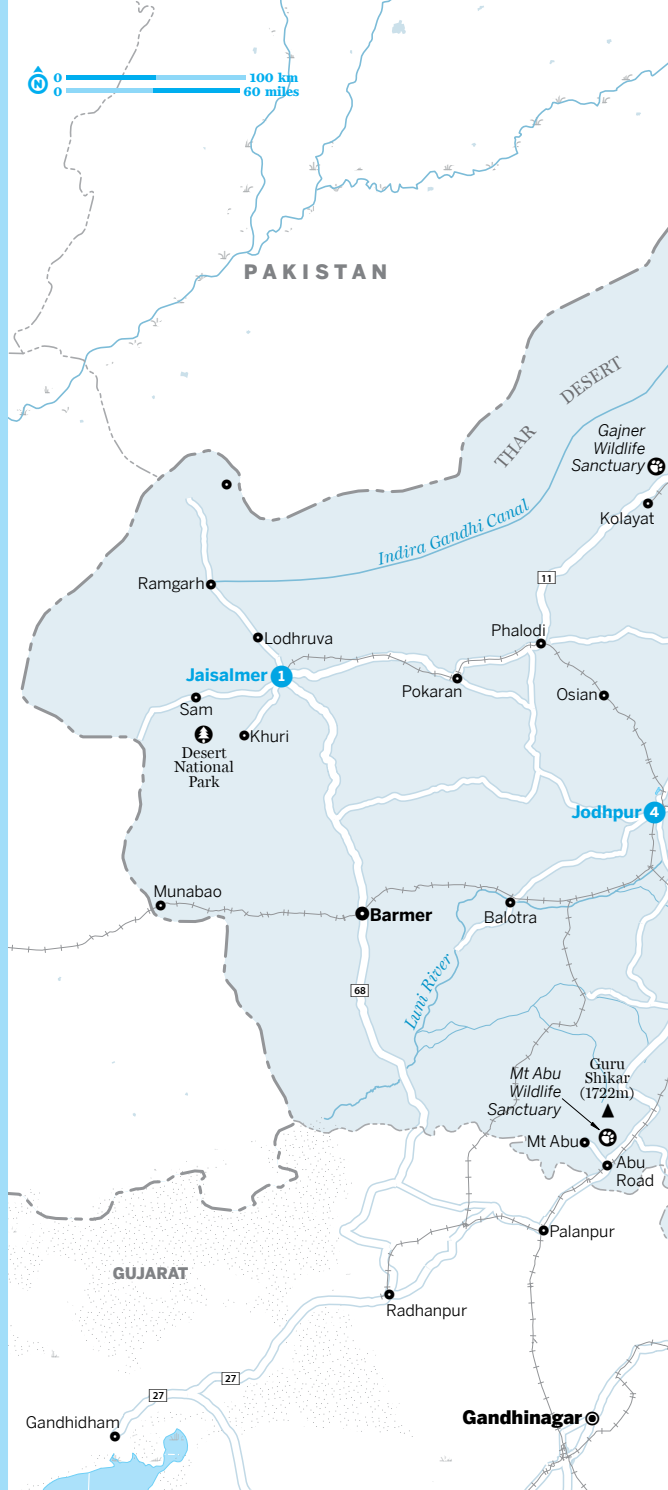
Wandering the colourful bazaars of Jaipur and the marvellous Amber Fort.

## 7 Bundi (p143)

Resting up in this town with its low-key backpacker vibe, fairy-tale palace and a solemn fort.

## 8 Shekhawati (p173)

Admiring the whimsical frescos adorning the crumbling havelis.





Ganganagar

Sirsa

HARYANA

UTTAR PRADESH

Anupgarh

Suratgarh

Hisar

DELHI

Rajgarh

Churu

Shekhawati

Rewari

19

Bikaner

Ratangarh

Ramgarh

Jhunjhunu

Neemrana

Deshnok

Tal Chhapar Wildlife Sanctuary

Fatehpur

Mahidawa

Patan

Nokha

Nawalgarh

Udaipurvati

Kotputli

Deeg

Mathura

Nagaur

Jaipur

Sariska Tiger Reserve & National Park

Bharatpur

Agra

Mandore

Pushkar

Kishangarh

Amber

Dausa

Abhaneri

Keoladeo National Park

Sikri

Saraswati River

Sambhar Salt Lake

Bagru

Sanganer

Karauli

Dholpur

Rohet

Beawar

Kekri

Tonk

Ranthambhore National Park

Sawai

Pali

Deoli

Madhopur

46

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Deogarh

Deoli

Bundi

Shivpuri

Kumbhalgarh

Bhilwara

Bijolia

Kota

Ranakpur

Rajsamand

Chittorgarh

Bijaipur

Baroli

Udaipur

Jaisamand Lake

Gandhi Sagar

Jhalawar

Jhalrapatan

Dungarpur

Banswara

Ratlam

Ujjain

Bhopal

MADHYA PRADESH

52

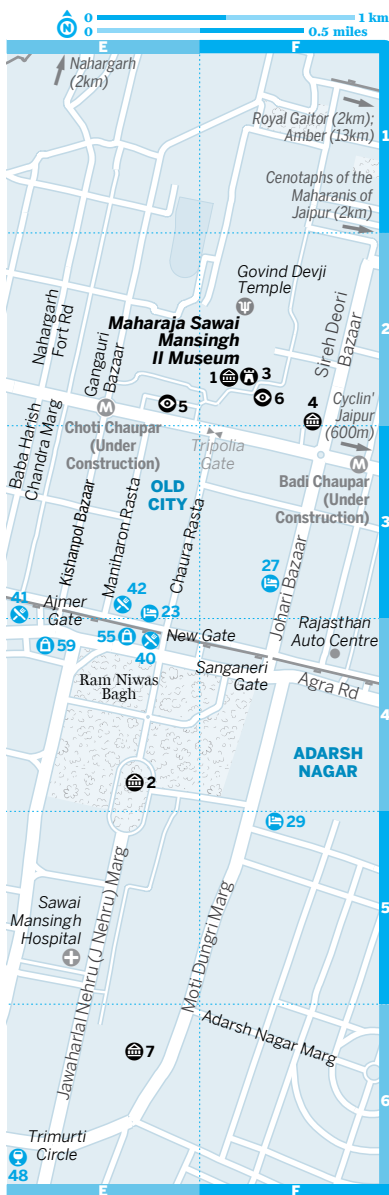
## Jaipur

RAJASTHAN JAIPUR



Singh II, but within it the palace has been enlarged and adapted over the centuries. There are palace buildings from different eras, some dating from the early 20th century. It is a striking blend of Rajasthani and Mughal architecture.

The price of admission includes entry to Royal Gaitor and the Cenotaphs of the Maharanis, as well as to Jaigarh, a long climb above Amber Fort. This composite ticket is valid for two days and costs Indians an extra



₹60 on top of City Palace entry (no extra cost for foreigners).

#### ➔ Mubarak Mahal

Entering through Virendra Pol, you'll see the Mubarak Mahal (Welcome Palace), built in the late 19th century for Maharaja Madho

Singh II as a reception centre for visiting dignitaries. Its multiarched and colonnaded construction was cooked up in an Islamic, Rajput and European stylistic stew by the architect Sir Swinton Jacob. It now forms part of the **Maharaja Sawai Mansingh II Museum**, containing a collection of royal costumes and superb shawls, including Kashmiri pashmina. One remarkable exhibit is Sawai Madho Singh I's capacious clothing; it's said he was a cuddly 2m tall, 1.2m wide and 250kg.

#### ➔ The Armoury

The Anand Mahal Sileg Khana – the Maharani's Palace – houses the Armoury, which has one of the best collections of weapons in the country. Many of the ceremonial items are elegantly engraved and inlaid, belying their grisly purpose.

#### ➔ Diwan-i-Khas (Sarvatobhadra)

Set between the Armoury and the Diwan-i-Am art gallery is an open courtyard known in Sanskrit as Sarvatobhadra. At its centre is a pink-and-white, marble-paved gallery that was used as the Diwan-i-Khas (Hall of Private Audience), where the maharajas would consult their ministers. Here you can see two enormous silver vessels, each 1.6m tall and reputedly the largest silver objects in the world.

#### ➔ Diwan-i-Am Art Gallery

Within the lavish Diwan-i-Am (Hall of Public Audience) is this art gallery. Exhibits include a copy of the entire Bhagavad Gita (scripture) handwritten in tiny script, and miniature copies of other holy Hindu scriptures, which were small enough to be easily hidden in the event that zealot Mughal armies tried to destroy the sacred texts.

#### ➔ Pitam Niwas Chowk & Chandra Mahal

Located towards the palace's inner courtyard is Pitam Niwas Chowk. Here four glorious gates represent the seasons – the **Peacock Gate** depicts autumn, the **Lotus Gate** signifies summer, the **Green Gate** represents spring, and finally the **Rose Gate** embodies winter.

Beyond this *chowk* (square) is the private palace, the Chandra Mahal, which is still the residence of the descendants of the royal family and where you can take a 45-minute **Royal Grandeur guided tour** of select areas.

#### ★ Jantar Mantar

(Indian/foreigner ₹50/200, guide ₹200, audio guide ₹100; ☀9am-4.30pm) Adjacent to the

HISTORIC SITE

## Jaipur

### 📍 Top Sights

- 1 Maharaja Sawai Mansingh II  
Museum ..... F2

### 📍 Sights

- 2 Central Museum ..... E4  
3 City Palace ..... F2  
4 Hawa Mahal ..... F2  
5 Iswari Minar Swarga Sal. .... E2  
6 Jantar Mantar ..... F2  
7 SRC Museum of Indology ..... E6

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14 Alisar Haveli ..... C3  
15 Atithi Guest House ..... B3  
16 Dera Rawatsar ..... C2  
17 Hotel Anuraag Villa ..... A2  
18 Hotel Arya Niwas ..... C3  
19 Hotel Bissau Palace ..... D1  
20 Hotel Diggi Palace ..... D5  
21 Hotel Meghniwas ..... A2  
22 Hotel Pearl Palace ..... B4  
23 Hotel Sweet Dream ..... E3  
24 Jaipur Inn ..... B2  
25 Jas Vilas ..... A2  
26 Karni Niwas ..... C3  
27 LMB Hotel ..... F3  
28 Madhuban ..... A2  
29 Nana-ki-Haveli ..... F5  
30 Narain Niwas Palace Hotel ..... D6  
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32 Rambagh Palace ..... D6  
33 Roadhouse Hostel Jaipur ..... B4  
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36 Vinayak Guest House ..... A3

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37 Copper Chimney ..... C4  
38 Dāsaprakash ..... D4

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Hotel Sweet Dream ..... (see 23)  
41 Indian Coffee House ..... E3  
Jaipur Modern Kitchen ..... (see 56)  
Jal Mahal ..... (see 43)  
Little Italy ..... (see 53)  
LMB ..... (see 27)  
42 Mohan ..... E3  
43 Natraj ..... D4  
44 Niro's ..... D4  
45 Old Takeaway the Kebab Shop ..... C4  
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46 Rawat Kachori ..... B3  
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52 Raj Mandir Cinema ..... D4

### 📍 Shopping

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54 Fabindia ..... D5  
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56 Jaipur Modern ..... B4  
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City Palace is Jantar Mantar, an observatory begun by Jai Singh II in 1728 that resembles a collection of bizarre giant sculptures. Built for measuring the heavens, the name is derived from the Sanskrit *yanta mantr*, meaning 'instrument of calculation', and in 2010 it was added to India's list of Unesco World Heritage Sites. Paying for a local guide is

highly recommended if you wish to learn how each fascinating instrument works.

Jai Singh liked astronomy even more than he liked war and town planning. Before constructing the observatory he sent scholars abroad to study foreign constructs. He built five observatories in total, and this is the largest and best preserved (it was re-



stored in 1901). Others are in Delhi, Varanasi and Ujjain. No traces of the fifth, the Mathura observatory, remain.

A valid Amber Fort/Hawa Mahal composite ticket will also gain you entry.

### ★ **Hawa Mahal**

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Sireh Deori Bazaar; Indian/foreigner incl camera ₹50/200, guide ₹200, audio guide Hindi/English ₹115/170; ☀9am-5.30pm) Jaipur's most distinctive landmark, the Hawa Mahal is an extraordinary pink-painted delicately honeycombed hive that rises a dizzying five storeys. It was constructed in 1799 by Maharaja Sawai Pratap Singh to enable ladies of the royal household to watch the life and processions of the city. The top offers stunning views over Jantar Mantar and the City Palace in one direction and over Sireh Deori Bazaar in the other.

There's a small **museum** (open Saturday to Thursday), with miniature paintings and some rich relics, such as ceremonial armour, which help evoke the royal past.

Claustrophobes should be aware that the narrow corridors can sometimes get extremely cramped and crowded inside the Hawa Mahal.

Entrance is from the back of the complex. To get here, return to the intersection on your left as you face the Hawa Mahal, turn right and then take the first right again through an archway. Shopkeepers can show you another way – past their shops!

A valid Amber Fort/Hawa Mahal composite ticket will also gain you entry.

### 🕒 **New City**

By the mid-19th century it became obvious that the well-planned city was bulging at the seams. During the reign of Maharaja Ram Singh (1835–80) the seams ruptured and the city burst out beyond its walls. Civic facilities, such as a postal system and piped water, were introduced. This period gave rise to a part of town very different from the bazaars of the Old City, with wide boulevards, landscaped grounds and grand European-influenced buildings.

### **Central Museum**

MUSEUM

(Albert Hall; J Nehru Marg; Indian/foreigner ₹40/300, audio guide Hindi/English ₹115/175; ☀9am-6pm) This museum is housed in the spectacularly florid Albert Hall, south of the Old City. The building was designed by Sir Swinton Jacob, and combines elements of English and North Indian architecture, as

### DON'T MISS

#### HEAVEN-PIERCING MINARET

Piercing the skyline near the City Palace is this unusual minaret. **Iswari Minar Swarga Sal** (Heaven-Piercing Minaret; Indian/foreigner ₹50/200; ☀9am-4.30pm) erected in the 1740s by Jai Singh II's son and successor Iswari. The entrance is around the back of the row of shops fronting Chandpol Bazaar – take the alley 50m west of the minaret along the bazaar or go via the Atishpol entrance to the City Palace compound, 150m east of the minaret. You can spiral to the top of the minaret for excellent views.

Iswari ignominiously killed himself by snakebite (in the Chandra Mahal) rather than face the advancing Maratha army – his 21 wives and concubines then did the necessary noble thing and committed *jauhar* (ritual mass suicide by immolation) on his funeral pyre.

A valid Amber Fort/Hawa Mahal composite ticket will also gain you entry.

well as huge friezes celebrating the world's great cultures. It was known as the pride of the new Jaipur when it opened in 1887. The grand old building hosts an eclectic array of tribal dress, dioramas, sculptures, miniature paintings, carpets, musical instruments and even an Egyptian mummy.

### **SRC Museum of Indology**

MUSEUM

(24 Gangwell Park, Prachyavidya Path; Indian/foreigner incl guide ₹40/100; ☀8am-6pm) This ramshackle, dusty treasure trove is an extraordinary private collection. It contains folk-art objects and other pieces – there's everything from a manuscript written by Aurangzeb and a 200-year-old mirror work swing from Bikaner to a glass bed (for a short queen). The museum is signposted off J Nehru Barg.

### 🕒 **City Edge**

Surrounding the city are several historic sites including forts, temples, palaces and gardens. Some of these can be visited on the way to Amber Fort.

### **Nahargarh**

FORT

(Tiger Fort; Indian/foreigner ₹50/200; ☀10am-5pm) Built in 1734 and extended in 1868, this sturdy fort overlooks the city from a sheer ridge to the north. The story goes that the

fort was named after Nahar Singh, a dead prince whose restless spirit was disrupting construction. Whatever was built in the day crumbled in the night. The prince agreed to leave on condition that the fort was named for him. The views are glorious and there's a restaurant that's perfect for a beer.

The best way to visit is to walk or take a cycle-rickshaw (₹50 from MI Rd) to the end of Nahargarh Fort Rd, then climb the steep, winding 2km path to the top. To drive, you have to detour via the Amber area in a circuitous 8km round trip.

A valid Amber Fort/Hawa Mahal composite ticket will also gain you entry.

### Royal Gaitor

HISTORIC SITE

(Gatore ki Chhatriyan; Indian/foreigner ₹40/100; ☀9am-5pm) The royal cenotaphs, just outside the city walls, beneath Nahargarh, are an appropriately restful place to visit and feel remarkably undiscovered. The stone monuments are beautifully and intricately carved. Maharajas Pratap Singh, Madho Singh II and Jai Singh II, among others, are honoured here. Jai Singh II has the most impressive marble cenotaph, with a dome supported by 20 carved pillars.

### Jai Mahal

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Water Palace; ☹closed to the public) Near the cenotaphs of the maharanis of Jaipur, and beautifully situated in the watery expanse of Man Sagar, is this dreamlike palace. Its origins are uncertain, but it was believed to have been extensively restored if not built by Jai Singh II (1734). It's accessed via a causeway at the rear, and is undergoing restora-

tion under the auspices of the Jal Tarang (www.jaltarang.in) project.

### Cenotaphs of the Maharanis of Jaipur

HISTORIC SITE

(Maharani ki Chhatri; Amber Rd; Indian/foreigner ₹40/100; ☀9am-5pm) Located between Jaipur and Amber, 5km from the centre, the cenotaphs of the maharanis of Jaipur are worth a visit for a stroll.

### Galta

HINDU TEMPLE

Squeezed between cliffs in a rocky valley, Galta is a desolate, if evocative, place. The temple houses a number of sacred tanks, into which some daring souls jump from the adjacent cliffs. The water is claimed to be several elephants deep and fed from a spring that falls through the mouth of a sculpted cow.

There are some original frescos in reasonable condition in a chamber at the end of the bottom pool, including those depicting athletic feats, the maharaja playing polo, and the exploits of Krishna and the *gopis* (milkmaids).

It is also known as the Monkey Temple and you will find hundreds of monkeys living here – bold and aggressive macaques and more graceful and tolerable langurs. You can purchase peanuts at the gate to feed to them, but be prepared to be mobbed by teeth-barring primates.

Although only a few kilometres east of the City Palace, Galta is about 10km by road from central Jaipur. An autorickshaw should charge around ₹300 return with waiting time, a taxi will charge at least ₹600.

## TOP STATE FESTIVALS

**Jaisalmer Desert Festival** (☀Jan/Feb) A chance for moustache twirlers to compete in the Mr Desert contest.

**Gangaur** (☀Mar/Apr) A festival honouring Shiva and Parvati's love, celebrated statewide but with fervour in Jaipur.

**Mewar Festival** (p157) Udaipur's version of Gangaur, with free cultural events and a colourful procession down to the lake.

**Tej** (☀Jul/Aug) Jaipur and Bundi honour the arrival of the monsoon and Shiva and Parvati's marriage.

**Dussehra Mela** (☀Oct/Nov) Commemorates Rama's victory over Ravana (the demon king of Lanka). It's a spectacular time to visit Kota – the huge fair features 22m-tall fire-cracker-stuffed effigies.

**Marwar Festival** (p178) Celebrates Rajasthani heroes through music and dance; one day is held in Jodhpur, the other in Osian.

**Pushkar Camel Fair** (p138) The most famous festival in the state; it's a massive congregation of camels, horses and cattle, pilgrims and tourists.

On the ridge above Galta is the **Surya Mandir** (Temple of the Sun God), which rises 100m above Jaipur and can be seen from the eastern side of the city. A 2.5km-long walking trail climbs up to the temple from Suraj Pol, or you can walk up from the Galta side. There are hazy views over the humming city.



## Activities

Several hotels will let you use their pool for a daily fee; try those at Narain Niwas Palace Hotel (p117) and **Mansingh Hotel** (Sansar Chandra Marg; nonguests ₹350; ☀7am-8pm).

### Kerala Ayurveda Kendra

AYURVEDA

(☎0141-4022446; [www.keralaayurvedakendra.com](http://www.keralaayurvedakendra.com); 32 Indra Colony, Bani Park; ☀9am-9pm) Is Jaipur making your nerves jangle? Get help through ayurvedic massage and therapy. Treatments include *sirodhara* (₹1500/2400 for 50/90 minutes), where medicated oil is steadily streamed over your forehead to reduce stress, tone the brain and help with sleep disorders. Massages (male therapist for male clients and female for female clients) cost from ₹500 for 55 minutes.

It offers free transport to/from your hotel.

### Charak Ayurveda

AYURVEDA

(☎0141-2205628; [www.charakayurveda.com](http://www.charakayurveda.com); E-7 Kantichandra Marg, Bani Park; ☀9am-2pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) A full range of ayurvedic treatments are available. Massages start at ₹500.

### Yog Sadhna Ashram

YOGA

(☎9314011884; [www.yogsadhnaindia.org](http://www.yogsadhnaindia.org); Bapu Nagar; ☀Wed-Mon) Free classes take place among trees off University Rd (near Rajasthan University) and incorporate breathing exercises, yoga asanas (postures) and exercise. Most of the classes are in Hindi, but some English is spoken in the 7.30am to 9.30am class. You can visit for individual classes, or register for longer courses.

### Madhavanand Girls College

YOGA

(C19 Behari Marg, Bani Park; ☀6-7am) This college runs free casual yoga classes every day in both Hindi and English. Very convenient if you happen to be lodging in Bani Park – the college is next door to Madhuban hotel.



## Courses

### Jaipur Cooking Classes

COOKING

(☎9928097288; [www.jaipurcookingclasses.com](http://www.jaipurcookingclasses.com); 33 Gyan Vihar, Nirman Nagar, near Ajmer Rd; class veg/nonveg from ₹2000/3700) Popular cooking classes with chef Lokesh Mathur, who boasts

more than 25 years' experience working in the restaurant and hotel business. Classes cover both classic dishes and Rajasthani menus and can be veg or nonveg. After a three-hour lesson, you sit down for a lunch or dinner of what you've prepared. Lokesh's kitchen is outside the western outskirts of Jaipur.

Call ahead for exact directions for your autorickshaw driver.

### Kripal Kumbh

ART

(☎0141-2201127; B18A Shiv Marg, Bani Park) Advance bookings are essential for these free lessons in blue pottery. Lessons aren't possible during the monsoon, from late June to mid-September. There's also a **showroom** ([www.kripalkumbh.com](http://www.kripalkumbh.com); ☀9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat).

### Dhamma Thali Vipassana Meditation Centre

HEALTH & WELLBEING

(☎0141-2680220; [www.thali.dhamma.org](http://www.thali.dhamma.org); courses by donation) This serene *vipassana* meditation centre is tucked away in the hilly countryside near Galta, a 12km drive east of the city centre. It runs courses in meditation for both beginners and more advanced students throughout the year. Courses are usually for 10 days, during which you must observe noble silence – no communication with others.



## Tours

### Cyclin' Jaipur

CYCLING

(☎7728060956; [www.cyclinjaipur.com](http://www.cyclinjaipur.com); 4hr tour ₹2000; ☀tour 6.45am) Get up early to beat the traffic for a tour of the Pink City by bike, exploring the hidden lanes, temples, markets and food stalls of Jaipur. It's a unique and fun way to learn about the workings and culture of the city. Breakfast and refreshments during the tour are included, and helmets are provided on demand.

Tours start at Karnot Mahal, on Ramganj Chaupar in the Old City. Tailor-made walking and food tours are also available.

### Vintage Jeep Tour

SIGHTSEEING

(☎9829404055, 0141-2373700; [www.pearlpalace-heritage.com/exclusive-vintage-jeep-tour-jaipur](http://www.pearlpalace-heritage.com/exclusive-vintage-jeep-tour-jaipur); Lane 2, 54 Gopal Bari; per person ₹2500; ☀9am-5.30pm) A fun way to explore Jaipur's major sights (including Amber and the City Palace) is by jeep – a genuine US Army 1942 Ford Jeep. With a dedicated driver and a guide on board, you are guaranteed to be part of a small tour group (maximum three guests), giving great flexibility. Admission prices and lunch costs are not included.



## Walking Tour Pink City

**START NEW GATE**  
**END AJMER GATE**  
**LENGTH 4.5KM; THREE TO FIVE HOURS**

Entering the old city from **1 New Gate**, turn right into **2 Bapu Bazaar**, inside the city wall. Brightly coloured bolts of fabric, jootis (traditional shoes) and aromatic perfumes make the street a favourite destination for Jaipur's women. At the end of Bapu Bazaar you'll come to **3 Sanganeri Gate**. Turn left into **4 Johari Bazaar**, the jewellery market, where you will find jewellers, goldsmiths and artisans doing highly glazed meenakari (enamelwork), a speciality of Jaipur.

Continuing north you'll pass the famous **5 LMB Hotel**, the **6 Jama Masjid**, with its tall minarets, and the bustling **7 Badi Chaupar**. Be very careful crossing the road here. To the north is **8 Sireh Deori Bazaar**, also known as Hawa Mahal Bazaar. The name is derived from the spectacular **9 Hawa Mahal** (p111), a short distance to the north. Turning left on **10 Tripolia Bazaar**, you will see

a lane leading to the entrance to the Hawa Mahal. A few hundred metres west is the **11 Tripolia Gate**. This is the main entrance to the **12 Jantar Mantar** (p109) and **13 City Palace** (p105), but only the maharaja's family may enter here. The public entrance is via the less ostentatious Atishpol (Stable Gate), a little further along.

After visiting the City Palace complex, head back to Tripolia Bazaar and resume your walk west past **14 Iswari Minar Swarg Sal** (p111), which is well worth the climb for the view. Cross the bazaar at the minaret and head west. The next lane on the left is **15 Maniharon Rasta**, the best place to buy colourful lac (resin) bangles.

Back on Tripolia Bazaar, continue west to cross Choti Chaupar to Chandpol Bazaar until you reach a traffic light. Turn left into **16 Khajane Walon ka Rasta**, where you'll find marble and stoneware carvers at work. Continue south until you reach a broad road just inside the city wall, **17 Indra Bazaar**. Follow the road east towards **18 Ajmer Gate**, which marks the end of the tour.

**RTDC**

TOURS

(📍2200778; tours@rtdc.in; RTDC Tourist Office, Platform 1, Jaipur Train Station; half-/full-day tour ₹400/500; 🕒8am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Full-day tours (9am to 6pm) take in all the major sights of Jaipur (including Amber Fort), with a lunch break at Nahargarh. The lunch break can be as late as 3pm, so have a big breakfast. Rushed half-day tours (8am to 1pm, 11.30am to 4.30pm, and 1.30pm to 6.30pm) still squeeze in Amber. The tour price doesn't include admission charges.

Departing at 6.30pm, the **Pink City by Night tour** (₹700) explores several well-known sights and includes dinner at Nahargarh.

Tours depart from Jaipur train station; the company also picks up and takes bookings from the RTDC Hotel Teej, RTDC Hotel Gangaur and the tourist office at the main bus station.

**🛏 Sleeping**

Jaipur accommodation pretty much covers all bases, and travellers are spoiled for choice in all budget categories. From May to September, most midrange and top-end hotels offer bargain rates, dropping prices by 25% to 50%.

**🚶 Around MI Road****★Hotel Pearl Palace**

HOTEL \$

(📍0141-2373700, 9414236323; www.hotelpearlpalace.com; Hari Kishan Somani Marg, Hathroi Fort; dm ₹400, r with AC ₹1310-1910; 🍷@🍷) The dependable Pearl Palace continues to surprise. Ongoing renovations means many excellent rooms simply defy their ordinary tariffs. There's quite a range of rooms to choose from – small, large, some with AC or fan cooling, and all are spotless. Services include money changing, city tours and travel arrangements, and the hotel boasts the excellent Peacock Rooftop Restaurant (p118). Advance booking is recommended.

**Karni Niwas**

GUESTHOUSE \$

(📍0141-2365433, 9929777488; www.hotelkarniwas.com; C5 Motilal Atal Marg; r ₹1000, with AC ₹1500; 🍷@🍷) This friendly hotel has clean, cool and comfortable rooms, often with balconies. There's no restaurant, but there are relaxing plant-decked terraces to enjoy room service on. And being so central, restaurants aren't far away. The owner shuns commissions for rickshaw drivers; free pick-up from the train or bus station is available.

**Roadhouse Hostel Jaipur**

HOSTEL \$

(📍9945522299; www.roadhousehostels.com; D-76 Shiv Heera Path; dm/s/d ₹300/1000/1200; 🍷@🍷) This bright and friendly hostel is in a quiet residential part of town, but it's not too far from all the restaurants on MI Rd. Six- and eight-bed dorms are spotless and air-conditioned and there are a couple of private rooms. There is a free-use kitchen and games room, and management will help with transport tickets.

There's a handy rickshaw stand at the end of the road.

**Tony Guest House**

GUESTHOUSE \$

(📍9928871717; www.facebook.com/tonyguesthousejaipur; 11 Station Road; dm/s/d ₹180/280/340, r with bathroom ₹600; 🍷@🍷) This friendly choice on a busy road is well set up for travellers and backpackers on a tight budget, with a rooftop garden, honest travel advice, internet and free-flowing chai. Rooms are extremely basic, some with plywood partition walls, and only one has a private bathroom, although it's with a cold-water shower. The common shower is hot.

**★Atithi Guest House**

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(📍0141-2378679; www.atithijaipur.com; 1 Park House Scheme Rd; s/d ₹1200/1310, with AC ₹1530/1750; 🍷@🍷) This nicely presented modern guesthouse, well situated between MI and Station Rds, offers strikingly clean, simple rooms dotted around a quiet courtyard. It's central but peaceful, and the service is friendly and helpful. Meals are available (the thali is particularly recommended) and you can have a drink on the very pleasant rooftop terrace.

**Pearl Palace Heritage**

HOTEL \$\$

(📍0141-4106599, 9772558855; www.pearlpalaceheritage.com; Lane 2, 54 Gopal Bari; r ₹3260-3815; 🍷@🍷) The second hotel for the successful Pearl Palace team is a midrange property boasting some very special characteristics. Stone carvings adorn the halls and each spacious room vibrantly recreates an individual cultural theme, such as a village hut, a sandstone fort, or a mirror-lined palace boudoir. Modern luxuries and facilities have been carefully integrated into the appealing traditional designs.

**Dera Rawatsar**

HOTEL \$\$

(📍0141-2200770; www.derarawatsar.com; D194 Vijay Path; r incl breakfast ₹4500-5500, ste ₹8000; 🍷@🍷@🍷) Situated in a quiet suburban street and yet close to the bus station, this

tranquil hotel is managed by three generations of women of a gracious Bikaner noble family. The hotel has a range of lovely decorated rooms, sunny courtyards, and offers home-style Indian meals. It is an excellent choice for young families and solo female travellers.

### All Seasons Homestay

HOMESTAY \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2369443, 9460387055; www.allseasonshomestayjaipur.com; 63 Hathroi Fort; s/d from ₹1600/1700, deluxe ₹2000; 🍷🍷🍷) Ranjana and her husband Dinesh run this welcoming homestay in their lovely bungalow on a quiet backstreet behind Hathroi Fort. There are 10 pristine guest rooms, two of which have small kitchens for longer stays. There's a pleasant lawn, home-cooked meals and cooking lessons. Advance booking is recommended.

### Nana-ki-Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0141-2615502; www.nanakihaveli.com; Fateh Tiba; r ₹1800-3000; 🍷🍷🍷) Tucked-away off Moti Dungri Marg is this tranquil place with attractive, comfortable rooms decorated with traditional flourishes (discreet wall painting, wooden furniture). It's hosted by a lovely family and is a good choice for solo female travellers. It's fronted by a relaxing lawn and offers home-style cooking and discounted rooms in summer.

### Hotel Arya Niwas

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0141-4073456; www.aryaniwas.com; Sansar Chandra Marg; s ₹1635-2725, d ₹2350-3110; 🍷🍷🍷) Just off Sansar Chandra Marg, behind a high-rise tower, this very popular travellers' haunt has a travel desk, bookshop and yoga lessons. For a hotel of 92 rooms it is very well run, though its size means it's not as personal as smaller guesthouses. The spotless rooms vary in layout and size so check out a few.

Outside, there's an extensive terrace facing a soothing expanse of lawn. The self-service vegetarian restaurant doesn't sell beer, but you can bring your own.

### Alsisar Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2368290; www.alsisar.com; Sansar Chandra Marg; s/d from ₹7605/10,530; 🍷🍷🍷) This genuine heritage hotel housed in a gracious 19th-century mansion is set in beautiful green gardens, and boasts a lovely swimming pool and grand dining room. Its bedrooms don't disappoint either, with elegant Rajput arches and antique furnishings. Though a little impersonal, perhaps be-

cause it hosts many tour groups, occasional discounts can be found by booking directly online.

### Hotel Diggi Palace

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2373091; www.hoteldiggiipalace.com; off Sawai Ram Singh Rd; s/d incl breakfast from ₹4000/5000; 🍷🍷) About 1km south of Ajmer Gate, this former residence of the *thakur* (nobleman) of Diggi is surrounded by vast shaded lawns. Once a budget hotel, the more expensive rooms are substantially better than the cheaper options. Management prides itself on using organic produce from the hotel's own gardens and farms in the restaurant.

### Bani Park

The Bani Park area is relatively peaceful, away from the main roads, about 2km west of the Old City (northwest of MI Rd).

### Vinayak Guest House

HOTEL \$

(☎ 0141-2205260; vinayakguesthouse@yahoo.co.in; 4 Kabir Marg, Bani Park; r ₹500-1100; 🍷🍷) This welcoming guesthouse is actually in a small, quiet street behind busy Kabir Marg, very convenient to the train station. There is a variety of different rooms and tariffs; those with air-con also have great renovated bathrooms and are your best option. The vegetarian restaurant on the rooftop gets good reports.

### ★ Madhuban

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2200033; www.madhuban.net; D237 Behari Marg; s/d/ste from ₹2290/2615/3865; 🍷🍷🍷) Madhuban has bright, antique-furnished, spotlessly clean rooms, plus a private enclosed garden for alfresco meals. The vibrantly frescoed restaurant serves Rajasthani specialities in addition to Continental and North Indian dishes, and sits beside the courtyard plunge pool. The relatively peaceful locale of Bani Park makes this place a comfortable stay. Bus and train station pick-up available.

### Hotel Anuraag Villa

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0141-2201679; www.anuraagvilla.com; D249 Devi Marg; s/d ₹1080/1310, with AC from ₹1800/1970; 🍷🍷) This quiet and comfortable option has no-fuss, spacious rooms and an extensive lawn where you can find some quiet respite from the hassles of sightseeing. It has a highly commended vegetarian restaurant with its kitchen on view, and efficient, helpful staff.

**Jaipur Inn**

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 9829013660, 0141-2201121; www.jaipurinn.com; B17 Shiv Marg, Bani Park; r from ₹1500-2000; 🍷@🍷) Once a budget travellers' favourite, this is now a midrange hotel offering an assortment of eclectic and individual rooms. Inspect a few before settling in. Plus points include the helpful manager and several common areas where travellers can make a coffee, use the wi-fi, or grab a meal. Yoga and Bollywood dance lessons can be had on the rooftop.

**Hotel Meghniwas**

GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-4060100; www.meghniwas.com; C9 Sawai Jai Singh Hwy; r/ste ₹5760/8220; 🍷@🍷) In a building erected by Brigadier Singh in 1950 and run by his gracious descendants, this very welcoming hotel has comfortable and spotless rooms, with traditional carved-wood furniture and leafy outlooks. The standard rooms are spacious, and although it's on a major road it is set well back behind a leafy garden. There's a first-rate restaurant and an inviting pool.

**Jas Vilas**

GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2204638; www.jasvilas.com; C9 Sawai Jai Singh Hwy; s/d incl breakfast from ₹6250/6960; 🍷@🍷) This small but impressive hotel was built in 1950 and is still run by the same charming family. It offers spacious rooms, most of which face the large sparkling pool set in a romantic courtyard. Three garden-facing rooms are wheelchair accessible. In addition to the relaxing courtyard and garden, there is a cosy dining room and helpful management.

**Shahpura House**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2203069; www.shahpura.com; D257 Devi Marg; s/d/ste from ₹7140/8330/9520; 🍷@🍷) Elaborately built and decorated in traditional style, this heritage hotel offers immaculate rooms, some with balconies, featuring murals, coloured-glass lamps, flat-screen TVs, and even ceilings covered in small mirrors (in the suites). This rambling palace boasts a durbar hall (royal reception hall) with a huge chandelier, and a cosy cocktail bar.

There's also an inviting swimming pool and an elegant rooftop terrace restaurant that stages cultural shows.

**Old City****Hotel Sweet Dream**

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2314409; www.hotelsweetdreamjaipur.in; Nehru Bazaar; s/d ₹900/1150, with AC from

₹1600/1850; 🍷🍷) Probably the best option right inside the Old City, and one of Jaipur's better budget hotels. Several of the rooms have been renovated and enlarged (reducing the overall room count). There are increasing amenities the higher up the price scale (and rickety elevator) you go. There's a bar plus an excellent rooftop terrace restaurant.

**Hotel Bissau Palace**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2304391; www.bissaupalace.com; outside Chandpol; r ₹3270-6540; 🍷@🍷) This is a worthy choice if you want to stay in a palace on a budget. It's actually just outside the city walls, less than 10 minutes' walk from Chandpol (a gateway to the Old City). There's a swimming pool, a handsome wood-panelled library and three restaurants. The hotel has oodles of heritage atmosphere, with antique furnishings and mementos.

**Rambagh Environs****Rambagh Palace**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2385700; www.tajhotels.com; Bhawani Singh Marg; r from ₹43,560; 🍷@🍷) This splendid palace was once the Jaipur pad of Maharaja Man Singh II and his glamorous wife Gayatri Devi. Veiled in hectares of manicured gardens, the hotel – run by the luxury Taj Group brand – has fantastic views across the immaculate lawns. More expensive rooms are naturally the most sumptuous.

Nonguests can join in the magnificence by dining in the lavish restaurants or drinking tea on the gracious verandah. At least treat yourself to a drink at the spiffing Polo Bar (p120).

**Narain Niwas Palace Hotel**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2561291; www.hotelnarainniwas.com; Narain Singh Rd; s/d incl breakfast from ₹8425/10,530, deluxe d ₹13,455; 🍷@🍷) In Kanta Bagh, just south of the city, this genuine heritage hotel has wonderful ramshackle splendour. There's a lavish dining room with liveried staff, an old-fashioned verandah on which to drink tea, and antiques galore. The standard rooms are in a garden wing and aren't as spacious as the high-ceilinged deluxe rooms, which vary in atmosphere and amenities.

Out back you'll find a large secluded pool (nonguests ₹300 for two hours between 8am and 4pm), a heavenly spa, and sprawling gardens complete with peacocks.

 Around MI Rd

**Indian Coffee House**

CAFE \$

(MI Rd; coffee ₹20-40, snacks ₹35-60; ☺ 6am-9pm) Set back from the street, down an easily missed alley, this traditional coffee house (a venerable co-op-owned institution) offers a pleasant cup of filtered coffee in very relaxed surroundings. Aficionados of Indian Coffee Houses will not be disappointed by the fan-cooled, pale-green ambience. Inexpensive *pakor*as (deep-fried battered vegetables) and dosas grace the menu.

**Jai Mahal**

ICE CREAM \$

(MI Rd; cups & cones ₹30-120; ☺ 10am-11pm) This great little ice-cream parlour has been going since 1952. There are around 50 flavours to choose from, but if it's hot outside, it's hard to beat mango. There are also plenty of other ice-cream concoctions, including sundaes and banana splits, many with fanciful names.

**Old Takeaway the Kebab Shop**

KEBAB \$

(151 MI Rd; kebabs ₹90-180; ☺ 6-11pm) One of several similarly named roadside kebab shops on this stretch of MI Road, this one (next to the mosque) is the original (so we're told) and the best (we agree). It knocks up outstanding tandoori kebabs, including paneer *sheesh*, mutton *sheesh* and tandoori chicken. Like the sign says: a house of delicious nonveg corner.

**Rawat Kachori**

SWEETS \$

(Station Rd; kachori ₹30, lassi ₹50, sweets per kg ₹350-850; ☺ 6am-10pm) Head to this popular takeaway with an attached restaurant for delicious Indian sweets and famous kachori (potato masala in a fried pastry case), a scrumptious savoury snack. A salty or sweet lassi or a delicious milk crown (fluffy dough with cream) should fill you up for the afternoon.

 **Peacock Rooftop Restaurant**

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(☎ 0141-2373700; Hotel Pearl Palace, Hari Kishan Somani Marg; mains ₹175-340; ☺ 7am-11pm) This multilevel rooftop restaurant at the Hotel Pearl Palace gets rave reviews for its excellent yet inexpensive cuisine (Indian, Chinese and Continental) and fun ambience. The attentive service, whimsical furnishings and romantic view towards Hathroi Fort make it a first-rate restaurant. In addition to the dinner menu, there are healthy breakfasts

and great-value burgers, pizzas and thalis for lunch.

It's wise to make a booking for dinner.

**Four Seasons**

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(☎ 0141-2375450; D43A Subhash Marg; mains ₹125-295; ☺ 11am-3.30pm & 6.30-11pm; 🍷🍷) Four Seasons is one of Jaipur's best vegetarian restaurants. It's a popular place with dining on two levels and a glass wall to the busy kitchens. There's a great range of dishes on offer, including tasty Rajasthani specialities, South Indian dosas, Chinese fare, and a selection of thalis and pizzas. No alcohol.

**Anokhi Café**

INTERNATIONAL \$\$

(☎ 0141-4007245; 2nd fl, KK Square, C-11 Prithviraj Marg; mains ₹250-350; ☺ 10am-7.30pm; 🍷🍷) This relaxing cafe with a fashionable organic vibe is the perfect place to come if you're craving a crunchy, well-dressed salad, a quiche or a thickly filled sandwich – or just a respite from the hustle with a latte or an iced tea. The delicious organic loaves of bread are made to order and can be purchased separately.

**Handi Restaurant**

NORTH INDIAN \$\$

(MI Rd; mains ₹220-440; ☺ noon-3.30pm & 6-11pm) Handi has been satisfying customers since 1967, with scrumptious tandoori and barbecue dishes and rich Mughlai curries. In the evenings it sets up a smoky kebab stall at the entrance to the restaurant. Good vegetarian items are also available. No beer.

It's opposite the main post office, tucked at the back of the Maya Mansions.

**Surya Mahal**

SOUTH INDIAN \$\$

(☎ 0141-2362811; MI Rd; mains ₹130-310, thalis ₹240-350; ☺ 8am-11pm; 🍷🍷) This popular option near Panch Batti specialises in South Indian vegetarian food; try the delicious *masala dosa* and the tasty *dhal makhani* (black lentils and red kidney beans). There are also Chinese and Italian dishes, and good ice creams, sundaes and cool drinks.

**Natraj**

INDIAN \$\$

(☎ 0141-2375804; MI Rd; mains ₹150-250, thalis ₹250-520; ☺ 9am-11pm; 🍷🍷) Not far from Panch Batti is this classy vegetarian place, which has an extensive menu featuring North Indian, Continental and Chinese cuisine. Diners are blown away by the potato-encased 'vegetable bomb' curry. There's a good selection of thalis and South Indian food – the *paper masala dosa* is delicious – as well as a great array of Indian sweets.



**Dāsaprakash**

SOUTH INDIAN \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2371313; 5 Kamal Mansions, MI Rd; mains ₹115-240, thalis ₹310-345; ☎ 9am-10.30pm; ☎) Part of a renowned chain established in 1921, Dāsaprakash specialises in vegetarian South Indian cuisine, including thalis and several versions of dosa and *idli* (spongy, round, fermented rice cake). Afterwards you can choose from a wonderful selection of cold drinks and over-the-top ice-cream sundaes.

**★ Niro's**

INDIAN \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2374493; MI Rd; mains ₹250-500; ☎ 10am-11pm; ☎) Established in 1949, Niro's is a long-standing favourite on MI Rd that, like a good wine, only improves with age. Escape the chaos of the street by ducking into its cool, clean, mirror-ceilinged sanctum to savour veg and nonveg Indian cuisine with professional service. Classic Chinese and Continental food are available, but the Indian menu is definitely the pick.

Even locals rave about the butter chicken and rogan josh. Beer and wine are served.

**Copper Chimney**

INDIAN \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2372275; Maya Mansions, MI Rd; mains ₹300-475, thali veg/nonveg ₹490/575; ☎ noon-3.30pm & 6.30-11pm; ☎) Copper Chimney is casual, verging on elegant, and is definitely welcoming, with the requisite waiter army and a fridge of cold beer. It offers excellent veg and nonveg Indian cuisine (with generous servings), including aromatic Rajasthan specials. Continental and Chinese food is also on offer, as is a small selection of Indian wine, but the curry-and-beer combos are hard to beat.

**Little Italy**

ITALIAN \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-4022444; 3rd fl, KK Square, Prithviraj Marg; mains ₹300-500; ☎ noon-10pm; ☎) The best Italian restaurant in Jaipur, Little Italy is part of a small national chain that offers excellent vegetarian pasta, risotto, and wood-fired pizzas in cool, contemporary surroundings. The menu is extensive and includes some Mexican items, plus first-rate Italian desserts. It's licensed and there's an attached sister concern, Little India, with an Indian and Chinese menu.

**Jaipur Modern Kitchen**

MEDITERRANEAN \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-4113000; www.jaipurmodern.com; 51 Sardar Patel Marg, C-Scheme; mains ₹300-550; ☎ 11am-11pm; ☎) In addition to the homewares and fashion, Jaipur Modern boasts this super Mediterranean cafe showcasing organic ingredients and supporting

local sustainable agriculture. The tasty pizzas, pasta, *momos* and wraps are all made in-house. There's even a special emphasis on locally grown quinoa; the Q menu features soups, appetisers, mains and desserts, all containing the versatile seed.

