

The COFFS COAST Advocate

Udaipur: Venice of the East

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Royal family driving force behind luring tourists to India's most romantic city

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UDAIPUR is one of the most romantic cities in all of India. Marble palaces, beautiful gardens and placid blue lakes enhance the beguiling beauty of the city. Surrounded by the ochre and purple ridges of the picturesque Aravalli Hills, Udaipur is better known as the City of Lakes and is often called the "Venice of the East".

Located on the shores of shimmering Lake Pichola, the artificial freshwater lake is named after the nearby Picholi village.

Created in 1362, it is one of several lakes developed over the past centuries in and around the famous city.

Towering on the banks of Lake Pichola is the magnificent structure of the City Palace which boasts a wonderful blend of Medieval, European and Chinese architecture.

It has various towers, domes and arches which add to the special charm of this heritage site.

The palace is an assortment of courtyards, pavilions, terraces, corridors and hanging gardens, encircled by fortifications and is built entirely of granite and marble.

Not satisfied with this one palace the Maharaja of the time not only built a lake palace but also constructed a monsoon palace on a high ridge overlooking Udaipur.

Over the years, the original palace changed from the official summer residences of the Royal family to a museum.

In 1963, the lake palace was transformed into a hotel now called Taj Lake Palace.

Alan and I stayed here as part of my small group tour and enjoyed its tranquil surroundings and fantastic views.

There are several other lake islands, one of which is where the son of a Maharaja was exiled (in luxury) until his father died and he took over the dynasty.

Today it is a popular wedding venue which erupts with Bollywood music as only an Indian wedding celebration can do in its unique style.

The old city wraps tightly around Lake Pichola. Countless narrow, crooked, streets built for donkeys prove to be a little congested with tourists and traffic, but to escape the crush you should take a tranquil boat ride on the lake to view the panorama from a different angle.

The local markets are a feast of colours with the women in their beautiful saris selling the freshest of fruit and vegetables bought down from the surrounding hills.

There are also many vendor carts offering chai, samosas and handicrafts for sale.

Udaipur is famous for textiles with beautiful examples of the local product.

There is a thriving micro industry supported by the royal family who remain influential and in recent decades have been a driving force of Udaipur as a tourist destination.

Romantic and whimsical, Udaipur will make you fall in love at first sight.

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