



PDF

# India



## Rajasthan (PDF Chapter)

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### COVERAGE INCLUDES:

- Eastern Rajasthan
- Jaipur & around
- Bharatpur
- Keoladeo Ghana National Park
- Alwar
- Sariska Tiger Reserve
- Shekhawati
- Ajmer
- Pushkar
- Ranthambhore National Park
- Southern Rajasthan
- Bundi
- Kota
- Chittorgarh (Chittor)
- Udaipur & around
- Mt Abu & around
- Western Rajasthan



# Rajasthan

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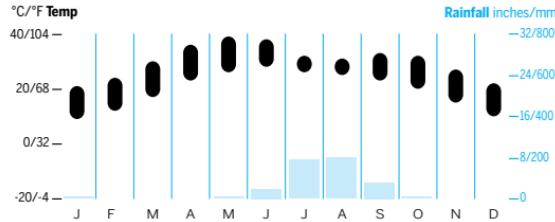
## Why Go?

It is said there is more history in Rajasthan than the rest of India put together. Welcome to the Land of the Kings; a fabled realm of maharajas and their majestic forts and lavish palaces. India is littered with splendid ruined bastions, but nowhere will you find fortresses quite as magnificent as those here; rising up imperiously from the desert landscape like fairy-tale mirages of a bygone era.

As enchanting as they are, though, there is more to this most royal of regions than its seemingly timeless 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 festivals here to fill a calendar (and an artist's palette), and the shopping and cuisine are nothing short of spectacular. In truth, Rajasthan just about has it all; it is the must-see state of this must-see country; brimming with startling, thought-provoking and, ultimately, unforgettable attractions.

## When to Go

### Jaipur



**Oct** Ranthambore National Park reopens for tiger safaris.

**Oct/Nov** Don't miss the Pushkar Camel Festival, featuring camels (of course) and culture.

**Mar** Jaipur's famous Elephant Festival precedes the typically boisterous Holi celebrations.

## Food

As with the rest of the north, Mughal-influenced curries and smoky tandoori food are extremely popular, but there are a few favourites with a regional twist that are worth hunting down. *Kachori* is a round-shaped, masala-dhal-filled, samosa-like package that hits the spot for a street snack. A favourite Rajasthani meal is *gatta*, gram-flour dumplings cooked in a yoghurt sauce. For refreshment you can't go past a thick and creamy *makhania* (saffron-flavoured) lassi, or a light, fragrant *kheer* (rice pudding).

### DON'T MISS

In Jaipur, the **City Palace** is at the centre of a cluster of top sights, including the fascinating **Jantar Mantar**, **Hawa Mahal** and **Iswari Minar Swarga Sal**. But the stand-out attraction in the Jaipur area is **Amber Fort**. If you are a real fort connoisseur, though, you need to make the long trek west for the best of them all: the spectacular, mirage-like desert fortress that is **Jaisalmer Fort**. Running a close second is Jodhpur's imposing rock-like fortress, **Mehrangarh**, whilst more off-the-beaten-track forts worth hunting down include the remote **Kumbhalgarh** and the utterly enormous **Chittorgarh**. Nature lovers shouldn't miss the birdlife at **Keoladeo Ghana National Park** nor the very real chance of spotting a tiger at **Ranthambhore National Park**, while romantics will soon fall in love with the lake city of **Udaipur**.

### MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

Jaipur International Airport, Jaipur train station, Jaipur main bus station.

### Fast Facts

- **Population** 68.6 million
- **Area** 342,239 sq km
- **Capital** Jaipur
- **Main languages** Hindi and Rajasthani
- **Sleeping prices:** \$ below ₹500, \$\$ ₹500 to ₹1500, \$\$\$ above ₹1500
- **Eating prices:** \$ below ₹150, \$\$ ₹150 to ₹300, \$\$\$ above ₹300

### Top Tips

- Carry small denominations (below ₹50) as drivers often lack small change.
- Use prepaid autorickshaw booths outside large train stations to avoid the tiresome rickshaw hustle.
- For shorter train journeys, when tickets are sold out, just buy an unreserved 'general ticket' and pile into second class.

## Top State Festivals

- **Desert Festival** (⌚ Feb; Jaisalmer, p183) A chance for moustache twirlers to compete in the Mr Desert contest.
- **Elephant Festival** (⌚ Mar; Jaipur, p108) Parades, polo and human-versus-elephant tugs-of-war.
- **Gangaur** (⌚ Mar/Apr; statewide) A festival honouring Shiva and Parvati's love, celebrated with fervour in Jaipur.
- **Mewar Festival** (⌚ Mar/Apr; Udaipur, p157) Udaipur's version of Gangaur, with free cultural events and a colourful procession down to the lake.
- **Teej** (⌚ Aug; Jaipur, p108, & Bundi, p149) Honours the arrival of the monsoon, and Shiva and Parvati's marriage.
- **Dussehra Mela** (⌚ Oct; Kota, p152) 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 firecracker-stuffed effigies.
- **Marwar Festival** (⌚ Oct; Jodhpur, p174, & Osian, p182) Celebrates Rajasthani heroes through music and dance; one day is held in Jodhpur, the other in Osian.
- **Pushkar Camel Fair** (⌚ Oct/Nov; Pushkar, p144) The most famous festival in the state; it's a massive congregation of camels, horses and cattle, traders, pilgrims and tourists.