**Old City****Ganesh Restaurant**

NORTH INDIAN \$

(Nehru Bazaar; mains ₹100-160; ☎ 9am-11.30pm; ☎) This pocket-sized outdoor restaurant is in a fantastic location on the top of the Old City wall near New Gate. The chef is in a pit on one side of the wall, so you can check out your pure vegetarian food being cooked. If you're looking for a local eatery with fresh tasty food such as paneer butter masala, you'll love it.

There's an easy-to-miss signpost, but no doubt a stallholder will show you the narrow stairway.

**Mohan**

INDIAN \$

(144-5 Nehru Bazaar; mains ₹25-150, thali ₹80; ☎ 9am-10.30pm; ☎) Tiny Mohan is easy to miss: it's a few steps down from the footpath on the corner of the street. It's basic, cheap and a bit grubby, but the thalis, curries (half-plate and full plate) and snacks are freshly cooked and very popular.

**LMB**

INDIAN \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2560845; Johari Bazaar; mains ₹210-320; ☎ 8am-11pm; ☎) Laxmi Misthan Bhandar, LMB to you and me, is a vegetarian restaurant in the Old City that's been going strong since 1954. A welcoming air-conditioned refuge from frenzied Johari Bazaar, LMB is also an institution with its singular decor, attentive waiters and extensive sweet counter. Now it is no longer purely *sattvik* (pure vegetarian), you can now order meals with onion and garlic.

Popular with both local and international tourists, try the Rajasthan thali (₹540) followed by the signature *kulfa* (₹100, a fusion of *kulfi* and *falooda* with dry fruits and saffron).

**Hotel Sweet Dream**

MULTICUISINE \$\$\$

(☎ 0141-2314409; www.hotelsweetdreamjaipur.in; Nehru Bazaar; mains ₹130-285; ☎) This hotel in the Old City has a splendid restaurant on the roof with views down to bustling Nehru Bazaar. It's a great place to break the shopping spree and grab a light lunch or a refreshing *makhania* lassi (₹140) made with fresh fruits and curd. The menu includes pizza and Chinese, but the Indian is best.



## Drinking & Nightlife

### ★ Lassiwala

CAFE

(MI Rd; lassi small/large ₹25/50; ☎ 7.30am until sold out) This famous, much-imitated institution is a simple place that whips up fabulous, creamy lassis in clay cups. Get here early to avoid disappointment! Will the real Lassiwala please stand up? It's the one that says 'Shop 312' and 'Since 1944', directly next to the alleyway. Imitators spread to the right as you face it.

### ★ Curious Life

CAFE

(☎ 0141-2229877; [www.facebook.com/curiouslife](http://www.facebook.com/curiouslife) coffeeroasters; P25 Yudhisthira Marg, C-Scheme; coffees from ₹75; ☎ 9am-10pm; ☎) The latest coffee trends brew away in this showcase of Indian hipster-hood. Single-origin, espresso, French press, AeroPress, V60 pour over – you name it, and you'll find it brewing here among the predominantly 20-something crowd. There are also cold brews, smoothies, shakes and muffins, all underscored by a curiously retro soundtrack.

### ★ Bar Palladio

BAR

(☎ 0141-2565556; [www.bar-palladio.com](http://www.bar-palladio.com); Narain Niwas Palace Hotel, Narain Singh Rd; cocktails ₹500-700; ☎ 6-11pm) This cool bar-restaurant boasts an extensive drinks list and an Italian food menu (mains ₹350 to ₹400). The vivid blue theme of the romantic Orientalist interior flows through to candlelit outdoor seating, making this a very relaxing place to sip a drink, snack on bruschetta and enjoy a conversation. Il Teatro is an occasional live-music event at the bar – see the website for dates.

### 100% Rock

BAR

(Hotel Shikha, Yudhishtir Marg, C-Scheme; pint of beer/cocktails from ₹190/300; ☎ 11am-12.30am; ☎) Attached to, but separate from Hotel Shikha, this is the closest thing there is to a beer garden in Jaipur, with plenty of outdoor seating as well as air-conditioned side rooms and a clubby main room with a small dance floor. Two-for-one beer offers are common, making this popular with local youngsters.

### Polo Bar

BAR

(Rambagh Palace Hotel, Bhawan Singh Marg; ☎ noon-midnight) This spiffing watering hole adorned with polo memorabilia boasts arched, scalloped windows framing the neatly clipped lawns. A bottle of beer costs from ₹400 according to the label, a glass of wine starts at ₹550, and cocktails cost from

₹600. Delicious snacks are also available throughout the day.

### Café Coffee Day

CAFE

(Country Inn & Suites, MI Rd; coffees ₹80-150; ☎ 10am-10pm) The franchise that successfully delivers espresso to coffee addicts, as well as the occasional creamy concoction and muffin, has several branches in Jaipur. In addition to this one, sniff out the brews at Paris Point on Sawai Jai Singh Hwy (aka Collectorate Rd), at the central museum, and near the exit point at Amber Fort.

## ★ Entertainment

Jaipur isn't a big late-night party town, though many of its hotels put on some sort of evening music, dance or puppet show. English-language films are occasionally screened at some cinemas – check the cinemas and local press for details.

### Raj Mandir Cinema

CINEMA

(☎ 0141-2379372; [www.therajmandir.com](http://www.therajmandir.com); Baghwandas Marg; tickets ₹120-400; ☎ reservations 10am-6pm, screenings 12.30pm, 3pm, 6.30pm & 10pm) Just off MI Rd, Raj Mandir is *the* place to go to see a Hindi film in India. This opulent cinema looks like a huge pink cream cake, with a meringue auditorium and a foyer somewhere between a temple and Disneyland. Bookings can be made one hour to seven days in advance at windows 9 and 10.

Advance booking is your best chance of securing a seat, but forget it in the early days of a new release. Alternatively, sharpen your elbows and join the queue when the current booking office opens 45 minutes before curtain up. Avoid the cheapest tickets, which seat you very close to the screen.

### Chokhi Dhani

LIVE PERFORMANCE

(☎ 0141-5165000; [www.chokhidhani.com](http://www.chokhidhani.com); Tonk Rd; adult/child incl Rajasthan thali from ₹600/350; ☎ 6-11pm) Chokhi Dhani, meaning 'special village', is a mock Rajasthani village 20km south of Jaipur, and is a fun place to take kids. There are open-air restaurants, where you can enjoy a tasty Rajasthani thali, plus a bevy of traditional entertainment – dancers, acrobats, snack stalls – and adventure-park-like activities for kids to swing on, slide down and hide in.

There are more expensive tickets depending on which dining experience you opt for. A return taxi from Jaipur, including waiting time, will cost about ₹800.

## Polo Ground

SPECTATOR SPORT

(📍 ticket info 0141-2385380; Ambedkar Circle, Bhawan Singh Marg) Maharaja Man Singh II indulged his passion for polo by building an enormous polo ground next to Rambagh Palace, which is still a polo-match hub today. A ticket to a match also gets you into the lounge, which is adorned with historic photos and memorabilia. The polo season extends over winter. Contact the Rajasthan Polo Club for info about tickets.



## Shopping

Jaipur is a shopper's paradise. Commercial buyers come here from all over the world to stock up on the amazing range of jewellery, gems, textiles and crafts that come from all over Rajasthan. You'll have to bargain hard, particularly around major tourist sights.

Many shops can send your parcels home for you – often cheaper than if you do it yourself.

The city is still loosely divided into traditional artisans' quarters. **Bapu Bazaar** is lined with saris and fabrics, and is a good place to buy trinkets. **Johari Bazaar** and **Sireh Deori Bazaar** are where many jewellery shops are concentrated, selling gold, silver and highly glazed enamelwork known as meenakari, a Jaipur speciality. You may also find better deals for fabrics with the cotton merchants of Johari Bazaar.

**Kishanpol Bazaar** is famous for textiles, particularly *bandhani* (tie-dye). **Nehru Bazaar** also sells fabric, as well as jootis (traditional shoes), trinkets and perfume. The best place for bangles is Maniharon Rasta.

Plenty of factories and showrooms are strung along the length of the road to Amber, between Zorawar Singh Gate and the Park Regis Hotel, to catch the tourist traffic. Here you'll find huge emporiums selling block prints, blue pottery, carpets and antiques. Note that these shops are used to busloads of tourists swinging in to blow their cash, so you'll need to wear your bargaining hat.

Rickshaw-wallahs, hotels and travel agents will be getting a hefty cut from any shop they steer you towards. Many unwary visitors get talked into buying things for resale at inflated prices, especially gems. Beware of these get-rich-quick scams.

## Jaipur Modern

FASHION &amp; ACCESSORIES

(📍 0141-4112000; www.jaipurmodern.com; 51 Sardar Patel Marg, C-Scheme; ☎ 11am-11pm) This contemporary showroom offers local arts

## SHOPPING FOR GEMS

Jaipur is famous for precious and semi-precious stones. There are many shops offering bargain prices, but you do need to know your gems. The main gem-dealing area is around the Muslim area of Pahar Ganj, in the southeast of the Old City. Here you can see stones being cut and polished in workshops tucked off narrow backstreets.

One of the oldest scams in India is the gem scam, where tourists are fooled into thinking they can buy gems to sell at a profit elsewhere. To receive an authenticity certificate, you can deposit your gems at the **gem-testing laboratory** (📍 0141-2568221; www.gtljaipur.info; Rajasthan Chamber Bhawan, MI Rd; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) between 10am and 4pm, then return the following day between 4pm and 5pm to pick up the certificate. The service costs ₹1050 per stone, or ₹1650 for same-day service, if deposited before 1pm.

and crafts, clothing, homewares, stationary and fashion accessories. The staff are relaxed (no hard sell here) and if you are not in the mood to shop, there's a great cafe serving Lavazza coffee and Mediterranean snacks.

## Inde Rooh

CLOTHING

(📍 9829404055, 9929442022; www.inderooh.com; Hotel Pearl Palace, Hari Kishan Somani Marg; ☎ 10.30am-10.30pm) This tiny outlet in the Hotel Pearl Palace highlights the talents of Jaipur's traditional block printers blended with contemporary design. Handmade and stitched, the quality and value of the women's and menswear compares well with Jaipur's more famous fashion houses. Homewares are also available.

## Rajasthali

ARTS &amp; CRAFTS

(MI Rd; ☎ 11am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) This state-government-run emporium, opposite Ajmer Gate, is packed with quality Rajasthani artefacts and crafts, including enamelwork, embroidery, pottery, woodwork, jewellery, puppets, block-printed sheets, miniatures, brassware, mirrorwork and more. Scout out prices here before launching into the bazaar; items can be cheaper at the markets, but the quality is often higher at the state emporium for not much more money.

**Anokhi**

CLOTHING, TEXTILES

(www.anokhi.com; 2nd fl, KK Square, C-11 Prithviraj Marg; ☎9.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-7pm Sun) Anokhi is a classy, upmarket boutique selling stunning high-quality textiles such as block-printed fabrics, tablecloths, bed covers, cosmetic bags and scarves, as well as a range of well-designed, beautifully made clothing that combines Indian and Western influences. There's a wonderful little cafe on the premises and an excellent bookshop in the same building.

**Fabindia**

CLOTHING

(☎0141-4015279; www.fabindia.com; B 4 E- Prithviraj Road; ☎11am-9pm) A great place to coordinate colours with reams of rich fabrics, plus furniture and home accessories. You can also find organically certified garments, beauty products and condiments. Located opposite Central Park, gate number 4.

**Silver Shop**

JEWELLERY

(Hotel Pearl Palace, Hari Kishan Somani Marg; ☎6-10pm) A trusted jewellery shop backed by the hotel management that hosts the store. A money-back guarantee is offered on all items. Find it under the peacock canopy in the hotel's Peacock Rooftop Restaurant.

**Crossword**

BOOKS

(1st fl, KK Square, Prithviraj Marg; ☎11am-9pm) Crossword is an excellent bookshop with all sorts of fiction and nonfiction, including the latest best sellers, pictorial books and books on Indian history. Music CDs and DVDs are also available. There is a cafe and restaurant in the same building.

**Mojari**

CLOTHING

(☎0141-2377037; D-67 Shiv Heera Marg; ☎10am-6.30pm) Named after the traditional decorated shoes of Rajasthan, Mojari is a UN-supported project that helps rural leatherworkers, traditionally among the poorest members of society. A wide variety of footwear (₹300 to ₹1000) is available, including embroidered, appliquéd and open-toed shoes, mules and sandals. There's a particularly good choice for women, plus a small selection of handmade leather bags and purses.

**i Information****INTERNET ACCESS**

Internet cafes are thin on the ground, but almost all hotels and guesthouses provide wi-fi and/or internet access.

**Mewar Cyber Café** (Station Rd; per hr ₹30; ☎7am-11pm) Near the main bus station.

**MEDICAL SERVICES**

Most hotels can arrange a doctor on-site.

**Santokba Durlabhji Memorial Hospital**

(SDMH; ☎0141-2566251; www.sdmh.in; Bhanwan Singh Marg) Private hospital, with 24-hour emergency department, helpful staff and clear bilingual signage. Consultancy fee ₹400.

**Sawai Mansingh Hospital** (SMS Hospital;

☎0141-2518222, 0141-2518597; Sawai Ram Singh Rd) State-run, but part of Soni Hospitals group (www.soni-hospitals.com). Before 3pm, outpatients go to the CT & MRI Centre; after 3pm, go to the adjacent Emergency Department.

**MONEY**

There are plenty of places to change money, including numerous hotels, and masses of ATMs, most of which accept foreign cards.

**Thomas Cook** (☎0141-2360940; Jaipur Towers, MI Rd; ☎9.30am-6pm) Changes cash and travellers cheques.

**POST**

**DHL Express** (☎0141-2361159; www.dhl.co.in; G8, Geeta Enclave, Vinobha Marg;

☎10am-8pm) Look for the sub-branch on MI Rd then walk down the lane beside it to find DHL Express. For parcels, the first kilogram is expensive, but each 500g thereafter is cheap. All packaging is included in the price. Credit cards and cash accepted.

**Main Post Office** (☎0141-2368740; MI Rd; ☎8am-7.45pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5.45pm Sat) A cost-effective and efficient institution, though the back-and-forth can infuriate. Parcel-packing-wallahs in the foyer must first pack, stitch and wax seal your parcel for a small fee before sending.

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

*Jaipur Vision* and *Jaipur City Guide* are two useful, inexpensive booklets available at bookshops and some hotel lobbies (where they are free). They feature up-to-date listings, maps, local adverts and features.

**RTDC Tourist Office** (☎0141-5155137; www.rajasthan-tourism.gov.in; former RTDC Tourist Hotel, MI Rd; ☎9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri) has maps and brochures on Jaipur and Rajasthan. Additional branches at the **airport** (☎0141-2722647; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Fri), **Amber Fort** (☎0141-2530264; ☎9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri), **Jaipur train station** (☎0141-2200778; platform 1; ☎24hr) and the **main bus station** (☎0141-5064102; platform 3; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Fri).

**i Getting There & Away****AIR**

**Jaipur International Airport** (☎0141-2550623; www.jaipurairport.com) is located 12km southeast of the city.

It's possible to arrange flights to Jaipur from Europe, the US and other places, via Delhi. A few direct flights run to Bangkok and Singapore and the Gulf.

**Air India** (☎ 0141-2743500, airport 0141-2721333; www.airindia.com; Nehru Place, Tonk Rd) Daily flights to Delhi and Mumbai.

**IndiGo** (☎ 9212783838; www.goindigo.in; Terminal 2, Jaipur International Airport) Flights to Ahmedabad, Bengaluru (Bangalore), Chennai (Madras), Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata (Calcutta), Mumbai and Pune.

**Jet Airways** (☎ 0141-2725025, 1800 225522; www.jetairways.com; ☎ 5.30am-9pm) Flights to Delhi and Mumbai.

**SpiceJet** (☎ 9871803333; www.spicejet.com; Terminal 2, Jaipur International Airport; ☎ 6am-7pm) Daily flights to Delhi.

**Scoot** (☎ 8000016354; www.scoot.com) Three weekly flights to Singapore.

**Thai Smile** (☎ Thailand +662-1188888; www.thaismileair.com) Three weekly flights to Bangkok.

## BUS

Rajasthan State Road Transport Corporation (RSRTC, aka Rajasthan Roadways) buses all leave from the **main bus station** (Station Rd; left luggage per bag per 24hr ₹10), picking up passengers at Narain Singh Circle (where you can also buy tickets). There's a left-luggage office at the main bus station, as well as a prepaid autorickshaw stand.

Ordinary buses are known as 'express' buses, but there are also 'deluxe' buses (coaches, really, but still called buses), which vary a lot

but are generally much more expensive and comfortable (usually with air-con but not always) than ordinary express buses. Deluxe buses leave from Platform 3, tucked away in the right-hand corner of the bus station. Unlike ordinary express buses, seats can be booked in advance from the **reservation office** (☎ 0141-5116032; Main Bus Station).

With the exception of those going to Delhi (half-hourly), deluxe buses are much less frequent than ordinary buses.

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Most hotels and the RTDC tourist office can arrange a car and driver. Depending on the vehicle, costs are ₹9 to ₹12 per kilometre, with a minimum rental rate equivalent to 250km per day. Also expect to pay a ₹200 overnight charge, and note that you will have to pay for the driver to return to Jaipur even if you are not returning.

**Rajasthan Auto Centre** (p1203) You can hire, buy or fix a Royal Enfield Bullet (and lesser motorbikes) at Rajasthan Auto Centre, the cleanest little motorcycle workshop in India. To hire a 350cc Bullet costs ₹600 per day (including helmet) within Jaipur.

## TRAIN

The **reservation office** (☎ enquiries 131, reservations 135; ☎ 8am-2pm & 3-8pm) is to your left as you enter Jaipur train station. It's open for advance reservations only (more than five hours before departure). Join the queue for 'Freedom Fighters and Foreign Tourists' (counter 769).

For same-day travel, buy your ticket at the northern end of the train station at Platform

## MAIN BUSES FROM JAIPUR

| DESTINATION       | FARE (₹)            | DURATION (HR) | FREQUENCY       |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Agra              | 261-289, AC 470-573 | 5½            | 11 daily        |
| Ajmer             | 150, AC 316         | 2½            | at least hourly |
| Bharatpur         | 195, AC 410         | 4½            | at least hourly |
| Bikaner           | 334, AC 596         | 5½-7          | hourly          |
| Bundi             | 216                 | 5             | 5 daily         |
| Chittorgarh       | 339, AC 585         | 7             | 6 daily         |
| Delhi             | 273, AC 800         | 5½            | at least hourly |
| Jaisalmer         | 593                 | 14            | 2 daily         |
| Jhunjhunu         | 181, AC 321         | 3½-5          | half-hourly     |
| Jodhpur           | 340, AC 741         | 5½-7          | every 2 hours   |
| Kota              | 252                 | 5             | hourly          |
| Mt Abu (Abu Road) | 486, AC 866         | 10½-13        | 6 daily         |
| Nawalgarh         | 145, AC 258         | 2½-4          | hourly          |
| Pushkar           | 161                 | 3             | daily           |
| Udaipur           | 420, AC 914         | 10            | 6 daily         |

1, window 10 (closed 6am to 6.30am, 2pm to 2.30pm and 10pm to 10.30pm).

Station facilities on Platform 1 include an RTDC tourist office, Tourism Assistance Force (police), a cloakroom for left luggage (₹16 per bag per 24 hours), retiring rooms, restaurants and air-con waiting rooms for those with 1st-class and 2AC train tickets.

There's a prepaid autorickshaw stand and local taxis at the road entrance to the train station.

Services include the following:

**Agra** sleeper ₹185, 3½ to 4½ hours, nine daily

**Ahmedabad** sleeper ₹350, nine to 13 hours, seven daily (12.30am, 2.20am, 4.25am, 8.40am, 11.45am, 2.20pm and 8.35pm)

**Ajmer (for Pushkar)** sleeper ₹90, two hours, 21 daily

**Bikaner** sleeper ₹275, 6½ to 7½ hours, three daily (12.45am, 4.15pm, 9.45pm)

**Delhi** sleeper ₹245, 4½ to six hours, at least nine daily (1am, 2.50am, 4.40am, 5am, 6am, 2.35pm, 4.25pm, 5.50pm and 11.15pm), more on selected days

**Jaisalmer** sleeper ₹350, 12 hours, three daily (11.10am, 4.15pm and 11.45pm)

**Jodhpur** sleeper ₹250, 4½ to six hours, 10 daily (12.45am, 2.45am, 6am, 9.25am, 11.10am, 11.25am, 12.20pm, 5pm, 10.40pm and 11.45pm)

**Ranthambhore NP (Sawai Madhopur)** sleeper ₹180, two to three hours, at least nine daily (12.30am, 5.40am, 6.40am, 11.05am, 2pm, 4.50pm, 5.35pm, 7.35pm and 8.45pm), more on selected days

**Udaipur** sleeper ₹270, seven to eight hours, three daily (6.15am, 2pm and 11pm)

## **i** Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

There are no bus services from the airport. An autorickshaw/taxi costs at least ₹350/450. There's a prepaid taxi booth inside the terminal.

### AUTORICKSHAW

Autorickshaw drivers at the bus and train stations might just be the pushiest in Rajasthan. Use the fixed-rate prepaid autorickshaw stands instead. Keep hold of your docket to give to the driver at the end of the journey. In other cases be prepared to bargain hard – expect to pay at least ₹80 from either station to the Old City.

### CYCLE-RICKSHAW

You can do your bit for the environment by flagging down a lean-limbed cycle-rickshaw rider. Though it can be uncomfortable watching someone pedalling hard to transport you, this is how they make a living. A short trip costs about ₹50.

### PUBLIC TRANSPORT

**Jaipur Metro** (☎ 0141-2385790; www.jaipurmetrorail.info) operates about 10km of track, known as the Pink Line, and nine stations. The track starts southwest of the Pink City in Mansarovar, travels through Civil Lines, and currently terminates at Chandpole. At the time of writing, the continuation of this track

## MAJOR TRAINS FROM JAIPUR

| DESTINATION         | TRAIN                       | DEPARTURE TIME | ARRIVAL TIME | FARE (₹)        |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Agra (Cantonment)   | 19666 Udaipur-Kurj Exp      | 6.15am         | 11am         | 185/510 (A)     |
| Agra (Fort)         | 12035 Jaipur-AF Shatabdi    | 7.05am         | 10.35am      | 505/1050 (D)    |
| Ahmedabad           | 12958 Adi Sj Rajdhani       | 12.30am        | 9.40am       | 1130/1580 (B)   |
| Ajmer (for Pushkar) | 12195 Ajmer-AF Intercity    | 9.40am         | 11.50am      | 100/325 (C)     |
| Bikaner             | 12307 Howrah-Jodhpur Exp    | 12.45am        | 8.15am       | 275/705 (A)     |
| Delhi (New Delhi)   | 12016 Ajmer Shatabdi        | 5.50pm         | 10.40pm      | 570/1205 (D)    |
| Delhi (S Rohilla)   | 12985 Dee Double Decker     | 6am            | 10.30am      | 505/1205 (D)    |
| Jaisalmer           | 14659 Delhi-JSM Exp         | 11.45pm        | 11.40am      | 350/935 (A)     |
| Jodhpur             | 22478 Jaipur-Jodhpur SF Exp | 6am            | 10.30am      | 515/625 (E)     |
| Sawai Madhopur      | 12466 Intercity Exp         | 11.05am        | 1.15pm       | 180/325/560 (F) |
| Udaipur             | 19665 Jaipur-Udaipur Exp    | 11pm           | 6.45am       | 270/715 (A)     |

Fares: (A) sleeper/3AC, (B) 3AC/2AC, (C) 2nd-class seat/AC chair, (D) AC chair/1AC, (E) AC chair/3AC, (F) sleeper/AC chair/3AC

through the Pink City from Chandpole to Badi Chaupar was under construction. Fares are between ₹5 and ₹15.

## TAXI

There are unmetered taxis available, which will require negotiating a fare.

**Metro Cabs** (☎ 0414-4244444; www.metro-cabs.in; flagfall incl 2km ₹50, then per km ₹10-12, plus per min ₹1, night surcharge 10pm-6am 25%; 🕒 24hr) Taxis can be hired for sightseeing for four-/eight-hour blocks for ₹700/1350.

## Around Jaipur

### Amber

The magnificent, formidable, honey-hued fort of Amber (pronounced 'amer'), an ethereal example of Rajput architecture, rises from a rocky mountainside about 11km northeast of Jaipur, and is the city's must-see sight.

Amber was the former capital of Jaipur state. It was built by the Kachhwaha Rajputs, who hailed from Gwalior, in present day Madhya Pradesh, where they reigned for over 800 years. The construction of the fort, which was begun in 1592 by Maharaja Man Singh, the Rajput commander of Akbar's army, was financed with war booty. It was later extended and completed by the Jai Singhs before they moved to Jaipur on the plains below.

The town of Amber, below the fort, is also worth visiting, especially the Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing. From the museum you can walk around the ancient town to the restored **Panna Meena Baori** (step-well) and **Jagat Siromani Temple** (known locally as the Meera Temple).

## 👁 Sights

### ★ Amber Fort

FORT

(Indian/foreigner ₹100/500, night entry ₹100, guide ₹200, audio guide ₹200-250; 🕒 8am-6pm, last entry 5.30pm, night entry 7-9pm) This magnificent fort comprises an extensive palace complex, built from pale yellow and pink sandstone, and white marble, and is divided into four main sections, each with its own courtyard. It is possible to visit the fortress on elephant-back, but animal welfare groups have criticised the keeping of elephants at Amber because of reports of abuse, and because carrying passengers can cause lasting injuries to the animals.

## WORTH A TRIP

### ABHANERI

Abhaneri is home to one of Rajasthan's most spectacular step-wells. With around 11 visible levels (depending on groundwater level) of zigzagging steps, the 10th-century **Chand Baori** (🌅 dawn-dusk) **FREE** is an incredible geometric wonder. Flanking the well is a small crumbling palace, where royals used to picnic and bathe in private rooms (water was brought up by ox-power).

Abhaneri is about 95km from Jaipur and about 10km from National Hwy 21, the main Agra-Jaipur highway. From Jaipur catch a bus to Sikandra (₹70, 1½ hours), from where you can hop in a crowded share taxi (₹10) for the 5km trip to Gular. From Gular catch a share taxi or minibus to Abhaneri (another 5km and ₹10). If you have your own transport, Abhaneri and its step-well is a worthwhile stop between Jaipur and Agra/Bharatpur.

As an alternative, you can trudge up to the fort from the road in about 10 minutes, or take a 4WD to the top and back for ₹400 (good for up to five passengers), including a one-hour wait time. For night entry, admission for foreigners drops to the Indian price.

However you arrive, you will enter Amber Fort through the **Suraj Pol** (Sun Gate), which leads to the **Jaleb Chowk** (Main Courtyard), where returning armies would display their war booty to the populace - women could view this area from the veiled windows of the palace. The ticket office is directly across the courtyard from the Suraj Pol. If you arrive by car you will enter through the **Chand Pol** (Moon Gate) on the opposite side of Jaleb Chowk. Hiring a guide or grabbing an audio guide is highly recommended, as there are very few signs and many blind alleys.

From Jaleb Chowk, an imposing stairway leads up to the main palace, but first it's worth taking the steps just to the right, which lead to the small **Siladevi Temple**, with its gorgeous silver doors featuring repoussé (raised relief) work.

Heading back to the main stairway will take you up to the second courtyard and the **Diwan-i-Am** (Hall of Public Audience), which has a double row of columns, each topped by a capital in the shape of an elephant, and latticed galleries above.

The maharaja's apartments are located around the third courtyard – you enter through the fabulous **Ganesh Pol**, decorated with beautiful frescoed arches. The **Jai Mandir** (Hall of Victory) is noted for its inlaid panels and multimirrored ceiling. Carved marble relief panels around the hall are fascinatingly delicate and quirky, depicting cartoon-like insects and sinuous flowers. Opposite the Jai Mandir is the **Sukh Niwas** (Hall of Pleasure), with an ivory-inlaid sandalwood door and a channel that once carried cooling water right through the room. From the Jai Mandir you can enjoy fine views from the palace ramparts over picturesque **Maota Lake** below.

The **zenana** (secluded women's quarters) surrounds the fourth courtyard. The rooms were designed so that the maharaja could embark on his nocturnal visits to his wives' and concubines' respective chambers without the others knowing, as the chambers are independent but open onto a common corridor.

The **Amber Sound & Light Show** (📞 0141-2530844; Kesar Kiyari complex; Indian/foreigner ₹100/200; 🕒 English 7.30pm, Hindi 8.30pm) takes place below the fort in the complex near Maota Lake.

### Jaigarh

FORT

(Indian/foreigner ₹50/100, car ₹50, Hindi/English guide ₹200/300; 🕒 9am–5pm) A scrubby green hill rises above Amber and is topped by the imposing Jaigarh, built in 1726 by Jai Singh. The stern fort, punctuated by whimsical-hatted lookout towers, was never captured and has survived intact through the centuries. It's an uphill walk (about 1km) from Amber and offers great views from the Diwa Burj watchtower. The fort has reservoirs, residential areas, a puppet theatre and the world's largest wheeled cannon, *Jaya Vana*.

During the Mughal empire, Jaipur produced many weapons for the Mughal and Rajput rulers. The cannon, a most spectacular example, was made in the fort foundry, which was constructed in Mughal times. The huge weapon dates from 1720, has a barrel around 6m long, is made from a mix of eight different metals and weighs 50 tonnes. To fire it requires 100kg of gunpowder, and it has a range of 30km. It's debatable how many times this great device was used.

A sophisticated network of drainage channels feed three large tanks that used to provide water for all the soldiers, residents and livestock living in the fort. The largest tank has a capacity for 22.8 million litres

of water. The fort served as the treasury of the Kachhwahas, and for a long time people were convinced that at least part of the royal treasure was still secreted in this large water tank. The Indian government even searched it to check, but found nothing.

Within the fort is an armoury and museum, with the essential deadly weapons collection and some royal knick-knacks, including interesting photographs, maps of Jaigarh, spittoons, and circular 18th-century playing cards. The structure also contains various open halls, including the *Shubhat Niwas* (Meeting Hall of Warriors), which has some weather-beaten sedan chairs and drums lying about.

Admission is free with a valid ticket from the Jaipur City Palace that is less than two days old.

### Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing MUSEUM

(📞 0141-2530226; Anokhi Haveli, Kheri Gate; adult/child ₹80/25; 🕒 10.30am–4.30pm Tue–Sat, 11am–4.30pm Sun, closed May–mid-Jul) This interesting museum in a restored *Haveli* documents the art of hand-block printing, from old traditions to contemporary design. You can watch masters carve unbelievably intricate wooden printing blocks and even have a go at printing your own scarf or T-shirt. There's a cafe and gift shop, too.

## Sleeping

### ★ Mosaics Guesthouse GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(📞 0141-2530031, 8875430000; www.mosaics-guesthouse.com; Siyaram Ki Doongri; s/d incl breakfast ₹3300/3800; 🍷🍷🍷) Get away from it all at this gorgeous arty place (the French owner is a mosaic artist and will show off his workshop) with four lovely rooms and a rooftop terrace with beautiful fort views. Set-price Franco-Indian meals cost ₹800/1000 for veg/nonveg. It's about 1km past the fort near Kunda Village – head for Siyaram Ki Doongri, where you'll find signs.

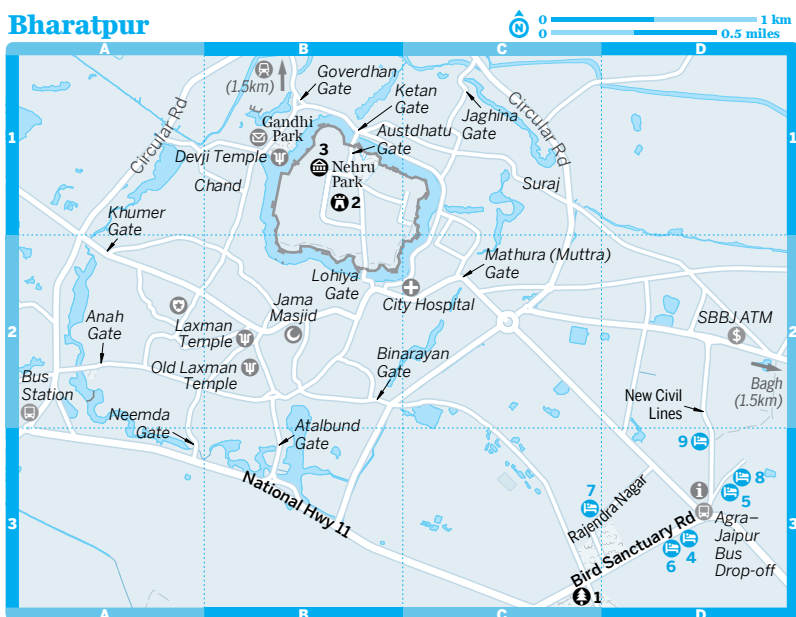
## Bharatpur & Keoladeo National Park

(📞 05644252.350 / POP 252.350)

Bharatpur is famous for its wonderful UNESCO-listed Keoladeo National Park, a wetland and significant bird sanctuary. Apart from the park, Bharatpur also has a few historic vestiges, though it wouldn't be worth making the journey for these alone. The town is dusty, noisy and not particularly visitor-



## Bharatpur



friendly. Bharatpur hosts the boisterous and colourful **Brij Festival** just prior to Holi celebrations.

### Sights

#### Lohagarh

FORT

**FREE** The still-inhabited, 18th-century Lohagarh, or Iron Fort, was so named because of its sturdy defences. Despite being somewhat forlorn and derelict, it is still impressive, and sits at the centre of town, surrounded by a moat. There's a northern entrance, at **Austdhatu (Eight-Metal) Gate** – apparently the spikes on the gate are made of eight different metals – and a southern entrance, at **Lohiya Gate**.

Maharaja Suraj Mahl, constructor of the fort and founder of Bharatpur, built two towers, the **Jawahar Burj** and the **Fateh Burj**, within the ramparts to commemorate his victories over the Mughals and the British. The fort also contains three much decayed palaces within its precincts.

One of the palaces, centred on a tranquil courtyard, houses a **museum** (Indian/foreigner ₹20/100, photography prohibited inside museum; ☉ 9.45am–5.15pm Tue–Sun). Upstairs is a ragtag display of royal artefacts, including weaponry. More impressive is the Jain sculpture gallery, which includes some beautiful 7th- to

## Bharatpur

### Top Sights

- 1 Keoladeo National Park ..... C3

### Sights

- 2 Lohagarh ..... B1  
3 Museum ..... B1

### Sleeping

- 4 Birder's Inn ..... D3  
5 Falcon Guest House ..... D3  
6 Hotel Sunbird ..... C3  
7 Kiran Guest House ..... C3  
8 New Spoonbill Guesthouse ..... D3  
9 Royal Guest House ..... D3

### **Flexible category 3**

- State Bank of India ATM ..... (see 5)

10th-century pieces. The most spectacular feature of the museum, however, is the palace's original *hammam* (bathhouse), which retains some fine carvings and frescos.

### Keoladeo National Park

This tremendous bird sanctuary and **national park** (Indian/foreigner ₹75/500, video ₹600/900, guide per hr ₹150, bike/mountain-bike/binoculars rental per day ₹25/40/100; ☉ 6am–6pm Apr–Sep, 6.30am–5pm Oct–Mar) has long been

recognised as one of the world's most important bird breeding and feeding grounds. In a good monsoon season over one-third of the park can be submerged, hosting more than 360 species within its 29 sq km. The marshland patchwork is a wintering area for aquatic birds, including visitors from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, China and Siberia. The park is also home to deer, nilgai (antelope) and boar, which can be readily spotted.

Keoladeo originated as a royal hunting reserve in the 1850s. It continued to supply the tables of the maharajas with fresh game until as late as 1965. In 1982 Keoladeo was declared a national park and it was listed as a World Heritage Site in 1985.

By far the best time to visit this park is October to February, when you should see many migratory birds. At other times it can be dry and relatively bird-free.

### Visiting the Park

Park admission entitles you to one entrance per day. One narrow road (no motorised vehicles are permitted past checkpoint 2) runs through the park, but a number of tracks and pathways fan out from it and thread their way between the shallow wetlands. Generally speaking, the further away from the main gate you go, the more interesting the scenery, and the more varied the wildlife becomes.

Only the government-authorised cycle-rickshaws (recognisable by the yellow license plate) are allowed beyond checkpoint 2, and they can only travel along the park's larger tracks. You don't pay an admission fee for the drivers, but they charge ₹100 per hour; some are very knowledgeable.

An excellent way to see the park is by hiring a bicycle at the park entrance. Having a bike is a wonderfully quiet way to travel, and allows you to avoid bottlenecks and take in the serenity on your own. However, we recommend that lone female travellers who wish to cycle do so with a guide (who will cycle alongside you), as we've had more than one report of lone women being harassed by young men inside the park in recent years.

You get a small map with your entrance ticket, though the park isn't big, so it's difficult to get lost.

### Sleeping

There are plenty of sleeping options, suiting all budgets, near the park on Bird Sanctuary Rd, so don't feel pressured by touts at Bharatpur's train or bus stations.

### New Spoonbill Guesthouse

HOTEL \$

(☎ 05644-223571, 7597412553; www.hotelspoonbill.com; Gori Shankur Colony; s/d ₹700/800, with AC ₹1100/1200; 📶📶📶) Owned and run by the same family as the original Spoonbill Hotel down the road, this place has simple but smart rooms, each with a small terrace. The larger rooms are great, with lots of windows. The dining room looks onto the garden and delicious home-cooked meals are available.

### Royal Guest House

HOTEL \$

(☎ 9414315457; www.royalguesthousebharatpur.com; B-15 New Civil Lines, near Saras Circle; r ₹300-900; 📶📶📶) Rooms at the Royal are all very clean and fresh, and the rooftop restaurant is cosy, making the whole place feel more like a homestay than a guesthouse. Guests can use a kitchen for self-catering, and have free access to the internet. The ultrakeen management, who live on the premises, do money changing and run a sister operation, Royal Farmhouse, 3.5km from here.

### Falcon Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎ 05644-223815; falconguesthouse@hotmail.com; Gori Shankur Colony; s/d from ₹600/800, r with AC ₹1200-1500; 📶📶) The Falcon may well be the pick of a bunch of hotels all in a row and all owned by the same extended family. It's a well-kept, snug place to stay, run by the affable Mrs Rajni Singh. There is a range of comfortable, good-sized rooms at different prices, including a family room. The best rooms have balconies.

### Kiran Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎ 05644-223845; www.kiranguesthouse.com; 364 Rajendra Nagar; r ₹400-800, with AC ₹1100; 📶) Managed by eager-to-please brothers, this guesthouse delivers great value, with seven simple, clean and spacious rooms and a pleasant rooftop where you can eat tasty home cooking. It's on a quiet road not far from Keoladeo park. Nature guiding and free pick-up from the Bharatpur train and bus stations are offered.

### ★ Hotel Sunbird

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 05644-225701; www.hotelsunbird.com; Bird Sanctuary Rd; s/d from ₹2100/2550, ste ₹2950; 📶📶) This popular, well-run place close to the Keoladeo park entrance may look modest from the road, but out back boasts a lovely garden (with bar) and spacious rooms with balconies. Rooms are clean and comfortable and the restaurant dishes up a good range of tasty veg and nonveg dishes. Packed lunches and guided tours for the park are available.

## ★ Birder's Inn

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 05644-227346; www.birdersinn.com; Bird Sanctuary Rd; r incl breakfast from ₹3500; ㊚ ㊚ ㊚ ㊚) The Birder's Inn is a popular, long-standing base for exploring the national park. There is a multicuisine restaurant and a small pool to cool off in. The rooms are airy, spacious and nicely decorated, and are set far back from the road in well-tended gardens. Guides from the hotel are available for Keoladeo.

## i Information

**Main Post Office** (🕒 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) Near Gandhi Park.

**Tourist Office** (☎ 05644-222542; Saras Circle; 🕒 9am-5pm) On the crossroads about 700m from the national park entrance; has a free map of Bharatpur and Keoladeo National Park.

## i Getting There & Away

### BUS

Buses running between Agra and Jaipur will drop you by the tourist office or outside the Keoladeo park entrance if you ask.

Services from Bharatpur **bus station** include the following:

**Agra** non-AC/AC ₹68/171, 1½ hours, half-hourly around the clock

**Alwar** ₹136, four hours, hourly until 8pm

**Deeg** ₹39, one hour, hourly until 8pm

**Delhi** ₹192, five hours, half-hourly from 6am to 7pm, then hourly until 11pm

**Fatehpur Sikri** ₹28, 45 minutes, half-hourly around the clock

**Jaipur** ₹195, 4½ hours, half-hourly around the clock

### TRAIN

The **train station** is about 4km from Keoladeo and the main hotel area; a rickshaw should cost around ₹70.

**Agra** 2nd-class seat/sleeper/3AC ₹60/150/510, 1½ to two hours, nine daily between 4.45am and 8.10pm

**Delhi** 2nd-class seat/sleeper/3AC ₹95/180/510, three to four hours, 12 trains

daily, plus three other services on selected days

**Jaipur** 2nd-class seat/sleeper/3AC ₹110/150/510, three to four hours, nine daily between 2am and 10pm

**Ranthambhore NP (Sawai Madhopur)** 2nd-class seat/sleeper/3AC ₹135/180/560, two to three hours, 10 daily between 1am and 9.40pm. These trains all continue to Kota (four hours) from where you can catch buses to Bundi.

## i Getting Around

A cycle- or autorickshaw from the bus station to the main hotel area should cost around ₹40 (add an extra ₹30 from the train station).

## Alwar

☎ 0144 / POP 341,430

Alwar is perhaps the oldest of the Rajasthan kingdoms, forming part of the Matsya territories of Viratnagar in 1500 BC. It became known again in the 18th century under Pratap Singh, who pushed back the rulers of Jaipur to the south and the Jats of Bharatpur to the east, and who successfully resisted the Marathas. It was one of the first Rajput states to ally itself with the fledgling British empire, although British interference in Alwar's internal affairs meant this partnership was not always amicable.

Alwar is the nearest town to Sariska Tiger Reserve and National Park and boasts a fascinating museum, but it sees relatively few tourists.

## 👁 Sights

### City Palace

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Vinay Vilas Mahal) Under the gaze of Bala Quila fort sprawls the colourful and convoluted City Palace complex, with massive gates and a tank reflecting a symmetrical series of ghats and pavilions. Today most of the complex is occupied by government offices, overflowing with piles of dusty papers and soiled by pigeons and splatters of *paan* (a mixture of betel nut and leaves for chewing).

## MAJOR TRAINS FROM BHARATPUR

| DESTINATION               | TRAIN                    | DEPARTURE | ARRIVAL | FARE (₹)    |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------|-------------|
| Agra (Cantonment)         | 19666 Udz-Kurj Exp       | 9.46am    | 10.55am | 150/510 (A) |
| Delhi (Hazrat Nizamuddin) | 12059 Kota-Jan Shatabdi  | 9.25am    | 12.30pm | 135/415 (B) |
| Jaipur                    | 19665 Kurj-Udaipr Exp    | 6.55pm    | 10.50pm | 150/510 (A) |
| Sawai Madhopur            | 12904 Golden Temple Mail | 10.30am   | 12.55pm | 180/560 (A) |

Fares: (A) sleeper/3AC, (B) 2nd-class/AC chair

## SURAJ MAHL'S PALACE, DEEG

At the centre of Deeg – a small, rarely visited, dusty tumult of a town about 35km north of Bharatpur – stands the incongruously glorious **Suraj Mahl's Palace** (Indian/foreigner ₹15/200; ☀ 9.30am-5.30pm Sat-Thu), edged by stately formal gardens. It's one of India's most beautiful and carefully proportioned palace complexes. Pick up a map and brochure at the entrance; photography is not permitted in some of the bhavans (buildings).

Built in a mixture of Rajput and Mughal architectural styles, the 18th-century **Gopal Bhavan** is fronted by imposing arches to take full advantage of the early-morning light. Downstairs is a lower storey that becomes submerged during the monsoon as the water level of the adjacent tank, **Gopal Sagar**, rises. It was used by the maharajas until the early 1950s, and contains many original furnishings, including faded sofas, huge punkas (cloth fans) that are over 200 years old, chaise longues, a stuffed tiger, elephant-foot stands, and fine porcelain from China and France.

In an upstairs room at the rear of the palace is an Indian-style marble dining table – a stretched oval-shaped affair raised just 20cm off the ground. Guests sat around the edge, and the centre was the serving area. In the maharaja's bedroom is an enormous 3.6m by 2.4m wooden bed with silver legs.

Two large tanks lie alongside the palace, the aforementioned Gopal Sagar to the east and **Rup Sagar** to the west. The well-maintained gardens and flowerbeds, watered by the tanks, continue the extravagant theme with over 2000 fountains. Many of these fountains are in working order and coloured waters pour forth during the monsoon festival in August.

The **Keshav Bhavan** (Summer or Monsoon Pavilion) is a single-storey edifice with five arches along each side. Tiny jets spray water from the archways and metal balls rumble around in a water channel imitating monsoon thunder. Deeg's massive walls (which are up to 28m high) and 12 vast bastions, some with their cannons still in place, are also worth exploring. You can walk up to the top of the walls from the palace.

Other bhavans (in various states of renovation) include the marble **Suraj Bhavan**, reputedly taken from Delhi and reassembled here, the **Kishan Bhavan** and, along the northern side of the palace grounds, the **Nand Bhavan**.

Deeg is an easy day trip (and there's nowhere good to stay) from Bharatpur or Alwar by car. All the roads to Deeg are rough and the buses crowded. Frequent buses run to and from Alwar (₹60, 2½ hours) and Bharatpur (₹28, one hour).

Hidden within the City Palace is the excellent **Alwar Museum** (Indian/foreigner ₹50/100; ☀ 9.45am-5.15pm Tue-Sun).

The museum's eclectic exhibits evoke the extravagance of the lifestyle of the maharajas: stunning weapons, stuffed Scottish pheasants, royal ivory slippers, erotic miniatures, royal vestments, a solid silver table, and stone sculptures, such as an 11th-century sculpture of Vishnu.

Somewhat difficult to find in the Kafkaesque tangle of government offices, the museum is on the top floor of the palace, up a ramp from the main courtyard. There should be plenty of people around to point you in the right direction and from there you can follow the signs.

### Cenotaph of Maharaja Bakhtawar Singh

HISTORIC BUILDING

This double-storey edifice, resting on a platform of sandstone, was built in 1815 by

Maharaja Vinay Singh, in memory of his father. To gain access to the cenotaph, take the steps to the far left when facing the palace. The cenotaph is also known as the Chhatri of Moosi Rani, after one of the mistresses of Bakhtawar Singh who performed *sati* (self-immolation) on his funeral pyre – after this act she was promoted to wifely status.

### Bala Quila

FORT

This imposing fort stands 300m above Alwar, its fortifications hugging the steep hills that line the eastern edge of the city. Predating the time of Pratap Singh, it's one of the few forts in Rajasthan built before the rise of the Mughals, who used it as a base for attacking Ranthambhore. Mughal emperors Babur and Akbar have stayed overnight here, and Prince Salim (later Emperor Jehangir) was exiled in Salim Mahal for three years.

Now in ruins, the fort houses a radio transmitter station and parts can only be

visited with permission from the superintendent of police. However, this is easy to get: just ask at the superintendent's office in the City Palace complex. You can walk the very steep couple of kilometres up to the fort entrance or take a 7km rickshaw ride.

## Sleeping & Eating

### ★ Aravali Clarks Inn

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0144-2332316; www.clarksinn.in; Nehru Rd; s/d incl breakfast from ₹2500/3000, ste ₹6000; 🍷🍷🍷🍷) One of the town's best choices, this conveniently located hotel has recently come under the patronage of Clarks Inn and is undergoing refurbishment. Rooms are large and well furnished and boast big bathrooms. The multicuisine Bridge restaurant is one of the best in town, and there's a bar. The pool is summer only.

Turn left out of the train station and it's about 300m down the road.

### Hotel Hill View

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0144-2700989; www.hillviewalwar.com; 19 Moti Dugri Rd; r from ₹2100; 🍷🍷) Rooms at this centrally located hotel vary so much that you may prefer a cheaper 'deluxe' to a pricier 'super deluxe'; inspect a few before deciding. The same management runs three Inderlok restaurants in town, including one here, so the food is good. The attached bar may or may not be an advantage depending on the clientele.

It is found south of the city centre on the road that encircles Moti Dugri.

### RTDC Hotel Meenal

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0144-2347352; meenal@rtdc.in; Topsingh Circle; s/d ₹900/1100, with AC ₹1100/1300; 🍷) A respectable option with tidy yet bland rooms typical of the chain. It's located about 1km south of town on the way to Sariska, so it's quiet and leafy, though a long way from the action.

### Prem Pavitra Bhojnalaya

INDIAN \$

(☎ 9314055521; near Hope Circle; mains ₹75-100; ☺ 10.30am-4pm & 6.30-10pm; 🍷) Alwar's renowned restaurant has been going since 1957. In the heart of the old town, it serves fresh, tasty pure-veg food – try the delicious *aloo parathas* (bread stuffed with spicy potato) and *palak paneer* (unfermented cheese cubes in spinach puree). The servings are big; half-serves are available. Finish off with the famous *kheer* (creamy rice pudding).

You have to pay 10% extra to eat in the air-conditioned section – but it is worth it. Turn right out of the bus station, take the

first left (towards Hope Circle) and it's on your left after 100m.

## Information

**State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur** (Company Bagh Rd; ☎ 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) Changes major currencies and travellers cheques and has an ATM. Near the bus stand.

**Tourist Office** (☎ 0144-2347348; Nehru Rd; ☺ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Helpful centre (if actually open when it should be) offering a map of Alwar and information on Sariska. Near the train station.

## Getting There & Around

A cycle-rickshaw between the bus and train stations costs ₹80. Look out for the shared taxis (₹10) that ply fixed routes around town. They come in the form of white minivans and have the word 'Vahini' printed on their side doors. One handy route goes past Aravali Clarks Inn, the tourist office and the train station before continuing on to the bus station and terminating a short walk from the City Palace complex.

A return taxi to Sariska Tiger Reserve will cost you around ₹1500.

## BUS

The Alwar **bus station** is on Old Bus Stand Rd, near Manu Marg. Services:

**Bharatpur** ₹128, four hours, hourly from 5am to 8.30pm

**Deeg** ₹87, 2½ hours, hourly from 5am to 8.30pm

**Delhi** ₹176, four hours, every 20 minutes from 5am to 9pm

**Jaipur** ₹160, four hours, half-hourly from 6am to 10.30pm

**Sariska** ₹35, one hour, half-hourly from 6am to 10.30pm

## TRAIN

The **train station** is fairly central, on Naru Marg. Around a dozen daily trains leave for Delhi (sleeper/3AC ₹180/560, three to four hours) throughout the day.

It's also three to four hours to Jaipur (sleeper/3AC ₹180/510) from here. Sixteen trains depart daily and prices are almost identical to those for Delhi.

## Sariska Tiger Reserve & National Park

☎ 0144

Enclosed within the dramatic, shadowy folds of the Aravalli Hills, the **Sariska Tiger Reserve & National Park** (☎ 0144-2841333; www.rajasthanwildlife.in; Indian/foreigner ₹105/570,

vehicle ₹250; ☀ morning safari 7-10.30am, evening safari 2-5.30pm Nov-Feb, timings vary by 30min Mar-Jun & Oct, no safaris Jul-Sep, tickets on sale an hour before entry time) is a tangle of remnant semideciduous jungle and craggy canyons sheltering streams and lush greenery. It covers 866 sq km (including a core area of 498 sq km), and is home to peacocks, monkeys, majestic sambars, nilgai, chital, wild boars and jackals.

Unfortunately, despite its name, you're unlikely to spot a tiger in Sariska. It is, however, still a fascinating sanctuary. The best time to spot wildlife is November to March, and you'll see most wildlife in the evening. The park is closed to safaris from 1 July to 30 September. Your chances of spotting wildlife at this time is minimal, in any case, and the park is only open for temple pilgrimage.

## Sights

Besides wildlife, Sariska has some fantastic sights within the reserve or around its peripheries, which are well worth seeking out. If you take a longer tour, you can ask to visit one or more of these. Some are also accessible by public bus.

### **Kankwari Fort**

FORT

Deep inside the sanctuary, this imposing small jungle fort, 22km from Sariska, offers amazing views over the plains of the nation-

al park, dotted with red mud-brick villages. A four- to five-hour 4WD safari (one to five passengers plus mandatory guide) to Kankwari Fort from the Forest Reception Office near the reserve entrance costs ₹2600, plus guide fee (₹300).

This fort is the inaccessible place that Aurangzeb chose to imprison his brother, Dara Shikoh, Shah Jahan's chosen heir to the Mughal throne, for several years before he was beheaded.

### **Bhangarh**

HISTORIC SITE

Around 55km from Sariska, beyond the inner park sanctuary and out in open countryside, is this deserted, well-preserved and notoriously haunted city. Founded in 1631 by Madho Singh, it had 10,000 dwellings, but was suddenly deserted about 300 years ago for reasons that remain mysterious. Bhangarh can be reached by a bus (₹39) that runs twice daily through the sanctuary to nearby Gola-ka village. Check what time the bus returns, otherwise you risk getting stranded.

## Tours

Private cars, including taxis, are limited to sealed roads heading to the temple and are allowed only on Tuesday and Saturday. The best way to visit the park is by gypsy (open-topped, six-passenger 4WD), which can explore off the main tracks. Gypsy safaris start

## **SARISKA'S TIGER TALE**

Sariska Tiger Reserve took centre stage in one of India's most publicised wildlife dramas. In 2005 an Indian journalist broke the news that the tiger population here had been eliminated, a report that was later confirmed officially after an emergency census was carried out.

An inquiry into the crisis recommended fundamental management changes before tigers be reintroduced to the reserve. Extra funding was proposed to cover relocation of villages within the park as well as increasing the protection force. But action on the recommendations has been slow and incomplete despite extensive media coverage and a high level of concern in India.

Nevertheless, a pair of tigers from Ranthambhore National Park were moved by helicopter to Sariska in 2008. By 2010, five tigers had been transferred. However, in November 2010 the male of the original pair was found dead, having been poisoned by local villagers, who are not supportive of the reintroduction. The underlying problem: the inevitable battle between India's poorest and ever-expanding village populace with the rare and phenomenally valuable wildlife on their doorstep. Plans to relocate and reimburse villagers inside the park have largely failed to come to fruition, and illegal marble mining and clashes between cattle farmers and park staff have remained a problem.

In early 2012 the first cubs were sighted. At the time of writing, Sariska's tiger population was thought to be 14.

Only time will tell if this reintroduction is successful – inbreeding in the small population is an understandably high concern. Despite much vaunted successes for Project Tiger ([www.projecttiger.nic.in](http://www.projecttiger.nic.in)) at a national level, Sariska remains a sad indictment of tiger conservation in India, from the top government officials down to the underpaid forest guards.

at the park entrance, and vehicle plus driver hire is ₹2100 for a three-hour safari; the vehicles can take up to five people (including guide). The bigger 20-seat canters cost ₹5000 for the vehicle and driver, but offer a much diminished experience. Guides are mandatory (₹300 for three hours).

Bookings can be made at the **Forest Reception Office** (📍0144-2841333; www.rajasthanwildlife.in; Jaipur Rd; 🎫 ticket sales 6.55-7.30am & 1-3pm Nov-Jan, timings vary by 30min Mar-Jun & Oct), where buses will drop you.

## Sleeping

**RTDC Hotel Tiger Den** HOTEL \$\$  
(📍0144-2841342; tigerden@rtdc.in; s/d incl breakfast ₹1860/2645, with AC ₹2505/3290, ste ₹4780; 🍷) Hotel Tiger Den isn't fancy – a cement block fronted by a lawn and backed by a rambling garden. It's best feature is that it is very close to the reserve entrance. On the plus side the management is friendly, there is a bar, and the rooms have balconies with a pleasant outlook. Bring a mosquito net or repellent.

**Hotel Sariska Palace** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$  
(📍7073474870; www.thesariskapalace.in; r incl breakfast ₹8400, ste from ₹13,500; 🍷🍷🍷) Near the reserve entrance is this imposing former hunting lodge of the maharajas of Alwar. There's a driveway leading from opposite the Forest Reception Office. Rooms have soaring ceilings and soft mattresses, and those in the annexe by the swimming pool have good views. The Fusion Restaurant here serves expensive Indian and Continental dishes, as well as hosting a buffet (lunch/dinner ₹750/900).

**Sariska Tiger Heaven** HOTEL \$\$\$  
(📍9251016312; www.sariskatigerheaven.com; r incl all meals from ₹7500; 🍷🍷🍷) This isolated place about 3km west of the bus stop at Thanagazi village has free pick-up on offer. Rooms are set in stone-and-tile cottages and have big beds and windowed alcoves. It's a tranquil, if overpriced, place to stay. Staff can arrange 4WDs and guides to the reserve.

## Getting There & Away

Sariska is 35km from Alwar, a convenient town from which to approach the reserve. There are frequent (and crowded) buses from Alwar (₹35, one to 1½ hours, at least hourly) and on to Jaipur (₹129, four hours). Buses stop in front of the Forest Reception Office.

## Ajmer

(📍0145 / POP 542,330)

Ajmer is a bustling, chaotic city, 130km southwest of Jaipur and just 13km from the Hindu pilgrimage town of Pushkar. It surrounds the expansive lake of Ana Sagar, and is itself ringed by rugged Aravalli Hills. Ajmer is Rajasthan's most important site in terms of Islamic history and heritage. It contains one of India's most important Muslim pilgrimage centres, the shrine of Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti, who founded the Chishtiya order, the prime Sufi order in India. As well as some superb examples of early Muslim architecture, Ajmer is also a significant centre for the Jain religion, possessing an amazing golden Jain temple. However, with Ajmer's combination of high-voltage crowds and traffic, especially during Ramadan and the anniversary of the saint's death, most travellers choose to use Ajmer as a stepping stone to laid-back Pushkar.

## Sights

**Dargah of Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti** ISLAMIC SHRINE  
(www.dargahajmer.com; 🕒 4am-9pm summer, 5am-9pm winter) This is the tomb of Sufi saint Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti, who came to Ajmer from Persia in 1192 and died here in 1236. The tomb gained its significance during the time of the Mughals – many emperors added to the buildings here. Construction of the shrine was completed by Humayun, and the gate was added by the Nizam of Hyderabad. Mughal emperor Akbar used to make the pilgrimage to the dargah from Agra every year.

You have to cover your head in certain parts of the shrine, so remember to take a scarf or cap – there are plenty for sale at the colourful bazaar leading to the dargah, along with floral offerings and delicious toffees.

The main entrance is through **Nizam Gate** (1915). Inside, the green and white mosque, **Akbari Masjid**, was constructed in 1571 and is now an Arabic and Persian school for religious education. The next gate is called the **Shahjahani Gate**, as it was erected by Shah Jahan, although it is also known as 'Nakkarkhana', because of the two large *nakkharas* (drums) fixed above it.

A third gate, **Buland Darwaza** (16th century), leads into the dargah courtyard.

## Ajmer



## Ajmer

## 📍 Sights

- 1 Adhai-din-ka-Jhonpra .....A4
- 2 Dargah of Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti .....A3
- 3 Nasiyam (Red) Temple .....B2

## 🛏 Sleeping

- 4 Badnor House .....C1
- 5 Haveli Heritage Inn .....C3

## 🍴 Eating

- 6 Madina Hotel .....C3

Flanking the entrance of the courtyard are the *dags* (large iron cauldrons), one donated by Akbar in 1567, the other by Jehangir in 1631, for offerings for the poor.

Inside this courtyard, the saint's domed tomb is surrounded by a silver platform. Pilgrims believe that the saint's spirit will intercede on their behalf in matters of illness,

business or personal problems, so the notes and holy string attached to the railings around are thanks or requests.

Pilgrims and Sufis come from all over the world on the anniversary of the saint's death, the Urs, in the seventh month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Crowds can be suffocating.

Bags must be left in the cloakroom (₹10 each, with camera ₹20) outside the main entrance.

## Nasiyam (Red) Temple

JAIN TEMPLE

(Prithviraj Marg; ₹10; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm) This marvellous Jain temple, built in 1865, is also known as the Golden Temple, due to its amazing golden diorama in the double-storey temple hall. The intricate diorama depicts the Jain concept of the ancient world, with 13 continents and oceans, the golden city of Ayodhya, flying peacock and elephant gondolas, and gilded elephants with many tusks. The hall is also decorated with gold, silver and precious stones. It's unlike any



other temple in Rajasthan and is well worth a visit.

### Adhai-din-ka-Jhonpra

HISTORIC SITE

(Two-and-a-Half-Day Building; ☀️ dawn-dusk) Beyond the Dargah of Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti, on the town outskirts, are the extraordinary ruins of the Adhai-din-ka-Jhonpra mosque. According to legend, construction in 1153 took only 2½ days. Others say it was named after a festival lasting 2½ days. It was originally built as a Sanskrit college, but in 1198 Mohammed of Ghori seized Ajmer and converted the building into a mosque by adding a seven-arched wall covered with Islamic calligraphy in front of the pillared hall.

## Sleeping & Eating

### Haveli Heritage Inn

HOTEL \$\$

(☎️ 0145-2621607; www.haveliheritageinn.com; Kutcheri Rd; r ₹1340-3000; 📞 @) Set in a 140-year-old *haveli*, this welcoming city-centre oasis is arguably Ajmer's best midrange choice. The high-ceilinged rooms are spacious (some are almost suites), simply decorated, air-cooled and set well back from the busy road. There's a pleasant, grassy courtyard and the hotel is infused with a family atmosphere, complete with home-cooked meals.

### Badnor House

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎️ 0145-2627579; www.badnorhouse.com; Savitri Girl's College Rd, Civil Lines; s/d incl breakfast ₹2600/3000; 📞 📞) This guesthouse provides an excellent opportunity to stay with a delightful family and receive down-to-earth hospitality. There are three heritage-style doubles and an older-style, spacious and comfortable self-contained suite with private courtyard. The host is also an occasional travel photographer.

### Mansingh Palace

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎️ 0145-2425956; www.mansinghotels.com; Circular Rd; r from ₹4200, ste ₹7000; 📞 @ 📞) This modern place, on the shores of Ana Sagar about 3km from the centre, is rather out of the way, but has attractive and comfortable rooms, some with views and balconies. The hotel has a shady garden, a bar and a good restaurant, the Sheesh Mahal.

### Madina Hotel

NORTH INDIAN \$

(Station Rd; mains ₹30-100; ☀️ 9am-11pm) Handy if you're waiting for a train (it's opposite the station), this simple, open-to-the-street eatery cooks up cheap veg and nonveg fare, with specialities such as chicken Mughlai and *rumali roti* (huge paper-thin chapati).

### Sheesh Mahal

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Circular Rd; mains ₹150-375; ☀️ noon-3pm & 7-10.30pm) This upmarket restaurant, located in Ajmer's top hotel, the Mansingh Palace (p135), offers excellent Indian, Continental and Chinese dishes, as well as a buffet when the tour groups pass through. The service is slick, the air-con is on the chilly side, and the food is very good; it also boasts a bar.

## Information

**JLN Hospital** (☎️ 0145-2625500; Daulat Bagh; ☀️ 24hr)

**Main Post Office** (Prithviraj Marg; ☀️ 10am-1pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Sat) Less than 500m from the train station.

**Satguru's Internet** (60-61 Kutcheri Rd; per hr ₹30; ☀️ 9am-10pm)

**Tourist Office** Ajmer Junction Train Station (☀️ 9am-5pm); RTDC Hotel Khadim (☎️ 0145-2627426; ☀️ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

## Getting There & Away

For those pushing on to Pushkar, haggle hard for a private taxi – ₹350 is a good rate.

### BUS

Government-run buses leave from the **main bus stand** in Ajmer, from where buses to Pushkar (₹14, 30 minutes) also leave throughout the day. In addition to these buses, there are less-frequent 'deluxe' coach services running to major destinations such as Delhi and Jaipur. There is a 24-hour cloakroom at the bus stand (₹10 per bag per day).

| DESTINATION | FARE (₹)     | DURATION (HR) |
|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| Agra        | 392          | 10            |
| Ahmedabad   | 543          | 13            |
| Bharatpur   | 330          | 7             |
| Bikaner     | 267          | 7             |
| Bundi       | 184          | 5             |
| Chittorgarh | 195, AC 348  | 5             |
| Delhi       | 404, AC 1096 | 8½            |
| Jaipur      | 148, AC 314  | 2½            |
| Jaisalmer   | 458          | 11            |
| Jodhpur     | 205, AC 445  | 6             |
| Udaipur     | 285, AC 542  | 9             |

### TRAIN

Ajmer is a busy train junction. To book tickets, go to booth 5 at the train station's **reservations office** (☀️ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun). Services include the following:

**Agra (Agra Fort Station)** sleeper/AC Chair ₹275/570, 6½ hours, three daily (2.10am, 12.50pm and 3pm)

**Chittorgarh** sleeper/3AC ₹180/560, three hours, at least six daily (1.25am, 2.15am, 1pm, 4.10pm, 8.30pm and 9.05pm)

**Delhi** (mostly to Old Delhi or New Delhi stations) 2nd-class seat/sleeper ₹165/300, eight hours, 11 daily around the clock

**Jaipur** 2nd-class seat/sleeper/AC chair ₹100/150/325, two hours, at least 24 throughout the day

**Jodhpur** sleeper/3AC ₹185/510, four to five hours, two direct daily (1.40pm and 2.25pm)

**Mt Abu (Abu Road)** sleeper ₹245, five hours, 12 daily

**Mumbai** sleeper ₹495, around 19 hours, three daily (6.35am, 9.20am and 12.40pm)

**Udaipur** sleeper ₹245, five hours, four daily (1.25am, 2.15am, 8.25am and 4.10pm)

## Pushkar

📍 0145 / POP 21.630

Pushkar has a magnetism all of its own – it's quite unlike anywhere else in Rajasthan. It's a prominent Hindu pilgrimage town and devout Hindus should visit at least once in their lifetime. The town curls around a holy lake, said to have appeared when Brahma dropped a lotus flower. It also has one of the world's few Brahma temples. With 52 bathing ghats and 400 milky-blue temples, the town often hums with *puja* (prayers), generating an episodic soundtrack of chanting, drums and gongs, and devotional songs.

The result is a muddle of religious and tourist scenes. The main street is one long bazaar, selling anything to tickle a traveller's fancy, from hippy-chic tie-dye to didgeridoos. Despite the commercialism and

banana pancakes, the town remains enchantingly small and authentically mystic.

Pushkar is only 11km from Ajmer, separated from it by rugged Nag Pahar (Snake Mountain).

## 👁 Sights

Fifty-two bathing ghats surround the lake, where pilgrims bathe in the sacred waters. If you wish to join them, do so with respect. Remember, this is a holy place: remove your shoes and don't smoke, kid around or take photographs.

Some ghats have particular importance: Vishnu appeared at **Varah Ghat** in the form of a boar, Brahma bathed at **Brahma Ghat**, and Gandhi's ashes were sprinkled at **Gandhi Ghat**, formerly Gau Ghat.

Pushkar boasts hundreds of temples, though few are particularly ancient, as they were mostly desecrated by Aurangzeb and subsequently rebuilt.

### Old Rangji Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

Old Rangji Temple is close to the bazaar and is often alive with worshippers.

### Savitri Mata Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

(Saraswati Temple; ropeway return trip ₹92; 🚡 ropeway 9.30am-7.30pm) The ropeway makes the ascent to the hilltop Saraswati Temple a breeze. The temple overlooks the lake and the views are fantastic at any time of day. Alternatively, you could take the one-hour trek up before dawn to beat the heat and capture the best light.

### Brahma Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

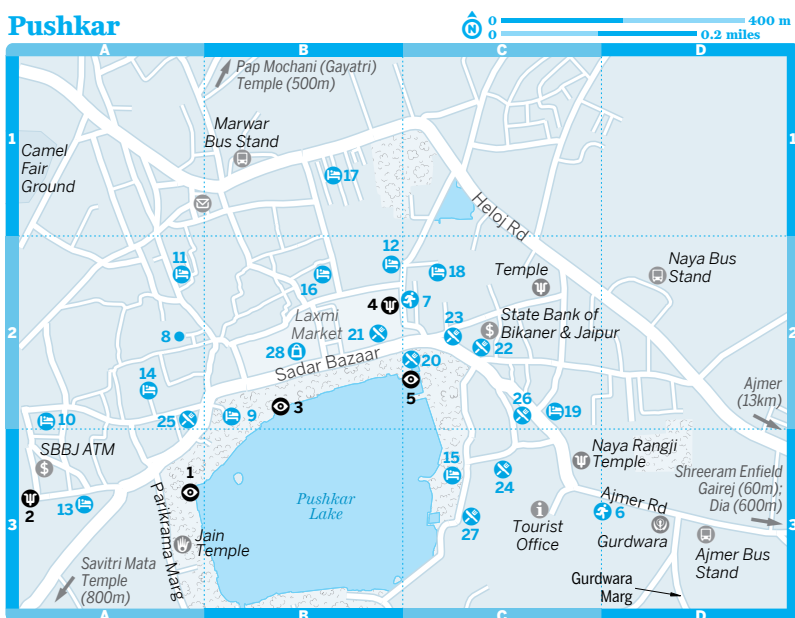
Pushkar's most famous temple is the Brahma Temple, said to be one of the few such temples in the world as a result of a curse by Brahma's consort, Saraswati. The temple is

## MAJOR TRAINS FROM AJMER

| DESTINATION              | TRAIN                       | DEPARTURE | ARRIVAL | FARE (₹)            |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------------|
| Agra (Agra Fort Station) | 12988 Ajmer-SDAH Exp        | 12.50pm   | 6.50pm  | 275/695 (A)         |
| Delhi (New Delhi)        | 12016 Ajmer Shatabdi        | 2.05pm    | 10pm    | 720/1530 (B)        |
| Jaipur                   | 12991 Udaipur-Jaipur Exp    | 11.30am   | 1.30pm  | 100/325/440 (C)     |
| Jodhpur                  | 15014 Ranighat Exp          | 1.40pm    | 5.35pm  | 185/510 (A)         |
| Udaipur                  | 09721 Jaipur-Udaipur SF SPL | 8.25am    | 1.15pm  | 140/245/490/560 (D) |

Fares: (A) sleeper/3AC, (B) AC chair/1AC, (C) 2nd-class seat/AC chair/1AC, (D) 2nd-class seat/sleeper/AC chair/3AC

## Pushkar



RAJASTHAN PUSHKAR

## Pushkar

## 🕒 Sights

- 1 Brahma Ghat..... A3
- 2 Brahma Temple..... A3
- 3 Gandhi Ghat..... B2
- 4 Old Rangji Temple..... B2
- 5 Varah Ghat..... C2

## 🍽️ Activities, Courses &amp; Tours

- Cooking Bahar..... (see 8)
- 6 Government Homeopathic Hospital.... D3
- 7 Roshi Hiralal Verma..... C2
- 8 Saraswati Music School..... A2

## 🛏️ Sleeping

- 9 Bharatpur Palace..... B2
- 10 Hotel Akash..... A2
- 11 Hotel Everest..... A2
- 12 Hotel Kanhaia Haveli..... B2
- 13 Hotel Navaratan Palace..... A3
- 14 Hotel Paramount Palace..... A2

- 15 Hotel Pushkar Palace..... C3
- 16 Hotel Tulsi Palace..... B2
- 17 Hotel White House..... B1
- 18 Inn Seventh Heaven..... C2
- 19 Shyam Krishna Guesthouse..... C2

## 🍽️ Eating

- 20 Falafel Wrap Stalls..... C2
- 21 Honey & Spice..... B2
- 22 Naryan Café..... C2
- 23 Om Baba Restaurant..... C2
- 24 Om Shiva Garden Restaurant..... C3
- 25 Out of the Blue..... A2
- 26 Shri Vankatesh..... C2
- Sixth Sense..... (see 18)
- 27 Sunset Café..... C3

## 🛍️ Shopping

- 28 Sadar Bazaar..... B2

marked by a red spire, and over the entrance gateway is the *hans* (goose symbol) of Brahma. Inside, the floor and walls are engraved with dedications to the dead.

### Pap Mochani (Gayatri) Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

The sunrise views over town from Pap Mochani (Gayatri) Temple, reached by a track

behind the Marwar bus stand, are well worth the 30-minute climb.

### 🚶 Activities

#### Government Homeopathic Hospital

AYURVEDA

(Ajmer Rd; 1hr full-body massage ₹500; 🕒 9am-1pm & 4-6pm) For a noncommercial massage-treatment experience, try the ayurvedic

## PUSHKAR CAMEL FAIR

Come the month of Kartika, the eighth lunar month of the Hindu calendar and one of the holiest, Thar camel drivers spruce up their ships of the desert and start the long walk to Pushkar in time for Kartik Purnima (Full Moon). Each year around 200,000 people converge on the **Pushkar Camel Fair** (☺ Oct/Nov), bringing with them some 50,000 camels, horses and cattle.

The place becomes an extraordinary swirl of colour, sound and movement, thronged with musicians, mystics, tourists, traders, animals, devotees and camera crews.

Trading begins a week before the official fair (a good time to arrive to see the serious business), but by the time the RTDC mela (fair) starts, business takes a back seat and the bizarre sidelines (snake charmers, children balancing on poles etc) jostle onto centre stage. Even the cultural program seems peculiar, with contests for the best moustache, and most beautifully decorated camel. Visitors are encouraged to take part: pick up a program from the RTDC office and see if you fancy taking part in the costumed wedding parade, or join a Visitors versus Locals sports contest such as traditional Rajasthani wrestling.

It's hard to believe, but this seething mass is all just a sideshow. Kartik Purnima is when Hindu pilgrims come to bathe in Pushkar's sacred waters. The religious event builds in tandem with the camel fair in a wild, magical crescendo of incense, chanting and processions to dousing day, the last night of the fair, when thousands of devotees wash away their sins and set candles afloat on the holy lake.

Although fantastical, mystical and a one-off, it must be said that it's also crowded, touristy, noisy (light sleepers should bring earplugs) and occasionally tacky. Those affected by dust and/or animal hair should bring appropriate medication. However, it's a grand epic, and not to be missed if you're anywhere within camel-spitting distance.

The fair usually takes place in November, but dates change according to the lunar calendar.

department at the small and basic Government Homeopathic Hospital.

### Roshi Hiralal Verma

REIKI, YOGA

(☎ 9829895906; Ambika Guest House, Laxmi Market) Offers reiki, yoga and shiatsu; costs depend on the duration and nature of your session.

## 🎓 Courses

### Saraswati Music School

MUSIC

(☎ Birju 9828297784, Hemant 9829333548; sara swati\_music@hotmail.com; Mainon ka Chowk) Teaches tabla (drums), flute, harmonium, singing, and *kathak* (classical dance) and Bollywood dance. For music, contact Birju, who's been playing for around 20 years, and charges from ₹350 for two hours. He often conducts evening performances (7pm to 8pm), and also sells instruments. For dance, contact Hemant.

### Cooking Bahar

COOKING

(☎ 0145-2773124; www.cookingbahar.com; Mainon ka Chowk; 2-3hr class ₹1100) Part of the Saraswati Music School family, Deepa conducts cooking classes that cover three vegetarian courses.

## 🛏 Sleeping

Owing to Pushkar's star status among backpackers, there are far more budget options than midrange, though many budget properties have a selection of midrange-priced rooms. At the time of the camel fair, prices multiply up to three-fold or more, and it's essential to book several weeks ahead.

### ★ Hotel Everest

HOTEL \$

(☎ 9414666958, 0145-2773417; www.pushkar-hoteleverest.com; off Sadar Bazaar; r ₹300-850, with AC ₹1000-1150; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This welcoming budget hotel is nestled in the quiet laneways north of Sadar Bazaar. It's run by a friendly father-and-son team who can't do too much for their appreciative guests. The rooms are variable in size, colourful and spotless, and the beds are comfortable. The rooftop is a pleasant retreat for meals or just relaxing with a book.

### Hotel Tulsi Palace

HOTEL \$

(☎ 8947074663; www.hoteltulsipalacepushkar.com; VIP Rd, Holika Chowk; r ₹500-700, with AC ₹1000-1500; 🍷) Tulsi Palace is a great budget choice with a variety of bright and

airy rooms around a central courtyard. The attached Little Prince Cafe on the 1st-floor verandah serves Continental breakfasts and Indian lunch and dinner, and boasts prime street-life views. The friendly staff will help with your transport needs.

### Hotel White House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎ 0145-2772147; www.pushkarwhitehouse.com; off Heloj Rd; r ₹350-950, with AC ₹1000-1500; 🍷🍷🍷) This place is indeed white, with spotless rooms. Some are decidedly on the small side, but the nicest are generous and have balconies to boot. There is good traveller fare and green views from the plant-filled rooftop restaurant. It's efficiently run by a woman and her two sons. Yoga is offered, as is a welcome brew of mango tea for every guest.

### Hotel Akash

HOTEL \$

(☎ 0145-2772498; filterboy21@yahoo.com; Badi Basti; d ₹600, s/d without bathroom ₹300/500; 🍷) A simple budget place with keen young management and a large tree sprouting up from the courtyard to shade the rooftop terrace. Rooms are basic fan-cooled affairs that open out to a balcony restaurant good for spying on the street below.

### Bharatpur Palace

HOTEL \$

(☎ 0145-2772320; bharatpurpalace\_pushkar@yahoo.co.in; Sadar Bazaar; r ₹400-1000, without bathroom ₹250-600; 🍷) This rambling building occupies one of the best spots in Puskhar, on the upper levels adjacent to Gandhi Ghat. It features aesthetic blue-washed simplicity: bare-bones rooms with unsurpassed views of the holy lake. The rooftop terrace (with restaurant) has sublime vistas, but respect for bathing pilgrims is paramount for intended guests.

Room 1 is the most romantic place to wake up: it's surrounded on three sides by the lake. Rooms 9, 12, 13 and 16 are also good.

### Shyam Krishna Guesthouse

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎ 0145-2772461; skguesthouse@yahoo.com; Sadar Bazaar; s/d ₹400/700, without bathroom ₹300/500; 🍷) Housed in a lovely old blue-washed building with lawns and gardens, this guesthouse has ashram austerity and genuinely friendly management. Some of the cheaper rooms are cell-like, though all share the simple, authentic ambience. The outdoor kitchen and garden seating are a good setting for a relaxing meal of hearty vegetarian fare, but watch out for passing troops of monkeys.

### Hotel Paramount Palace

HOTEL \$

(☎ 0145-2772428; www.pushkarparamount.com; r ₹200-1000; 🍷) Perched on the highest point in Pushkar overlooking an old temple, this welcoming hotel has excellent views of the town and lake (and lots of stairs). The rooms vary widely; the best (106, 108, 109) have lovely balconies, stained-glass windows and are good value, but the smaller rooms can be dingy. There's a dizzyingly magical rooftop terrace.

### Hotel Navaratan Palace

HOTEL \$

(☎ 0145-2772145; www.navaratanpalace.com; s/d incl breakfast ₹800/900, with AC ₹1000/1200; 🍷🍷🍷) Located close to the Brahma Temple, this hotel has a lovely enclosed garden with a fabulous pool (₹100 for nonguests), children's playground and pet tortoises. The rooms, crammed with carved wooden furniture, are clean and comfortable but small.

### ★ Inn Seventh Heaven

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0145-5105455; www.inn-seventh-heaven.com; Choti Basti; r ₹1350-3300; 🍷🍷🍷) Enter this lovingly converted *haveli* through heavy wooden doors into an incense-perfumed courtyard, with a marble fountain in the centre and surrounded by tumbling vines. There are just a dozen individually decorated rooms situated on three levels, all with traditionally crafted furniture and comfortable beds. Rooms vary in size, from the downstairs budget rooms to the spacious Asana suite.

On the roof you'll find the excellent Sixth Sense restaurant (p140), as well as sofas and swing chairs for relaxing with a book. Early booking (two-night minimum, no credit cards) is recommended.

### Hotel Kanhaia Haveli

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0145-2772146; www.pushkarhotelkanhaia.com; Choti Basti; r ₹400-600, with AC ₹1500-1800; 🍷🍷) Boasting a vast range of rooms, from budget digs to suites, you are sure to find a room and price that suits. Rooms get bigger and lighter, with more windows, the more you spend. Some rooms have balconies, while all have cable TV. There is a multicuisine restaurant with views on the rooftop.

### Dia

B&B \$\$

(☎ 0145-5105455; www.diahomestay.com; Panch Kund Marg; r incl breakfast ₹3550-4950; 🍷🍷🍷) This beautifully designed B&B by the folks at Inn Seventh Heaven has five very private doubles a short walk from town. The rooms are straight out of a design magazine and will have you swooning (and extending your

booking). You can dine here at the cosy rooftop restaurant or head to the Sixth Sense restaurant at Inn Seventh Heaven.

### Hotel Pushkar Palace HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎0145-2772001; www.hotelpushkarpalace.com; s/d/ste incl breakfast ₹7715/8310/17,805; \* @) Once belonging to the maharaja of Kishangarh, the top-end Hotel Pushkar Palace boasts a romantic lakeside setting. The rooms have carved wooden furniture and beds, and all rooms above the ground floor, and all the suites, look directly out onto the lake: no hotel in Pushkar has better views. A pleasant outdoor dining area overlooks the lake.

### Ananta Spa & Resort RESORT \$\$\$

(☎0145-3054000; www.anantahotels.com; Lee-la Sevri, Ajmer Rd; r incl breakfast from ₹6000; \* @ ☎) The arrival of Ananta, an (almost) five-star resort sprawling on 3.5 hectares in the rugged ranges 4km from Pushkar, heralds a new era in pilgrimages. Lucky pilgrims zip from reception to the Balinese-style cottages on golf buggies. Rooms are spacious and fully appointed, but most guests will gravitate to the luscious pool, spa, games room, restaurant, lounge or bar.

## Eating

Pushkar has plenty of atmospheric eateries with lake views, and menus reflecting backpacker preferences. Strict vegetarianism, forbidding even eggs, is the order of the day.

### Naryan Café CAFE \$

(Mahadev Chowk, Sadar Bazaar; breakfast from ₹100; ☺7.30am-10pm) Busy any time of day, this is particularly popular as a breakfast stop: watch the world go by with a fresh coffee (from ₹40) or juice (from ₹80) and an enormous bowl of homemade muesli, topped with a mountain of fruit.

### Shri Vankatesh INDIAN \$

(Choti Basti; mains ₹60-100; ☺9am-10pm) Head to this no-nonsense local favourite and tuck into some dhal, paneer or kofta, before mopping up the sauce with some freshly baked chapatis and washing it all down with some good old-fashioned chai. The thalis (₹70 to ₹150) are excellent value, too. Watch your food being cooked or head upstairs to people-watch the street below.

### Falafel Wrap Stalls MIDDLE EASTERN \$

(Sadar Bazaar; wraps ₹70-130; ☺7.30am-10.30pm) Perfect for quelling a sudden attack of the munchies, and a big hit with Israeli travellers,

these adjacent roadside joints knock up a choice selection of filling falafel-and-hummus wraps. Eat them while sitting on stools on the road or devour them on the hoof.

### Out of the Blue MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Sadar Bazaar; mains ₹170-280; ☺8am-11pm; ☎) Distinctly a deeper shade of blue in this sky-blue town, Out of the Blue is a reliable restaurant. The menu ranges from noodles and *momos* (Tibetan dumplings) to pizza, pasta, falafel and pancakes. A nice touch is the street-level espresso coffee bar (coffee ₹60 to ₹80) and German bakery.

### Sixth Sense MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Inn Seventh Heaven, Choti Basti; mains ₹100-200; ☺8.30am-4pm & 6-10pm; ☎) This chilled rooftop restaurant is a great place to head to even if you didn't score a room in the popular hotel. The pizza and the Indian seasonal vegetables and rice are all serviceable, as is the filter coffee and fresh juice. Its ambience is immediately relaxing and the pulley apparatus that delivers food from the ground-floor kitchen is very cunning.

Save room for the desserts, such as the excellent homemade tarts.

### Om Shiva Garden Restaurant MULTICUISINE \$\$

(☎0145-2772305; www.omshivagardenrestaurant.com; mains ₹140-250; ☺8am-11pm; ☎) This traveller stalwart near Naya Rangji Temple continues to satisfy, with wood-fired pizzas and espresso coffee featuring on its predominantly Italian and North Indian menu. It's hard to pass on the pizzas, but there are also some Mexican and Chinese dishes and 'German bakery' items to try.

### Honey & Spice MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Laxmi Market, off Sadar Bazaar; mains ₹90-250; ☺8am-5.30pm; ☎) Run by a friendly family, this tiny wholefood breakfast and lunch place has delicious South Indian coffee and homemade cakes. Even better are the salads and hearty vegetable combo stews served with brown rice – delicious, wholesome and a welcome change from frequently oil-rich Indian food.

### Sunset Café MULTICUISINE \$\$

(mains ₹80-250; ☺7.30am-midnight; ☎) Right on the eastern ghats, this café has sublime lake views. It offers the usual traveller menu, including curries, pizza and pasta, plus there's a German bakery serving reasonable cakes. The lakeside setting is perfect at sunset and gathers a crowd.

**Om Baba Restaurant**

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(☎ 0145-2772858; off Sadar Bazaar; mains ₹130-220; ☀ 8.30am-11pm) Om Baba Rooftop Restaurant serves all the traveller favourites so common in the neighbourhood (pizza, pasta, falafel, hummus), but it's the views from the rooftop that sets this place apart.

**Shopping****Sadar Bazaar**

MARKET

Pushkar's Sadar Bazaar is lined with enchanting little shops and is a good place for picking up gifts. Many of the vibrant Rajasthan textiles originate from Barmer, south of Jaisalmer. There's plenty of silver and beaded jewellery catering both to local and foreign tastes, including some heavy tribal pieces. As Pushkar is touristy, you'll have to haggle.

The range of Indian-music CDs makes this market an excellent place to sample local tunes.

**i Information**

Foreign-card-friendly ATMs and unofficial money changers are dotted around Sadar Bazaar.

**Post Office** (off Heloj Rd; ☀ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Near the Marwar bus stand.

**State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur** (SBBJ; Sadar Bazaar; ☀ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) Changes travellers cheques and cash. The SBBJ ATM accepts international cards.

**Tourist Office** (☎ 0145-2772040; Hotel Sarovar; ☀ 10am-5pm) Free maps and camel fair programs.

**DANGERS & ANNOYANCES**

Beware of anyone giving you flowers to offer a *puja* (prayer): before you know it you'll be whisked to the ghats in a well-oiled hustle and asked for a personal donation of up to ₹1000. Other priests do genuinely live off the donations of others and this is a tradition that goes back centuries – but walk away if you feel bullied and always agree on a price before taking a red ribbon (a 'Pushkar passport') or flowers.

During the camel fair, Pushkar is besieged by pickpockets working the crowded bazaars. You can avoid the razor gang by not using thin-walled

day packs and by carrying your pack in front of you. At any time of year, watch out for rampaging motorbikes ridden by inconsiderate youths in the bazaar.

**i Getting There & Away**

Pushkar's tiny train station is so badly connected it's not worth bothering with. Use Ajmer junction train station instead.

A private taxi to Ajmer costs around ₹300 (note that it's almost always more expensive in the opposite direction). When entering Pushkar by car there is a toll of ₹20 per person.

**BUS**

Frequent buses to/from Ajmer (₹14, 30 minutes) depart from the **Naya Bus Stand**, and also from the **Ajmer Bus Stand** on the road heading eastwards out of town. Most other buses leave from the Naya Bus Stand, though some may still use the old **Marwar Bus Stand** (but not RSRTC buses).

Local travel agencies sell tickets for private buses – you should shop around. These buses often leave from Ajmer (p135), but the agencies should provide you with free connecting transport. Check whether your bus is direct, as many services from Pushkar aren't. And note, even if they are direct buses they may well stop for some time in Ajmer, meaning it's often quicker to go to Ajmer first and then catch another bus from there.

**i Getting Around**

There are no autorickshaws in central Pushkar, but it's a breeze to get around on foot. If you want to explore the surrounding countryside, you could try hiring a motorbike (₹400 per day) from one of the many places around town. For something more substantial, try **Shreeram Enfield Gairej** (Ajmer Rd; Enfield Bullet hire per day ₹700, deposit ₹50,000), which hires Enfield Bullets and sells them.

**Ranthambhore National Park**

☎ 07462

This famous **national park** ([www.rajasthanwildlife.in](http://www.rajasthanwildlife.in); ☀ Oct-Jun) is the best place to spot wild tigers in Rajasthan. Comprising 1334

**BUSES FROM PUSHKAR (NAYA BUS STAND)**

| DESTINATION | FARE (₹) | DURATION (HR) | FREQUENCY  |
|-------------|----------|---------------|--|
| Bikaner     | 225      | 6             | hourly   |
| Bundi       | 200      | 6             | daily (11am)   |
| Jaipur      | 160      | 4             | 7 daily (7.15am, 7.45am, 8am, 8.30am, 9.30am, 2pm & 4pm) |
| Jodhpur     | 185      | 5             | 3 daily (8am, 10.30am & 12.30pm)                         |

sq km of wild jungle scrub hemmed in by rocky ridges, at its centre is the 10th-century Ranthambhore Fort. Scattered around the fort are ancient temples and mosques, hunting pavilions, crocodile-filled lakes and vine-covered *chhatris* (burial tombs). The park was a maharajas' hunting ground until 1970, a curious 15 years after it had become a sanctuary.


Seeing a tiger (around 52 to 55 in 2016) is partly a matter of luck; leave time for two or three safaris to improve your chances. But remember there's plenty of other wildlife to see, including more than 300 species of birds.

It's 10km from Sawai Madhopur (the gateway town for Ranthambhore) to the first gate of the park, and another 3km to the main gate and Ranthambhore Fort.

## Sights

### Ranthambhore Fort

FORT

 6am-6pm **FREE** From a distance, the magical 10th-century Ranthambhore Fort is almost indiscernible on its hilltop perch – as you get closer, it seems almost as if it is growing out of the rock. It covers an area of 4.5 sq km, and affords peerless views from the disintegrating walls of the Badal Mahal (Palace of the Clouds), on its northern side. The ramparts stretch for more than 7km, and seven enormous gateways are still intact.

To visit the on the cheap, join the locals who go there to visit the temple dedicated to Ganesh. Shared 4WDs (₹40 per person) go from the train station to the park entrance – say 'national park' and they'll know what you want. From there, other shared 4WDs (₹20 per person) shuttle to and from the fort, which is inside the park. Alternatively hire your own gypsy (and driver) for about ₹1000 for three hours through your hotel.

## Activities

Safaris take place in the early morning and late afternoon, starting between 6am and 7am or between 2pm and 3.30pm, depending on the time of year. Each safari lasts for around three hours. The mornings can be exceptionally chilly in the open vehicles, so bring warm clothes.





The best option is to travel by **gypsy** (six-person, open-topped 4WD; Indian/foreigner ₹730/1470). You still have a chance of seeing a tiger from a **canter** (20-seat, open-topped truck; ₹510/1250), but other passengers can be very rowdy.

Be aware that the rules for booking safaris (and prices) are prone to change. You can book online through the park's official website ([www.rajasthanwildlife.in](http://www.rajasthanwildlife.in)), or go in person to the safari booking office, which is inconveniently located 1.5km from Hammir Circle, in the opposite direction to the park. And to be sure of bagging a seat in a vehicle, start queuing at least an hour (if not two) before the safaris are due to begin – meaning a very early start for morning safaris! Booking with hotels is much simpler, but be aware that they add commission to the rates.




## Sleeping

### Hotel Aditya Resort

HOTEL \$



 9414728468; [www.hoteladityaresort.com](http://www.hoteladityaresort.com); Ranthambhore Rd; r ₹400-700, with AC ₹900;    This friendly place is one of the better of the few ultracheapies along Ranthambhore Rd. There are just six simple, unadorned rooms (get one with an outside window; only a couple have air-conditioning), and a basic rooftop restaurant. The staff will help with safari bookings, but be sure to ask how much they are charging for the service.

### ★ Hotel Ranthambhore Regency HOTEL \$\$

 07462-221176; [www.ranthambhor.com](http://www.ranthambhor.com); Ranthambhore Rd; s/d incl all meals from ₹6500/7500;    A very professional place that caters to tour groups but can still provide great service to independent travellers. It has immaculate, well-appointed rooms (think marble floors, flat-screen TVs etc), which would rate as suites in most hotels. The central garden with an inviting pool is a virtual oasis, and there's a pampering spa next to the restaurant.

### Tiger Safari Resort

HOTEL \$\$

 07462-221137; [www.tigersafariresort.com](http://www.tigersafariresort.com); Ranthambhore Rd; r incl breakfast ₹1800-2200;    A reasonable midrange option, with spacious doubles and 'cottages' (larger rooms with bigger bathrooms) facing a garden and small pool. The management is adept at organising safaris, wake-up calls and early breakfasts before the morning safari. As per the other hotels, a commission is added for this service, so ask for a breakdown of the costs.

### Ankur Resort

HOTEL \$\$

 07462-220792; [www.ankurresorts.com](http://www.ankurresorts.com); Ranthambhore Rd; s/d incl all meals ₹3500/4000, cottages ₹4000/5000;    Ankur Resort is good at organising safaris, wake-up calls and



early breakfasts for tiger spotters. Standard rooms are fairly unadorned, but clean and comfortable with TVs. The cottages boast better beds, a fridge and settee, and overlook the surrounding gardens and pool.

### ★ **Khem Villas**

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎) 07462-252099; www.khemvillas.com; Khem Villas Rd; s/d incl all meals ₹12,000/14,000, tents ₹19,000/23,000, cottages ₹21,000/25,000; (☎) (📶) Set in 9 hectares of organic farmland and reforested land, this splendid ecolodge was created by the Singh Rathore family, the driving force behind the conservation of tigers at Ranthambhore. The accommodation ranges from colonial-style bungalow rooms to luxury tents and sumptuous stone cottages. Privacy is guaranteed – you can even bathe under the stars.

In addition to jungle safaris, Khem Villas runs a river safari (₹5000 for two people) on the Chambal river where you can see gharial and mugger crocodiles plus numerous bird species.

### ① **Information**

There's an ATM just by Hammir Circle, as well as others by the train station.

#### **Ranthambore Adventure Tours**

(☎) 9414214460; ranthambhoretours@rediffmail.com; Ranthambhore Rd) Safari agency that gets good reviews.

**Tourist Office** (☎) 07462-220808; Train Station; ☀ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri) Has maps of Sawai Madhopur, and can offer suggestions on safaris.

**Safari Booking Office** (www.rajasthanwildlife.com; ☀ 5.30am-3.30pm) Seats in gypsies and canters can be reserved on the website, though a single gypsy (with a premium price) and five canters are also kept for direct booking at the Forest Office. Located 500m from the train station.

### ① **Getting There & Away**

There are very few direct buses to anywhere of interest, so it's always preferable to take the train.

#### **TRAIN**

Sawai Madhopur junction station is near Hammir Circle, which leads to Ranthambhore Rd.

**Agra (Agra Fort Station)** sleeper ₹210, six hours, three daily (11.10am, 4.10pm, 11.15pm)

**Delhi** 2nd-class/sleeper/3AC ₹190/260/660, 5½ to eight hours, 13 daily

**Jaipur** 2nd-class seat/sleeper/3AC ₹100/180/560, two hours, 11 to 13 daily

**Keoladeo NP (Bharatpur)** 2nd-class/sleeper/3AC ₹95/180/560, 2½ hours, 12 to 13 daily

**Kota** (from where you can catch buses to Bundi) 2nd-class/sleeper/3AC ₹90/180/560, one to two hours, hourly

### ① **Getting Around**

Bicycle hire (around ₹40 per day) is available in the main bazaar. Autorickshaws are available at the train station; it's ₹50 to ₹100 for an autorickshaw from the train station to Ranthambhore Rd, depending on where you get off. Many hotels will pick you up from the train station for free if you call ahead.

If you want to walk, turn left out of the train station and follow the road up to the overpass (200m). Turn left and cross the bridge over the railway line to reach a roundabout (200m), known as Hammir Circle. Turn right here to reach the safari booking office (1.5km) or left to find accommodation.

## **UDAIPUR & SOUTHERN RAJASTHAN**

### **Bundi**

(☎) 0747 / POP 103,290

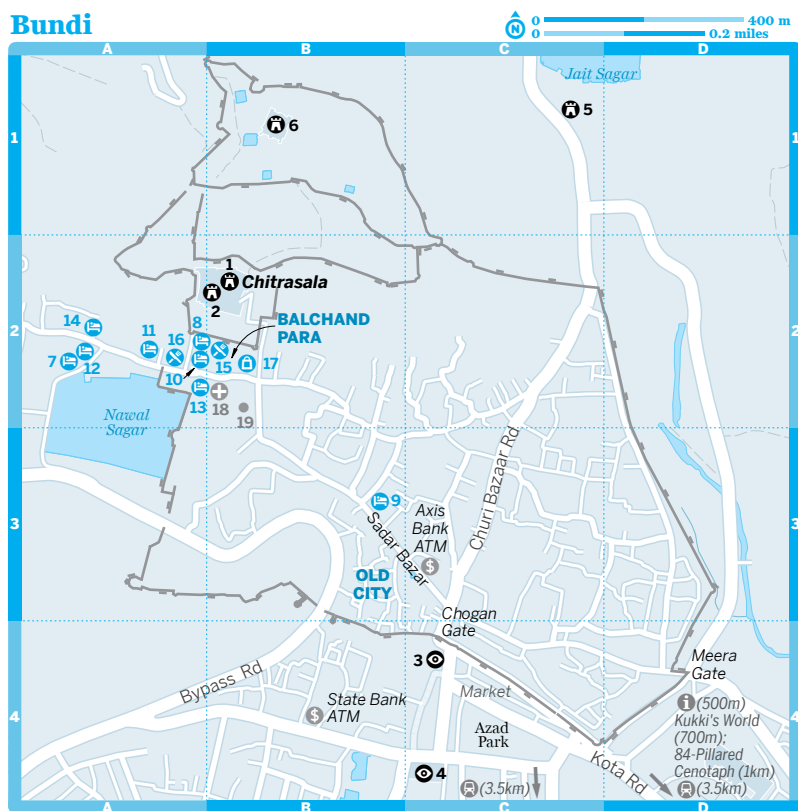
A captivating town with narrow lanes of Brahmin-blue houses, lakes, hills, bazaars, and a temple at every turn, Bundi is dominated by a fantastical palace of faded parchment cupolas and loggias rising from the hillside above the town. Though an increasingly popular traveller hang-out, Bundi attracts nothing like the tourist crowds of places such as Jaipur or Udaipur. Few places in Rajasthan retain so much of the magical atmosphere of centuries past.

Bundi came into its own in the 12th century when a group of Chauhan nobles from Ajmer were pushed south by Mohammed of Ghori. They wrested the Bundi area from the Mina and Bhil tribes and made Bundi the capital of their kingdom, known as Hadoti. Bundi was generally loyal to the Mughals from the late 16th century on, but it maintained its independent status until incorporated into the state of Rajasthan after 1947.

### 👁 **Sights**

Bundi has around 60 beautiful *baoris* (stepwells), some right in the town centre. The majesty of many of them is unfortunately diminished by their lack of water today – a result of declining groundwater levels – and

## Bundi



## Bundi

## 📍 Top Sights

- 1 Chitrasala..... B2

## 📍 Sights

- 2 Bundi Palace..... B2  
 3 Nagar Sagar Kund..... C4  
 4 Raniji-ki-Baori..... C4  
 5 Sukh Mahal..... C1  
 6 Taragarh..... B1

## 🏠 Sleeping

- 7 Annpurna Haveli..... A2  
 8 Bundi Vilas..... A2  
 9 Dev Niwas..... B3  
 10 Haveli Braj Bhushanjee..... A2  
 11 Haveli Katkoun..... A2

- 12 Hotel Bundi Haveli..... A2  
 13 Kasera Heritage View..... A2  
 14 Shivam Tourist Guest House..... A2

## 🍴 Eating

- Bundi Vilas..... (see 8)  
 15 Morgan's Place..... B2  
 16 Rainbow Cafe..... A2

## 🛒 Shopping

- 17 Yug Art..... B2

## 📍 Information

- 18 Ayurvedic Hospital..... B2  
 19 Roshan Tour & Travel..... B2

by the rubbish that collects in them which no one bothers to clean up. The most impressive, **Raniji-ki-Baori** (Queen's Step-Well; Indian/foreigner ₹50/200; ☀️ 9.30am-5pm), is 46m deep

and decorated with sinuous carvings, including the avatars of Lord Vishnu. The **Nagar Sagar Kund** is a pair of matching step-wells just outside the old city's Chogan Gate.

Three sights around town, the Rani-ji-ki-Baori, **84-Pillared Cenotaph** (Indian/foreigner ₹50/200; ☀9.30am-5pm) and Sukh Mahal (p145), can be visited using a composite ticket (Indian/foreigner ₹75/350) – a great saving if you plan to visit two or more of these sights.

### Bundi Palace

PALACE

(Garh Palace; Indian palace/fort/camera ₹80/100/50, foreigner palace, fort & camera ₹500; ☀8am-6pm) This extraordinary, partly decaying edifice – described by Rudyard Kipling as ‘the work of goblins rather than of men’ – almost seems to grow out of the rock of the hillside it stands on. Though large sections are still closed up and left to the bats, the rooms that are open hold a series of fabulous, fading turquoise-and-gold murals that are the palace’s chief treasure. The palace is best explored with a local guide (₹700 half-day), who will be charged ₹100 to enter.

The palace was constructed during the reign of Rao Raja Ratan Singh (r 1607–31) and added to by his successors. Part of it remained occupied by the Bundi royals until 1948.

If you are going up to Taragarh as well as the palace, get tickets for both at the palace entrance. Once inside the palace’s **Hathi Pol** (Elephant Gate), climb the stairs to the Ratan Daulat or **Diwan-e-Aam** (Hall of Public Audience), with a white marble coronation throne. You then pass into the **Chhatra Mahal**, added by Rao Raja Chhatra Shabji in 1644, with some fine but rather weathered murals. Stairs lead up to the **Phool Mahal** (1607), the murals of which include an immense royal procession, and then the **Badal Mahal** (Cloud Palace; also 1607), with Bundi’s very best murals, including a wonderful Chinese-inspired ceiling, divided into petal shapes and decorated with peacocks and Krishnas.

### ★ Chitrasala

PALACE

(Umaid Mahal; ☀8am-6pm) Within the Bundi Palace complex is the Chitrasala, a small 18th-century palace built by Rao Ummed Singh. To find it, exit through the palace’s Hathi Pol (Elephant Gate) and walk round the corner uphill. Above the palace’s garden courtyard are several rooms covered in beautiful paintings. There are some great Krishna images, including a detail of him sitting up a tree playing the flute after stealing the clothes of the *gopis* (milkmaids).

The back room to the right is the **Sheesh Mahal**, badly damaged but still featuring

some beautiful inlaid glass, while back in the front room there’s an image of 18th-century Bundi itself.

### Taragarh

FORT

(Star Fort; ₹100, camera/video ₹50/100; ☀8am-5pm) This ramshackle, partly overgrown 14th-century fort, on the hilltop above Bundi Palace, is a wonderful place to ramble around – but take a stick to battle the overgrown vegetation, help the knees on the steep climb and provide confidence when surrounded by testosterone-charged macaques. To reach it, just continue on the path up behind the Chitrasala.

### Jait Sagar

LAKE

Round the far side of the Taragarh hill, about 2km north from the centre of town, this picturesque, 1.5km-long lake is flanked by hills and strewn with pretty lotus flowers during the monsoon and winter months. At its near end, the **Sukh Mahal** (Indian/foreigner ₹50/200; ☀9.30am-5pm) is a small summer palace surrounded by terraced gardens where Rudyard Kipling once stayed and wrote part of *Kim*.

### 👉 Tours

#### Keshav Bhati

TOURS

(☎9414394241; bharat\_bhati@yahoo.com) Keshav Bhati is a retired Indian Air Force officer with a passion for Bundi. He is also an official tour guide with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the region and is highly recommended. Tour prices are negotiable.

#### Kukki's World

TOURS

(☎9828404527; www.kukkisworld.com; 43 New Colony; half-/full-day tour for 2 people US\$56/78) OP ‘Kukki’ Sharma is a passionate amateur archaeologist who has discovered around 70 prehistoric rock-painting sites around Bundi. His trips get you out into the villages and countryside, which he knows like the back of his hand. You can visit his collection of finds and select sites from his laptop at his house (about 300m south of the tourist office) beforehand.

### 🛏 Sleeping

#### Shivam Tourist Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎9460300272, 0747-2447892; Balchand Para; s/d ₹450/500, r with AC ₹800-1000) This guesthouse is run by an energetic young couple who are keen to help travellers get the most from their stay in Bundi. Rooms are simple but comfortable and spotless; the better

rooms are upstairs. There is an all-veg rooftop restaurant, cooking and henna-design classes are offered, plus they can help with booking transport.

### Annupurna Haveli

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎ 0747-2447055, 9602805455; www.annpurnahavelibundi.com; Balchand Para; r ₹800, r with breakfast & AC ₹1200; 🍷🍷) Annupurna is a very peaceful family-run guesthouse of just six rooms opposite Nawal Sagar. The simple and clean rooms are a great budget choice, and the best rooms have lake views. Home-cooked meals are enjoyed either in the dining room or on the roof in fine weather.

### ★ Haveli Braj Bhushanjee

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0747-2442322, 9783355866; www.kiplingsbundi.com; Balchand Para; r ₹1500-6000; 🍷🍷) This rambling 200-year-old *haveli* is run by the very helpful and knowledgeable Braj Bhushanjee family, descendants of the former prime ministers of Bundi. It's Bundi's first guesthouse and an enchanting place with original stone interiors, a private garden, splendid rooftop views, beautiful, well-preserved murals, and all sorts of other historic and valuable artefacts.

The terrific range of accommodation includes some lovely, modernised rooms that are still in traditional style. It's a fascinating living museum where you can really get a feel for Bundi's heritage. The *haveli* is opposite the Ayurvedic Hospital, though the main entrance is around the corner.

### ★ Hotel Bundi Haveli

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 9929291552, 0747-2447861; www.hotelbundi-haveli.com; Balchand Para; r ₹1300-4750; 🍷🍷) The exquisitely renovated Bundi Haveli leads the pack in terms of contemporary style and sophistication. Spacious rooms, white walls, stone floors, colour highlights and framed artefacts are coupled with modern plumbing and electricity. Yes, it's very comfortable and relaxed and there's a lovely rooftop dining area boasting palace views and an extensive, mainly Indian menu (mains ₹100 to ₹280).

### Dev Niwas

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0747-2442928, 8233345394; www.jagatcollection.com; Maaji Sahib-ki-Haveli; r ₹870-1300, with AC ₹3050, ste ₹4350; 🍷🍷) Dev Niwas is a fine *haveli*, just off the busy Sadar Bazaar. Inside is a peaceful oasis with courtyards and open-sided pavilions. Rooms are all very different, yet they are all comfortably furnished and fitted with modern bathrooms.

The open-sided restaurant has cushion seating and there are great views of the fort.

### Bundi Vilas

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0747-2444614, 9214803556; www.bundivilas.com; r incl breakfast ₹4000-5000; 🍷🍷🍷) This 300-year-old *haveli* up a side alley has been tastefully renovated with golden Jaisalmer sandstone, earth-toned walls and deft interior design. The five deluxe and two suite rooms exude period character yet boast excellent bathrooms. Set in the lee of the palace walls, this guesthouse has commanding views of the town below and palace above from the rooftop terrace restaurant.

### Kasera Heritage View

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎ 9983790314, 0747-2444679; www.kaseraheritageview.com; s/d from ₹800/1000, r with breakfast & AC from ₹2000; 🍷🍷🍷) A revamped *haveli*, Kasera has an incongruously modern lobby, but offers a range of slightly more authentic rooms. The welcome is friendly, it's all cheerfully decorated, the rooftop restaurant has great views, and discounts of 20% to 30% are offered in summer. The owners' sister *haveli*, Kasera Paradise, just below the palace, has the same contact details and rates.

### Haveli Katkoun

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎ 0747-2444311, 9414539146; www.katkounhavelibundi.com; s/d ₹700/1200, r incl breakfast & AC ₹2400; 🍷🍷) Just outside the town's western gate, Katkoun is a completely revamped *haveli* with friendly family management who live downstairs. It boasts large, spotless rooms offering superb views on both sides, to either the lake or palace, and has a good rooftop restaurant (mains ₹65 to ₹200), known for its Indian nonveg dishes.

## 🍴 Eating

### ★ Bundi Vilas

INDIAN \$\$

(☎ 0747-2444614; www.bundivilas.com; Balchand Para; mains ₹210-250, set dinners ₹700; ☀ 7.30-10am, 1-3pm & 7-10pm; 🍷🍷) The most romantic restaurant in Bundi welcomes visitors from other hotels. Dine in the sheltered yet open-sided terrace, or on the rooftop with uninterrupted views of the fort. It's wise to book for dinner as spots are limited for the candlelit experience beneath the floodlit palace. The set dinner offers several courses of exquisite food and wine is available.

Bundi Vilas has its own farm on the outskirts of Bundi that supplies much of its fresh fruit and vegetables. Do try the home-made jams if you get the chance.

**Morgan's Place**

(Kasera Paradise Hotel; mains ₹130-240; ☺ 9am-10pm; ☺) Morgan's Place is a relaxed (possibly overly relaxed) rooftop restaurant with good espresso (coffees ₹60 to ₹100). If you're in the mood for caffeine, don't mind climbing lots of stairs, and aren't in a hurry, then it delivers. It also serves fresh juice, respectable pizza and pasta, and falafel.

MULTICUISINE \$\$

**Rainbow Cafe**

(☎ 9887210334; mains ₹120-260, thalis ₹250-500; ☺ 7am-11pm; ☺) Bohemian ambience with chill-out tunes, floor-cushion seating, good snacks and special lassis. You need to be patient, but food eventually emerges from the tiny kitchen. Located on the rooftop of the town's western gate and caged off from marauding macaques with a bamboo trellis.

MULTICUISINE \$\$

**Shopping****Yug Art**

(www.yugartbundi.com; near Surang Gate; portrait postcard ₹800-1600, comics from ₹3000; ☺ 10am-7.30pm) Many art shops will offer you Rajasthani miniatures, but Yug Art offers to put you into one. Provide a photo and you can be pictured on elephant-back or in any number of classical scenes. Alternatively, Yug will record your India trip in a unique travel comic – you help with the script and he'll provide the artwork.

ART

**Information**

Head to Sadar Bazar to find ATMs.

**Ayurvedic Hospital** (☎ 0747-2443708; Balchand Para; ☺ 9am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, 9-11am Sun) This charitable hospital prescribes

natural plant-based remedies. There are medicines for all sorts of ailments, from upset tummies to arthritis, and many of them are free.

**Roshan Tour & Travel** (internet per hr ₹40; ☺ 8am-10pm) Travel agency that books train tickets, exchanges currency and has an internet cafe. Located 300m south of the palace.

**Tourist Office** (☎ 0747-2443697; Kota Rd; ☺ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri) Offers bus and train schedules, free maps and helpful advice.

**Getting There & Away****BUS**

For Ranthambhore, it's quicker to catch the train or a bus to Kota, then hop on a train to Sawai Madhopur.

Direct services from **Bundi bus stand**:

**Ajmer** ₹186, four hours, hourly

**Jaipur** ₹216, five hours, hourly

**Jodhpur** ₹376, eight hours, five per day

**Kota** ₹39, 40 minutes, every 15 minutes

**Pushkar** ₹200, 4½ hours, two daily

**Sawai Madhoper** ₹120, five hours, three daily

**TRAIN**

Bundi station is 4km south of the old city. There are no daily trains to Jaipur, Ajmer or Jodhpur. It's better to take a bus, or to catch a train from Kota or Chittorgarh.

**Agra (Agra Fort Station)** sleeper ₹160, 12½ hours, daily (5.35pm)

**Chittorgarh** sleeper ₹180, 2½ to 3½ hours, three to five daily (2.08am, 2.24am, 7.05am, 9.16am and 11pm)

**Delhi (Hazrat Nizamuddin)** sleeper ₹325, eight to 12 hours, two daily (5.48pm and 10.35pm)

**THE MINI-MASTERPIECES OF KOTA & BUNDI**

Some of Rajasthan's finest miniature and mural painting was produced around Bundi and Kota, the ruling Hada Rajputs being keen artistic patrons. The style combined the dominant features of folk painting – intense colour and bold forms – with the Mughals' concern with naturalism.

The Bundi and Kota schools were initially similar, but developed markedly different styles, though both usually have a background of thick foliage, cloudy skies and scenes lit by the setting sun. When architecture appears it is depicted in loving detail. The willowy women sport round faces, large petal-shaped eyes and small noses – forerunners of Bollywood pin-ups.

The Bundi school is notable for its blue hues, with a palette of turquoise and azure unlike anything seen elsewhere. Bundi Palace (p145) in particular hosts some wonderful examples.

In Kota you'll notice a penchant for hunting scenes with fauna and dense foliage – vivid, detailed portrayals of hunting expeditions in Kota's once thickly wooded surrounds. Kota's City Palace (p148) has some of the best-preserved wall paintings in the state.

**Sawai Madhopur** sleeper ₹180, 2½ to five hours, three daily (5.35pm, 5.48pm and 10.35pm; the last train is the fastest)

**Udaipur** sleeper ₹220, five hours, daily (12963 Mewar Express; 2.08am)

## **i** Getting Around

An autorickshaw from town to the train station costs ₹70 by day and ₹100 to ₹120 at night.

## Kota

☎0744 / POP 1 MILLION

An easy day trip from Bundi, Kota is a gritty industrial and commercial city on the Chambal, Rajasthan's only permanent river. You can take boat trips on the river here, for bird- and crocodile-watching, or explore the city's old palace.

## **o** Sights

### City Palace

PALACE, MUSEUM

(Kotah Garh; www.kotahfort.com; Indian/foreigner ₹100/300; ☀10am-4.30pm) The City Palace, and the fort that surrounds it, make up one of the largest such complexes in Rajasthan. This was the royal residence and centre of power, housing the Kota principedom's treasury, courts, arsenal, armed forces and state offices. The palace, entered through a gateway topped by rampant elephants, contains the offbeat **Rao Madho Singh Museum**, where you'll find everything for a respectable Raj existence, from silver furniture to weaponry, as well as perhaps India's most depressing moth-eaten stuffed trophy animals.

The oldest part of the palace dates from 1624. Downstairs is a durbar (royal audience) hall with beautiful mirrorwork, while the elegant, small-scale apartments upstairs contain exquisite, beautifully preserved paintings, particularly the hunting scenes for which Kota is renowned.

To get here, it's around ₹40 in an autorickshaw from the bus stand, and at least ₹70 from the train station.

## **🎪** Activities

### Boat Trips

BOATING

(per person 5min/1hr ₹60/1300, max 6 people; ☀10.30am-dusk) A lovely hiatus from the city is a Chambal River boat trip. The river upstream of Kota is part of the **Darrah National Park** and once you escape the city it's beautiful, with lush vegetation and craggy cliffs on either side. Boats start from **Cham-**

**bal Gardens** (Indian/foreigner ₹2/5), 1.5km south of the fort on the river's east bank.

Trips provide the opportunity to spot a host of birds, as well as gharials (thin-snouted, fish-eating crocodiles) and muggers (keep-your-limbs-inside-the-boat crocodiles).

## **🏠** Sleeping

### Palkiya Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎0744-2387497; www.palkiyahaveli.com; Mokha Para; s/d ₹2725/3315; 📶📶) This exquisite *haveli* has been in the same family for 200 years. Set in a deliciously peaceful corner of the old city, about 800m east of the City Palace, it's a lovely, relaxing place to stay, with welcoming hosts, a high-walled garden and a courtyard with a graceful neem tree.

There are impressive murals and appealing heritage rooms, and the food is top-notch.

## **i** Information

**Tourist Office** (☎0744-2327695; RTDC Hotel Chambal; ☀9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) Has free maps of Kota and helpful staff. Turn left out of the bus stand, right at the second roundabout and it's on your right.

## **i** Getting There & Away

### BUS

Services from the main bus stand (on Bundi Rd, east of the bridge over the Chambal River) include the following:

**Ajmer (for Pushkar)** ₹230, four to five hours, at least 10 daily

**Bundi** ₹35, 40 minutes, every 15 minutes throughout the day

**Chittorgarh** ₹184, four hours, half-hourly from 6am

**Jaipur** ₹240, five hours, hourly from 5am

**Udaipur** ₹350 to ₹400, six to seven hours, at least 10 daily

### TRAIN

Kota is on the main Mumbai-Delhi train route via Sawai Madhopur, so there are plenty of trains to choose from, though departure times aren't always convenient.

**Agra (Fort)** sleeper ₹225, five to nine hours, three to four daily (7.30am, 9.50am, 2.40pm and 9pm)

**Chittorgarh** sleeper ₹150, three to four hours, three to four daily (1.10am, 1.25am, 6.05am and 8.45am)

**Delhi (New Delhi or Hazrat Nizamuddin)** sleeper ₹315, five to eight hours, almost hourly

**Jaipur** sleeper ₹225, four hours, six daily (2.55am, 7.40am, 8.55am, 12.35pm, 5.35pm and 11.50pm), plus other trains on selected days

**Mumbai** sleeper ₹490, 14 hours, five daily fast trains (7.45am, 2.25pm, 5.30pm, 9.05pm and 11.45pm)

**Sawai Madhopur** 2nd-class seat/sleeper ₹125/180, one to two hours, more than 24 daily

**Udaipur** sleeper ₹245, six hours, one or two daily (1.10am and 1.25am)

## Getting Around

Minibuses and shared autorickshaws link the train station and main bus stand (₹10 per person). A private autorickshaw costs around ₹50.

## Chittorgarh (Chittor)

 01472 / POP 116,410

Chittorgarh (the fort, *garh*, at Chittor) is the largest fort complex in India, and a fascinating place to explore. It rises from the plains like a huge rock island, nearly 6km long and surrounded on all sides by 150m-plus cliffs.

Its history epitomises Rajput romanticism, chivalry and tragedy, and it holds a special place in the hearts of many Rajputs. Three times (in 1303, 1535 and 1568) Chittorgarh was under attack from a more powerful enemy; each time, its people chose death before dishonour, performing *jauhar*. The men donned saffron martyrs' robes and rode out from the fort to certain death, while the women and children immolated themselves on huge funeral pyres. After the last of the three sackings, Rana Udai Singh II fled to Udaipur, where he established a new capital for Mewar. In 1616, Jehangir

returned Chittor to the Rajputs. There was no attempt at resettlement, though it was restored in 1905.

## Sights

### ★ Chittorgarh

FORT

(Indian/foreigner ₹15/200, Sound & Light Show (in Hindi) ₹100; ☀ dawn-dusk, Sound & Light Show dusk) A zigzag ascent of more than 1km starts at **Padal Pol** and leads through six gateways to the main gate on the western side, the **Ram Pol** (the former back entrance). Inside Ram Pol is a still-occupied village (turn right here for the ticket office). The rest of the plateau is deserted except for the wonderful palaces, towers and temples that survive from the fort's heyday, along with a few recent temples. A loop road runs around the plateau.

A typical vehicular exploration of the fort takes two to three hours. Licensed guides charging around ₹400 for up to four hours are available for either walking or autorickshaw tours, usually at the ticket office.

### ➔ Meera & Kumbha Shyam Temples

Both of these temples southeast of the **Rana Kumbha Palace** were built by Rana Kumbha in the ornate Indo-Aryan style, with classic, tall *sikharas* (spires). The **Meera Temple**, the smaller of the two, is now associated with the mystic-poetess Meera Bai, a 16th-century Mewar royal who was poisoned by her brother-in-law but survived due to the blessings of Krishna. The **Kumbha Shyam Temple** (Temple of Varah) is dedicated to Vishnu and its carved panels illustrate 15th-century Mewar life.

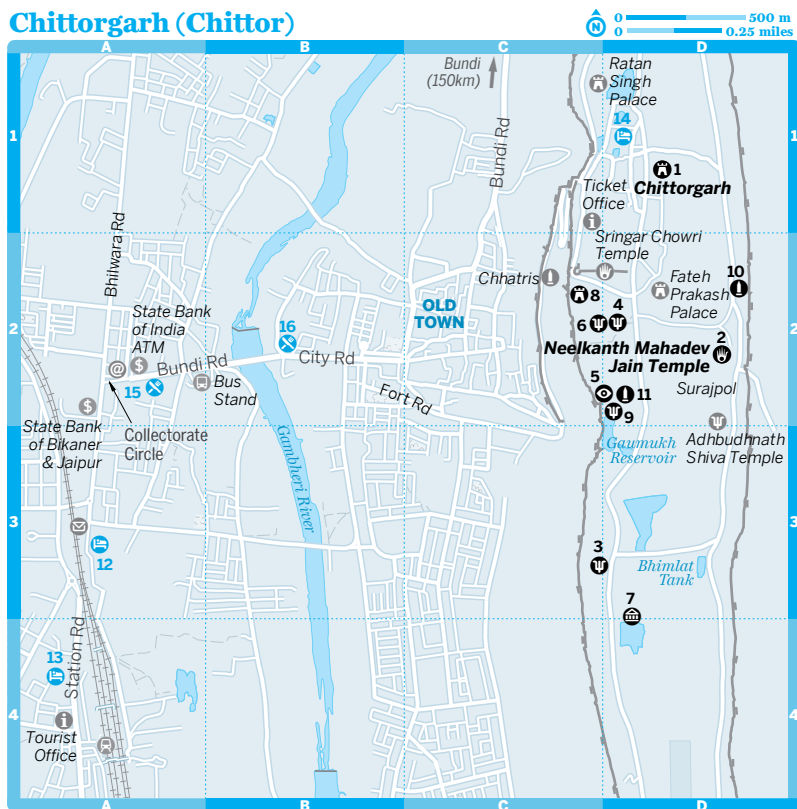
## MAJOR TRAINS FROM KOTA

| DESTINATION               | TRAIN                    | DEPARTURE | ARRIVAL | FARE (₹)               |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------|------------------------|
| Agra                      | 19037/19039 Avadh Exp    | 2.40pm    | 9.50pm  | 225/600/850 (A)        |
| Chittorgarh               | 29020 Dehradun Exp       | 8.45am    | 11.35am | 150/715/1180 (C)       |
| Delhi (Hazrat Nizamuddin) | 12903 Golden Temple Mail | 11.05am   | 6.45pm  | 315/805/1115/1855 (E)  |
| Jaipur                    | 12955 Mumbai-Jaipur Exp  | 8.55am    | 12.40pm | 225/580/780/1275 (E)   |
| Mumbai                    | 12904 Golden Temple Mail | 2.25pm    | 5.20am  | 490/1275/1805/3035 (E) |
| Sawai Madhopur            | 12059 Shatabdi           | 5.55am    | 7.03am  | 125/370 (D)            |
| Udaipur                   | 12963 Mewar Exp          | 1.25am    | 7.15am  | 245/580/780/1275 (E)   |

Fares: (A) sleeper/3AC/2AC, (B) sleeper, (C) sleeper/2AC/1AC, (D) 2nd class/AC chair, (E) sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC

## Chittorgarh (Chittor)

RAJASTHAN CHITTORGARH (CHITTOR)



## Chittorgarh (Chittor)

## 📍 Top Sights

- 1 Chittorgarh.....D1  
2 Neelkanth Mahadev Jain Temple.....D2

## 📍 Sights

- 3 Kalika Mata Temple.....C3  
4 Kumbha Shyam Temple.....D2  
5 Mahasati.....D2  
6 Meera Temple.....C2  
7 Padmini's Palace.....D3  
8 Rana Kumbha Palace.....C2  
9 Samidheshwar Temple.....D2

- 10 Tower of Fame.....D2  
11 Tower of Victory.....D2

## 🏠 Sleeping

- 12 Hotel Pratap Palace.....A3  
13 Hotel Shree Ji.....A4  
14 Padmini Haveli.....D1

## 🍴 Eating

- 15 Chokhi Dhani Garden Family  
Restaurant.....A2  
16 Saffire Garden Restaurant.....B2

## ➔ Tower of Victory

The glorious **Tower of Victory** (Jaya Stambha), symbol of Chittorgarh, was erected by Rana Kumbha in the 1440s, probably to commemorate a victory over Mahmud Khilji of Malwa. Dedicated to Vishnu, it rises 37m in nine exquisitely carved storeys, and you can climb the 157 narrow stairs (the interior

is also carved) to the 8th floor, from where there's a good view of the area.

Below the tower, to the southwest, is the **Mahasati** area, where there are many *sati* (self-immolation) stones – this was the royal cremation ground and was also where 13,000 women committed *jauhar* in 1535. The **Samidheshwar Temple**, built in the



6th century and restored in 1427, is nearby. Notable among its intricate carving is a Trimurti (three-faced) figure of Shiva.

### ➔ Gaumukh Reservoir

Walk down beyond the Samidheshwar Temple and at the edge of the cliff is a deep tank, the Gaumukh Reservoir, where you can feed the fish. The reservoir takes its name from a spring that feeds the tank from a *gaumukh* (cow's mouth) carved into the cliffside.

### ➔ Padmini's Palace

Continuing south, you reach the **Kalika Mata Temple**, an 8th-century sun temple damaged during the first sacking of Chittorgarh and then converted to a temple for the goddess Kali in the 14th century. **Padmini's Palace** stands about 250m further south, beside a small lake with a central pavilion. The bronze gates to this pavilion were carried off by Akbar and can now be seen in Agra Fort.

### ➔ Surajpol & Tower of Fame

Surajpol, on the fort's east side, was the main gate and offers fantastic views across the cultivated plains. Opposite is the **Neelkanth Mahadev Jain Temple**. A little further north, the 24m-high **Tower of Fame** (Kirti Stambha), dating from 1301, is smaller than the Tower of Victory. Built by a Jain merchant, the tower is dedicated to Adinath, the first Jain *tirthankar* (one of the 24 revered Jain teachers) and is decorated with naked figures of various other *tirthankars*, indicating that it is a monument of the Digambara (sky-clad) order. A narrow stairway leads up the seven storeys to the top. Next door is a 14th-century Jain temple.

## Sleeping & Eating

### ★ Padmini Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 9414734497, 9414110090; www.thepadminihaveli.com; Annapoorna Temple Rd, Shah Chowk, Village, Chittorgarh Fort; r/site incl breakfast ₹4000/5000; 🍷🍷🍷) This fabulous guesthouse with charming, enthusiastic and well-informed hosts is the only accommodation within the fort. Stylish rooms boast granite bathrooms and traditional decoration, and open onto the communal courtyard of the *haveli*. The hosts are official Chittorgarh guides and they live on-site, providing Italian coffee and homemade meals and jams.

There are only six rooms, three standard and three suites, so booking is advised. This white-washed *haveli* with a large black door

can be hard to find in the labyrinthine laneways of the village, so call first.

### Hotel Shree Ji

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 9413670931, 01472-249131; hotelshreeji@gmail.com; Station Rd; s/d from ₹1800/2000; 🍷🍷) A cheerful and efficient business hotel, just 300m from the train station, and a world away from the lacklustre hotels near the bus station. Rooms are bright and spotless and come with complimentary morning tea, newspaper and bottle of water. The restaurant serves an inexpensive thali in the evening.

### Hotel Pratap Palace

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 01472-240099; www.hotelpratappalacechittorgarh.com; off Maharana Pratap Setu Marg; r ₹1500, with AC ₹1800-4500; 🍷🍷🍷) This hotel has a wide range of rooms, though its business as a lunch stop for bus groups takes precedence over its accommodation enterprise. Even the more expensive rooms suffer from poor maintenance, and cleanliness standards could be higher. There's a large multi-cuisine restaurant that produces buffets for tour groups. Try and order à la carte if you can.

The owners also run village tours, horse rides and the upmarket Hotel Castle Bijapur out of town.

### Hotel Castle Bijapur

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 01472-240099; www.castlebijapur.co.in; r from ₹8700; 🍷🍷🍷) This fantastically set 16th-century palace is an ideal rural retreat 41km by road east of Chittorgarh. It's a great place to settle down with a good book, compose a fairy-tale fantasy or just laze around. Rooms are romantic and luxurious, and there's a pleasant garden courtyard and an airy restaurant serving Rajasthani food. It's popular with tour groups.

Reservations should be made through the website or through Chittorgarh's Hotel Pratap Palace. The owners can arrange transfer from Chittor as well as horse and 4WD safaris, birdwatching, cooking classes, massage and yoga.

### Chokhi Dhani Garden Family Restaurant

INDIAN \$

(☎ 9413716593; Bundi Rd; mains ₹80-150, thalis ₹110-290; ☺ 9am-10.30pm; 🍷🍷) This fan-cooled roadside *dhaba* (snack bar) with extra seating in the back does a good-value selection of vegetarian dishes, including filling thalis and a variety of North and South Indian dishes.

**Saffire Garden Restaurant** MULTICUISINE \$  
(City Rd; mains ₹100-170; ☺ 8am-10pm; ☹) Sit at tables on the small, tree-shaded lawn or inside the air-conditioned room at the back, and tuck into a variety of standard, but tasty enough, Indian and Chinese dishes.

### **i** Information

ATMs can be found near Collectorate Circle.

**State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur** (SBBJ; Bhillwara Rd; ☺ 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) ATM and money changing.

**Mahavir Cyber Cafe** (Collectorate Circle; per hour ₹40; ☺ 8am-10pm)

**Tourist Office** (☎ 01472-241089; Station Rd; ☺ 10am-1.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) Friendly and helpful, with a town map and brochure.

### **i** Getting There & Away

#### BUS

There are no direct buses to Bundi; take the train instead. Services from the Chittorgarh **bus stand** include the following:

**Ajmer (for Pushkar)** ₹197, AC ₹350, four hours, hourly until mid-afternoon

**Jaipur** ₹339, AC ₹667, seven hours, around every 1½ hours

**Kota** ₹184, four hours, half-hourly

**Udaipur** ₹120, with AC ₹255, 2½ hours, half-hourly

#### TRAIN

**Ajmer (for Pushkar)** sleeper ₹150, three hours, five to seven daily (12.35am, 2.50am, 8.20am, 10.10am, 7.30pm, 7.45pm and 11.30pm)

**Bundi** sleeper ₹150, two to 3½ hours, three daily (1.50pm, 3.35pm and 8.50pm)

**Delhi (Delhi Sarai Rohilla or Hazrat Nizamuddin)** sleeper ₹380, 10 hours, two daily fast trains (7.30pm and 8.50pm)

**Jaipur** sleeper ₹220, 5½ hours, four daily (12.35am, 2.45am, 8.20am and 8.35am)

**Sawai Madhopur** sleeper ₹210, four to nine hours, three daily (1.50pm, 3.35pm and 8.50pm; the latest is the quickest)

**Udaipur** sleeper ₹150, two hours, six daily (4.25am, 5.05am, 5.33am, 6.35am, 4.50pm and 7.25pm)

### **i** Getting Around

A full tour of the fort by autorickshaw should cost around ₹400 return. You can arrange this yourself in town.

## Udaipur

☎ 0294 / POP 451.735

Beside shimmering Lake Pichola, with the ochre and purple ridges of the wooded Aravalli Hills stretching away in every direction, Udaipur has a romance of setting unmatched in Rajasthan and arguably in all India. Fantastical palaces, temples, *havelis* and countless narrow, crooked, timeless streets add the human counterpoint to the city's natural charms. For the visitor there's the tranquillity of boat rides on the lake, the bustle and colour of ancient bazaars, a lively arts scene, the quaint old-world feel of its better hotels, endless tempting shops and some lovely countryside to explore on wheels, feet or horseback.

Udaipur's tag of 'the most romantic spot on the continent of India' was first applied in 1829 by Colonel James Tod, the East India Company's first political agent in the region. Today the romance is wearing slightly thin as ever-taller hotels compete for the best view and traffic clogs ancient thoroughfares.

Udaipur was founded in 1568 by Maharana Udai Singh II following the final sacking of Chittorgarh by the Mughal emperor Akbar. This new capital of Mewar had a much less vulnerable location than Chittorgarh. Mewar still had to contend with repeated in-

## MAJOR TRAINS FROM CHITTORGARH

| DESTINATION               | TRAIN                    | DEPARTURE | ARRIVAL | FARE (₹)              |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------|-----------------------|
| Ajmer (for Pushkar)       | 12991 Udaipur-Jaipur Exp | 8.20am    | 11.25am | 120/410/550 (A)       |
| Bundi                     | 29019 MDS-Kota Exp       | 3.35pm    | 5.45pm  | 160/735/1200 (B)      |
| Delhi (Hazrat Nizamuddin) | 12964 Mewar Exp          | 8.50pm    | 6.35am  | 370/975/1380/2325 (C) |
| Jaipur                    | 12991 Udaipur-Jaipur Exp | 8.20am    | 1.30pm  | 160/545/750 (A)       |
| Sawai Madhopur            | 29019 MDS-Kota Exp       | 3.35pm    | 9.25pm  | 210/735/1200 (B)      |
| Udaipur                   | 19329 Udaipur City Exp   | 4.50pm    | 7.15pm  | 160/530/735/1200 (C)  |

Fares: (A) 2nd-class seat/AC chair/1st-class seat, (B) sleeper/2AC/1AC, (C) sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC

vations by the Mughals and, later, the Marathas, until British intervention in the early 19th century. This resulted in a treaty that protected Udaipur from invaders while allowing Mewar's rulers to remain effectively all-powerful in internal affairs. The ex-royal family remains influential and in recent decades has been the driving force behind the rise of Udaipur as a tourist destination.

## Sights

### ★ City Palace

PALACE

(www.eternalmewar.in; adult/child ₹30/15; ☀9am-11pm) Surmounted by balconies, towers and cupolas towering over the lake, the imposing City Palace is Rajasthan's largest palace, with a facade 244m long and 30.4m high. Construction was begun in 1599 by Maharana Udai Singh II, the city's founder, and it later became a conglomeration of structures (including 11 separate smaller palaces) built and extended by various maharanas, though it still manages to retain a surprising uniformity of design.

You can enter the complex through **Badi Pol** (Great Gate) at the northern end, or the **Sheetla Mata Gate** to the south. Tickets for the City Palace Museum are sold at both entrances. Note: you must pay the ₹30 City Palace entrance ticket in order to pass south through **Chandra Chowk Gate**, en route to the Crystal Gallery or Rameshwar Ghat for the Lake Pichola boat rides, even if you have a City Palace Museum ticket.

Inside Badi Pol, eight arches on the left commemorate the eight times maharanas were weighed here and their weight in gold or silver distributed to the lucky locals. You then pass through the three-arched **Tripolia Gate** into a large courtyard, **Manek Chowk**. Spot the large tiger-catching cage, which worked rather like an oversized mousetrap, and the smaller one for leopards.

### ★ City Palace Museum

MUSEUM

(adult/child ₹250/100, camera or video ₹250, guide ₹250, audio guide ₹200; ☀9.30am-5.30pm, last entry 4.30pm) The main part of the City Palace is open as the City Palace Museum, with rooms extravagantly decorated with mirrors, tiles and paintings, and housing a large and varied collection of artefacts. It's entered from **Ganesh Chowk**, which you reach from Manek Chowk.

The City Palace Museum begins with the **Rai Angan** (Royal Courtyard), the very spot where Udai Singh met the sage who told

him to build a city here. Rooms along one side contain historical paintings, including several of the Battle of Haldighati (1576), in which Mewar forces under Maharana Pratap, one of the great Rajput heroes, gallantly fought the army of Mughal emperor Akbar to a stalemate.

As you move through the palace, highlights include the **Baadi Mahal** (1699), where a pretty central garden gives fine views over the city. **Kishan (Krishna) Vilas** has a remarkable collection of miniatures from the time of Maharana Bhim Singh (r 1778-1828). The story goes that Bhim Singh's daughter Krishna Kumari drank a fatal cup of poison here to solve the dilemma of rival princely suitors from Jaipur and Jodhpur who were both threatening to invade Mewar if she didn't marry them. The **Surya Choupad** boasts a huge, ornamental sun – the symbol of the sun-descended Mewar dynasty – and opens into **Mor Chowk** (Peacock Courtyard) with its lovely mosaics of peacocks, the favourite Rajasthani bird.

The southern end of the museum comprises the **Zenana Mahal**, the royal ladies' quarters built in the 17th century. It now contains a long picture gallery with lots of royal hunting scenes (note the comic strip-style of the action in each painting). The Zenana Mahal's central courtyard, **Laxmi Chowk**, contains a beautiful white pavilion and a stable of *howdahs*, palanquins and other people-carriers.

### Crystal Gallery

GALLERY

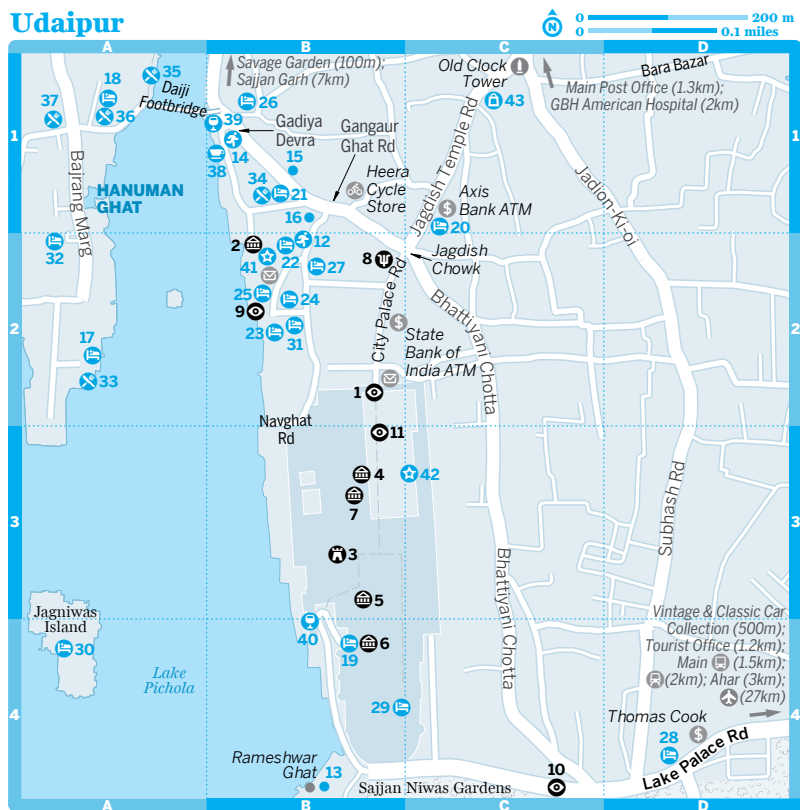
(City Palace Complex; adult/child incl audio guide & drink ₹550/350, photography prohibited; ☀9am-7pm) The Crystal Gallery houses rare crystal that Maharana Sajjan Singh (r 1874-84) ordered from F&C Osler & Co in England in 1877. The maharana died before it arrived, and all the items stayed forgotten and packed up in boxes for 110 years. The extraordinary, extravagant collection includes crystal chairs, sofas, tables and even beds. The rather hefty admission fee also includes entry to the grand **Durbar Hall**. Tickets are available at the City Palace gates or the Crystal Gallery entrance.

### Government Museum

MUSEUM

(Indian/foreigner ₹20/100; ☀10am-5pm Tue-Sun) Entered from Ganesh Chowk, this museum has a splendid collection of jewel-like miniature paintings of the Mewar school and a turban that belonged to Shah Jahan, creator of the Taj Mahal. Stranger exhibits include

## Udaipur



a stuffed monkey holding a lamp. There are also regal maharana portraits in profile, documenting Mewar's rulers along with the changing fashions of the moustache.

### ★ Lake Pichola

LAKE

Limpid and large, Lake Pichola reflects the grey-blue mountains on its mirror-like surface. It was enlarged by Maharana Udai Singh II, following his foundation of the city, by flooding Picholi village, which gave the lake its name. The lake is now 4km long and 3km wide, but remains shallow and dries up completely during severe droughts. The City Palace complex, including the gardens at its southern end, extends nearly 1km along the lake's eastern shore.

**Boat trips** (adult/child 10am-2pm ₹400/200, 3-5pm ₹700/400; ☀️ 10am-5pm) leave roughly hourly from Rameshwar Ghat, within the City Palace complex (note, you have to pay ₹30 to enter). The trips make a stop at

Jagmandir Island, where you can stay for as long as you like before taking any boat back. Take your own drinks and snacks, though, as those sold on the island are extortionately expensive. You can also take 25-minute boat rides from **Lal Ghat** (₹250 per person) throughout the day without the need to enter the City Palace complex: it's worth checking in advance what time the popular sunset departure casts off.

### Jagmandir Island

ISLAND

The palace on Jagmandir Island, about 800m south of Jagniwas Island, was built by Maharana Karan Singh II in 1620, added to by his successor Maharana Jagat Singh, and then changed very little until the last few years when it was partly converted into another (smaller) hotel. When lit up at night it has more romantic sparkle to it than the Lake Palace. As well as the seven hotel rooms, the island has a restaurant, bar and spa, which are open to visitors.

## Udaipur

### 📍 Sights

|                            |    |
|----------------------------|----|
| 1 Badi Pol .....           | B2 |
| 2 Bagore-ki-Haveli .....   | B2 |
| 3 City Palace .....        | B3 |
| 4 City Palace Museum ..... | B3 |
| 5 Crystal Gallery .....    | B3 |
| 6 Durbar Hall .....        | B4 |
| 7 Government Museum .....  | B3 |
| 8 Jagdish Temple .....     | B2 |
| 9 Lal Ghat .....           | B2 |
| 10 Sheetla Mata Gate ..... | C4 |
| 11 Tripolia Gate .....     | B3 |

### 🎨 Activities, Courses & Tours

|                                   |          |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Art of Bicycle Trips .....        | (see 14) |
| Ashoka Arts .....                 | (see 21) |
| 12 Ayurvedic Body Care .....      | B2       |
| 13 Lake Pichola Boat Trips .....  | B4       |
| Millets of Mewar .....            | (see 36) |
| 14 Prakash Yoga .....             | B1       |
| 15 Prem Musical Instruments ..... | B1       |
| 16 Shashi Cooking Classes .....   | B1       |
| Sushma's Cooking Classes .....    | (see 22) |

### 🛏 Sleeping

|                                     |    |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| 17 Amet Haveli .....                | A2 |
| 18 Dream Heaven .....               | A1 |
| 19 Fateh Prakash Palace Hotel ..... | B4 |
| 20 Hotel Baba Palace .....          | C1 |
| 21 Hotel Gangaur Palace .....       | B1 |
| 22 Hotel Krishna Niwas .....        | B2 |
| 23 Jagat Niwas Palace Hotel .....   | B2 |
| 24 Jaiwana Haveli .....             | B2 |

|                                  |          |
|----------------------------------|----------|
| 25 Lal Ghat Guest House .....    | B2       |
| 26 Nukkad Guest House .....      | B1       |
| Poonam Haveli .....              | (see 22) |
| 27 Pratap Bhawan .....           | B2       |
| 28 Rangniwas Palace Hotel .....  | D4       |
| 29 Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel ..... | B4       |
| 30 Taj Lake Palace .....         | A4       |
| 31 Udai Garh .....               | B2       |
| 32 Udai Kothi .....              | A2       |

### 🍴 Eating

|                                |          |
|--------------------------------|----------|
| 33 Ambrai .....                | A2       |
| 34 Cafe Edelweiss .....        | B1       |
| Charcoal .....                 | (see 27) |
| Jagat Niwas Palace Hotel ..... | (see 23) |
| 35 Little Prince .....         | A1       |
| Mayur Rooftop Cafe .....       | (see 20) |
| 36 Millets of Mewar .....      | A1       |
| 37 Queen Cafe .....            | A1       |

### 🍷 Drinking & Nightlife

|                                    |          |
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With its entrance flanked by a row of enormous stone elephants, the island has an ornate 17th-century tower, the **Gol Mahal**, carved from bluestone and containing a small exhibit on Jagmandir's history, plus a garden and lovely views across the lake.

Boat trips (p154) leave roughly hourly from Rameshwar Ghat, within the City Palace complex (note, you have to pay ₹30 to enter). The trips make a stop at Jagmandir Island, where you can stay for as long as you like before taking any boat back. Take your own drinks and snacks, though, as those sold on the island are extortionately expensive.

### Jagdish Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

(☀ 5.30am-2pm & 4-10pm) Reached by a steep, elephant-flanked flight of steps, 150m north of the City Palace's Badi Pol, this busy Indo-Aryan temple was built by Maharana Jagat Singh in 1651. The wonderfully carved main structure enshrines a black stone image of Vishnu as Jagannath, Lord of the

Universe. There's also a brass image of the Garuda (Vishnu's man-bird vehicle) in a shrine facing the main structure.

### Bagore-ki-Haveli

MUSEUM

(Indian/foreigner ₹40/80, camera ₹50; ☀ 9.30am-5.30pm) This gracious 18th-century *haveli*, set on the water's edge in the Gangaur Ghat area, was built by a Mewar prime minister and has since been carefully restored. There are 138 rooms set around courtyards, some arranged to evoke the period during which the house was inhabited, while others house cultural displays, including – intriguingly enough – the world's biggest turban.

The *haveli* also houses a gallery featuring a fascinating collection of period photos of Udaipur and a surreal collection of world-famous monuments carved out of polystyrene.

### Sajjan Garh

PALACE

(Monsoon Palace) Perched on top of a distant hill like a fairy-tale castle, this melancholy, neglected late-19th-century palace was con-

structed by Maharana Sajjan Singh. Originally an astronomical centre, it became a monsoon palace and hunting lodge. Now government owned, it's in a sadly dilapidated state, but visitors stream up here for the marvellous views, particularly at sunset. It's 5km west of the old city as the crow flies, about 9km by the winding road.

At the foot of the hill you enter the 5-sq-km **Sajjan Garh Wildlife Sanctuary** (Indian/foreigner ₹50/300, car ₹200). A good way to visit is with the daily sunset excursion in a minivan driven by an enterprising taxi driver who picks up tourists at the entrance to Bagore-ki-Haveli at Gangaur Ghat every day at 5pm. The round trip costs ₹300 per person, including waiting time (but not the sanctuary fees). His minivan has 'Monsoon Palace-Sajjangerh Fort' written across the front of it. Alternatively, autorickshaws charge ₹400 including waiting time for a round trip to the sanctuary gate, which they are not allowed to pass. Taxis ferry people the final 4km up to the palace for ₹150 per person.

**Vintage & Classic Car Collection** MUSEUM (Garden Hotel, Lake Palace Rd; adult/child ₹250/150, lunch or dinner ₹230; ☉9am-9pm) The maharanas' car collection makes a fascinating diversion, for what it tells about their elite lifestyle and for the vintage vehicles themselves. Housed within the former state garage are 22 splendid vehicles, including a seven-seat 1938 Cadillac complete with purdah system, the beautiful 1934 Rolls-Royce Phantom used in the Bond film *Octopussy*, and the Cadillac convertible that whisked Queen Elizabeth II to the airport in 1961. The museum is a 10-minute walk east along Lake Palace Rd.



## Activities

### Krishna Ranch

HORSE RIDING

(☎9828059505; www.krishnaranch.com; full day incl lunch ₹1200) Situated in beautiful countryside near Badi village, 7km northwest of Udaipur, and run by the owners of Kumbha Palace guesthouse. Experienced owner-guide Dinesh Jain leads most trips himself, riding local Marwari horses through the surrounding hills. There are also attractive cottages (p159) at the ranch.

### Prakash Yoga

YOGA

(☎0294-2524872; inside Chandpol; class by donation; ☉classes 8am & 7pm) A friendly hatha yoga centre with hour-long classes. The

teacher has more than 20 years' experience. It's tucked inside Chandpol, near the foot-bridge, but well signed.

### Ayurvedic Body Care

AYURVEDA, MASSAGE

(☎0294-2413816; www.ayurvedicbodycare.com; 38 Lal Ghat; ☉9.30am-8.30pm) A small and popular old-city operation offering ayurvedic massage at reasonable prices, including a 20-minute head or back massage (₹350) and a 50-minute full-body massage (₹850). It also sells ayurvedic products such as oils, moisturisers, shampoos and soaps.



## Courses

### Shashi Cooking Classes

COOKING

(☎9929303511; www.shashicookingclasses.blogspot.com; Sunrise Restaurant, 18 Gangaur Ghat Rd; 4hr class ₹1500; ☉classes 10.30am & 5.30pm) Readers rave about Shashi's high-spirited classes, teaching many fundamental Indian dishes. Classes go for 3½ to four hours and include a free recipe booklet.

### Sushma's Cooking Classes

COOKING

(☎7665852163; www.cookingclassesinudaipur.com; Hotel Krishna Niwas, 35 Lal Ghat; 2hr class ₹1000) A highly recommended cooking class run by the enthusiastic Sushma. Classes offer up anything from traditional Rajasthani dishes and learning how to make spice mixes, through bread-making to the all-important method of making the perfect cup of chai.

### Prem Musical Instruments

MUSIC

(☎9414343583; 28 Gadiya Devra; per hr ₹700; ☉10.30am-6pm) Rajesh Prajapati (Bablu) is a successful local musician who gives sitar, tabla and flute lessons. He also sells and repairs those instruments and can arrange performances.

### Ashoka Arts

ART

(Hotel Gangaur Palace, Ashoka Haveli, Gangaur Ghat Rd; per hr ₹200) Learn the basics of classic miniature painting from a local master.



## Tours

### Art of Bicycle Trips

CYCLING

(☎8769822745; www.artofbicycletrips.com; 27 Gadiya Devra, inside Chandpol; half-day tour ₹1950) This well-run outfit offers a great way to get out of the city. The Lakecity Loop is a 30km half-day tour that quickly leaves Udaipur behind to have you wheeling through villages, farmland and along the shores of Fateh Sagar and Badi Lakes. Other options include a vehicle-supported trip further afield to

Kumbhalgarh and Ranakpur. Bikes are well maintained and all come with helmets.

### Milletts of Mewar

WALKING  
(☎) 8890419048; www.milletsofmewar.com; Hanuman Ghat; per person ₹1000, min 2 people) Health-food specialists Milletts of Mewar (p160) organises 2½-hour city tours on which you can meet local artisans who live and work in Udaipur. Tours should be booked a day in advance; they leave from the restaurant at 10am.



## Festivals & Events

### Holi

RELIGIOUS  
(☺) Feb/Mar) If you're in Udaipur in February/March, you can experience the festival of Holi, Udaipur-style, when the town comes alive in a riot of colour.

### Mewar Festival

RELIGIOUS  
(☺) Mar/Apr) Holi is followed in March/April by the procession-heavy Mewar Festival – Udaipur's own version of the springtime Gangaur festival.



## Sleeping

Many budget and midrange lodgings cluster close to the lake, especially on its eastern side in Lal Ghat. This area is a tangle of streets and lanes close to the City Palace. It's Udaipur's tourist epicentre and boasts numerous eateries and shops. Directly across the water from Lal Ghat, Hanuman Ghat has a slightly more local vibe and often better views, though you're certainly not out of the touristic zone.



## Lal Ghat

### Lal Ghat Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$  
(☎) 0294-2525301; lalghat@hotmail.com; 33 Lal Ghat; dm ₹200, r ₹1000, without bathroom ₹750, with AC ₹2000; (☎) (☎) This mellow guesthouse by the lake was one of the first to open in Udaipur, and it's still a sound choice, with an amazing variety of older and newer rooms. Accommodation ranges from a spruce, non-smoking dorm (with curtained-off beds and lockers under the mattresses) to the best room, which sports a stone wall, a big bed, a big mirror and air-con.

Most rooms have lake views and those in the older part of the building generally have more character. There's a small kitchen for self-caterers.

### Nukkad Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$  
(☎) 0294-2411403; nukkad\_raju@yahoo.com; 56 Ganesh Ghati; s/d without bathroom ₹100/200,

r ₹300-500; (☎) (☎) Nukkad has clean and simple fan-cooled good-value rooms, plus a sociable, breezy, upstairs restaurant with very good Indian and international dishes. You can join afternoon cooking classes and morning yoga sessions (by donation) without stepping outside the door – just don't stay out past curfew or get caught washing your clothes in your bathroom.



## Jagat Niwas

### Palace Hotel

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$  
(☎) 0294-2420133, 0294-2422860; www.jagatniwaspalace.com; 23-25 Lal Ghat; r ₹2000-3185, with lake view ₹4860-8100; (☎) (☎) This leading midrange hotel set in two converted lakeside *havelis* takes the location cake, and staff are efficient and always courteous. The lake-view rooms are charming, with carved wooden furniture, cushioned window seats and pretty prints. Rooms without a lake view are almost as comfortable and attractive, and considerably cheaper.

The building is full of character, with lots of pleasant sitting areas, terraces and courtyards, and it makes the most of its position with a picture-perfect rooftop restaurant

### Jaiwana Haveli

HOTEL \$\$  
(☎) 0294-2411103, 9829005859; www.jaiwanahaveli.com; 14 Lal Ghat; r from ₹3265; (☎) (☎) Professionally run by two helpful, efficient brothers, this smart midrange option has spotless, unfussy rooms with good beds, TVs and attractive block-printed fabrics. Book a corner room for views. The rooftop restaurant has great lake views and Indian food (mains ₹140 to ₹300), plus there's a mod cafe (p160) on the ground floor.

## ANIMAL AID UNLIMITED

The spacious refuge of **Animal Aid Unlimited** (☎) 9352511435, 9602055895; www.animalaidunlimited.com; Badi Village) treats around 200 street animals a day (mainly dogs, donkeys and cows) and answers more than 3000 emergency rescue calls a year. The refuge welcomes volunteers and visitors: you can visit between 9am and 4pm without needing to call first, though avoid lunch-time (1pm to 2pm). The refuge is in Badi village, 7km northwest of Udaipur.

A round trip by autorickshaw, including waiting time, costs around ₹350 to ₹400. Call Animal Aid Unlimited if you see an injured or ill street animal in Udaipur.

**Hotel Baba Palace**

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0294-2427126; www.hotelbabapalace.com; Jagdish Chowk; r/deluxe r incl breakfast ₹2250/2750; 🍷🍷) This slick hotel has sparkling, fresh rooms with decent beds behind solid doors and there's a lift. It's eye to eye with Jagdish Temple, so many of the rooms have interesting views; all have air-conditioning and TVs, some have delightfully canopied beds. On top there's the popular Mayur Rooftop Cafe (p160). Free train station or airport pick-ups available.

**Hotel Krishna Niwas**

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0294-2420163, 9414167341; www.hotelkrishna.niwas.com; 35 Lal Ghat; d ₹1500-2000; 🍷🍷🍷) Run by an artist family, Krishna Niwas has smart, clean, all air-con rooms; those with views are smaller, and some come with balconies. There are splendid vistas from the rooftop, and a decent restaurant. You can also try your own cooking after taking one of the popular cooking lessons (p156) here.

**Pratap Bhawan**

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0294-2560566; www.pratapbhawanudaipur.com; 12 Lal Ghat; r ₹1450-2250; 🍷🍷) A curving marble staircase leads up from the wide lobby to large rooms with good, big bathrooms and, in many cases, cushioned window seats. A deservedly popular place, even if recent price hikes have spun the place slightly out of the budget category. The rooftop Charcoal restaurant is nice for sitting out at night.

**Poonam Haveli**

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 0294-2410303; www.hotelpoonamhaveli.com; 39 Lal Ghat; r incl breakfast ₹3215; 🍷🍷🍷) A fairly modern place decked out in traditional style, friendly Poonam has 16 spacious, spotlessly clean rooms with marble floors, big beds, TVs and spare but tasteful decor, plus pleasant sitting areas. None of the rooms enjoy lake views, but the rooftop restaurant does, and also boasts wood-fired pizzas among the usual Indian and traveller fare.

**Hotel Gangaur Palace**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$

(☎ 0294-2422303; www.ashokahaveli.com; Ashoka Haveli, 339 Gangaur Ghat Rd; s ₹400-2000, d ₹500-2500; 🍷🍷🍷) This elaborate, faded *haveli* is set around a stone-pillared courtyard, with a wide assortment of rooms on several floors. It's gradually moving upmarket and rooms range from windowless with flaking paint to bright and recently decorated with lake views. Many have wall paintings and window seats.

The hotel also boasts an in-house palm reader, art shop, art school (p156), and a rooftop restaurant.

**Udai Garh**

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 9660055500, 0294-2421239; www.udaigarhudaipur.in; 21 Lal Ghat; r incl breakfast ₹2600-3400; 🍷🍷🍷) Set just back from the lakeshore, Udai Garh is an oasis of peace, with a central courtyard and spacious rooms. Unfortunately the rooms don't quite capture a lake view, but the wonderful rooftop, with a neat swimming pool and delightful restaurant, certainly does.

**Hanuman Ghat****Dream Heaven**

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎ 0294-2431038; www.dreamheaven.co.in; Hanuman Ghat; r ₹400-1200; 🍷🍷🍷) This higgledy-piggledy building boasts clean rooms with wall hangings and paintings. Bathrooms are smallish, though some rooms have a decent balcony and/or views. The food at the rooftop restaurant (dishes ₹100 to ₹150), which overlooks the lake, is fresh and tasty; it's the perfect place to chill out on a pile of cushions and the only place to pick up wi-fi.

**Amet Haveli**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0294-2431085; www.amethaveliudaipur.com; Hanuman Ghat; s/d from ₹4165/4760; 🍷🍷🍷🍷) A 350-year-old heritage building on the lakeshore, with delightful rooms featuring cushioned window seats, coloured glass and little shutters. They're set around a pretty courtyard and pond. Splurge on one with a balcony or giant bath tub. One of Udaipur's most romantic restaurants, Ambrai (p160), is part of the hotel.

**Udai Kothi**

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0294-2432810; www.udaikothi.com; Hanuman Ghat; r ₹6500-10,000; 🍷🍷🍷🍷) A bit like a five-storey wedding cake, Udai Kothi is a glittery, modern building (there's an elevator) with lots of traditional embellishments – cupolas, interesting art and fabrics, and window seats in some rooms, marble bathrooms and carved-wood doors in others – and thoughtful touches such as bowls of floating flowers throughout. Rooms are pretty, individually designed and well equipped.

The apex is the rooftop terrace, where you can dine well at the restaurant and swim in Udaipur's best rooftop pool (nonguests ₹500).



## City Palace

**Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$  
(☎ 0294-2528016; www.hrhhotels.com; City Palace Complex; r ₹18,000-103,000; 🍷@🍷🍷) This hotel, in the former palace guest quarters, has opulent common areas such as its pool courtyard, bar and lawn garden. Some of the suites are truly palatial, filled with fountains and silver, but the standard rooms are poorer value. Go for a suite, or just for a drink, meal or massage. Rates drop dramatically from April to September.

**Fateh Prakash Palace Hotel** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$  
(☎ 0294-2528016; www.hrhhotels.com; City Palace Complex; r/premier ste ₹23,000/45,000; 🍷@🍷🍷) Built in the early 20th century for royal functions, the Fateh Prakash has luxurious rooms and gorgeous suites, all comprehensively equipped and almost all looking straight out onto Lake Pichola. Views aside, the general ambience is a little less regal than at Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel – although the Sunset Terrace bar (p160) is a great place for an evening drink.

**Taj Lake Palace** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$  
(☎ 0294-2428800; www.tajhotels.com; r from ₹38,250; 🍷@🍷🍷) The icon of Udaipur, this romantic white-marble palace seemingly floating on the lake is extraordinary, with open-air courtyards, lotus ponds and a small, mango-tree-shaded pool. Rooms are hung with breezy silks and filled with carved furniture. Some of the cheapest overlook the lily pond rather than the lake; the mural-decked suites will make you truly feel like a maharaja.

## Other Areas

★ **Krishna Ranch** COTTAGE \$\$\$  
(☎ 9828059505, 9828059506; www.krishnaranch.com; s/d incl meals from ₹2000/2500; 🍷) This delightful countryside retreat has five cottages set around the grounds of a small farm. Each comes with attached bathroom (with solar-heated shower), tasteful decor and farm views. All meals are included and are prepared using organic produce grown on the farm. The ranch is 7km from town, near Badi village, but there's free pick-up from Udaipur.

It's an ideal base for the hikes and horse treks (p156) that the management – a

Dutch-Indian couple – organises from here, though you don't have to sign up for the treks to stay here.

**Rangniwas Palace Hotel** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$  
(☎ 0294-2523890; www.rangniwaspalace.com; Lake Palace Rd; s ₹1090-1420, d ₹1310-1635, ste ₹3050-4360; 🍷@🍷🍷) This 19th-century palace boasts plenty of heritage character and a peaceful central garden with a small pool shaded by mature palms. The quaint rooms in the older section are the most appealing, while the suites – full of carved wooden furniture and boasting terraces with swing seats or balcony window seats overlooking the garden – are a delight.

## Eating

Udaipur has scores of sun-kissed rooftop restaurants, many with mesmerising lake views. The fare is not always that inspiring or varying, but competition keeps most places striving for improvement.

## Lal Ghat

**Cafe Edelweiss** CAFE \$  
(73 Ganga Ghat Rd; coffee from ₹60, sandwiches from ₹140; ☺ 8am-8pm; 🍷) The Savage Garden restaurant folks run this itty cafe with baked goods and coffee. Offerings included sticky cinnamon rolls, blueberry chocolate cake, spinach-and-mushroom quiche or apple strudel, muesli or eggs for breakfast, and various sandwiches.

★ **Jagat Niwas Palace Hotel** INDIAN \$\$\$  
(☎ 0294-2420133; 23-25 Lal Ghat; mains ₹250-325; ☺ 7am-10am, noon-3pm & 6-10pm) A wonderful, classy, rooftop restaurant with superb lake views, delicious Indian cuisine and excellent service. Choose from an extensive selection of mouth-watering curries (tempered for Western tastes) – mutton, chicken, fish, veg – as well as the tandoori classics. There's a tempting cocktail menu, Indian wine and the beer is icy cold. Book ahead for dinner.

**Charcoal** MULTICUISINE \$\$\$  
(☎ 8769160106; www.charcoalpb.com; Pratap Bhawan, 12 Lal Ghat; mains ₹140-480; ☺ 8am-11pm; 🍷) As the name implies, barbecue and tandoor specials feature at this innovative rooftop restaurant. There are plenty of vegetarian and juicy meat dishes on offer and the homemade soft corn tacos with a variety of fillings are deservedly popular.

**Mayur Rooftop Cafe**

MULTICUISINE \$\$\$

(Hotel Baba Palace, Jagdish Chowk; mains ₹150-290; ☺ 7am-10pm; 🍷🍷) This delightful rooftop restaurant has a great view of the multihued light show on the Jagdish Temple. You can choose the air-con room or the breezy open section. The usual multicuisine themes fill out the menu, and the quality is top-notch. The thali is great value and vegetarians will love the choice of nine paneer dishes.

**Savage Garden**

MEDITERRANEAN \$\$\$

(☎ 8890627181; inside Chandpol; mains ₹280-520; ☺ 11am-11pm) Tucked away in the backstreets near Chandpol, Savage Garden does a winning line in soups, chicken, and homemade pasta dishes. Try ravioli with lamb ragu, and the sweet-savoury stuffed chicken breast with nuts, cheese and carrot rice. The setting is a whitewashed 250-year-old *haveli* with bowls of flowers, tables in alcoves and a pleasant courtyard. Indian wine is also served.

**Hanuman Ghat****Milletts of Mewar**

INDIAN \$

(www.milletsofmewar.com; Hanuman Ghat; mains ₹110-180; ☺ 8.30am-10.30pm; 🍷) Local millet is used where possible instead of wheat and rice at this environmentally aware, slow-food restaurant. There are vegan options, gluten-free dishes, fresh salads, and juices and herbal teas. Also on the menu are multigrain sandwiches and millet pizzas, plus regular curries, Indian snacks, pasta and pancakes.

**Little Prince**

MULTICUISINE \$

(Daiji Footbridge; mains ₹100-160; ☺ 8.30am-11pm) This lovely open-air eatery looking towards the quaint Daiji Footbridge dishes up delicious veg and nonveg meals. There are plenty of Indian options, along with pizzas, pastas and some original variations on the usual multicuisine theme, including Korean and Israeli dishes. The ambience is super-relaxed and the service friendly.

**Queen Cafe**

INDIAN \$

(14 Bajrang Marg; mains ₹70-80; ☺ 8am-10pm) This restaurant is like a family's front room, serving up good home-style Indian vegetarian dishes. Try the pumpkin curry with mint and coconut, and the Kashmir *pulao* with fruit, vegies and coconut. Host Meenu also offers cooking classes and walking tours that start with a home-cooked breakfast.

**★ Ambrai**

NORTH INDIAN \$\$\$

(☎ 0294-2431085; www.amethaveliudaiipur.com; Amet Haveli, Hanuman Ghat; mains ₹315-515; ☺ 12.30-3pm & 7.30-10.30pm) Set at lake-shore level, looking across the water to the floodlit City Palace in one direction and Jagniwas in the other, this is one highly romantic restaurant at night with candlelit, white-linen tables beneath enormous trees. And the service and cuisine do justice to its fabulous position, with terrific tandoor and curries and a bar to complement the dining.

**Drinking & Nightlife****Jaiwana Bistro Lounge**

CAFE

(☎ 9829005859; Jaiwana Haveli, 14 Lal Ghat; coffees from ₹100; ☺ 7am-10.30pm; 🍷) This modern, cool and clean cafe has espresso coffee and fresh healthy juices to help wash down the tasty bakery items and other main meals.

**Paps Juices**

JUICE BAR

(inside Chandpol; juices ₹60-180; ☺ 9am-8pm) This bright-red spot is tiny but very welcoming, and a great place to refuel during the day with a shot of Vitamin C from a wide range of delicious juice mixes. If you want something more substantial, the muesli mix is pretty good, too.

**Jheel's Ginger Coffee Bar**

CAFE

(Jheel Palace Guest House, 56 Gangaur Ghat Rd; coffees ₹80-110; ☺ 8am-8pm; 🍷) This small but slick cafe by the water's edge is on the ground floor of Jheel Palace Guest House. Large windows afford good lake views, and the coffee is excellent. It also does a range of cakes and snacks. Note, you can take your coffee up to the open-air rooftop restaurant if you like.

**Sunset Terrace**

BAR

(Fateh Prakash Palace Hotel; beer/cocktails from ₹400/650; ☺ 7am-10.30pm) On a terrace overlooking Lake Pichola, this bar is perfect for a sunset gin and tonic. It's also a restaurant (mains ₹400 to ₹950), with live music performed every night.

**Entertainment****Dharohar**

DANCE

(☎ 0294-2523858; Bagore-ki-Haveli; Indian/foreigner ₹90/150, camera ₹150; ☺ 7-8pm) The beautiful Bagore-ki-Haveli (p155) hosts the best (and most convenient) opportunity to see Rajasthani folk dancing, with nightly shows of colourful, energetic Marwari, Bhil

and western Rajasthani dances, as well as traditional Rajasthani puppetry.

### Mewar Sound & Light Show

LIVE PERFORMANCE

(Manek Chowk, City Palace; adult/child ₹150/100; ☀️7pm Sep-Mar, 7.30pm Apr, 8pm May-Aug) Fifteen centuries of intriguing Mewar history are squeezed into one atmospheric hour of commentary and light switching – in English from September to April, in Hindi other months.



### Shopping

Tourist-oriented shops – selling miniature paintings, wood carvings, silver jewellery, bangles, spices, camel-bone boxes, and a large variety of textiles – line the streets radiating from Jagdish Chowk. Udaipur is known for its local crafts, particularly miniature painting in the Rajput-Mughal style, as well as some interesting contemporary art.

The local market area extends east from the old clock tower at the northern end of Jagdish Temple Rd, and buzzes loudest in the evening. It's fascinating as much for browsing and soaking up local atmosphere as it is for buying. Bara Bazar, immediately east of the old clock tower, sells silver and gold, while its narrow side street, Maldas St, specialises in saris and fabric. A little further east, traditional shoes are sold on Mochiwada.

Foodstuffs and spices are mainly found around the new clock tower at the east end of the bazaar area, and Mandi Market, 200m north of the tower.

### Sadhna

CLOTHING

(☎️0294-2454655; www.sadhna.org; Jagdish Temple Rd; ☀️10am-7pm) This is the crafts outlet for Seva Mandir, a long-established

NGO working with rural and tribal people. The small, hard-to-see shop sells attractive fixed-price textiles; profits go to the artisans and towards community development work.



### Information

#### EMERGENCY

**Police** (☎️0294-2414600, emergency 100) There are police posts at Surajpol, Hatipol and Delhi Gate, three of the gates in the old-city wall.

#### INTERNET ACCESS

You can surf the internet at plenty of places, particularly around Lal Ghat, for ₹40 per hour. Many places double as travel agencies, bookshops, art shops etc.

#### MEDICAL SERVICES

**GBH American Hospital** (☎️24hr enquiries 0294-2426000, emergency 9352304050; www.gbhamericanhospital.com; Meera Girls College Rd, 101 Kothi Bagh, Bhatt Ji Ki Bari) Modern, reader-recommended private hospital with 24-hour emergency service, about 2km northeast of the old city.

#### MONEY

There are lots of ATMs, on City Palace Rd near Jagdish Temple, near the bus stand and outside the train station.

**Thomas Cook** (Lake Palace Rd; ☀️9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Changes cash and travellers cheques.

#### POST

**DHL** (1 Town Hall Rd; ☀️10am-7pm Mon-Sat) Has a free collection service within Udaipur.

**DHL Express** (☎️0294-2525301; Lal Ghat Guesthouse, Lal Ghat) Conveniently situated inside Lal Ghat Guesthouse.

**Main post office** (Chetak Circle; ☀️10am-1pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Sat) North of the old city.

## RSRTC BUSES FROM UDAIPUR

| DESTINATION         | FARE (₹)     | DURATION (HR) | FREQUENCY               |
|---------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| Ahmedabad           | 236, AC 585  | 5             | hourly from 5.30am      |
| Ajmer (for Pushkar) | 296          | 7             | hourly from 5am         |
| Bundi               | 328          | 6             | daily (7.45am)          |
| Chittorgarh         | 120          | 2½            | half-hourly from 5.15am |
| Delhi               | 672, AC 1685 | 15            | 4 daily                 |
| Jaipur              | 424, AC 903  | 9             | hourly                  |
| Jodhpur             | 273, AC 604  | 6-8           | hourly                  |
| Kota                | 291          | 7             | hourly                  |
| Mt Abu (Abu Road)   | 166          | 4             | 10 daily from 5.30am    |

**Post office** (City Palace Rd; ☺ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) Tiny post office that sends parcels (including packaging them up), and there are virtually no queues. Beside the City Palace's Badi Pol ticket office.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

Small tourist offices operate erratically at the train station and airport.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0294-2411535; Fateh Memorial Bldg; ☺ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Not situated in the most convenient position, 1.5km east of the Jagdish Temple (though only about 500m from the bus stand), this place dishes out a limited amount of brochures and information.

## i Getting There & Away

### AIR

Udaipur's airport, 25km east of town, is served by flights from Delhi, Mumbai and other hubs. A prepaid taxi from the airport to the Lal Ghat area costs ₹450.

**Air India** (☎ 0294-2410999, airport office 0294-2655453; www.airindia.com; 222/16 Mumal Towers, Saheli Rd) Flies daily to Mumbai and Delhi (via Jodhpur).

**IndiGo** (☎ 9212783838; www.goindigo.in) Three flights daily to Delhi and two flights daily to Mumbai.

**Jet Airways** (☎ 0294-5134000; www.jetairways.com; Maharana Pratap Airport, Dabok) Flies direct to Delhi and Mumbai daily.

**Spice Jet** (☎ 9871803333; www.spicejet.com) Flies twice daily to Delhi and daily to Mumbai.

### BUS

RSRTC and private buses run from the **main bus stand**, 1.5km east of the City Palace. Turn left at the end of Lake Palace Rd, take the first right then cross the main road at the end, just after passing through the crumbling old Surajpol Gate. It's around ₹40 in an autorickshaw.

If arriving by bus, turn left out of the bus stand, cross the main road, walk through Surajpol Gate then turn left at the end of the road before taking the first right into Lake Palace Rd.

Private bus tickets can also be bought at any one of the many travel agencies lining the road leading from Jagdish Temple to Daiji Footbridge.

### TRAIN

The train station is about 2.5km southeast of the City Palace, and 1km directly south of the main bus stand. An autorickshaw between the train station and Jagdish Chowk should cost around ₹50. There's a prepaid autorickshaw stand at the station.

There are no direct trains to Abu Road, Jodhpur or Jaisalmer.

**Agra sleeper** ₹370, 13 hours, daily (10.20pm)

**Ajmer (for Pushkar) seat/sleeper** ₹145/215, five hours, four daily (6am, 3.05pm, 5.15pm and 10.20pm), via Chittorgarh (seat/sleeper ₹95/150, two hours)

**Bundi sleeper** ₹220, 4½ hours, daily (6.15pm)

**Delhi sleeper** ₹425, 12 hours, two daily (5.15pm and 6.15pm)

**Jaipur seat/sleeper** ₹180/270, around seven hours, three daily (6am, 3.05pm and 10.20pm)

## i Getting Around

### AUTORICKSHAW

These are unmetered, so you should agree on a fare before setting off – the normal fare anywhere in town is around ₹40. You will usually have to go through the rigmarole of haggling, walking away etc to get this fare. Some drivers ask tourists for ₹100 or more. It costs around ₹350 to hire an autorickshaw for a day of local sightseeing.

The commission system is in place, so tenaciously pursue your first choice of accommodation.

## MAJOR TRAINS FROM UDAIPUR

| DESTINATION               | TRAIN                    | DEPARTURE | ARRIVAL | FARE (₹)     |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------|--------------|
| Agra (Cantonment)         | 19666 Udaipur-Kurj Exp   | 10.20pm   | 11am    | 370/995 (A)  |
| Ajmer (for Pushkar)       | Udaipur-Jaipur SF SPL    | 3.05pm    | 8pm     | 140/490 (B)  |
| Bundi                     | 12964 Mewar Exp          | 6.15pm    | 10.33pm | 220/560 (A)  |
| Chittorgarh               | 12982 Chetak Exp         | 5.15pm    | 7.10pm  | 180/560 (A)  |
| Delhi (Hazrat Nizamuddin) | 12964 Mewar Exp          | 6.15pm    | 6.35am  | 425/1115 (A) |
| Jaipur                    | 12991 Udaipur-Jaipur Exp | 6am       | 1.30pm  | 180/625 (B)  |

Fares: (A) sleeper/3AC, (B) 2nd-class seat/AC chair

## KUMBHALGARH WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Ranakpur is a great base for exploring the hilly, densely forested **Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary** (Indian/foreigner ₹50/300, 4WD or car ₹200, camera/video free/₹400; ☉ safaris 6-9am & 3-4.30pm), which extends over some 600 sq km. It's known for its leopards and wolves, although the chances of spotting antelopes, gazelles, deer and possibly sloth bears are higher, especially from March to June. You will certainly see some of the sanctuary's 200-plus bird species.

Beside the park office, near the Ranakpur Jain temples, is the recommended tour company **Evergreen Safari** (☎ 7568830065; gypsy safari ₹2500). There are also several safari outfits on the road leading up to Kumbhalgarh Fort, including **A-one Tour & Safari** (☎ 8003854293; Pratap Circle; 2/6 people ₹3000/4500; ☉ safaris 6-9am & 3-4.30pm). Most hotels will use these or similar outfits to organise your safari.

There's a ticket office for the sanctuary right beside where the bus drops you off for the Jain temples, but the nearest of the sanctuary's four entrances is 2km beyond here.

### BICYCLE & MOTORCYCLE

A cheap and environmentally friendly way to buzz around is by bicycle (around ₹200 per day), although motorcycle traffic and pollution make it very tiresome if not dangerous. Scooters and motorbikes, meanwhile, are great for exploring the surrounding countryside.

**Heera Cycle Store** (☎ 9950611973; off Gangaur Ghat Rd; ☉ 7.30am-8pm) Hires out bicycles/scooters/Bullets for ₹200/500/800 per day (with a deposit of US\$200/400/500); you must show your passport and driver's licence.

## Around Udaipur

### Kumbhalgarh

☎ 02954

About 80km north of Udaipur, Kumbhalgarh is a fantastic, remote fort, fulfilling romantic expectations and vividly summoning up the chivalrous, warlike Rajput era.

The large and rugged Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary can also be visited from Kumbhalgarh.

### 👁️ Sights

#### Kumbhalgarh

FORT

(Indian/foreigner ₹15/200, Light & Sound Show (in Hindi) ₹100/200; ☉ 9am-6pm, Light & Sound Show 6.30pm) One of the many forts built by Rana Kumbha (r 1433-68), under whom Mewar reached its greatest extents, this isolated fort is perched 1100m above sea level, with endless views melting into blue distance. The journey to the fort, along twisting roads through the Aravalli Hills, is a highlight in itself.

Kumbhalgarh was the most important Mewar fort after Chittorgarh, and the rulers,

sensibly, used to retreat here in times of danger. Not surprisingly, Kumbhalgarh was only taken once in its entire history. Even then, it took the combined armies of Amber, Marwar and Mughal emperor Akbar to breach its strong defences, and they only managed to hang on to it for two days.

The fort's thick walls stretch about 36km; they're wide enough in some places for eight horses to ride abreast and it's possible to walk right round the circuit (allow two days). They enclose around 360 intact and ruined temples, some of which date back to the Mauryan period in the 2nd century BC, as well as palaces, gardens, step-wells and 700 cannon bunkers.

If you're staying here and want to make an early start on your hike around the wall, you can still get into the fort before 9am, although no one will be around to sell you a ticket.

There's a **Light & Sound Show** (in Hindi) at the fort every evening.

### 🛏️ Sleeping

#### Kumbhal Castle

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 02954-242171; www.thekumbhalcastle.com; Fort Rd; r from ₹3130; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The modern Kumbhal Castle, 2km from the fort, has plain but pleasant white rooms featuring curly iron beds, bright bedspreads and window seats, shared balconies and good views. The super-deluxe rooms are considerably bigger and worth considering for the few hundred extra rupees. There's an in-house restaurant.

#### Aodhi

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 8003722333, 02954-242341; www.eternalmewar.in; r from ₹8775; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Just under

2km from the fort is this luxurious and blissfully tranquil hotel with an inviting pool, rambling gardens and winter campfires. The spacious rooms, in stone buildings, all boast their own palm-thatched terraces, balconies or pavilions, and assorted wildlife and botanical art and photos.

Nonguests can dine in the restaurant, where good standard Indian fare is the pick of the options on offer, or have a drink in the cosy Chowpal Bar. Room rates plummet from April to September.

## **i** Getting There & Away

From Udaipur's main bus stand, catch a Ranakpur-bound bus as far as Saira (₹78, 2½ hours, hourly), a tiny crossroads town where you can change for a bus to Kumbhalgarh (₹41, one hour, hourly). That bus, which will be bound for Kellarwa, will drop you at the start of the approach road to the fort, leaving you with a pleasant 1.5km walk to the entrance gate.

The last bus back to Saira swings by at 5.30pm (and is always absolutely jam-packed). The last bus from Saira back to Udaipur leaves at around 8pm. To get to Ranakpur from Kumbhalgarh, head first to Saira then change for Ranakpur (₹20, 40 minutes, at least hourly).

A day-long round trip in a private car from Udaipur to Kumbhalgarh and Ranakpur will cost around ₹2000 per car.

## Ranakpur

📞 02934

On the western slopes of the Aravalli Hills, 75km northwest of Udaipur, and 12km west of Kumbhalgarh as the crow flies (but 50km by road, via Saira), the village of Ranakpur hosts one of India's biggest and most important Jain temple complexes.

The village also makes a great base for exploring the impressive Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary (p163) or for taking a day trip to visit the fort at Kumbhalgarh (p163).

## **👁** Sights

### Ranakpur

JAIN TEMPLE

(Indian/foreigner incl audio guide free/₹200, camera/tablet ₹100/200; 🕒 Jains 6am-7pm, non-Jains noon-5pm) Built in the 15th century in milk-white marble, the main temple of Ranakpur, **Chaumukha Mandir** (Four-Faced Temple), is dedicated to Adinath, the first Jain *tirthankar* (depicted in the many Buddha-like images in the temple). An incredible feat of Jain devotion, the temple is a complicated series of 29 halls, 80 domes and 1444 in-

dividually engraved pillars. The interior is completely covered in knotted, lovingly wrought carving, and has a marvellously calming sense of space and harmony.

Shoes, cigarettes, food and all leather articles must be left at the entrance; women who are menstruating are asked not to enter.

Also exquisitely carved and well worth inspecting are two other Jain temples, dedicated to **Neminath** (the 22nd *tirthankar*) and **Parasnath** (the 23rd *tirthankar*), both within the complex, and a nearby **Sun Temple**. About 1km from the main complex is the **Amba Mata Temple**.

## **🛏** Sleeping

### ★ Aranyawas

HOTEL \$\$

📞 02956-293029; www.aranyawas.com; r incl dinner & breakfast ₹5000; 🍷🍷🍷) In secluded, tree-shaded grounds off Hwy 32, 12km south of the temple, Aranyawas has 28 attractive rooms in two-storey stone cottages. They aren't fancy, but are spacious, neat and tasteful, with pine furnishings and, in most cases, balconies overlooking a river and jungle-clad hills. There's a large *baori*-inspired pool surrounded by trees and a bonfire for evening drinks in winter.

The restaurant (mains ₹150 to ₹250, buffet lunch/dinner ₹450/500) is a lovely place to stop for a meal even if you're not staying here.

### Ranakpur Hill Resort

HOTEL \$\$\$

📞 02934-286411; www.ranakpurhillresort.com; Ranakpur Rd; s/d from ₹5850/6435; 🍷🍷🍷) This is a well-run hotel with a nice pool and gardens, around which are arranged the attractive cottages sporting marble floors, stained glass, floral wall paintings and touches of mirrorwork. There is also a good multicuisine restaurant, and horse-riding packages can be arranged. Check for discounts on the website. It's 3.5km north of the temple complex, along Hwy 32.

## **i** Getting There & Away

There are direct buses to Ranakpur leaving roughly hourly from the main bus stands in both Udaipur (₹93, three hours) and Jodhpur (₹189, four to five hours). You'll be dropped outside the temple complex unless you state otherwise. Return buses stop running around 7pm. Buses departing for Udaipur can drop you at Saira (₹20, 40 minutes, hourly), about 25km south of Ranakpur, to connect with a bus to Kumbhalgarh (₹41, one hour, hourly).

A day-long round trip in a private car from Udaipur to Ranakpur and Kumbhalgarh costs around ₹2000.

## Mt Abu

📍 02974 / POP 22,950 / ELEV 1200M

Rajasthan's only hill station nestles among green forests on the state's highest mountain at the southwestern end of the Aravalli Hills and close to the Gujarat border. Quite unlike anywhere else in Rajasthan, Mt Abu provides Rajasthanis, Gujaratis and a steady flow of foreign tourists with respite from scorching temperatures and arid terrain elsewhere. It's a particular hit with honeymooners and middle-class families from Gujarat.

Mt Abu town sits towards the southwestern end of the plateau-like mountain, which stretches about 19km from end to end and 6km from east to west. The town is surrounded by the 289-sq-km Mt Abu Wildlife Sanctuary, which extends over most of the mountain.

The mountain is of great spiritual importance for both Hindus and Jains and has

over 80 temples and shrines, most notably the exquisite Jain temples at Delwara, built between 400 and 1000 years ago.

Be mindful that if you arrive during Diwali (October or November), or the following two weeks, prices soar and the place is packed. Mt Abu also gets pretty busy from mid-May to mid-June, before the monsoon. In the cooler months, you'll find everyone wrapped up in shawls and hats; pack something woolly to avoid winter chills in poorly heated hotel rooms.

## 👁 Sights

The white-clad people you'll see around town are members of the **Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University** ([www.bkwsu.com](http://www.bkwsu.com)), a worldwide organisation that has its headquarters here in Mt Abu. The university's **Universal Peace Hall** (Om Shanti Bhawan; ☀ 8am-6pm), just north of Nakki Lake, has free 30-minute tours that include an introduction to the Brahma Kumaris philosophy (be prepared for a bit of proselytising). The organisation also runs the **World Renewal**

### DON'T MISS

#### DELWARA TEMPLES

The **Delwara Temples** (donations welcome; 🕒 Jains 6am-6pm, non-Jains noon-6pm) are Mt Abu's most remarkable attraction and feature some of India's finest temple decoration. They predate the town of Mt Abu by many centuries and were built when this site was just a remote mountain wilderness. It's said that the artisans were paid according to the amount of dust they collected, encouraging them to carve ever more intricately. Whatever their inducement, there are two temples here in which the marble work is dizzyingly intense.

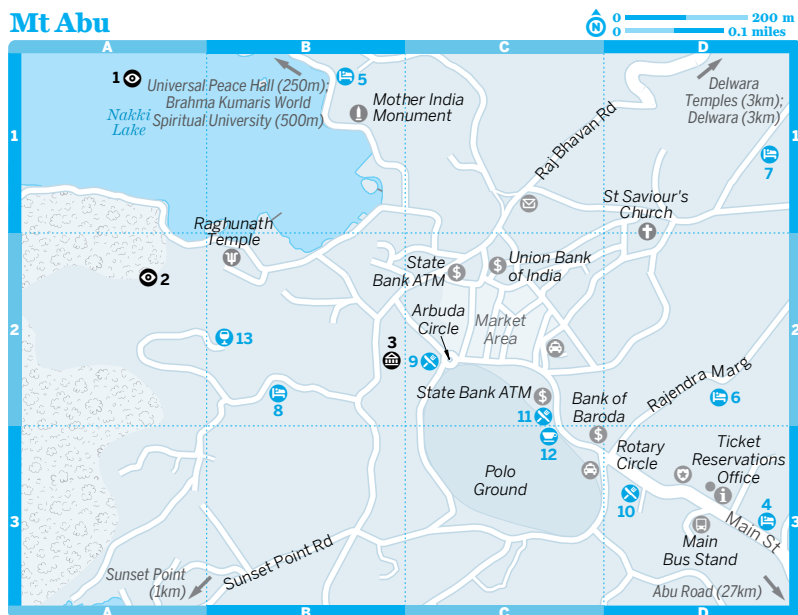
The older of the two is the **Vimal Vasahi**, on which work began in 1031 and was financed by a Gujarati chief minister named Vimal. Dedicated to the first *tirthankar*, Adinath, it took 1500 masons and 1200 labourers 14 years to build, and allegedly cost ₹185.3 million. Outside the entrance is the **House of Elephants**, featuring a procession of stone elephants marching to the temple, some of which were damaged long ago by marauding Mughals. Inside, a forest of beautifully carved pillars surrounds the central shrine, which holds an image of Adinath himself.

The **Luna Vasahi Temple** is dedicated to Neminath, the 22nd *tirthankar*, and was built in 1230 by the brothers Tejpal and Vastupal for a mere ₹125.3 million. Like Vimal, the brothers were both Gujarati government ministers. The marble carving here took 2500 workers 15 years to create, and its most notable feature is its intricacy and delicacy, which is so fine that, in places, the marble becomes almost transparent. The many-layered lotus flower that dangles from the centre of the dome is a particularly astonishing piece of work.

As at other Jain temples, leather articles (including belts and shoes), cameras and phones must be left at the entrance, and menstruating women are asked not to enter.

Delwara is about 3km north of Mt Abu town centre: you can walk there in less than an hour, or hop aboard a shared taxi (₹10 per person) from up the street opposite Chacha Cafe. A taxi all to yourself should be ₹200 round trip, with one hour of waiting time.

## Mt Abu



## Mt Abu

## 📍 Sights

- 1 Nakki Lake ..... A1  
 2 Toad Rock ..... A2  
 3 World Renewal Spiritual Museum ..... B2

## 👣 Activities, Courses &amp; Tours

- Mt Abu Treks ..... (see 5)  
 Shri Ganesh Hotel ..... (see 8)

## 🏠 Sleeping

- 4 Hotel Hilltone ..... D3  
 5 Hotel Lake Palace ..... B1  
 6 Kishangarh House ..... D2

- 7 Mushkil Aasan ..... D1  
 8 Shri Ganesh Hotel ..... B2

## 🍴 Eating

- 9 Arbuda ..... C2  
 10 Kanak Dining Hall ..... D3  
 Mulberry Tree Restaurant ..... (see 4)  
 11 Sankalp ..... C2

## 🍷 Drinking &amp; Nightlife

- 12 Cafe Coffee Day ..... C3  
 13 Polo Bar ..... B2

**Spiritual Museum** (🕒 8am-8pm) **FREE** in the town centre.

**Nakki Lake**

LAKE

Scenic Nakki Lake, the town's focus, is one of Mt Abu's biggest attractions. It's so named because, according to legend, it was scooped out by a god using his *nakh* (nails). Some Hindus thus consider it a holy lake. It's a pleasant 45-minute stroll around the perimeter – the lake is surrounded by hills, parks and strange rock formations. The best known, **Toad Rock**, looks like a toad about to hop into the lake.

**Sunset Point**

VIEWPOINT

Sunset Point is a popular place to watch the brilliant setting sun. Hordes stroll out here every evening to catch the end of the day, the food stalls and all the usual hill-station entertainment. To get there, follow Sunset Point road west of the Polo Ground out of town.

**Mt Abu Wildlife Sanctuary**

WILDLIFE RESERVE

(Indian/foreigner ₹50/300, vehicle ₹200; 🕒 8am-5pm) This 289-sq-km sanctuary covers much of the mountain plateau and surrounds the town of Mt Abu. It is home to leopards, deer, foxes and bears. Contact Mt Abu Treks to arrange an overnight stay.



## Guru Shikhar

MOUNTAIN

At the northeast end of the Mt Abu plateau, 17km by the winding road from the town, rises 1722m-high Guru Shikhar, Rajasthan's highest point. A road goes almost all the way to the summit and the **Atri Rishi Temple**, complete with a priest and fantastic, huge views. A popular spot, it's a highlight of the RSRTC tour; if you decide to go it alone, a 4WD from Mt Abu will cost ₹600 return.

## Tours

### Mt Abu Treks

TREKKING

(☎ 9414154854; [www.mount-abu-treks.blogspot.com](http://www.mount-abu-treks.blogspot.com); Hotel Lake Palace; 3-4hr trek per person ₹500, full day incl lunch ₹1200) Mahendra 'Charles' Dan arranges tailor-made treks ranging from gentle village visits to longer, wilder expeditions into Mt Abu Wildlife Sanctuary. He's passionate and knowledgeable about the local flora and fauna. Short treks are available as well as an overnight village trek including all meals (₹2000). The sanctuary entrance fee (₹50/300 Indian/foreigner) is not included.

### Shri Ganesh Hotel

TREKKING

(☎ 02974-237292; [lalit\\_ganesh@yahoo.co.in](mailto:lalit_ganesh@yahoo.co.in); per person 1hr ₹200, 4hr ₹1000) Organises good short hikes starting at 7am or 4pm.

### RSRTC

TOURS

(half-/full-day tours ₹50/110; ☺ half-day tour 1pm, full day 9.30am) The RSRTC runs bus tours of Mt Abu's main sights, leaving from the bus stand where reservations can be made. Both tours visit Achalgarh, Guru Shikhar and the Delwara temples and end at Sunset Point. The full-day tour also includes Adhar Devi, the Brahma Kumaris Peace Hall and Honey-moon Point. Admission and camera fees and the ₹20 guide fee are extra.

## Sleeping

Room rates can double, or treble, during the peak seasons – mid-May to mid-June, Diwali and Christmas/New Year – but generous discounts are often available at other times at midrange and top-end places. If you have to come here during Diwali, you'll need to book way ahead and you won't be able to move for the crowds. Many hotels have an ungenerous 9am checkout time.

### Shri Ganesh Hotel

HOTEL \$

(☎ 02974-237292; [lalit\\_ganesh@yahoo.co.in](mailto:lalit_ganesh@yahoo.co.in); dm ₹250, s/d ₹500/600, r with bathroom ₹700-1500; @☎) A fairly central and popular budget

spot, Shri Ganesh is well set up for travellers, with an inexpensive cafe and plenty of helpful travel information. Rooms are well used but kept clean. Some have squat toilets and limited hours for hot water. Daily forest walks and cooking lessons are on offer.

### Mushkil Aasan

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎ 9426057837, 02974-235150, 9429409660; [mushkilaasan.abu@gmail.com](mailto:mushkilaasan.abu@gmail.com); s/d/q ₹1000/1300/1650; ☎☎) A lovely guesthouse nestled in a tranquil vale in the north of town (near Global Hospital), with nine homely decorated rooms and a delightfully planted garden. Home-style Gujarati meals are available, and checkout is a civilised 24 hours. Rooms next to the reception area can be noisy.

### Hotel Lake Palace

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 02974-237154; [www.savshantihotels.com](http://www.savshantihotels.com); r incl breakfast from ₹4165; ☎☎) Spacious and friendly, Lake Palace has an excellent location, with small lawns overlooking the lake. Rooms are simple, uncluttered, bright and clean. All have air-conditioning and some have semiprivate lake-view terrace areas. There are rooftop and garden multicuisine restaurants, too.

### Kishangarh House

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 02974-238092; Rajendra Marg; cottages incl breakfast ₹4950, r incl breakfast from ₹6500; ☎☎) The former summer residence of the maharaja of Kishangarh is now a plush heritage hotel. The deluxe rooms in the main building are big, with extravagantly high ceilings. The cottage rooms at the back are smaller but cosier. There's a delightful

## TREKKING AROUND MT ABU

Getting off the well-worn tourist trail and out into the forests and hills of Mt Abu is a revelation. This is a world of isolated shrines and lakes, weird rock formations, fantastic panoramas, nomadic villagers, orchids, wild fruits, plants used in ayurvedic medicine, sloth bears (which are fairly common), wild boars, langurs, 150 bird species and even the occasional leopard.

A warning from the locals before you set out: it's very unsafe to wander unguided in these hills. Travellers have been mauled by bears and, even more disturbing, have been mugged (and worse) by other people.

sun-filled drawing room and lovely terraced gardens.

### Hotel Hilltone

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 02974-238391; www.hotelhilltone.com; Main St; s/d incl breakfast from ₹5355/6545; 📶📶📶) A modern, well-run hotel in spacious grounds, the punningly named Hilltone takes a leaf out of the more famous hospitality brand with stylishly comfortable and modern rooms that punch above the price tag. The in-house Mulberry Tree Restaurant serves alcohol and nonveg Indian food – a rarity in Mt Abu.

### Eating

#### Kanak Dining Hall

INDIAN \$

(Lake Rd; thali Gujarati/Punjabi ₹110/140; ☺ 8.30am-3.30pm & 7-11pm) The excellent all-you-can-eat thalis are contenders for Mt Abu's best meals. There's seating indoors in the busy dining hall or outside under a canopy. It's conveniently located near the bus stand for the lunch break during the all-day RSRTC tour.

#### Arbuda

INDIAN \$

(Arbuda Circle; mains ₹100-150; ☺ 7am-10.30pm; 🍷) This big restaurant is set on a sweeping open terrace filled with chrome chairs. It's very popular for its vegetarian Gujarati, Punjabi and South Indian food, and does fine Continental breakfasts and fresh juices.

#### Sankalp

SOUTH INDIAN \$\$

(Hotel Maharaja, Lake Rd; mains ₹90-250; ☺ 9am-11pm) A branch of a quality Gujarat-based chain serving up excellent South Indian vegetarian fare. Unusual fillings such as pineapple or spinach, cheese and garlic are available for its renowned dosas and *uttapams* (savoury South Indian rice pancake), which come with multiple sauces and condiments. Order *masala pappad* (wafer with spicy topping) for a tasty starter.

### Mulberry Tree Restaurant

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Hilltone Hotel, Main St; mains ₹250-350) Mt Abu's Gujarati tourists make veg thalis the order of the day in the town, so if you're craving a bit of nonveg, the smart Mulberry Tree Restaurant at the Hilltone Hotel is the place to go. There are plenty of meaty Indian options on the menu and alcohol is available to wash it down.



### Drinking & Nightlife

#### Polo Bar

BAR

(☎ 02974-235176; Jaipur House; ☺ 11.30am-3.30pm & 7.30-11pm) The terrace at the Jaipur Hotel, formerly the maharaja of Jaipur's summer palace, is a dreamy place for an evening tittle, with divine views over the hills, lake and the town's twinkling lights.

#### Cafe Coffee Day

CAFE

(Main St; coffee from ₹110; ☺ 9am-11pm) A branch of the popular caffeine-supply chain. The tea and cakes aren't bad either.



### Information

There are ATMs on Raj Bhavan Rd, including one outside the tourist office, as well as on Lake Rd.

**Bank of Baroda** (Main St; ☺ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) Changes currency and travellers cheques, and does credit-card advances.

**Union Bank of India** (Main Market; ☺ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) Changes travellers cheques and currency.

**Main Post Office** (Raj Bhavan Rd; ☺ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat)

**Tourist Office** (☺ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Opposite the main bus stand, this centre distributes free maps of town.



### Getting There & Away

Access to Mt Abu is by a dramatic 28km-long road that winds its way up thickly forested hillsides from the town of Abu Road, where the

## MAJOR TRAINS FROM ABU ROAD

| DESTINATION       | TRAIN                          | DEPARTURE | ARRIVAL | FARE (₹)      |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| Ahmedabad         | 19224 Jammu Tawi-Ahmedabad Exp | 10.50am   | 3pm     | 150/510 (A)   |
| Delhi (New Delhi) | 12957 Swarna J Raj Exp         | 8.50pm    | 7.30am  | 1265/1775 (B) |
| Jaipur            | 19707 Aravali Exp              | 10.07am   | 6.55pm  | 270/715 (A)   |
| Jodhpur           | 19223 Ahmedabad-Jammu Tawi Exp | 3.30pm    | 7.55pm  | 195/510 (A)   |
| Mumbai            | 19708 Aravali Exp              | 4.50pm    | 6.35am  | 365/985 (A)   |

Fares: (A) sleeper/3AC, (B) 3AC/2AC

nearest train station is located. Some buses from other cities go all the way up to Mt Abu, others only go as far as Abu Road. Buses (₹30, one hour) run between Abu Road and Mt Abu half-hourly from about 6am to 7pm. A taxi from Abu Road to Mt Abu is ₹350 by day or ₹450 by night. Vehicles are charged when entering Mt Abu (small/large car ₹100/200).

## BUS

Services from Mt Abu's **main bus stand**:

**Ahmedabad** ₹182, seven hours, four daily (6am, 7.30am, 10.15am and 2.45pm)

**Jaipur** AC ₹924, 11 hours, daily (6.30pm)

**Udaipur** ₹198, 4½ hours, four daily (8am, 9.15am, 12.45pm and 7pm)

## TRAIN

Abu Road station is on the line between Delhi and Mumbai via Ahmedabad. An autorickshaw from Abu Road train station to Abu Road bus stand costs ₹20. Mt Abu has a train **reservations office** (☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Sat), above the tourist office, with quotas on most of the express trains.

## Getting Around

To hire a jeep or taxi for sightseeing costs about ₹650/1200 per half-day/day. Many hotels can arrange a vehicle, or you can hire your own vehicle with driver in the town centre.

## NORTHERN RAJASTHAN (SHEKHAWATI)

Far less visited than other parts of Rajasthan, the Shekhawati region is renowned for its extraordinary painted *havelis* (ornately decorated residences), highlighted with dazzling, often whimsical, murals. Part of the region's appeal is that these works of art are found in tiny towns connected by single-track roads that run through desolate countryside north of Jaipur. Today it seems curious that such attention and money were lavished on these out-of-the-way houses, but these were once the homelands of wealthy traders and merchants.

From the 14th century onwards, Shekhawati's towns were important trading posts on caravan routes from Gujarati ports to the fertile and booming cities of the Ganges plain. The expansion of the British port cities of Calcutta (now Kolkata) and Bombay (Mumbai) in the 19th century could have been the death knell for Shekhawati, but the merchants moved to these cities, prospered, and sent funds home to construct and decorate their extraordinary abodes.

## Nawalgarh

☎ 01594 / POP 63,950

Nawalgarh is a small nontouristy town almost at the very centre of the Shekhawati region, and makes a great base for exploring. It boasts several fine *havelis*, a colourful, mostly pedestrianised bazaar and some excellent accommodation options.

## Sights

### Dr Ramnath A Podar Haveli Museum

MUSEUM

(www.podarhavelimuseum.org; Indian/foreigner ₹75/100, camera ₹30; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm) Built in 1902 on the eastern side of town, and known locally as 'Podar Haveli', this is one of the region's few buildings to have been thoroughly restored. The paintings of this *haveli* are defined in strong colours, and are the most vivid murals in town, although purists point to the fact that they have been simply repainted rather than restored.

On the ground floor are galleries on Rajasthani culture, including costumes, turbans, musical instruments and models of Rajasthan's forts.

### Morarka Haveli Museum

MUSEUM

(₹70; ☎ 8am-7pm) This museum has well-presented original paintings, preserved for decades behind doorways blocked with cement. The inner courtyard hosts some gorgeous Ramayana scenes; look out for the slightly incongruous image of Jesus on the top storey, beneath the eaves in the courtyard's southeast corner.

### Bhagton ki Choti Haveli

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Bhagat Haveli; ₹70) On the external western wall of Bhagton ki Choti Haveli is a locomotive and a steamship. Above them, elephant-bodied *gopis* (milkmaids) dance. Adjacent to this, women dance during the Holi festival. Inside you'll find a host of other murals, including one strange picture (in a room on the western side) of a European man with a cane and pipe, and a small dog on his shoulder.

## Tours

### Ramesh Jangid's Tourist Pension

TOURS

(☎ 01594-224060; www.touristpension.com; guided hikes 2-3 days per person from ₹2250) Ramesh Jangid organises guided hiking trips, guided camel-cart rides (half-day ₹2000 for two people) to outlying villages, and guided tours by car (full day ₹3500 for up to four



people) to other towns in the region. Lessons in Hindi, tabla, cooking and local crafts such as *bandhani* (tie-dyeing) can also be arranged.

## Sleeping

### Ramesh Jangid's Tourist Pension

**GUESTHOUSE \$**  
(☎ 01594-224060; [www.touristpension.com](http://www.touristpension.com); s/d/tr from ₹800/1050/1350; @☎) This guesthouse, run by genial Rajesh, son of Ramesh at Apani Dhani, offers homely, clean accommodation in spacious, cool rooms with big beds. Some rooms have furniture carved by Rajesh's grandfather, and the more expensive rooms also have murals created by visiting artists. Pure veg meals, made with organic ingredients, are available, including a delectable vegetable thali for ₹250.

The family also arranges all sorts of tours (p169) around Shekhawati.

On the western edge of town, near the Maur Hospital, this pension is well known, so if you get lost, just ask a local to point you in the right direction.

### DS Bungalow

**GUESTHOUSE \$**  
(☎ 9983168916; r ₹400-500) Run by a friendly, down-to-earth couple, this simple place with boxy air-cooled rooms is a little out of

town on the way to Roop Niwas Kothi. It's backed by a garden with a pleasant outdoor mud-walled restaurant serving delicious home-cooking. The more energetic can arrange camel tours here.

### Shekhawati Guesthouse

**GUESTHOUSE \$**  
(☎ 01594-224658; [www.shekhawatiguesthouse.com](http://www.shekhawatiguesthouse.com); r incl breakfast ₹600/800, r with AC ₹1000-1500; @☎☎) This corner of rural loveliness is more like a homestay run by a very friendly couple. There are six rooms in the main building plus five lovely, mud-walled thatched cottages in the garden. The organic garden supplies most of the hotel's produce needs, which can be enjoyed in the lovely outdoor restaurant.

It's 4km east of the bus stand (₹70 by taxi). Pick-up from the bus or train station can be arranged, as can cooking lessons.

### ★ Apani Dhani

**GUESTHOUSE \$\$**  
(☎ 01594-222239; [www.apanidhani.com](http://www.apanidhani.com); s/d from ₹1080/1420, r with AC from ₹2500; @☎) This award-winning ecotourism venture is a delightfully relaxing place. Rooms with comfortable beds are in cosy mud-hut, thatched-roof bungalows set around a bougainvillea-shaded courtyard. The adjoining organic farm supplies food, and there are

solar lights, water heaters and compost toilets. It's on the western side of the Jaipur road. Five per cent of the room tariff goes to community projects.

Tours around the area, via bicycle, car, camel cart or on foot, can be arranged.

## **i** Getting There & Away

### BUS

The **main bus stand** is little more than a dusty car park accessed through a large yellow double-arched gateway. Services run roughly every hour to Jaipur (₹145 to ₹258, 3½ hours), Jhunjhunu (₹40, one hour) and Mandawa (₹35, 45 minutes).

### TRAIN

Nawalgarh is on the route of the biweekly Sikar Dee Express. The train departs Dehli Sarai Rohilla station at 6.50am (on Wednesday and Friday) and arrives at Nawalgarh station at 12.15pm (sleeper/3AC ₹195/510, other classes available). The train continues to Sikar (arrives 1.10pm) on broad gauge, but beyond Sikar to Jaipur work is ongoing to convert the old metre-gauge track. In the opposite direction, the train departs Nawalgarh at 2.45pm (also on Wednesday and Friday) and arrives at Delhi at 9pm (via Jhunjhunu; 2nd class ₹55).

## Jhunjhunu

☎ 01592 / POP 118,470

Shekhawati's most important commercial centre has a different atmosphere from the smaller towns, with lots of traffic and concrete, and the hustle and bustle that befits the district capital. It does, on the other hand, have some appealing *havelis* and a colourful bazaar.

## **👁** Sights

### Mohanlal Ishwardas Modi Haveli

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Nehru Bazaar; ₹50) On the northern side of Nehru Bazaar is Mohanlal Ishwardas Modi Haveli (1896). A train runs merrily across the front facade. Above the entrance to the outer courtyard are scenes from the life of Krishna. On a smaller, adjacent arch are British imperial figures, including monarchs and robed judges. Facing them are Indian rulers, including maharajas and nawabs.

Around the archway, between the inner and outer courtyards, there are some glass-covered portrait miniatures, along with some fine mirror-and-glass tilework.

### Khetri Mahal

HISTORIC BUILDING

(₹50) A series of small laneways at the western end of Nehru Bazaar (a short rickshaw drive north of the bus station) leads to the imposing Khetri Mahal, a small palace dating from around 1770 and once one of Shekhawati's most sophisticated and beautiful buildings. It's believed to have been built by Bhopal Singh, Sardul Singh's grandson, who founded Khetri. Unfortunately, it now has a desolate, forlorn atmosphere, but the architecture remains a superb open-sided collection of intricate arches and columns.

### Modi Havelis

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Nehru Bazaar; ₹50) The Modi Havelis face each other and house some of Jhunjhunu's best murals and woodcarving. The *haveli* on the eastern side has a painting of a woman in a blue sari sitting before a gramophone; a frieze depicts a train, alongside which soldiers race on horses. The spaces between the brackets above show the Krishna legends. The *haveli* on the western side has some comical pictures, featuring some remarkable facial expressions and moustaches.

## **🛏** Sleeping

### Hotel Jamuna Resort

HOTEL \$\$

☎ 9414255035, 01592-232871; www.hotel-jamunaresort.in; near Nath Ka Tilla; r ₹1500-3500; 📞 @ 📺 📺) Hotel Jamuna Resort has everything the traveller needs. The rooms in the older wing are either vibrantly painted with murals or decorated with traditional mirrorwork, while the rooms in the newer wing are modern and airy. There's an inviting pool (₹100 for nonguests) set in the garden, plus purpose-built kitchens set up for in-house cooking courses.

The affable owner, Laxmi Kant Jangid has a wealth of knowledge on the villages of Shekhawati and tours can be organised here. Free pick-up from the train or bus stations can be arranged.

## **i** Getting There & Away

### BUS

There are two bus stands: the **main bus stand** and the **private bus stand**. Both have similar services and prices, but the government-run buses from the main bus stand run much more frequently. Shared autorickshaws run between the two (₹8 per person).

Services from the main bus stand:

**Bikaner** ₹226, five to six hours, hourly

**Delhi** ₹230, five to six hours, hourly

**Fatehpur** ₹45, one hour, half-hourly  
**Jaipur** ₹183, four hours, half-hourly  
**Mandawa** ₹25, one hour, half-hourly  
**Nawalgarh** ₹40, one hour, half-hourly

### TRAIN

Jhunjhunu is on the route of the biweekly Sikar Dee Express. The train departs Delhi Sarai Rohila station at 6.50am (on Wednesday and Friday) and arrives at Jhunjhunu station at 11.30am (sleeper/3AC ₹180/510, other classes available). In the opposite direction, the train departs Jhunjhunu at 3.30pm (also on Wednesday and Friday) and arrives at Delhi at 9pm. The train line to Sikar via Nawalgarh (2nd class ₹55) is broad gauge, but beyond Sikar to Jaipur work is ongoing to convert the old metre-gauge track.

## Fatehpur

📍 01571 / POP 92,600

Established in 1451 as a capital for nawabs (Muslim ruling princes), Fatehpur was their stronghold for centuries before it was taken over by the Shekhawati Rajputs in the 18th century. It's a busy little town, with plenty of *havelis*, many in a sad state of disrepair, but with a few notable exceptions.

### 👁 Sights

Apart from the magnificent Le Prince Haveli, other sights include the nearby **Chauhan Well**; **Jagannath Singhania Haveli**; the **Mahavir Prasad Goenka Haveli**, which is often locked but has superb paintings; the **Geori Shankar Haveli**, with mirrored mosaics on the antechamber ceiling; and south of the private bus stand, **Vishnunath Keria Haveli**, and **Harikrishnan Das Saraogi Haveli**, with a colourful facade and iron lacework.

### Le Prince Haveli

HISTORIC BUILDING

(📍 01571-233024; www.cultural-centre.com; incl guided tour ₹200; ☀ 9am-6pm) This 1802 *haveli* has been stunningly restored by French artist Nadine Le Prince and is one of the most exquisite *havelis* in Shekhawati. Family and visiting artists help to manage the building and conduct the detailed guided tours (30 to 45 minutes). There's a restaurant (bookings required) plus a small gallery. Many of the rooms have been converted into beautifully decorated guest rooms.

The *haveli* is around 2km north of the two main bus stands, down a lane off the main road. Turn right out of the bus stands,

and the turn-off will eventually be on your right, or hop into an autorickshaw.

### 👉 Tours

#### Shekhawati Bikers

TOURS

(📍 01571-233024; per person per day from ₹3600) Le Prince Haveli can get you on a classic Royal Enfield Bullet for a guided tour around the relatively traffic-free roads of Shekhawati.

### 🛏 Sleeping

#### ★ Le Prince Haveli

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$

(📍 8094880977, 01571-233024; www.leprincehaveli.com; near Chauhan Well; r from ₹1500, with bathroom from ₹2200, with AC ₹3500-6000; 📶 📺 🍷) The beautifully restored Le Prince Haveli has opened its artists' residence rooms to travellers. There are 18 highly variable, traditional-style rooms overlooking the central courtyard. The alfresco bar and pool area are great places to unwind, and the adjacent restaurant on the terrace serves buffet meals (Indian and French cuisine) and Italian coffee.

There's a 20% discount in summer.

### 📍 Getting There & Away

At the **private bus stand**, on the Churu-Sikar road, buses leave for the following Shekhawati destinations throughout day, departing as they fill with passengers:

**Churu** ₹39, one hour  
**Jhunjhunu** ₹45, one hour  
**Mandawa** ₹34, one hour  
**Ramgarh** ₹25, 45 minutes

From the **RSRTC bus stand**, further south down the same road, buses leave for the following:

**Bikaner** ₹195, 3½ hours, hourly  
**Delhi** ₹288, seven hours, five daily  
**Jaipur** ₹157, 3½ hours, two daily

## Mandawa

📍 01592 / POP 23,350

Of all the towns in the Shekhawati region, Mandawa is the one best set up for tourists, with plenty of places to stay and some decent restaurants. It's a little touristy (a relative term compared to other parts of Rajasthan), but this small 18th-century settlement is still a pleasant base for your *haveli* explorations.

There is only one main drag, with narrow lanes fanning off it. The easy-to-find Hotel Mandawa Haveli is halfway along this street

## SHEKHAWATI'S OUTDOOR GALLERIES

In the 18th and 19th centuries, shrewd Marwari merchants lived frugally and far from home while earning money in India's new commercial centres. They sent the bulk of their vast fortunes back to their families in Shekhawati to construct grand *havelis* (traditional, ornately decorated mansions) to show their neighbours how well they were doing and to compensate their families for their long absences. Merchants competed with one another to build ever more grand edifices – homes, temples, step-wells – which were richly decorated, both inside and out, with painted murals.

The artists responsible for these acres of decoration largely belonged to the caste of *kumhars* (potters) and were both the builders and painters of the *havelis*. Known as *chajeras* (masons), many were commissioned from beyond Shekhawati – particularly from Jaipur, where they had been employed decorating the new capital's palaces – and others flooded in from further afield to offer their skills. Soon, there was a cross-pollination of ideas and techniques, with local artists learning from the new arrivals.

The early paintings are strongly influenced by Mughal decoration, with floral arabesques and geometric designs. The Rajput royal courts were the next major influence; scenes from Hindu mythology are prevalent, with Krishna particularly popular.

With the arrival of Europeans, walls were embellished with paintings of the new technological marvels to which the Shekhawati merchants had been exposed in centres such as Calcutta. Pictures of trains, planes, telephones, gramophones and bicycles featured, often painted direct from the artist's imagination. Krishna and Radha are seen in flying motorcars, while the British are invariably depicted as soldiers, with dogs or holding bottles of booze.

These days most of the *havelis* are still owned by descendants of the original families, but not inhabited by their owners, for whom small-town Rajasthan has lost its charm. Many are occupied just by a single *chowkidar* (caretaker), while others may be home to a local family. Though they are pale reflections of the time when they accommodated the large households of the Marwari merchant families, they remain a fascinating testament to the changing times in which they were created. Only a few *havelis* have been restored; many more lie derelict, slowly crumbling away.

For a full rundown on the history, people, towns and buildings of the area, track down a copy of the excellent *The Painted Towns of Shekhawati* by Ilay Cooper, which can be picked up at bookshops in the region or in Jaipur.

and makes a handy point of reference. Most buses drop passengers off on the main street as well as by the bus stand.

### Sights

**Binsidhar Newatia Haveli** HISTORIC BUILDING  
This 1920s *haveli* on the northern side of the Fatehpur–Jhunjhunu road houses the State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur. There are fantastically entertaining paintings on the external eastern wall, including a European woman in a chauffeur-driven car, the Wright brothers in flight watched by women in saris, a strongman hauling along a car, and a bird-man flying in a winged device.

**Murmuria Haveli** HISTORIC BUILDING  
The Murmuria Haveli dates back to the 1930s. From the sandy courtyard out front, you can get a good view of the southern external wall of the adjacent double *haveli*: it

features a long frieze depicting a train and a railway crossing. Nehru is depicted on horseback holding the Indian flag. Above the arches on the southern side of the courtyard are two paintings of gondolas on the canals of Venice.

### Sleeping

**Hotel Shekhawati** HOTEL \$  
(☎ 01592-223036, 9314698079; www.hotelshekhawati.com; ₹400-2800; 📶 @ 📺) Near Mukundgarh Rd, the only real budget choice in town is run by a retired bank manager and his son (who's also a registered tourist guide). Bright, comically bawdy murals painted by artistic former guests give the rooms a splash of colour. Tasty meals are served on the peaceful rooftop.

Competitively priced camel, horse and 4WD tours can also be arranged.

**Hotel Mandawa Haveli** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$  
(☎ 01592-223088, 8890841088; www.hotelmandawahaveli.com; s/ste from ₹1750/5500, d ₹2200-2800; 🍷🍷) Close to Sonathia Gate, on the main road, this hotel is set in a glorious, restored 1890s *haveli* with rooms surrounding a painted courtyard. The cheapest rooms are small, so it's worth splashing out on a suite, filled with arches, window seats and countless small windows.

There's a rooftop restaurant serving delicious food; it's especially romantic at dinner time, when the lights of the town twinkle below. A set dinner costs ₹550.

**Hotel Radhika Haveli Mandawa** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$  
(☎ 01592-223045, 9784673645; www.hotelradhikahavelimandawa.com; s/d/ste incl breakfast ₹1800/2800/3600; 🍷🍷) This lovely restored *haveli* sits in a quiet part of town with a lawn (and pet rabbit) and boasts comfortable and tasteful rooms that are traditional but without garish murals. There's a good vegetarian restaurant in-house, but it's very close to Monica Rooftop Restaurant should you crave a chicken dish.

**Hotel Heritage Mandawa** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$  
(☎ 01592-223742, 9414647922; www.hotelheritagemandawa.com; r ₹1635-6215; 🍷🍷) South of the Subash Chowk is this gracious old *haveli* with traditionally decorated rooms. The eclectic suites have small mezzanine levels either for the bed or the bathroom. Rooms are highly variable, so check a few. Music performances and puppet shows are held in the small garden.

**Hotel Castle Mandawa** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$  
(☎ 01592-223124; www.castlemandawa.com; r incl breakfast from ₹10,230; 🍷@🍷🍷) Mandawa's large upmarket hotel in the town's converted fort is a swish and generally comfortable choice. Some rooms are far better appointed than others (the best are the suites in the tower, with four-poster and swing beds), so check a few before you settle in. The gardens and grounds boast restaurants, a coffeshop and cocktail bar, a pool and an ayurvedic spa.

## 🍴 Eating

**Monica Rooftop Restaurant** INDIAN \$\$  
(☎ 01592-224178; mains ₹180-400; ☀ 8am-9pm) This delightful rooftop restaurant, in between the fort gate and main bazaar, serves tasty Indian and Chinese meals and cold

beer. It's in a converted *haveli*, but only the facade, rather than the restaurant itself, has frescos.

**Bungli Restaurant** INDIAN \$\$  
(☎ 9929439846; Goenka Chowk; mains ₹140-220, thalis ₹260-360; ☀ 5am-11pm) A popular outdoor travellers' eatery near the Bikaner bus stand, Bungli serves piping-hot tandoori and cold beer from a down-at-heel setting. The food is cooked fresh by a chef who hails from Hotel Castle Mandawa. Early risers can enjoy an Indian breakfast and yoga class (5.30am, 6am, 6.30am) for a total of ₹400.

## 📍 Getting There & Away

The **main bus stand**, sometimes called Bikaner bus stand, has frequent services (roughly half-hourly), including those listed below. Note, there is also a separate **Nawalgarh bus stand**, just off the main drag, with services to Nawalgarh only. Both bus stands are so small they are unrecognisable as bus stands unless a bus is waiting at them. Look for the chai stalls that cluster beside them and you should have the right spot. The main bus stand is at one end of the main street, on your left as the road bears right.

**Bikaner** ₹223, five hours  
**Fatehpur** ₹34, one hour  
**Jhunjhunu** ₹25, one hour  
**Nawalgarh** ₹35, 45 minutes

## JAISALMER, JODHPUR & WESTERN RAJASTHAN

### Jodhpur

☎ 0291 / POP 1,033,900

Mighty Mehrangarh, the muscular fort that towers over the Blue City of Jodhpur, is a magnificent spectacle and an architectural masterpiece. Around Mehrangarh's base, the old city, a jumble of Brahmin-blue cubes, stretches out to the 10km-long, 16th-century city wall. The Blue City really is blue! Inside is a tangle of winding, glittering, medieval streets, which never seem to lead where you expect them to, scented by incense, roses and sewers, with shops and bazaars selling everything from trumpets and temple decorations to snuff and saris.

Modern Jodhpur stretches well beyond the city walls, but it's the immediacy and buzz of the old Blue City and the larger-



than-life fort that capture travellers' imaginations. This crowded, hectic zone is also Jodhpur's main tourist area. Areas of the old city further west, such as Navchokiya, are just as atmospheric, with far less hustling.

## History

Driven from their homeland of Kannauj, east of Agra, by Afghans serving Mohammed of Ghori, the Rathore Rajputs fled west around AD 1200 to the region around Pali, 70km southeast of Jodhpur. They prospered to such a degree that in 1381 they managed to oust the Pratiharas of Mandore, 9km north of present-day Jodhpur. In 1459 the Rathore leader Rao Jodha chose a nearby rocky ridge as the site for a new fortress of staggering proportions, Mehrangarh, around which grew Jodha's city: Jodhpur.

Jodhpur lay on the vital trade route between Delhi and Gujarat. The Rathore kingdom grew on the profits of sandalwood, opium, dates and copper, and controlled a large area, which became cheerily known as Marwar (the Land of Death) due to its harsh topography and climate. It stretched as far west as what's now the India-Pakistan border area, and bordered with Mewar (Udaipur) in the south, Jaisalmer in the northwest, Bikaner in the north, and Jaipur and Ajmer in the east.

## 👁 Sights & Activities

### ★ Mehrangarh

FORT

(www.mehrangarh.org) Rising perpendicular and impregnable from a rocky hill that itself stands 120m above Jodhpur's skyline, Mehrangarh is one of the most magnificent forts in India. The battlements are 6m to 36m high, and as the building materials were chiselled from the rock on which the fort stands, the structure merges with its base. Still run by the Jodhpur royal family, Mehrangarh is packed with history and legend. You don't need a ticket to enter the fort itself, only the museum section.

Mehrangarh's main entrance is at the northeast gate, **Jai Pol**. It's about a 300m walk up from the old city to the entrance, or you can take a winding 5km autorickshaw ride (around ₹120).

Jai Pol was built by Maharaja Man Singh in 1808 following his defeat of invading forces from Jaipur. Past the museum ticket office and a small cafe, the 16th-century **Dodh Kangra Pol** was an external gate

before Jai Pol was built, and still bears the scars of 1808 cannonball hits. Through here, the main route heads up to the left through the 16th-century **Imritia Pol** and then **Loha Pol**, the fort's original entrance, with iron spikes to deter enemy elephants. Just inside the gate are two sets of small hand prints, the *sati* (self-immolation) marks of royal widows who threw themselves on their maharajas' funeral pyres – the last to do so were Maharaja Man Singh's widows in 1843.

Past Loha Pol you'll find a restaurant and **Suraj Pol**, which gives access to the museum. Once you've visited the museum, continue on from here to the panoramic **ramparts**, which are lined with impressive antique artillery. The ramparts were fenced off in 2016 after a fatal selfie accident. Hopefully a temporary measure, as the views are spectacular.

Also worth exploring is the right turn from Jai Pol, where a path winds down to the **Chokelao Bagh**, a restored and gorgeously planted 18th-century Rajput garden (you could lose an afternoon here lolling under shady trees reading a book), and the **Fateh Pol** (Victory Gate). You can exit here into the old city quarter of Navchokiya.

### ★ Mehrangarh Museum

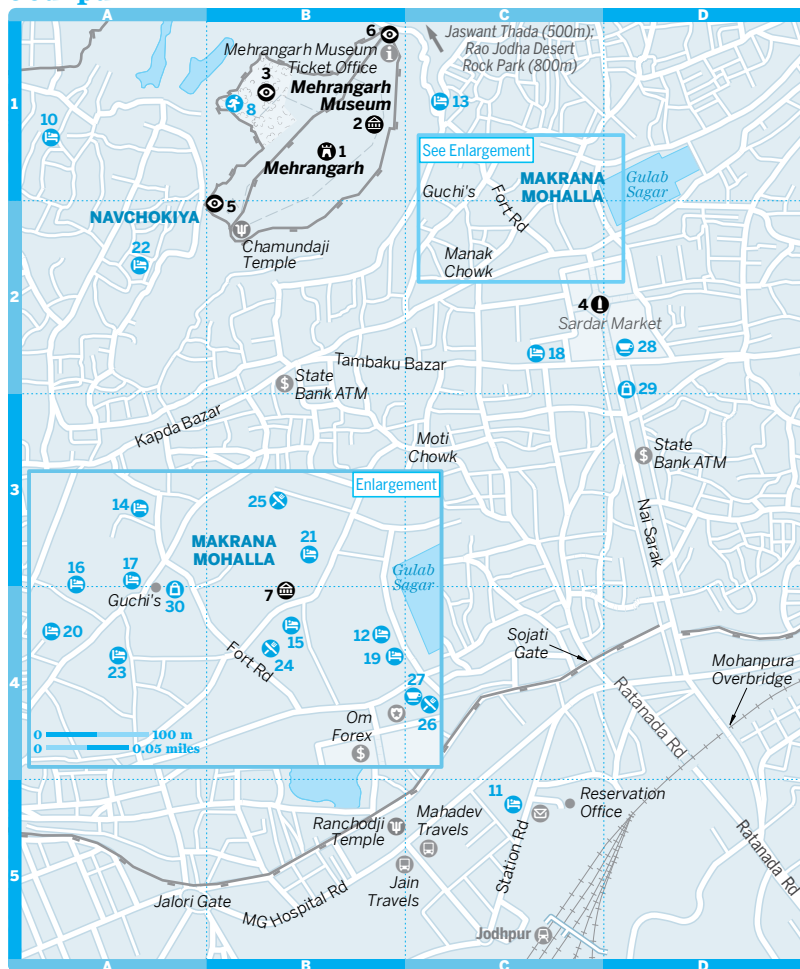
MUSEUM

(www.mehrangarh.org; Indian/foreigner incl audio guide ₹100/600, camera/video ₹100/200, Indian/foreign-language guide ₹170/225; ☀9am-5pm) The fort's museum encompasses the fort's former palace, and is a superb example of Rajput architecture. The network of courtyards and halls features stone-lattice work so finely carved that it often looks more like sandalwood than sandstone. The galleries around **Shringar Chowk** (Anointment Courtyard) display India's best collection of elephant *howdahs* and Jodhpur's royal palanquin collection. The superb audio guide (available in 11 languages) is included with the museum ticket, but bring ID or a credit card as deposit.

One of the two galleries off **Daulat Khana Chowk** displays textiles, paintings, manuscripts, headgear and the curved sword of the Mughal emperor Akbar; the other gallery is the armoury. Upstairs is a fabulous **gallery of miniature paintings** from the sophisticated Marwar school and the beautiful 18th-century **Phul Mahal** (Flower Palace), with 19th-century wall paintings depicting the 36 moods of classical ragas as well as royal portraits; the artist took 10

## Jodhpur

RAJASTHAN JODHPUR



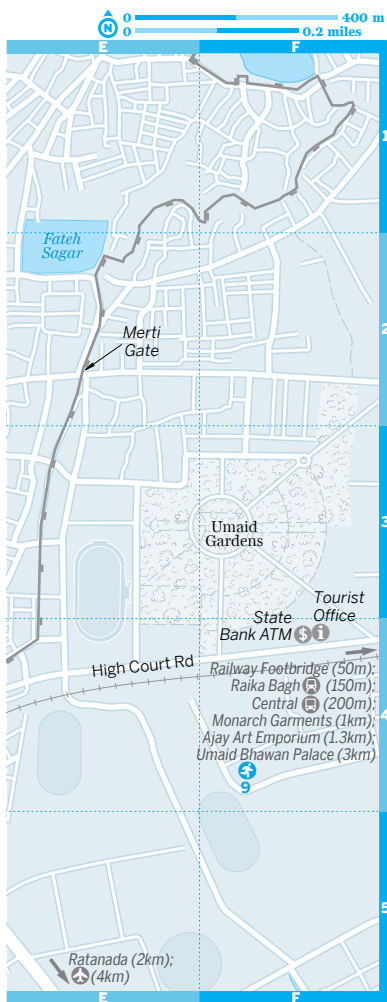
years to create them using a curious concoction of gold leaf, glue and cow's urine.

**Takhat Vilas** was the bedchamber of Maharaja Takhat Singh (r 1843–73), who had just 30 maharanis and numerous concubines. Its beautiful ceiling is covered with Christmas baubles. You then enter the extensive *zenana*, the lovely latticed windows of which are said to feature over 250 different designs (and through which the women could watch the goings-on in the courtyards). Here you'll find the **Cradle Gallery**, exhibiting the elaborate cradles of infant princes, and the 17th-century **Moti**

**Mahal** (Pearl Palace), which was the palace's main durbar hall (royal reception hall) for official meetings and receptions, with gorgeously colourful stained glass.

### Rao Jodha Desert Rock Park

**PARK**  
(☎ 9571271000; [www.raojodhapark.com](http://www.raojodhapark.com); Mehrangarh; ₹100, guide ₹200; ☀ 7am–7pm Apr–Sep, 8am–6pm Oct–Mar) This 72-hectare park – and model of ecotourism – sits in the lee of Mehrangarh. It has been lovingly restored and planted with native species to show the natural diversity of the region. The park is crisscrossed with walking trails that take you up to the city walls, around Devkund Lake,



spotting local birds, butterflies and reptiles. For an extra insight into the area's native flora and fauna, take along one of the excellent local guides.

Walks here are the perfect restorative if the Indian hustle has left you in need of breathing space. Visit in the early morning or late afternoon for the most pleasant temperatures. The visitors centre is thoughtfully put together, and there's a small cafe, too.

### Jaswant Thada

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Indian/foreigner ₹15/50, camera/video ₹25/50, guide ₹50; ☀ 9am-5pm) This milky-white marble memorial to Maharaja Jaswant Singh

## Jodhpur

### 📍 Top Sights

- 1 Mehrangarh..... B1
- 2 Mehrangarh Museum..... B1

### 📍 Sights

- 3 Chokelao Bagh..... B1
- 4 Clock Tower..... C2
- 5 Fateh Pol..... B2
- 6 Jai Pol..... B1
- 7 Tunwarji ka Jhalra..... B4

### 📍 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 8 Flying Fox..... B1
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### 📍 Sleeping

- 10 Cosy Guest House..... A1
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- 12 Haveli Inn Pal..... B4
- 13 Hill View Guest House..... C1
- 14 Hostelavie..... A3
- 15 Hotel Haveli..... B4
- 16 Kesar Heritage Hotel..... A3
- 17 Krishna Prakash Heritage Haveli..... A3
- 18 Nirvana Home..... C2
- 19 Pal Haveli..... B4
- 20 Pushp Paying Guest House..... C4
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### 📍 Eating

- Indique..... (see 19)
- 24 Jhankar Choti Haveli..... B4
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### 📍 Drinking & Nightlife

- 27 Cafe Sheesh Mahal..... C4
- Govind Hotel..... (see 11)
- 28 Shri Mishrilal Hotel..... D2
- Stepwell Cafe..... (see 7)

### 📍 Shopping

- 29 MV Spices..... D2
- 30 Sambhali Boutique..... A4

II, sitting above a small lake 1km northeast of Mehrangarh, is an array of whimsical domes. It's a welcome, peaceful spot after the hubbub of the city, and the views across to the fort and over the city are superb. Built in 1899, the cenotaph has some beautiful *jalis* (carved-marble lattice screens) and is hung with portraits of Rathore rulers going back to the 13th century.

Look out for the memorial to a peacock that flew into a funeral pyre.

### Umaid Bhawan Palace

PALACE

(museum Indian/foreigner ₹50/100; ☺ museum 9am-5pm) Take an autorickshaw to this hill-top palace, 3km southeast of the old city. The royal incumbent, Gaj Singh II, still lives in part of the building. Built in 1929, the 365-room edifice was designed by the British architect Henry Lanchester for Maharaja Umaid Singh. It took more than 3000 workers 15 years to complete, at a cost of around ₹11 million.

The building is mortarless, and incorporates 100 wagon loads of Makrana marble and Burmese teak in the interior. Apparently its construction began as a royal job-creation program during a time of severe drought. Much of the building has been turned into a suitably grand hotel.

Casual visitors are not welcome at either the royal residence or the hotel, but you can visit the **museum**, housed in one side of the building. It includes photos showing the elegant art-deco design of the palace interior, plus an eccentric collection of elaborate clocks. Don't miss the maharaja's highly polished classic cars, displayed in front of the museum, by the entrance gate.

### Tunwarji ka Jhalra

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Step-well; Makrana Mohalla) **FREE** This geometrically handsome step-well (also known as a *baori* or *wav*) has been rejuvenated after decades as a rubbish dump. It's clean lines and clear, fish-filled water will leave you mesmerised. It's a great place to just sit and watch, but the attached cafe (p181) adds further incentive for a visit.

### Clock Tower

MONUMENT

The century-old clock tower is an old city landmark surrounded by the vibrant sounds, sights and smells of Sardar Market, which is marked by triple gateways at its northern and southern ends. The narrow, winding lanes of the old city spread out in all directions from here. Westward, you plunge into the old city's commercial heart, with crowded alleys and bazaars selling vegetables, spices, sweets, silver and handicrafts.

### Flying Fox

ADVENTURE SPORTS

(www.flyingfox.asia; adult/child ₹1900/1600; ☺ 9am-5pm) This circuit of six zip lines flies back and forth over walls, bastions and lakes on the northern side of Mehrangarh. A brief training session is given before you start and safety standards are good: 'awesome' is the verdict of most who dare. Flying Fox has a desk near the main ticket office and its

starting point is in the Chokelao Bagh. Tours last up to 1½ hours, depending on the group size. Book online for a discount on the walk-up price.

## 🌟 Festivals & Events

### Rajasthan International Folk Festival

MUSIC

(www.jodhpurriff.org; ☺ Sep/Oct) The excellent Rajasthan International Folk Festival has five days of music concerts by Indian and international artists held at Mehrangarh.

### Jodhpur Flamenco & Gypsy Festival

MUSIC

(www.jfgfestival.com; Mehrangarh; ☺ Apr) Mehrangarh, this most spectacular of music venues, hosts April's Jodhpur Flamenco & Gypsy Festival.

### Marwar Festival

PERFORMING ARTS

(☺ Sep/Oct) In September or October Jodhpur hosts the colourful Marwar Festival, which includes polo and a camel tattoo.

## 🛏 Sleeping

The old city has something like 100 guest-houses, most of which scramble for your custom as soon as you get within breathing distance of Sardar Market.

If you call ahead, many lodgings can organise a pick-up from the train station or bus stops, even at night. Otherwise, for most places in the old city you can avoid nonsense by getting dropped at the clock tower and walking from there.

## 🏠 Old City (Sadar Market)

### Hostelavie

HOSTEL \$

(☎ 0291-2611001; www.hostelavie.com; Killi Khana, Fort Rd; dm ₹400-450, r ₹1600; ☺) A European-style hostel with clean air-con dorms, where each bed sports a lockable locker and mobile charging point. The dorms are four- and six-bed and each one has its own bathroom. There are also double rooms, making this a good budget option between the fort and the clock tower. It has the obligatory rooftop terrace restaurant.

Rooms are simple and those facing inside are darker but quieter, compared to the airier rooms facing the busy thoroughfare.

### Hill View Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎ 0291-2441763; hill\_view2004@yahoo.com; Makrana Mohalla; dm ₹150, r ₹300-700; ☺) Perched above town and just below the fort

walls, this hotel is run by a friendly, enthusiastic Muslim family, who'll make you feel right at home. Rooms are basic, clean and simple, all with bathrooms (but not all with decent windows), and the terrace has a great view over the city. Good, home-cooked veg and nonveg food is on offer.

Village and camel tours can be arranged here.

### Kesar Heritage Hotel

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎ 9983216625; www.kesarheritage.com; Makrana Mohalla; r ₹900-1800; 🍷🍷🍷) A popular budget choice, Kesar plays a good hand with large airy rooms (a few have balconies, air-con and flat-screen TVs) and friendly, helpful management. The sidestreet location puts noisily sputtering rickshaws out of earshot of light sleepers. The rooftop restaurant looks up to Mehrangarh.

### Pushp Paying Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎ 0291-2648494; www.pushpguesthouse.com; Pipli-ki-Gali, Naya Bass, Manak Chowk; r ₹600, with AC ₹900; 🍷🍷🍷) A small family-run guesthouse with five clean, colourful rooms with windows. It's tucked down the narrowest of alleys, but you get an up-close view of Mehrangarh from the rooftop restaurant, where owner Nikhil rustles up great vegetarian fare (dishes ₹30 to ₹90). Nikhil will send a rickshaw to the railway station to pick you up for ₹60 to ₹100.

### Yogi Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎ 0291-2643436; www.yogiguesthouse.com; r ₹800, with AC ₹1500-1900; 🍷🍷) Yogi's is a venerable travellers' hang-out, with budget and midrange rooms in a 500-year-old blue-washed *haveli* just below the fort walls. It's a friendly place with well-kept, clean rooms. There's also a lovely rooftop restaurant with great views.

### ★ Krishna Prakash Heritage Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0291-2633448; www.kpheritage.com; Nayabas; r incl breakfast ₹1550-3850; 🍷🍷🍷🍷) This multilevel heritage hotel right under the fort walls is great value and a peaceful choice. It has decorated carved furniture and colourful murals, and rooms are well proportioned; the deluxe ones are a bit more spruced up, generally bigger; and set on the upper floors, so airier. There's a shaded swimming pool and a relaxing terrace restaurant.

Free bus and train station pick-ups are offered and there are facilities for drivers.

### Haveli Inn Pal

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0291-2612519; www.haveliinnpal.com; Gulab Sagar; r incl breakfast ₹3500-4680; 🍷🍷🍷) This smaller sibling of Pal Haveli is accessed through the same grand entrance, but is located around to the right in one wing of the grand *haveli*. It's a simpler heritage experience, with comfortable rooms, and lake or fort views from the more expensive ones. It has its own very good rooftop restaurant, Panorama 360, a mere chapati toss from Indique.

Free pick-ups from Jodhpur transport terminals are offered, and discounts are often available for single occupancy.

### Hotel Haveli

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Haveli Guesthouse; ☎ 0291-2614615; www.hotel-haveli.net; Makrana Mohalla; s/d from ₹1465/1815; 🍷🍷🍷) This 250-year-old building inside the walled city is a popular, efficient and friendly place. Rooms vary greatly and are individually decorated with colour themes and paintings; many have semibalconies and fort views. The rooftop restaurant, Jharokha (p180), has excellent views and nightly entertainment. It's opposite the restored and beautiful Tunwarji ka Jhalra step-well.

### Nirvana Home

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0291-5106280; www.nirvana-home.com; 1st fl, Tija Mata ka Mandir, Tambaku Bazaar; s/d from ₹1200/1600, ste ₹3000; 🍷🍷) It's not often you get to lay your head down in a converted Hindu temple, but Nirvana Home gives you the chance. The hotel is in a busy bazaar, but rooms run off a lovely internal courtyard thick with pot plants. Windows face inside, with views of original 300-year-old temple frescos (fixtures are thankfully newer).

### ★ Pal Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0291-3293328; www.palhaveli.com; Gulab Sagar; r incl breakfast ₹5935-11,115; 🍷🍷🍷) This stunning *haveli*, the best and most attractive in the old city, was built by the Thakur of Pal in 1847. There are 21 charming, spacious rooms, mostly large and elaborately decorated in traditional heritage style, surrounding a central courtyard. The family retain a small museum here. The rooftop restaurant, Indique (p180), is one of the city's finest and boasts unbeatable views.

### Raas

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0291-2636455; www.raasjodhpur.com; Tunwarji ka Jhalara; r incl breakfast ₹19,000-41,000; 🍷🍷🍷🍷) Developed from a 19th-century city mansion, Jodhpur's first contempo-

rare-style boutique hotel is a splendid retreat of clean, uncluttered style, hidden behind castle-like gates. The red-sandstone-and-terrazzo rooms come with plenty of luxury touches. Most have balconies with great Mehrangarh views – also to be enjoyed from the lovely pool in the garden-court-yard. There are two restaurants and a highly indulgent spa.

## Old City (Navchokiya)

### Cosy Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎ 9829023390, 0291-2612066; www.cosy-guesthouse.com; Chuna Ki Choki, Navchokiya; r ₹400-1550, without bathroom ₹250; @☎) A friendly place in an enchanting location, this 500-year-old glowing blue house has several levels of higgledy-piggledy rooftops and a mix of rooms, some monastic, others comfortable. Ask the rickshaw driver for Navchokiya Rd, from where the guesthouse is signposted, or call the genial owner, Mr Joshi.

### Singhvi's Haveli

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎ 0291-2624293; www.singvihaveli.com; Ramdevji-ka-Chowk, Navchokiya; r ₹700-2800; ☎@☎) This 500-odd-year-old, family-run, red-sandstone *haveli* is an understated gem. Run by two friendly brothers, Singhvi's has 13 individual rooms, ranging from simple places to lay your head to the magnificent Maharani Suite, with its 10 windows and fort view. The relaxing vegetarian restaurant is a great place to sample a Rajasthani thali and is decorated with sari curtains and floor cushions.

## Train Station Area

### Govind Hotel

HOTEL, HOSTEL \$

(☎ 0291-2622758; www.govindhotel.com; Station Rd; dm ₹250, s/d from ₹800/900, s/d with AC from ₹1400/1600; ☎@☎) Well set up for travellers, with helpful management, an internet cafe, and a location convenient to the Jodhpur train station. All rooms are clean and tiled, with fairly smart bathrooms. There's a rooftop restaurant and a **coffeeshop** (Govind Hotel, Station Rd; ☎ 10am-10pm) with excellent espresso and cakes.

## Eating

### Omelette Shops

STREET FOOD \$

(omelettes from ₹25; ☎ 10am-10pm) On your right and left as you leave Sadar Market through its northern gate, these two omelette stalls compete for the attentions of passing travellers by knocking up seemingly

endless numbers and varieties of cheap, delicious omelettes. Both do a decent job, and are both run by characters worth spending a few minutes with.

Three tasty, spicy boiled eggs cost ₹15, and a two-piece masala and cheese omelette with four pieces of bread is ₹30.

### ★ Indique

INDIAN \$\$

(☎ 0291-3293328; Pal Haveli Hotel; mains ₹250-400; ☎ 11am-11pm) This candlelit rooftop restaurant at the Pal Haveli hotel is the perfect place for a romantic dinner, with superb views to the fort, clock tower and Umaid Bhawan. The food covers traditional tandoori, biryanis and North Indian curries, but the Rajasthani *laal maas* (mutton curry) is a delight. Ask the barman to knock you up a gin and tonic before dinner.

### Nirvana

INDIAN \$\$

(☎ 0291-5106280; 1st fl, Tija Mata ka Mandir, Tambaku Bazar; mains ₹130-200; ☎ 9am-10pm) Sharing premises with a Rama temple and a hotel, Nirvana has both an indoor cafe, covered in ancient Ramayana wall paintings, and a rooftop eating area with panoramic views. The Indian vegetarian food is among the most delicious you'll find in Rajasthan. The special thali is enormous and easily enough for two. Continental and Indian breakfasts are served in the cafe.

### Jhankar Choti Haveli

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(☎ 9828031291; Makrana Mohalla; mains ₹130-360; ☎ 8am-10pm; ☎@☎) Stone walls and big cane chairs in a leafy courtyard, along with prettily painted woodwork and whirring fans, set the scene at this semi-open-air travellers' favourite. It serves up good Indian vegetarian dishes, plus pizzas, burgers and baked-cheese dishes. There's also an air-con section and a rooftop for meals with a view.

### On the Rocks

NORTH INDIAN \$\$

(☎ 0291-5102701; Circuit House Rd; mains ₹130-375; ☎ 12.30-3.30pm & 7.30-11pm) This leafy garden restaurant, 2km southeast of the old city, is very popular with locals and tour groups. It has tasty Indian cuisine, including lots of barbecue options and rich and creamy curries, plus a small playground and a cavelike bar (open 11am to 11pm) with a dance floor (for couples only).

### Jharokha

INDIAN \$\$\$

(☎ 0291-2614615; www.hotelhaveli.net; Hotel Haveli, Makrana Mohalla; mains ₹225-355; ☎ 8am-11pm) The rooftop terrace of the Hotel Haveli

hosts this classy restaurant, with uniformed staff, Indian wine and Spanish *cerveza*. The excellent veg and nonveg dishes include Rajasthani specialities, such as *govind gatta* (cottage cheese and gram-flour dumplings in a yoghurt curry), plus other North Indian curries; try the *aloo Simla mirch* (green bell peppers and potatoes in a spicy gravy).



## Drinking & Nightlife

### ★ Shri Mishrial Hotel

CAFE

(Sardar Market; lassi ₹30; ☎ 8.30am-10pm) Just inside the southern gate of Sardar Market, this place is nothing fancy, but whips up the most superb creamy *makhania* lassis. These are the best in town, probably in all of Rajasthan, possibly in all of India.

### ★ Cafe Sheesh Mahal

CAFE

(Pal Haveli Hotel; coffee from ₹100; ☎ 9.30am-9pm) Coffee drinkers will enjoy the precious beans and the care that is bestowed on them at the deliciously air-conditioned Cafe Sheesh Mahal. And if you're feeling hungry the pancakes here are gaining legendary status.

### Stepwell Cafe

CAFE

(☎ 0291-2636455; Tunwarji ka Jhalra; coffee from ₹120; ☎ noon-10.30pm; ☎) This delightful modern cafe with espresso coffee, cakes and Italian dishes sits on one side of the wonderfully restored step-well, Tunwarji ka Jhalra. It's a great place to relax and contemplate the time when step-wells such as these kept the city alive. Or you can just watch the kids jump into the water with an impressive booming splash.



## Shopping

Plenty of Rajasthani handicrafts are available in Jodhpur, with shops selling textiles and other wares clustered around Sardar Market and along Nai Sarak. You'll need to bargain hard. The town is known for antiques.

### MV Spices

FOOD

(www.mvspices.com; 107 Nai Sarak; ☎ 9am-9pm) The most famous spice shop in Jodhpur (and believe us, there are lots of pretenders!), MV Spices has several small branches around town, including one at Meheranagarh, that are run by the seven daughters of the founder of the original stall. It will cost around ₹100 to ₹500 for 100g bags of spices, and the owners will email you recipes so you

## JODHPUR'S JODHPURS

A fashion staple for self-respecting horse people all around the world, jodhpurs are riding breeches – usually of a pale cream colour – that are loose above the knee and tapered from knee to ankle. It's said that Sir Pratap Singh, a legendary Jodhpur statesman, soldier and horseman, originally designed the breeches for the Jodhpur Lancers. When he led the Jodhpur polo team on a tour to England in 1897, the design caught on in London and then spread around the world.

If you fancy taking home an authentic pair of jodhpurs from the city they originated in, head to **Monarch Garments** (☎ 9352353768; www.monarch-garments.com; A-13 Palace Rd; ☎ 10.30am-8.45pm), opposite the approach road leading up to Umaid Bhawan Palace. Here you can buy ready-made jodhpurs or have a pair tailored for you within two days. Prices are polo club-worthy, starting at around ₹9000.

can use your spices correctly when you get home.

### Sambhali Boutique

FASHION &amp; ACCESSORIES

(Killi Khana; ☎ 10am-7pm) This small but interesting shop sells goods made by women who have learned craft skills with the **Sambhali Trust** (☎ 0291-2512385; www.sambhali-trust.org; c/o Durag Niwas Guest House, 1st Old Public Park, Raika Bagh, Jodhpur), which works to empower disadvantaged women and girls. Items include attractive *salwar* trousers, cute stuffed silk or cloth elephants and horses, bracelets made from pottery beads, silk bags, and block-printed muslin curtains and scarves.

### Ajay Art Emporium

ANTIQUES

(Palace Rd; ☎ 10am-7pm) Good quality replica Rajasthani antiques and furniture.

## i Information

There are foreign-card-friendly ATMs dotted around the city, though fewer are in the old city.

**Om Forex** (Sardar Market; internet per hr ₹30; ☎ 9am-10pm) Exchanges currency and also has an internet facility.

**Guchi's** (Killikhana, Naya Bass, Makrana Mohalla; internet ₹50 per hr; ☎ 8am-10pm)

As well as all forms of ticketing and vehicle hire, Guchi's has fast broadband internet and a wealth of knowledge on what to do and where to go, including how to do an excursion to Osian.

**Main Post Office** (Station Rd; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat, stamp sales only 10am-3pm Sun)

**Tourist Office** (☎ 0291-2545083; High Court Rd; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) Offers a free map and willingly answers questions.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The airport is 5km south of the city centre, about ₹400/150 by taxi/autorickshaw.

**Jet Airways** (☎ 0291-2515551; www.jetairways.com; Jodhpur Airport) and **Indian Airlines** (☎ 0291-2510758; www.indian-airlines.nic.in; 2 West Patel Nagar, Circuit House Rd, Ratanader) both fly daily to Delhi and Mumbai.

### BUS

Government-run buses leave from the **central bus stand** (Raika Bagh), directly opposite Raika Bagh train station. Walk east along High Court Rd, then turn right under the small tunnel. Services include the following:

**Ajmer (for Pushkar)** ₹207, AC ₹447, five hours, hourly until 6.30pm

**Bikaner** ₹243, 5½ hours, frequent from 5am to 6pm

**Jaipur** ₹336, AC ₹730, seven hours, frequent from 4.45am to midnight

**Jaisalmer** ₹266, 5½ hours, 10 daily

**Mt Abu (Abu Road)** ₹271, 7½ hours, nine daily until 9.30pm

**Osian** ₹62, 1½ hours, half-hourly until 10pm

**Rohet** ₹47, one hour, every 15 minutes

**Udaipur** ₹273, AC ₹604, seven hours, 10 daily until 6.30pm

For private buses, you can book through your hotel, although it's cheaper to deal directly with

the bus operators on the road in front of Jodhpur train station. **Jain Travels** (☎ 0291-2643832; www.jaintravels.com; MG Hospital Rd; ☎ 7am-11pm) and **Mahadev Travels** (☎ 0291-2633927; MG Hospital Rd; ☎ 7am-10pm) are both reliable. Buses leave from bus stands out of town, but the operator should provide you with free transport (usually a shared autorickshaw) from their ticket office. Example services:

**Ajmer (for Pushkar)** ₹180, five hours, at least six daily

**Bikaner** seat/sleeper ₹220/320, five hours, at least five daily

**Jaipur** seat/sleeper ₹260/380, 7½ hours, five daily

**Jaisalmer** ₹300, 5½ hours, hourly

**Mt Abu** (direct) seat/sleeper ₹315/550, 7½ hours, daily

### TAXI

You can organise taxis for intercity trips, or longer, through most accommodation places; otherwise, you can deal directly with drivers. There's a taxi stand outside Jodhpur train station. A reasonable price is ₹12 per kilometre (for a non-AC car), with a minimum of 250km per day. The driver will charge at least ₹100 for overnight stops and will charge for his return journey.

### TRAIN

The computerised **reservation office** (Station Rd; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 1.45pm Sun) is 300m northeast of Jodhpur train station. Window 786 sells the tourist quota. Services:

**Ajmer (for Pushkar)** sleeper/3AC ₹185/510, 5½ hours, two daily (6.35am and 7am)

**Bikaner** sleeper/3AC ₹210/530, 5½ to seven hours, five to eight daily (7.25am, 7.40am, 9.50am, 10.30am, 10.55am, 2.25pm, 4.35pm and 8.10pm)

**Delhi** sleeper/3AC ₹380/986, 11 to 14 hours, four daily (6.35am, 11.15am, 7.50pm and 9.15pm)

## MAJOR TRAINS FROM JODHPUR

| DESTINATION         | TRAIN                              | DEPARTURE | ARRIVAL | FARE (₹) |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------|----------|
| Ajmer (for Pushkar) | 54801 Jodhpur-Ajmer Fast Passenger | 7am       | 12.35pm | 185/510  |
| Bikaner             | 14708 Ranakpur Exp                 | 9.50am    | 3.35pm  | 210/530  |
| Delhi               | 12462 Mandor Exp                   | 7.50pm    | 6.40am  | 380/986  |
| Jaipur              | 14854 Marudhar Exp                 | 9.45am    | 3.30pm  | 250/625  |
| Jaisalmer           | 14810 Jodhpur-Jaisalmer Exp        | 11pm      | 6am     | 215/565  |
| Mumbai              | 14707 Ranakpur Exp                 | 2.45pm    | 9.40am  | 485/1270 |

Fares: sleeper/3AC



**Jaipur** sleeper/3AC ₹250/625, five to six hours, six to 12 daily from 6.10am to midnight

**Jaisalmer** sleeper/3AC ₹215/565, five to seven hours, three daily (5.20am, 7.25am, 5.50pm and 11pm)

**Mumbai** sleeper/3AC ₹485/1270, 16 to 19 hours, two to six daily (5.35am, 2.45pm, 6.20pm, 6.45pm, 7.20pm and 11.55pm); all go via Abu Rd for Mt Abu (4½ hours)

**Udaipur** There are no direct trains; change at Marwar Junction.

## **i** Getting Around

Despite the absurd claims of some autorickshaw drivers, the fare between the clock tower area and the train stations or central bus stand should be around ₹60 to ₹80. A couple of companies have reliable fixed-price taxis that can be pre-booked.

## Around Jodhpur

### Southern Villages

A number of traditional villages are strung along and off the Pali road southeast of Jodhpur. Most hotels and guesthouses in Jodhpur offer tours to these villages, often called Bishnoi village safaris. The Bishnoi are a Hindu sect who follow the 500-year-old teachings of Guru Jambheshwar, who emphasised the importance of protecting the environment. Many visitors are surprised by the density – and fearlessness – of wildlife such as blackbuck, nilgai (antelope), chinkara (gazelle) and desert fox around the Bishnoi villages.

The 1730 sacrifice of 363 villagers to protect khejri trees is commemorated in September at **Khejadali village**, where there is a memorial to the victims fronted by a small grove of khejri trees.

At **Guda Bishnoi**, the locals are traditionally engaged in animal husbandry. There's a small lake (full only after a good monsoon) where migratory birds, such as demoiselle cranes, and mammals such as blackbucks and chinkaras, can be seen, particularly at dusk when they come to drink.

The village of **Salawas** is a centre for weaving beautiful *dhurries* (rugs), a craft also practised in many other villages. A cooperative of 42 families here runs the **Roopraj Dhurry Udyog** (☎0291-2896658; rooprajdhurry@sify.com; ☀dawn-dusk), through which all profits go to the artisans. A 3ft by 5ft *dhurrie* costs a minimum of ₹3000, a price based

## **i** BORDER CROSSING: JODHPUR TO KARACHI

For Karachi (Pakistan), the 14889 Thar Express, alias the Jodhpur–Munabao Link Express, leaves Bhagat Ki Kothi station, 4km south of the Jodhpur train station, at 1am on Saturday only. You need to arrive at the station six hours before departure – the same time it takes to reach Munabao (about 7am) on the border. There you undergo lengthy border procedures before continuing to Karachi (assuming you have a Pakistan visa) in a Pakistani train, arriving about 2am on Sunday. Accommodation is sleeper only, with a total sleeper fare of around ₹500 from Jodhpur to Karachi. In the other direction the Pakistani train leaves Karachi at about 11pm on Friday, and Indian train 14890 leaves Munabao at 7pm on Saturday, reaching Jodhpur at 11.50pm. It is currently not possible to book this train online; you will need to go to the station.

on two weavers working several hours a day for a month at ₹50 per day each. Other families are involved in block-printing.

Bishnoi village tours tend to last four hours in total and cost around ₹800 per person. Those run by Deepak Dhanraj of **Bishnoi Village Safari** (☎9829126398; www.bishnoivillagesafari.com; half-day tour per person ₹800) get good feedback, but many other places do them.

## Osian

☎02922 / POP 12,550

The ancient Thar Desert town of Osian, 65km north of Jodhpur, was an important trading centre between the 8th and 12th centuries. Known as Upkeshpur, it was dominated by the Jains, whose wealth left a legacy of exquisitely sculpted, well-preserved temples. The **Mahavira Temple** (Indian/foreigner free/₹10, camera ₹100; ☀6am-8.30pm) surrounds an image of the 24th *tirthankar* (great Jain teacher), formed from sand and milk. **Sachiya Mata Temple** (☀6am-7.15pm) is an impressive walled complex where both Hindus and Jains worship.

Osian, along with Jodhpur, co-hosts the Marwar Festival (p178), a colourful display of Rajasthani folk music, dance and costume held every September/October.

Prakash Bhanu Sharma, a personable Brahmin priest, has an echoing **guesthouse** (☎ 9414440479, 02922-274331; s/d without bath-room ₹400/600) geared towards pilgrims, opposite the Mahavira Temple. **Safari Camp Osian** (☎ 9928311435; www.safaricamposian.com; d tent incl dinner, breakfast & camel ride from ₹9000) is a fancier tented-camp option.

## Tours

### Gemar Singh

SAFARI

(☎ 9460585154; www.hacra.org; per person per day around ₹2050, min 2 people) Gemar Singh arranges popular camel safaris, homestays, camping, desert walks and 4WD trips in the deserts around Osian and its Rajput and Bishnoi villages. Pick-up from Osian bus station, or from Jodhpur, can be arranged.

## Getting There & Away

Frequent buses depart from Jodhpur to Osian (₹62, 1½ hours). Buses also run from Phalodi (₹83, two hours). Trains between Jodhpur and Jaisalmer also stop here. A return taxi from Jodhpur costs about ₹1500.

## Jaisalmer

☎ 02992 / POP 65,480

The fort of Jaisalmer is a breathtaking sight: a massive sandcastle rising from the sandy plains like a mirage from a bygone era. No place better evokes exotic camel-train trade routes and desert mystery. Ninety-nine bastions encircle the fort's still-inhabited twisting lanes. Inside are shops swaddled in bright embroideries, a royal palace and numerous businesses looking for your tourist rupee. Despite the commercialism, it's hard not to be enchanted by this desert citadel. Beneath the ramparts, particularly to the north, the narrow streets of the old city conceal magnificent *havelis*, all carved from the same golden-honey sandstone as the fort – hence Jaisalmer's designation as the Golden City.

A city that has come back almost from the dead in the past half-century, Jaisalmer may be remote, but it's certainly not forgotten – indeed it's one of Rajasthan's biggest tourist destinations.

## History

Jaisalmer was founded way back in 1156 by a leader of the Bhati Rajput clan named Jaisal. The Bhatis, who trace their lineage back to

Krishna, ruled right through to Independence in 1947.

The city's early centuries were tempestuous, partly because its rulers relied on looting for want of other income, but by the 16th century Jaisalmer was prospering from its strategic position on the camel-train routes between India and Central Asia. It eventually established cordial relations with the Mughal empire. In the mid-17th century, Maharawal Sabal Singh expanded the Jaisalmer principedom to its greatest extents by annexing areas that now fall within the administrative districts of Bikaner and Jodhpur.

Under British rule the rise of sea trade (especially through Mumbai) and railways saw Jaisalmer's importance and population decline. Partition in 1947, with the cutting of trade routes to Pakistan, seemingly sealed the city's fate. But the 1965 and 1971 wars between India and Pakistan gave Jaisalmer new strategic importance, and since the 1960s, the Indira Gandhi Canal to the north has brought revitalising water to the desert.

Today, tourism, wind-power generation and the area's many military installations are the pillars of the city's economy.

## Sights

### ★ Jaisalmer Fort

FORT

Jaisalmer's fort is a living urban centre, with about 3000 people residing within its walls. It is honeycombed with narrow winding lanes, lined with houses and temples – along with a large number of handcraft shops, guesthouses and restaurants. You enter the fort from the east, near Gopa Chowk, and pass through four massive gates on the zig-zagging route to the upper section. The final gate opens into the square that forms the fort's centre, **Dashera Chowk**.

Founded in 1156 by the Rajput ruler Jaisal and reinforced by subsequent rulers, Jaisalmer Fort was the focus of a number of battles between the Bhatis, the Mughals of Delhi and the Rathores of Jodhpur. In recent years, the fabric of the fort has faced increasing conservation problems due to unrestricted water use caused, in the most part, by high tourist numbers.

### ★ Fort Palace

PALACE

(Indian/foreigner incl compulsory audio guide ₹100/500, camera ₹100; ☎ 8am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-6pm Nov-Mar) Towering over the fort's main square, and partly built on top of

## **i** ARRIVAL IN JAISALMER

Touts work the buses heading to Jaisalmer from Jodhpur, hoping to steer travellers to guesthouses or hotels in Jaisalmer where they will get a commission. Some may even approach you before the bus leaves Jodhpur; others ride part or all of the way from Jodhpur, or board about an hour before Jaisalmer. On arrival in Jaisalmer, buses can be surrounded by touts baying for your attention. Don't believe anyone who offers to take you anywhere you like for just a few rupees, and do take with a fistful of salt any claims that the hotel you want is full, closed or no good any more. Many hotels will offer pickups from the bus or train station.

Also be very wary of offers of rooms for ₹100 or similar absurd rates. Places offering such prices are almost certainly in the camel-safari hard-sell game with the objective of getting you out of the room and on to a camel as fast as possible. If you don't take up their safari offers, the room price may suddenly increase or you might be told there isn't a room available any more.

Touts are less prevalent on the trains, but the same clamour for your custom ensues outside the station once you have arrived.

the Hawa Pol (the fourth fort gate), is the former rulers' elegant seven-storey palace. Highlights of the tour include the mirrored and painted Rang Mahal (the bedroom of the 18th-century ruler Mulraj II), a gallery of finely wrought 15th-century sculptures donated to the rulers by the builders of the fort's temples, and the spectacular 360-degree views from the rooftop.

One room contains an intriguing display of stamps from the former Rajput states. On the eastern wall of the palace is a sculpted pavilion-style balcony. Here drummers raised the alarm when the fort was under siege. You can also see numerous round rocks piled on top of the battlements, ready to be rolled onto advancing enemies. Much of the palace is open to the public – floor upon floor of small rooms provide a fascinating sense of how such buildings were designed for spying on the outside world. The doorways connecting the rooms of the palace are quite low. This isn't a reflection on the stature of the Rajputs, but was a means of forcing people to adopt a humble, stooped position in case the room they were entering contained the maharawal.

The last part of the tour moves from the king's palace (Raja-ka-Mahal) into the queen's palace (Rani-ka-Mahal), which contains an interesting section on Jaisalmer's annual Gangaur processions in spring. The worthwhile 1½-hour audio-guide tour (available in six languages) is included with the entry fee, but you must leave a ₹2000 deposit, or your passport, driver's licence or credit card.

## Jain Temples

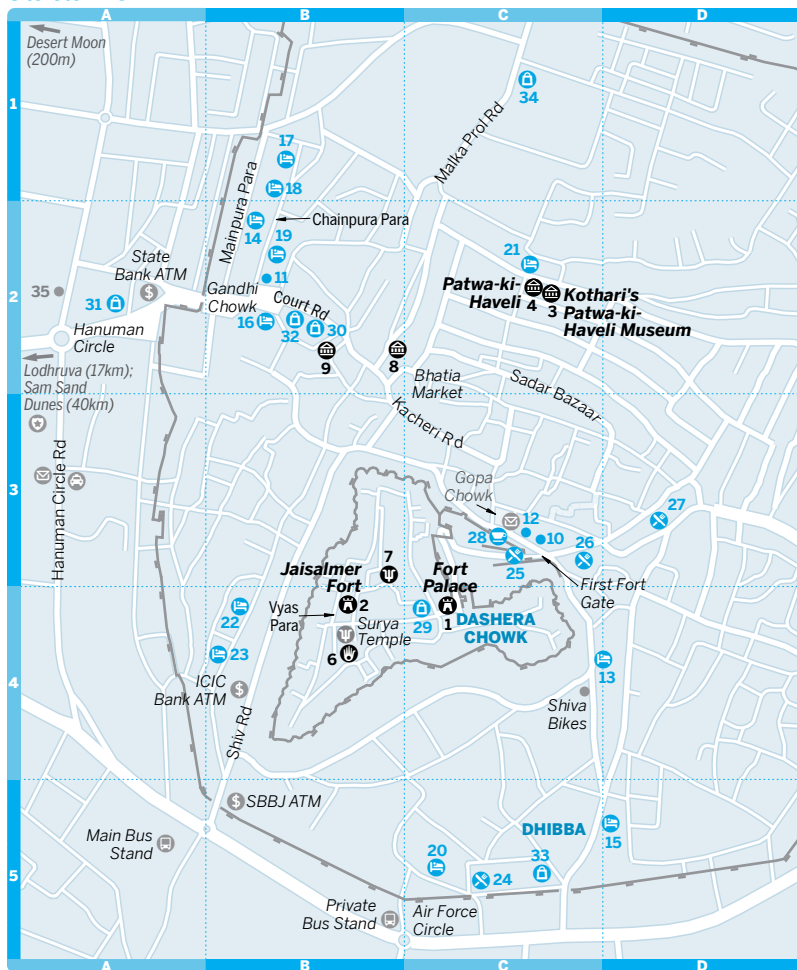
JAIN TEMPLE

(Indian/foreigner ₹50/200, camera ₹50; ☺ Chandraprabhu, Rikhabdev & Gyan Bhandar 8am-noon, other temples 11am-noon) Within the fort walls is a maze-like, interconnecting treasure trove of seven beautiful yellow sandstone Jain temples, dating from the 15th and 16th centuries. Opening times have a habit of changing, so check with the caretakers. The intricate carving rivals that of the marble Jain temples in Ranakpur and Mt Abu, and has an extraordinary quality because of the soft, warm stone. Shoes and all leather items must be removed before entering the temples.

**Chandraprabhu** is the first temple you come to, and you'll find the ticket stand here. Dedicated to the eighth *tirthankar*, whose symbol is the moon, it was built in 1509 and features fine sculpture in the *mandapa*, the intensely sculpted pillars of which form a series of *toranas*. To the right of Chandraprabhu is the tranquil **Rikhabdev** temple, with fine sculptures around the walls, protected by glass cabinets, and pillars beautifully sculpted with *apsaras* and gods.

Behind Chandraprabhu is **Parasnath**, which you enter through a beautifully carved *torana* culminating in an image of the Jain *tirthankar* at its apex. A door to the south leads to small **Shitalnath**, dedicated to the 10th *tirthankar*, whose image is composed of eight precious metals. A door in the northern wall leads to the enchanting, dim chamber of **Sambhavanth** – in the front courtyard, Jain priests grind sandalwood in mortars for devotional use. Steps lead down to the **Gyan Bhandar**, a fascinating

## Jaisalmer



tiny underground library founded in 1500, which houses priceless ancient illustrated manuscripts. The remaining two temples, **Shantinath** and **Kunthunath**, were built in 1536 and feature plenty of sensual carving. Note, the restrictive visiting times are for non-Jains. The temples are open all day for worshippers.

### Laxminarayan Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

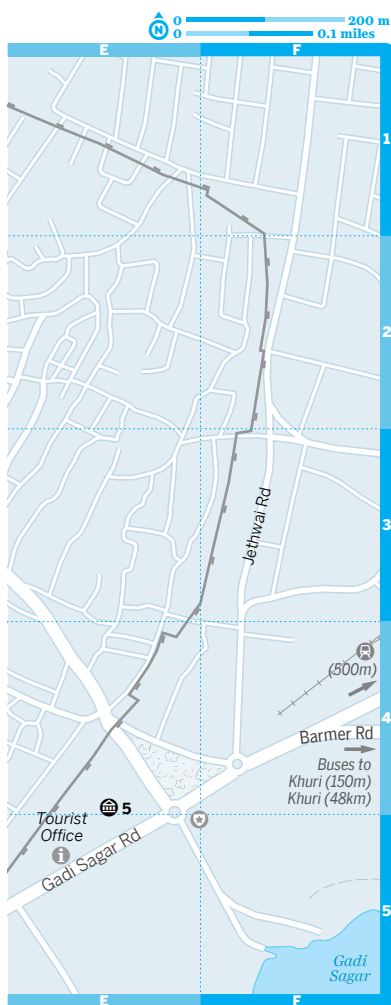
The Hindu Laxminarayan Temple, in the centre of the fort, is simpler than the Jain temples here and has a brightly decorated dome. Devotees offer grain, which is distrib-

uted before the temple. The inner sanctum has a repoussé silver architrave around its entrance, and a heavily garlanded image enshrined within.

### ★ Patwa-ki-Haveli

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Government sections Indian/foreigner ₹50/200; ☀9am-6pm) The biggest fish in the *haveli* pond is Patwa-ki-Haveli, which towers over a narrow lane, its intricate stonework like honey-coloured lace. Divided into five sections, it was built between 1800 and 1860 by five Jain brothers who made their fortunes in brocade and jewellery. It's all very



impressive from the outside; however, the first of the five sections, the privately owned **Kothari's Patwa-ki-Haveli Museum** (Indian/foreigner ₹100/250; ☎9am-6pm), richly evokes 19th-century life and is the only one worth paying entry for.

Other sections include two largely empty government-owned 'museums' and two private sections containing shops.

**Nathmal-ki-Haveli** HISTORIC BUILDING (donation requested; ☎8am-7pm) This late-19th-century *haveli*, once used as the prime minister's house, is still partly un-

## Jaisalmer

### 📍 Top Sights

- 1 Fort Palace..... C4
- 2 Jaisalmer Fort ..... B4
- 3 Kothari's Patwa-ki-Haveli Museum ..... C2
- 4 Patwa-ki-Haveli ..... C2

### 📍 Sights

- 5 Desert Cultural Centre & Museum ..... E4
- 6 Jain Temples ..... B4
- 7 Laxminarayan Temple ..... B3
- 8 Nathmal-ki-Haveli ..... B2
- 9 Thar Heritage Museum ..... B2

### 📍 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 10 Sahara Travels ..... C3
- 11 Thar Desert Tours ..... B2
- 12 Trotters ..... C3

### 📍 Sleeping

- 13 1st Gate Home Fusion ..... D4
- 14 Arya Haveli ..... B2
- 15 Hotel Gorakh Haveli ..... D5
- 16 Hotel Nachana Haveli ..... B2
- 17 Hotel Pleasant Haveli ..... B1
- 18 Hotel Renuka ..... B1
- 19 Hotel Swastika ..... B2
- 20 Hotel Tokyo Palace ..... C5
- 21 Killa Bhawan Lodge ..... C2
- 22 Roop Mahal ..... B4
- 23 Shahi Palace ..... B4

### 📍 Eating

- 1st Gate Home Fusion ..... (see 13)
- 24 Desert Boy's Dhani ..... C5
  - 25 Jaisal Italy ..... C3
  - 26 Monica Restaurant ..... C3
  - 27 Natraj Restaurant ..... D3
  - Saffron ..... (see 16)

### 📍 Drinking & Nightlife

- 28 Bhang Shop ..... C3

### 📍 Shopping

- 29 Bellissima ..... C4
- 30 Desert Handicrafts Emporium ..... B2
- 31 Gandhi Darshan Emporium ..... A2
- 32 Jaisalmer Handloom ..... B2
- 33 Khadi Gramodyog Bhavan ..... C5
- 34 Zila Khadi Gramodan Parishad ..... C1

### 📍 Transport

- 35 Hanuman Travels ..... A2
- Swagat Travels ..... (see 35)

habited. It has an extraordinary exterior, dripping with carvings, and the 1st floor has some beautiful paintings using 1.5kg of gold leaf. The left and right wings were the work

of two brothers, whose competitive spirits apparently produced this virtuoso work – the two sides are similar, but not identical. Sandstone elephants guard the entrance.

**Desert Cultural Centre & Museum** MUSEUM  
(Gadi Sagar Rd; museum ₹50, camera ₹50, combined museum & puppet show ₹100; ☺museum 10am-6pm, puppet show 6.30-8.30pm) This interesting little museum tells the history of Rajasthan's princely states and has exhibits on traditional Rajasthani culture. Features include Rajasthani music (with video), textiles, a *kavad* mobile temple, and a *phad* scroll painting depicting the story of the Rajasthani folk hero Pabuji, used by travelling singers as they recite Pabuji's epic exploits. It also hosts nightly half-hour **puppet shows** with English commentary. The ticket includes admission to the Jaisalmer Folklore Museum.

**Thar Heritage Museum** MUSEUM  
(off Court Rd; ₹40, camera ₹20; ☺10am-8pm) This private museum has an intriguing assortment of Jaisalmer artefacts, from turbans, musical instruments, fossils and kitchen equipment to displays on birth, marriage, death and opium customs. It's brought alive by the guided tour you'll get from its founder, local historian and folklorist LN Khatri. Look for the snakes and ladders game that acts as a teaching guide to Hinduism's spiritual journey. If the door is locked you'll find Mr Khatri at his shop, Desert Handicrafts Emporium, nearby on Court Rd.

## Tours

The tourist office (p192) runs sunset tours to the Sam Sand Dunes (₹200 per person, minimum four people). Add ₹100 if you'd like a short camel ride, too. Other tours visit Amar Sagar, Lodhruva and Bada Bagh by car.

## Sleeping

While staying in the fort might appear to be Jaisalmer's most atmospheric choice, habitation inside the fort – driven in no small part by tourism – is causing irreparable damage to the monument. As a result, we don't recommend staying inside. Fortunately, there's a wide choice of good places to stay outside the fort. You'll get massive discounts between April and August, when Jaisalmer is hellishly hot.

Unfortunately, some budget hotels are heavily into the high-pressure selling of camel safaris and things can turn sour if you don't take up their propositions; room rates that sound too good to be true almost always are.

**Arya Haveli** GUESTHOUSE \$  
(☎9782585337; www.aryahaveli.com; Mainpura Para; dm ₹175, with AC ₹275, r incl breakfast ₹450-1500; 🍷🍷) Helpful staff add to a stay at this spruced-up guesthouse. Rooms are well appointed and looked after; the cheaper ones face an internal courtyard, the best have their own balcony. The top-floor Blues Cafe is a nice place to relax to some good music and tasty food.

**Hotel Tokyo Palace** HOTEL \$  
(☎02992-255483; www.tokyopalace.net; Dhibba Para; dm ₹150-200, s incl breakfast ₹500-2000, d incl breakfast ₹900-3000; 🍷🍷🍷) Well run by honest, traveller-friendly management, this hotel has clean midrange rooms, some with lovely window seats, as well as plenty of budget options, including separate basement dorms for men and women (bathrooms are the next level up). A big bonus is the sparkling pool and rooftop restaurant.

**Roop Mahal** HOTEL \$  
(☎02992-251700; www.hotelroopmahal.com; off Shiv Rd; r ₹600-1500; 🍷🍷) A solid budget choice with clean spacious rooms, trustworthy management, fort views from the rooftop cafe, and free wi-fi throughout. Cheaper rooms have fan only and windows facing inside; more expensive rooms have air-conditioning and views.

**Desert Moon** GUESTHOUSE \$  
(☎9414149350, 02992-250116; www.desertmoonguesthouse.com; Achalvansi Colony; s ₹600-1200, d ₹900-1800; 🍷🍷🍷) On the northwestern edge of town, 1km from Gandhi Chowk, Desert Moon is in a quiet location beneath the Vyas Chhatri sunset point. The guesthouse is run by a friendly Indian-Kiwi couple who offer free pick-up from the train and bus stations. The 11 rooms are cool, clean and comfortable, with polished stone floors, tasteful decorations and sparkling bathrooms.

**Hotel Renuka** HOTEL \$  
(☎02992-252757; www.hotelrenuka.net; Chainpura Para; s/d ₹450/550, with AC ₹850/950; 🍷🍷🍷) Spread over three floors, Renuka has squeaky-clean rooms – the best have balconies, bathrooms and air-conditioning. It's

been warmly accommodating guests since 1988, so management knows its stuff. The roof terrace has great fort views and a good restaurant, and the hotel offers free pick-up from the bus and train stations.

### Hotel Swastika

HOTEL \$

(☎) 02992-252483; swastikahotel@yahoo.com; Chainpura Para; dm ₹100, s/d/tr ₹200/300/400, r with AC ₹600; (☎) In this well-run place, the only thing you'll be hassled about is to relax. Rooms are plain, quiet, clean and very good for the price; some have little balconies. There are plenty of restaurants nearby.

### ★ Hotel Nachana Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎) 02992-252110; www.nachanahaveli.com; Goverdhan Chowk; r/ste incl breakfast ₹3950/4950; (☎) This 280-year-old royal *haveli*, set around three courtyards – one with a tinkling fountain – is a fascinating hotel with a highly regarded restaurant, Saffron. The raw sandstone rooms have arched stone ceilings and the ambience of a medieval castle. They are sumptuously and romantically decorated. The common areas come with all the Rajput trimmings, including swing chairs and bearskin rugs.

Although centrally located, the hotel is set back from the road and the stone walls ensure a peaceful sleep.

### Hotel Gorakh Haveli

HOTEL \$\$

(☎) 02992-252978; www.hotelgorakhhaveli.com; Dhibba Para; s/d ₹1000/1500, with AC ₹1500/2500; (☎) A pleasantly low-key spot south of the fort, Gorakh Haveli is a modern place built with traditional sandstone and some attractive carving. Rooms are comfy and spacious, staff are amiable, and there's a reasonable all-veg, multicuisine rooftop restaurant (mains ₹30 to ₹150), with fort views, of course. A 30% discount on rooms is offered in summer.

### Hotel Pleasant Haveli

HOTEL \$\$

(☎) 02992-253253; www.pleasanthaveli.com; Chainpura Para; r from ₹2450; (☎) This welcoming place has lots of lovely carved stone, a beautiful rooftop (with restaurant) and just a handful of spacious and attractive colour-themed rooms, all with modern, well-equipped bathrooms and air-con. Complimentary water bottle and free pick-ups from transport terminals are available.

### Shahi Palace

HOTEL \$\$

(☎) 02992-255920; www.shahipalacehotel.com; off Shiv Rd; r ₹350-2000; (☎) Shahi Palace is

a deservedly popular option. It's a modern building in the traditional style with carved sandstone. It has attractive rooms with raw sandstone walls, colourful embroidery, and carved stone or wooden beds. The cheaper rooms are mostly in two annexes along the street, **Star Haveli** and **Oasis Haveli**. The rooftop restaurant (mains ₹80 to ₹200) is excellent.

Indian veg and nonveg dishes are available, plus some European fare, cold beer and a superb evening fort view.

### ★ 1st Gate Home Fusion

BOUQUET HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎) 02992-254462, 9462554462; www.1stgate.in; First Fort Gate; r incl breakfast from ₹8190; (☎) Italian-designed and super-slick, this is Jaisalmer's most sophisticated hotel and it is beautiful throughout, with a desert-meets-contemporary-boutique vibe. The location lends it one of the finest fort views in town, especially from its split-level, open-air restaurant-cafe area. Rooms are immaculate with complimentary minibar (soft drinks), fruit basket and bottled water replenished daily.

### Killa Bhawan Lodge

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎) 02992-253833; www.killabhawan.com; Patwa-ki-haveli Chowk; r incl breakfast from ₹4165; (☎) Near Patwa-ki-Haveli, this small hotel is a delight. There are five big and beautifully decorated rooms, a pleasant rooftop restaurant, KB Cafe, that looks up to the fort, and free tea and coffee all day.

### ★ Suryagarh

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎) 02992-269269; www.suryagarh.com; Kahala Fata, Sam Rd; r/ste incl breakfast from ₹18,000/23,000; (☎) The undisputed king in this category, Suryagarh rises like a fortress beside the Sam road, 14km west of town. It's a brand-new building in traditional Jaisalmer style centred on a huge palace-like courtyard with beautiful carved stonework. Features include a fabulous indoor pool and a multicuisine restaurant, Nosh (mains ₹650 to ₹800; nonguests welcome). Rooms follow the traditional/contemporary theme.

It's a spectacular place, but it doesn't stop there. A great range of activities and excursions are on offer plus nightly entertainment.

## ✂ Eating & Drinking

### ★ 1st Gate Home Fusion

ITALIAN, INDIAN \$\$

(☎) 02992-254462, 9462554462; First Fort Gate; mains ₹220-460; ☎ 7.30-10.30am, noon-3pm &

## JAISALMER CAMEL SAFARIS

Trekking around by camel is the most evocative and fun way to sample Thar Desert life. Don't expect dune seas, however – the Thar is mostly arid scrubland sprinkled with villages and wind turbines, with occasional dune areas popping out here and there. You will often come across fields of millet, and children herding flocks of sheep or goats, the neck bells of which tinkle in the desert silence.

Most trips now include 4WD rides to get you to less frequented areas. The camel riding is then done in two two-hour batches, one before lunch, one after. It's hardly camel *trekking*, but it's a lot of fun nevertheless. A cheaper alternative to arranging things in Jaisalmer is to base yourself in the small village of Khuri (p193), 48km southwest, where similar camel rides are available, but where you're already in the desert when you start.

### Before You Go

Competition between safari organisers is cut-throat and standards vary. Most hotels and guesthouses are very happy to organise a camel safari for you. While many provide a good service, some may cut corners and take you for the kind of ride you didn't have in mind. A few low-budget hotels in particular exert considerable pressure on guests to take 'their' safari. Others specifically claim 'no safari hassle'.

You can also organise a safari directly with one of the several reputable specialist agencies in Jaisalmer. Since these agencies depend exclusively on safari business it's particularly in their interest to satisfy their clients. It's a good idea to talk to other travellers and ask two or three operators what they're offering.

A one-night safari, leaving Jaisalmer in the afternoon and returning the next morning, with a night on some dunes, is a minimum to get a feel for the experience: you'll probably get 1½ to two hours of riding each day. You can trek for several days or weeks if you wish. The longer you ride, the more understanding you'll gain of the desert's villages, oases, wild life and people.

The best-known dunes, at Sam (p193), 40km west of Jaisalmer, are always crowded in the evening and are more of a carnival than a back-to-nature experience. The dunes near Khuri are also quite busy at sunset, but quiet the rest of the time. Operators all sell trips now to 'nontouristy' and 'off-the-beaten-track' areas. Ironically, this has made Khuri quieter again, although Sam still hums with day-tripper activity.

With 4WD transfers included, typical rates are between ₹1200 and ₹2500 per person for a one-day, one-night trip (leaving one morning and returning the next). This should include meals, mineral water, blankets and sometimes a thin mattress. Check that there will be one camel for each rider. You can pay for greater levels of comfort (eg tents, better food), but *always* get it all down in writing.

You should get a cheaper rate (₹1000 to ₹1500 per person) if you leave Jaisalmer in the afternoon and return the following morning. A quick sunset ride in the dunes at Sam costs around ₹600 per person, including 4WD transfer. At the other end of the scale, you can arrange for a 20-day trek to Bikaner. Expect to pay between ₹1200 and ₹2000 per person per day for long, multiday trips, depending on the level of support facilities (4WDs, camel carts etc).

7-11pm; 🍴🍷) Sitting atop the boutique hotel of the same name, this split-level, open-air terrace boasts dramatic fort views and a mouth-watering menu of authentic vegetarian Italian and Indian dishes. Also on offer are excellent wood-fired pizzas and good strong Italian coffee. Snacks and drinks are available outside meal times (7.30am to 11pm).

### ★ Saffron

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Hotel Nachana Haveli, Goverdhan Chowk; mains ₹195-415; ☀️ 7am-11pm) On the spacious roof terrace of Hotel Nachana Haveli, the veg and nonveg food here is excellent. It's a particularly atmospheric place in the evening, with private and communal lounges and more formal seating arrangements. The Indian food is hard to beat, though the Italian isn't too bad either. Alcohol is served.



## What to Take

A wide-brimmed hat (or Lawrence of Arabia turban), long trousers, a long-sleeved shirt, insect repellent, toilet paper, a torch (flashlight), sunscreen, a water bottle (with a strap), and some cash (for a tip to the camel men, if nothing else) are recommended. Women should consider wearing a sports bra, as a trotting camel is a bumpy ride. It can get cold at night, so if you have a sleeping bag bring it along, even if you're told that lots of blankets will be supplied. During summer, rain is not unheard of, so come prepared.

## Which Safari?

Recommendations shouldn't be a substitute for doing your own research. Whichever agency you go for, insist that all rubbish is carried back to Jaisalmer.

**Sahara Travels** (☎ 02992-252609; www.saharatravelsjaisalmer.com; Gopa Chowk; ☀ 6am-8pm)

Run by the son of the late LN Bissa (aka Mr Desert), this place is very professional and transparent. Trips are to 'nontouristy' areas only. Prices for an overnight trip (9am to 11am the following day) are ₹1900 per person, all inclusive. A cheaper overnight alternative that avoids the midday sun starts at 2pm and finishes at 11am for ₹1500.

**Trotters** (☎ 9828929974; www.trottersjaisalmer.net; Gopa Chowk; ☀ 5.30am-9.00pm) This company is transparently run with a clear price list showing everything on offer, including trips to 'off-the-beaten-track' areas as well as cheaper jaunts to Sam or Khuri. Prices for an overnight trip (6.30am to 11am the following day) are ₹1950 to ₹2450 per person, all inclusive.

**Thar Desert Tours** (☎ 91-9414365333; www.tharcamelsafarijaisalmer.com; Gandhi Chowk; ☀ 8.30am-7.30pm) This well-run operator charges ₹1200 per person per day including water and meals, adjusting prices depending on trip times. It limits tours to five people maximum, and we also receive good feedback about them. Customers pay 80% upfront.

## In the Desert

Camping out at night, huddling around a tiny fire beneath the stars and listening to the camel drivers' songs, is magical.

There's always a long lunch stop during the hottest part of the day. At resting points the camels are unsaddled and hobbled; they'll often have a roll in the sand before limping away to browse on nearby shrubs, while the camel drivers brew chai or prepare food. The whole crew rests in the shade of thorn trees.

Take care of your possessions, particularly on the return journey. Any complaints you do have should be reported, either to the **Superintendent of Police** (☎ 02992-252233), the **tourist office** (p192) or the intermittently staffed **Tourist Assistance Force** (Gadi Sagar Rd) posts inside the First Fort Gate and on the Gadi Sagar access road.

The camel drivers will expect a tip (up to ₹100 per day is welcomed) at the end of the trip; don't neglect to give them one.

## Monica Restaurant

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Amar Sagar Pol; mains ₹100-300, veg/nonveg thali ₹175/375; ☀ 8am-3pm & 6-11pm) The airy open-air dining room at Monica just about squeezes in a fort view, but if you end up at a non-view table, console yourself with the excellent veg and nonveg options. Meat from the tandoor is particularly well-flavoured and succulent, the thalis varied, and the salads fresh and tasty.

## Jaisal Italy

ITALIAN \$\$

(First Fort Gate; mains ₹180-290; ☀ 7.30am-11pm; ☎ ☎) Just inside First Fort Gate, Jaisal Italy has a decent vegetarian Italian menu, including bruschetta, antipasti, pasta, pizza, salad and desserts, plus Spanish omelettes. All this is served up in an exotically decorated indoor restaurant (cosy in winter, deliciously air-conditioned in summer) or on a delightful terrace atop the lower fort walls, with cinematic views. Alcohol is served.

**Desert Boy's Dhani**

(Dhibba Para; mains ₹120-250, thali ₹400; ☺ 11am-4pm & 7-11pm; 🍴🍷🍺) A walled-garden restaurant where tables are spread around a large, stone-paved courtyard shaded by a big tree. There's also traditional cushion seating undercover and in an air-con room. Rajasthani music and dance is performed from 8pm to 10pm nightly, and it's a very pleasant place to eat excellent, good-value Rajasthani and other Indian veg dishes.

INDIAN \$\$

**Natraj Restaurant**

(Aasani Rd; mains ₹120-180; ☺ 10am-10pm; 🍴🍷🍺) This rooftop restaurant has a satisfying view of the upper part of the Salim Singh-ki-Haveli next door. The pure veg food is consistently excellent and the service is great. The delicious South Indian dosas (large savoury crêpes) are fantastic value.

MULTICUISINE \$\$

**Bhang Shop**

(Gopa Chowk; lassi from ₹150) Jaisalmer's licensed Bhang Shop is a simple, unpretentious place. The magic ingredient is *bhang*: cannabis buds and leaves mixed into a paste with milk, ghee and spices. As well as lassi, it also does a range of *bhang*-laced cookies and cakes – choose either medium or strong. *Bhang* is legal, but it doesn't agree with everyone, so go easy.

CAFE

**Shopping**

Jaisalmer is famous for its stunning embroidery, bedspreads, mirrorwork wall hangings, oil lamps, stonework and antiques. Watch out when purchasing silver items: the metal is sometimes adulterated with bronze.

There are several good *khadi* (homespun cloth) shops where you can find fixed-price tablecloths, rugs and clothes, with a variety of patterning techniques including tie-dye, block printing and embroidery. Try **Zila Khadi Gramodan Parishad** (Malka Prol Rd; ☺ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat), **Khadi Gramodyog Bhavan** (Dhibba; ☺ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) or **Gandhi Darshan Emporium** (near Hanuman Circle; ☺ 11am-7pm Fri-Wed).

**Bellissima**

(Dasher Chowk; ☺ 8am-9pm) This small shop near the fort's main square sells beautiful patchworks, embroidery, paintings, bags, rugs, cushion covers and all types of Rajasthani art. Proceeds assist underprivileged women from surrounding villages, including those who have divorced or been widowed.

ARTS &amp; CRAFTS

**Jaisalmer Handloom**

(www.jaisalmerhandloom.com; Court Rd; ☺ 9am-10pm) This place has a big array of bedspreads, tapestries, clothing (ready-made and custom-made, including silk) and other textiles, made by its own workers and others. If you need an embroidered camel-saddle-cloth (and who doesn't?), try for one here.

ARTS &amp; CRAFTS

**Desert Handicrafts Emporium**

(Court Rd; ☺ 9.30am-9.30pm) With some unusual jewellery, paintings, and all sorts of textiles, this is one of the most original of numerous craft shops around town.

ARTS &amp; CRAFTS

**Information****MONEY**

There are ATMs near Hanuman Circle, on Shiv Rd, and outside the train station. Lots of licensed money changers are in and around Gandhi Chowk.

**POST**

**Main post office** (Hanuman Circle Rd; ☺ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) West of the fort.

**Post office** (Gopa Chowk; ☺ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Just outside the fort gate; sells stamps and you can send postcards.

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

**Tourist office** (☎ 02992-252406; Gadi Sagar Rd; ☺ 9.30am-6pm) Friendly office with a free town map.

**Getting There & Away****AIR**

Jaisalmer's new airport, 5km south of town, has been lying mothballed for a few years, but there have been signs that regular domestic flights would soon resume. Meanwhile, **Supreme Airlines** (☎ 9820588749; www.supremeairlines.com) was planning to fly a small plane from Delhi to Jaisalmer via Bikaner. Check locally to see if the route is currently operating.

**BUS**

RSRTC buses leave from the **main bus stand** (Shiv Rd). There are services to Ajmer (₹430, 9½ hours) and Jodhpur (₹266, 5½ hours) throughout the day. Buses to Khuri (₹39, one hour) depart from a **stand** just off Gadi Sagar Rd on Barmer Rd.

A number of private bus companies have ticket offices at Hanuman Circle. **Hanuman Travels** (☎ 9413362367) and **Swagat Travels** (☎ 02992-252557) are typical. The buses themselves leave from the **private bus stand** (Air Force Circle). Typical services:

**Ajmer (for Pushkar)** seat/sleeper ₹300/450, nine hours, two or three daily

**Bikaner** seat/sleeper ₹200/400, 5½ hours, three to four daily

**Jaipur** seat/sleeper ₹400/500, 11 hours, two or three daily

**Jodhpur** seat/sleeper ₹200/400, five hours, half-hourly from 6am to 10pm

**Udaipur** sleeper ₹350/450, 12 hours, one or two daily

### TAXI

One-way taxis should cost about ₹4500 to Jodhpur, ₹5000 to Bikaner or ₹8000 to Udaipur. There's a **taxi stand** on Hanuman Circle Rd.

### TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ ticket office 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 1.45pm Sun) is on the eastern edge of town, just off the Jodhpur road. There's a reserved ticket booth for foreigners.

**Bikaner** sleeper/3AC ₹250/625, around six hours, one or two daily (1.10am and 11.55pm)

**Delhi** sleeper/3AC ₹450/1205, 18 hours, two or three daily (12.45am, 1.10am, 5pm) via Jaipur (12 hours)

**Jaipur** sleeper/3AC ₹350/935, 12 hours, three daily (12.45am, 5pm, 11.55pm)

**Jodhpur** sleeper/3AC ₹215/565, five to six hours, three daily (12.45am, 6.45am and 5pm)

## Getting Around

### AUTORICKSHAW

It costs around ₹40 from the train station to Gandhi Chowk.

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

It's possible to hire taxis or 4WDs from the stand on Hanuman Circle Rd. To Khuri, the Sam Sand Dunes or Lodhruva, expect to pay ₹1000 to ₹1200 return including a wait of about an hour or so.

**Shiva Bikes** (First Fort Gate; motorbike per day ₹500-2000; ☎ 8am-9pm) A licensed hire place with motorbikes (including Royal Enfield

Bullets) and scooters for exploring town and nearby sights. Helmets and area maps are included.

## Around Jaisalmer

### Sam Sand Dunes

#### Sam Sand Dunes

AREA

(vehicle/camel ₹50/80) The silky Sam Sand Dunes, 41km west of Jaisalmer along a good sealed road (maintained by the Indian army), are one of the most popular excursions from the city. The band of dunes is about 2km long and is undeniably one of the most picturesque in the region. Some camel safaris camp here, but many more people just roll in for sunset, to be chased across the sands by tenacious camel owners offering short rides. Plenty more people stay overnight in one of the several tent resorts near the dunes.

The place acquires something of a carnival atmosphere from late afternoon till the next morning, making it somewhere to avoid if you're after a solitary desert experience.

If you're organising your own camel ride on the spot, expect to pay ₹300 for a one-hour sunset ride, but beware tricks from camel men such as demanding more money en route.

### Khuri

☎ 03014

The village of Khuri, 48km southwest of Jaisalmer, has quite extensive dune areas attracting their share of sunset visitors, and a lot of mostly smallish 'resorts' offering the same sort of overnight packages as Sam. It also has a number of low-key guesthouses where you can stay in tranquillity in a traditional-style hut with clay-and-dung

## MAJOR TRAINS FROM JAISALMER

| DESTINATION | TRAIN                       | DEPARTURE | ARRIVAL | FARE (₹) |
|-------------|-----------------------------|-----------|---------|----------|
| Bikaner     | 12467 Leelan Exp            | 11.55pm   | 5.20am  | 250/625  |
| Delhi       | 14660 Jaisalmer-Delhi Exp   | 5pm       | 10.55am | 450/1205 |
| Jaipur      | 14660 Jaisalmer-Delhi Exp   | 5pm       | 4.50am  | 350/935  |
| Jodhpur     | 14809 Jaisalmer-Jodhpur Exp | 6.45am    | 1pm     | 215/565  |

Fares: sleeper/3AC

walls and thatched roof, and venture out on interesting camel trips in the relatively remote and empty surrounding area.

Khuri is within the **Desert National Park**, which stretches over 3162 sq km southwest of Jaisalmer to protect part of the Thar ecosystem, including wildlife such as the desert fox, desert cat, chinkara (gazelle), nilgai (antelope), and some unusual bird life including the endangered great Indian bustard.

Be aware that the commission system is entrenched in Khuri's larger accommodation options. If you just want a quick camel ride on the sand dunes, expect to pay around ₹150 per person.

## Sleeping

### ★ Badal House

HOSTEL \$

(☎ 8107339097; r or hut per person incl full board ₹400) Here you can stay in a family compound in the centre of the village with a few spotlessly clean, mud-walled, thatched-roofed huts and equally spotless rooms (one with its own squat toilet), and enjoy good home-cooking. Former camel driver Badal Singh is a charming, gentle man who charges ₹600 for a camel safari with a night on the dunes.

He doesn't pay commission so don't let touts warn you away.

## Getting There & Away

You can catch local buses from Jaisalmer to Khuri (₹30, one hour) from a road just off Gadi Sagar Rd. Walking from Jaisalmer Fort towards the train station, take the second right after the tourist office, then wait by the tree on the left, with the small shrine beside it. Buses pass here at around 10am, 11.30am, 3.30pm and 4pm.

Return buses from Khuri to Jaisalmer leave at roughly 8am, 9am, 10.30am, 11.30am and 2.30pm.

A taxi from Jaisalmer will cost at least ₹1200 to ₹1500. Even if you are staying here you will be paying for the return trip.

## Bikaner

☎ 0151 / POP 644,400

Bikaner is a vibrant, dust-swirling desert town with a fabulous fort and an energising outpost feel. It's less dominated by tourism than many other Rajasthan cities, though it has plenty of hotels and a busy camel-safari scene, which attracts travellers looking to avoid the Jaisalmer hustle.

## History

The city was founded in 1488 by Rao Bika, a son of Rao Jodha, Jodhpur's founder, though the two Rathore ruling houses later had a serious falling out over who had the right to keep the family heirlooms. Bikaner grew quickly as a staging post on the great caravan trade routes from the late 16th century onwards, and flourished under a friendly relationship with the Mughals, but declined as the Mughals did in the 18th century. By the 19th century the area was markedly backward, but managed to turn its fortunes around by hiring out camels to the British during the First Anglo-Afghan War. In 1886 it was the first desert princely state to install electricity.

## Sight

### ★ Junagarh

FORT

(Indian/foreigner ₹50/300, video ₹150, audio guide ₹50, ID required; ☀ 10am-5.30pm, last entry 4.30pm) This most impressive fort was constructed between 1589 and 1593 by Raja Rai Singh, ruler of Bikaner and a general in the army of the Mughal emperor Akbar. You enter through the **Karan Prole** gate on the east side and pass through three more gates before the ticket office for the palace museum. An audio guide (requiring an identity document as a deposit), is available in English, French, German and Hindi, and is very informative.

The beautifully decorated **Karan Mahal** was the palace's Diwan-i-Am (Hall of Public Audience), built in the 17th and 18th centuries. **Anup Mahal Chowk** has lovely carved *jarokhas* (balcony windows) and *jali* screens, and was commissioned in the late 17th century by Maharaja Anup Mahal. Rooms off here include the sumptuous **Anup Mahal**, a hall of private audience with walls lacquered in red and gold, and the **Badal Mahal** (Cloud Palace), the walls of which are beautifully painted with blue cloud motifs and red and gold lightning.

The **Gaj Mandir**, the suite of Maharaja Gaj Singh (r 1745-87) and his two top wives, is a fantastic symphony of gold paint, colourful murals, sandalwood, ivory, mirrors, niches and stained glass. From here you head up to the palace roof to enjoy the views and then down eventually to the superb **Ganga Durbar Hall** of 1896, with its pink stone walls covered in fascinating relief carvings. You then move into **Maharaja Ganga Singh's office** and finally into the

## BIKANER CAMEL SAFARIS

Bikaner is an excellent alternative to the Jaisalmer camel-safari scene. There are fewer people running safaris here, so the hassle factor is quite low. Camel trips tend to be in the areas east and south of the city and focus on the isolated desert villages of the Jat, Bishnoi, Meghwal and Rajput peoples. Interesting wildlife can be spotted here, such as nilgais (antelope), chinkaras (gazelle), desert foxes, spiny-tailed lizards and plenty of birds including, from September to March, the demoiselle crane.

Three days and two nights is a common camel-safari duration, but half-day, one-day and short overnight trips are all possible. If you're after a serious trip, Jaisalmer is a two-week trek. The best months to head into the desert are October to February. Avoid mid-April to mid-July, when it's searingly hot.

Typical costs are ₹1800 to ₹2500 per person per day including overnight camping, with tents, mattresses, blankets, meals, mineral water, one camel per person, a camel cart to carry gear (and sometimes tired riders), and a guide in addition to the camel men.

Many trips start at Raisar, about 8km east of Bikaner, or Deshnok, 30km south. Traveling to the starting point by bus rather than 4WD is one way of cutting costs.

**Vikram Vilas Durbar Hall**, where pride of place goes to a WWI De Havilland DH-9 bi-plane bomber: General Maharaja Sir Ganga Singh commanded the Bikaner Camel Corps during WWI and was the only non-white member of Britain's Imperial War Cabinet during the conflict.

### Prachina Cultural Centre & Museum

MUSEUM

(Junagarh; Indian/foreigner ₹30/100; ☎9am-6pm) Across the fort's main courtyard from the palace entrance, this museum is fascinating and well labelled. It focuses on the Western influence on the Bikaner royals before Independence, including crockery from England and France and menu cards from 1936, as well as some exquisite costumes, jewellery and textiles, and exhibits on contemporary Bikaner crafts.

### Old City

AREA

The old city still has a medieval feel despite the motorbikes and autorickshaws. This labyrinth of narrow, winding streets conceals a number of fine *havelis*, and a couple of notable Jain temples just inside the southern wall, 1.5km southwest of Bikaner Junction train station. It makes for an interesting wander – we guarantee you'll get lost at least once. The old city is encircled by a 7km-long, 18th-century wall with five entrance gates, the main entrance being the triple-arched Kothe Gate.

### ★ Bhandasar Temple

JAIN TEMPLE

(☎5am-1pm & 5.30-11.30pm) Of Bikaner's two Jain temples, Bhandasar is particularly

beautiful, with yellow-stone carving and vibrant paintings. The interior of the temple is stunning. The pillars bear floral arabesques and depictions of the lives of the 24 *tirthankars* (great Jain teachers). It's said that 40,000kg of ghee was used instead of water in the mortar, which locals insist seeps through the floor on hot days. The priest may ask for a donation for entry, although a trust pays for the temple upkeep.



### Tours

#### Camel Man

TOURS

(☎9799911117, 9829217331, 0151-2231244; [www.camelman.com](http://www.camelman.com); Vijay Guest House, Jaipur Rd; half-/full-/multiday trip per person per day from ₹800/1200/1800) The standout Bikaner safari operator in terms of quality, reliability and transparency of what's on offer is Vijay Singh Rathore, aka Camel Man, who operates from Vijay Guest House.

#### Vino Desert Safari

TOURS

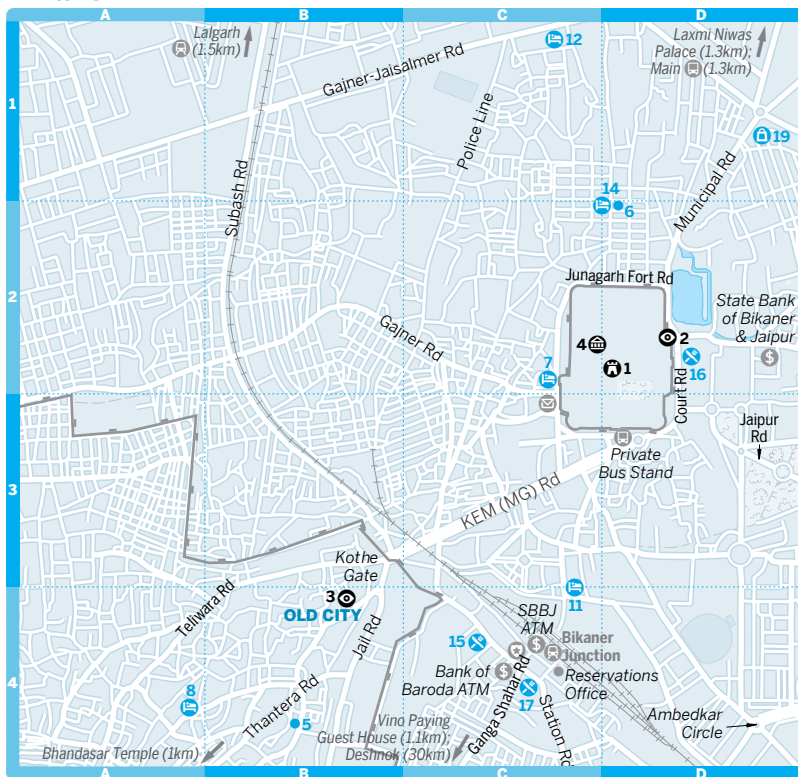
(☎0151-2270445, 9414139245; [www.vinodesertsafari.com](http://www.vinodesertsafari.com); VINO Paying Guest House; 1 day, 1 night per person ₹2500, multiday trek per person per day ₹1500-2000) A popular and long-established outfit, VINO Desert Safari is run by Vinod Bhojak, of VINO Paying Guest House.

#### Vinayak Desert Safari

TOURS

(☎0151-2202634, 9414430948; [www.vinayakdesertsafari.com](http://www.vinayakdesertsafari.com); Vinayak Guest House; half-day 4WD safari per person ₹500, full- or multiday 4WD safari per person ₹900-2000) Vinayak Desert Safari runs 4WD safaris with zoologist Jitu Solanki. This safari focuses on desert animals and

## Bikaner



birds including the impressive cinereous vulture, with its 3m wingspan, which visits the area in numbers from November to March.

### Gouri Guide

**TOURS**  
 (☎ 0151-2543306, 9461159796; [gouriguide@yahoo.in](mailto:gouriguide@yahoo.in); Shanti House, New Well, Old City; per person per hr ₹50) Gouri is a knowledgeable and personable guide based in the Old City who can show all the well-known sights and many of the lesser-known sights of Bikaner. He also runs a small guesthouse.

### Sleeping

#### ★ Vijay Guest House

**GUESTHOUSE \$**  
 (☎ 0151-2231244, 9829217331; [www.camelman.com](http://www.camelman.com); Jaipur Rd; r ₹500-1000, with AC ₹1200-1500, ste ₹1800; 🍴📶) About 4km east of the centre, this is a home away from home, with spacious, light-filled rooms, a warm welcome and good home-cooked meals. Owner

Vijay is a camel expert and a recommended safari operator (p195). Free pick-up and drop-off from rail and bus stations.

As well as camel trips, 4WD outings to sights around Bikaner, and tours to the owner's house in the village of Thelasar, Shekhawati, are offered.

#### Vino Paying Guest House

**GUESTHOUSE \$**  
 (☎ 9414139245, 0151-2270445; [www.vinodesertsafari.com](http://www.vinodesertsafari.com); Ganga Shahr; s ₹250-300, d ₹350-400; @📶) This guesthouse, in a family home 3km south of the main train station, is a cosy choice and the base of a good camel-safari operator (p195). It has six rooms in the house and six in cool adobe huts around the garden, where there's also a plunge pool. It's excellent value, and the family is helpful and welcoming.

Home-cooked food is served and cooking classes are on offer. It's opposite Gopeshwar Temple; free pick-ups are offered.



### Vinayak Guest House

**GUESTHOUSE \$**  
 (☎) 0151-2202634, 9414430948; vinayakguesthouse@gmail.com; ₹ 400-800, with AC ₹1000; Ⓜ @ ☎) This place offers six varied and clean rooms in a quiet family house with a little sandy garden (hot water only by bucket in some rooms). On offer are a free pick-up service, good home-cooked food, cooking lessons, bicycles (₹25 per day), and camel safaris and wildlife trips with Vinayak Desert Safari (p195). It's about half a kilometre north of Junagarh.

### Chandra Niwas Guest House

**HOTEL \$**  
 (☎) 0151-2200796, 9413659711; chandraniwas@yahoo.in; Rangmanch Rd, Civil Lines; ₹ 500, with AC ₹800-1500; Ⓜ @ ☎) This small and welcoming guesthouse is in a relatively quiet location, though still handy to Bikaner's sights. The rooms are clean, comfortable and tidy, and there is a lovely terrace restaurant where you can get a veg/nonveg thali for ₹180/250, plus there's a coffeeshop next door.

## Bikaner

### 📍 Top Sights

- 1 Junagarh.....D2

### 📍 Sights

- 2 Karan Prole.....D2  
 3 Old City.....B4  
 4 Prachina Cultural Centre & Museum .....C2

### 📍 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 5 Gouri Guide.....B4  
 6 Vinayak Desert Safari.....D2

### 📍 Sleeping

- 7 Bhairon Vilas .....C2  
 8 Bhanwar Niwas .....A4  
 9 Chandra Niwas Guest House.....E3  
 10 Hotel Harasar Haveli .....E1  
 11 Hotel Jaswant Bhawan.....C4  
 12 Hotel Kishan Palace.....C1  
 13 Udai Niwas .....E4  
 14 Vinayak Guest House.....D2

### 📍 Eating

- 15 Amberwalla.....C4  
 Café Indra ..... (see 13)  
 16 Gallops .....D2  
 17 Heeralal's .....C4  
 18 Road Runner Cafe.....E4  
 Shakti Dining ..... (see 18)

### 📍 Shopping

- 19 Bikaner Miniature Arts.....D1

### Hotel Jaswant Bhawan

**HOTEL \$**

(☎) 9001554746, 0151-2548848; www.hoteljaswantbhawan.com; Alakh Sagar Rd; ₹ 1000-1600; Ⓜ @ ☎) This is a quiet, welcoming place run by descendants of Bikaner prime ministers. It has a small garden and a comfy, old-fashioned sitting room with historic family photos. The air-conditioned rooms are spacious, plain and airy. Good meals are available (as are cooking lessons). It's a two-minute walk from the main train station, via the station's 'foot over bridge'.

### ★ Bhairon Vilas

**HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$**

(☎) 9928312283, 0151-2544751; www.bhaironvilas.com; ₹ from ₹1500-2000; Ⓜ @ ☎) This hotel on the western side of Junagarh is run by a former Bikaner prime minister's great-grandson. Rooms are mostly large and are eclectically and elaborately decorated with antiques, gold-threaded curtains and old family photographs. There's a bar straight out of the Addams Family, a garden restaurant, a coffeeshop, and a boutique that

## DON'T MISS

## THE TEMPLE OF RATS

The extraordinary **Karni Mata Temple** (camera/video ₹30/50; ☀ 4am-10pm) at Deshnoh, 30km south of Bikaner, is one of India's weirder attractions. Its resident mass of holy rodents is not for the squeamish, but most visitors to Bikaner brave the potential for ankle-nipping and put a half-day trip here on their itinerary. Frequent buses leave from Bikaner's main bus stand. A return autorickshaw from Bikaner with a one-hour wait costs ₹400 to ₹450.

Karni Mata lived in the 14th century and performed many miracles during her lifetime. When her youngest son, Lakhan, drowned, she ordered Yama (the god of death) to bring him back to life. Yama said he was unable to do so, but that Karni Mata, as an incarnation of Durga, could restore Lakhan's life. This she did, decreeing that members of her family would no longer die but would be reincarnated as *kabas* (rats). Around 600 families in Deshnoh claim to be descendants of Karni Mata and that they will be reincarnated as *kabas*.

The temple isn't, in fact, swarming with rats, but there are a lot of them here, especially in nooks and crannies and in areas where priests and pilgrims leave food for them. And yes, you do have to take your shoes off to enter the temple: it's considered highly auspicious to have a *kaba* run across your feet – you may be graced in this manner whether you want it or not.

You can find food and drinks for yourself at the numerous snack stalls outside.

specialises in beautiful, original wedding saris.

Camel safaris and local guides can be arranged here.

**Hotel Harasar Haveli**

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0151-2209891; www.harasar.com; ₹ 1800-2800; 🍷🍷) At this modern hotel with the frontage of an old sandstone *haveli* you'll find unexpectedly grand accommodation. The decor is stylish: that's not fancy blue and gold wallpaper in your room, but exquisitely hand-painted floral patterns. Old dark-wood furniture continues the classy character. Service is great, and the in-house restaurant on the terrace serves alcohol.

Located opposite Karni Singh Stadium, about 1km northeast of Junagarh.

**Udai Niwas**

HOMESTAY \$\$

(☎ 9971795447, 0151-2223447; Rangmanch Rd, Civil Lines; s/d ₹2000/2500; 🍷) This friendly and relaxed homestay is set behind its cheerful associated Café Indra. The rooms are large and comfortable, and you can choose to eat the delicious home-cooked meals with the family in the dining room or not. There's even a laundry to do your own washing.

**Hotel Kishan Palace**

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 9829512610, 0151-2527762; www.hotelkishanpalaceheritage.com; 8B Gajner-Jaisalmer Rd; ₹ with fan ₹750, ₹ incl breakfast with AC ₹1500; 🍷🍷) An old Bikaner house, this hotel was once the home of a colonel of the Bikaner Cam-

el Corps, and is now run by his grandson. Rooms are unfussy but generously sized, and the place is festooned with old photos and military memorabilia – check out grandfather's MBE and watercolours by the Japanese prisoners of war he once guarded. Get a room at the back away from the main road.

**Laxmi Niwas Palace**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0151-2202777; www.laxminiwaspalace.com; ₹ 10,500-14,500, ste ₹22,000-31,000; 🍷🍷🍷) Located 2km northeast of the city centre, this pink-sandstone hotel is part of the royal palace, dating from 1902. It has opulent interiors with stone carvings, and is set in large lovely grounds. Rooms are mostly large, elegant and evocative, while the bar and billiards room contain more trophy skins from tigers than are probably still alive in Rajasthan.

**Bhanwar Niwas**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎ 0151-2529323; www.bhanwarniwas.com; Rampuria St; ₹ ₹6000; 🍷🍷🍷) This superb hotel has been developed out of the beautiful Rampuria Haveli – a gem in the old city, 300m southwest of the City Kotwali police station. It has 26 all-different, spacious and delightfully decorated rooms, featuring stencil-painted wallpaper, marble or mosaic floors and antique furnishings. Comfortable common rooms drip with antiques and are arranged around a large courtyard.



## Eating & Drinking

### Café Indra

CAFE \$

(☎ 8287895446; Rangmanch Rd, Civil Lines; mains ₹120-170; ☎ 11.30am-10.30pm; 🍷) This bright and clean cafe is a great place to relax with a coffee or a cool drink, and equally good as a place for lunch or dinner, with an array of pizzas, burgers and wraps.

### Amberwalla

MULTICUISINE \$

(☎ 0151-2220333; Station Rd; mains ₹60-120, thalis ₹190-200; ☎ 7am-11pm; 🍷🍷) This large bright and airy 'diner' caters for everyone with Continental, Chinese, North Indian and South Indian mains, plus sweets, ice cream and a large bakery.

### ★ Gallops

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(☎ 0151-3200833; www.gallopsbikaner.com; Court Rd; mains ₹200-350; ☎ 10am-10pm; 🍷🍷) This contemporary cafe and restaurant close to the Junagarh entrance is known as 'Glops' to rickshaw-wallahs. There are snacks such as pizzas, wraps and sandwiches, and a good range of Indian and Chinese veg and non-veg dishes. You can sit outside or curl up in an armchair in the air-conditioned interior with a cold beer or an espresso (coffees from ₹100).

### Shakti Dining

INDIAN \$\$

(☎ 9928900422; Prithvi Niwas, Civil Lines; mains ₹150-260; ☎ 11am-11pm; 🍷🍷) Central and modern, Shakti's serves good Indian classics in a garden setting or in air-conditioned comfort. Also here is the funky **Road Runner Cafe** (☎ 0151-2545033, 9928900422; mains ₹150-260; ☎ 11am-11pm; 🍷🍷) for a more casual dining experience.

### Heeralal's

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(☎ 0151-2205551; Station Rd; mains ₹150-210, thalis ₹165-270; ☎ 7.30am-10.30pm; 🍷🍷) This bright and hugely popular 1st-floor restaurant serves up pretty good veg Indian dishes, plus a few Chinese mains and pizzas (but unfortunately no beer), amid large banks of

plastic flowers. It's a good place to sit and relax if waiting for a train. The ground-floor fast-food section is less appealing, but it does have a good sweets counter.



## Shopping

### Bikaner Miniature Arts

ART

(☎ 9829291431; www.bikanerminiaturearts.com; Municipal Rd; ☎ 9am-8pm) The Swami family has been painting miniatures in Bikaner for four generations, and now run this art school and gallery. The quality of work is astounding, and cheaper than you'll find in some of the bigger tourist centres. Art classes can be arranged.



## Information

**Main Post Office** (☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Near Bhairon Vilas hotel.

**PBM Hospital** (☎ 0151-2525312; Hospital Rd) One of Rajasthan's best government hospitals, with 24-hour emergency service.

**Tourist Office** (☎ 0151-2226701; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri) This friendly office (near Pooran Singh Circle) can answer most tourism-related questions and provide transport schedules and maps.



## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Supreme Airlines** (p192) flies a small plane (one way from ₹560) Monday to Saturday from Jaipur to Bikaner (departing 7am) and Bikaner to Jaipur (departing 8.45am). These schedules are likely to change.

### BUS

There's a **private bus stand** outside the southern wall of Junagarh with similar services (albeit slightly more expensive and less frequent) to the government-run services from the **main bus stand**, which is 2km directly north of the fort (autorickshaw ₹20).

Services from the main bus stand:

**Ajmer (for Pushkar)** ₹269, six hours, half-hourly until 6pm

## MAJOR TRAINS FROM BIKANER JUNCTION

| DESTINATION           | TRAIN                      | DEPARTURE | ARRIVAL | FARE (₹) |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------|---------|----------|
| Delhi (Sarai Rohilla) | 22471 Dee Intercity SF Exp | 9.30am    | 5.25pm  | 305/785  |
| Jaipur                | 12467 Leelan Exp           | 6am       | 12.35pm | 275/705  |
| Jaisalmer             | 12468 Leelan Exp           | 11.15pm   | 4.50am  | 250/625  |
| Jodhpur               | 14887 KLK-BME Exp          | 11am      | 4pm     | 200/510  |

Fares: sleeper/3AC

**Delhi** ₹445, 11 hours, at least four daily

**Deshnok** ₹35, one hour, half-hourly until 4.30pm

**Fatehpur** ₹136, 3½ hours, half-hourly until 5.45pm

**Jaipur** ₹334, with AC ₹596, seven hours, hourly until 5.45pm

**Jaisalmer** ₹309, 7½ hours, noon daily

**Jhunjhunu** ₹226, five hours, four daily (7.30am, 8.30am, 12.20pm and 6.30pm)

**Jodhpur** ₹243, five hours, half-hourly until 6.30pm

**Pokaran** ₹211, five hours, hourly until 12.45pm

For Jaisalmer, it's sometimes faster to head to Pokaran (which has more departures) and change there.

### TRAIN

The main train station is Bikaner Junction, with a computerised **reservations office** (☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) in a separate building just east of the main station building. The foreigner's window is 2931. A couple of other useful services go from Lalgarh station in the north of the city (autorickshaw ₹50).

**Delhi (Delhi Sarai Rohilla)** sleeper/3AC ₹305/785, eight to 14 hours, three to five daily, 6.30am, 9.30am, 4.45pm, 5.05pm and 11.30pm

**Jaipur** sleeper/3AC ₹275/705, 6½ hours, five daily, 12.05am, 6am, 6.45pm, 11.05pm and 11.55pm

**Jaisalmer** sleeper/3AC ₹250/625, 5½ hours, one or two daily, 6.30pm and 11.15pm

**Jodhpur** sleeper/3AC ₹200/510, five hours, six to seven daily, 12.45am, 6.35am, 9.30am, 11am, 1.40pm, 9.40pm and 10.10pm

No direct trains go to Ajmer for Pushkar.

## i Getting Around

An autorickshaw from the train station to Juna-garh palace should cost ₹30, but you'll probably be asked for more.

## Around Bikaner

### National Research Centre on Camels

MUSEUM

(☎ 0151-2230183; www.nrccamel.res.in; Indian/foreigner ₹30/100, camera ₹50, rides ₹50; ☎ 2-6pm) The National Research Centre on Camels is 8km southeast of central Bikaner, beside the Jodhpur-Jaipur Bypass. While here you can visit baby camels, go for a short ride and look around the small museum. There are about 400 camels, of four different breeds. The British Army had a camel corps drawn from Bikaner during WWI. Guides are available for ₹50-plus. The on-site Camel Milk Parlour offers samples to try including *kulfi* and lassi.

The round trip from Bikaner, including a half-hour wait at the camel farm, is around ₹150/₹400 for an autorickshaw/taxi.

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