### Resources

- **Festivals of India** ([www.festivalsofindia.in](http://www.festivalsofindia.in))
- **Incredible India** ([www.incredibleindia.org](http://www.incredibleindia.org))
- **Rajasthan Tourism** ([www.rajasthantourism.gov.in](http://www.rajasthantourism.gov.in))

## Rajasthan Highlights

1 Gaze wistfully at the magical, mirage-like sandstone fort at **Jaisalmer** (p186), before crossing the desert on a camel

2 Kick back in the pastel-hued pilgrimage town of **Pushkar** (p141)

3 Spot a tiger in the jungle then explore the clifftop fortress at **Ranthambore National Park** (p147)

4 Listen to the Blue City's secrets from the soaring ramparts of Jodhpur's dramatic fortress, **Mehrangarh** (p174)

5 Indulge in the romance of **Udaipur** (p157), with its gorgeous lake vistas and labyrinthine palace

6 Wander through the colourful bazaars of the **Pink City** (p109) in the chaotic capital, Jaipur, before visiting the marvelous **Amber Fort** (p124)

7 Fall for the laidback charms and backpacker vibe of hassle-free **Bundi** (p149)

8 Admire the forgotten towns and crumbling frescoed *havelis* of **Shekhawati** (p133)

0 0 100 km  
0 60 miles





## History

Rajasthan is home to 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; consequently much of their energy was spent squabbling among themselves. The resultant weakness eventually led to the Rajputs becoming vassals of the Mughal empire.

Nevertheless, the Rajputs' bravery and sense of honour were unparalleled. Rajput warriors would fight against all odds and, when no hope was left, chivalry demanded *jauhar* (ritual mass suicide). The men donned saffron robes and rode out to face the enemy (and certain death), while the women and children perished in the flames of a funeral pyre. It's not surprising that Mughal emperors had such difficulty controlling this part of their empire.

With the Mughal empire declining, the Rajputs gradually clawed back independence – at least until the British arrived. As the British Raj inexorably expanded, most Rajput states allied with the British, which allowed them to continue as independent states, subject to certain political and economic constraints.

These alliances proved to be the beginning of the end for the Rajput rulers. Consumption took over from chivalry so that, by the early 20th century, many of the maharajas spent much of their time travelling the world with scores of retainers, playing polo and occupying entire floors of expensive hotels. While it suited the British to indulge them, the maharajas' profligacy was economically and socially detrimental. When India gained its independence, Rajasthan had one of the subcontinent's lowest rates of life expectancy and literacy.

At Independence, India's ruling Congress Party was forced to make a deal with the nominally independent Rajput states to secure their agreement to join the new India. The rulers were allowed to keep their titles and their property holdings, and they were paid an annual stipend commensurate with their status. It couldn't last forever, though, and in the early 1970s Indira Gandhi abolished the titles and the stipends, and severely sequestered rulers' property rights.

In their absence Rajasthan has made headway, but the state remains poor. The

strength of tradition means that women have a particularly tough time in rural areas. Literacy stood at 67% in 2011 (males 81%, females 53%, a massive rise from 18% in 1961 and 39% in 1991), although it's still the third-lowest in India, while the gender gap remains India's widest.

## EASTERN RAJASTHAN

### Jaipur

 0141 / POP 3.0 MILLION

Jaipur, Rajasthan's capital, is an enthralling historical city and 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, while 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 (1688–1744), 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 his vision and the impressive expertise of his chief archi-

tect, 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

Consider buying a **composite ticket** (Indian/foreigner/foreign student ₹50/300/150), which gives you entry to Amber Fort, Central Museum, Jantar Mantar, Hawa Mahal and Nahargarh, and is valid for two days from time of purchase.

### ⦿ Old City (Pink City)

The Old City (known as the Pink City by some) is partially encircled by a crenellated wall punctuated at intervals by grand gateways. The major gates are Chandpol (*pol* means 'gate'), Ajmeri Gate and Sangani Gate. Avenues divide the Old City into neat rectangles, each specialising in certain crafts, as ordained in the ancient Hindu texts *Shilpa-Shastra*. The main bazaars in the Old City include Johari Bazaar, Tripolia Bazaar, Bapu Bazaar and Chandpol Bazaar.

#### **City Palace**

PALACE

(Indian/foreigner incl camera ₹75/300, video camera ₹200, audio guide ₹80, human guide from ₹300, Chandra Mahal tour ₹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 Singh, but within it the palace has been enlarged and adapted over the centuries. Despite the gradual development, the whole is a striking blend of Rajasthani and Mughal architecture.

The price of admission also gets you in to Jaigarh Fort (the fort above Amber Fort, 10km from town), a deal that is valid for two days.

#### ⇒ **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 multi-arched, 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* (wool shawls). 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.

#### ⇒ **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, 1.6m tall and reputedly the largest silver objects in the world; Maharaja Madho Singh II, as a devout Hindu, used these vessels to take holy Ganges water to England.

#### ⇒ **Diwan-i-Am**

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

#### ⇒ **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 weapons are elegantly engraved and inlaid, belying their grisly purpose.

#### ⇒ **Pitam Niwas Chowk & Chandra Mahal**

Located towards the palace's inner courtyard is Pitam Niwas Chowk, with four glorious gates that represent the seasons. The **Peacock Gate** depicts autumn, with zigzagging patterns and peacock motifs – around the doorway are five beautiful repeated peacock bas reliefs in all their feathered glory.

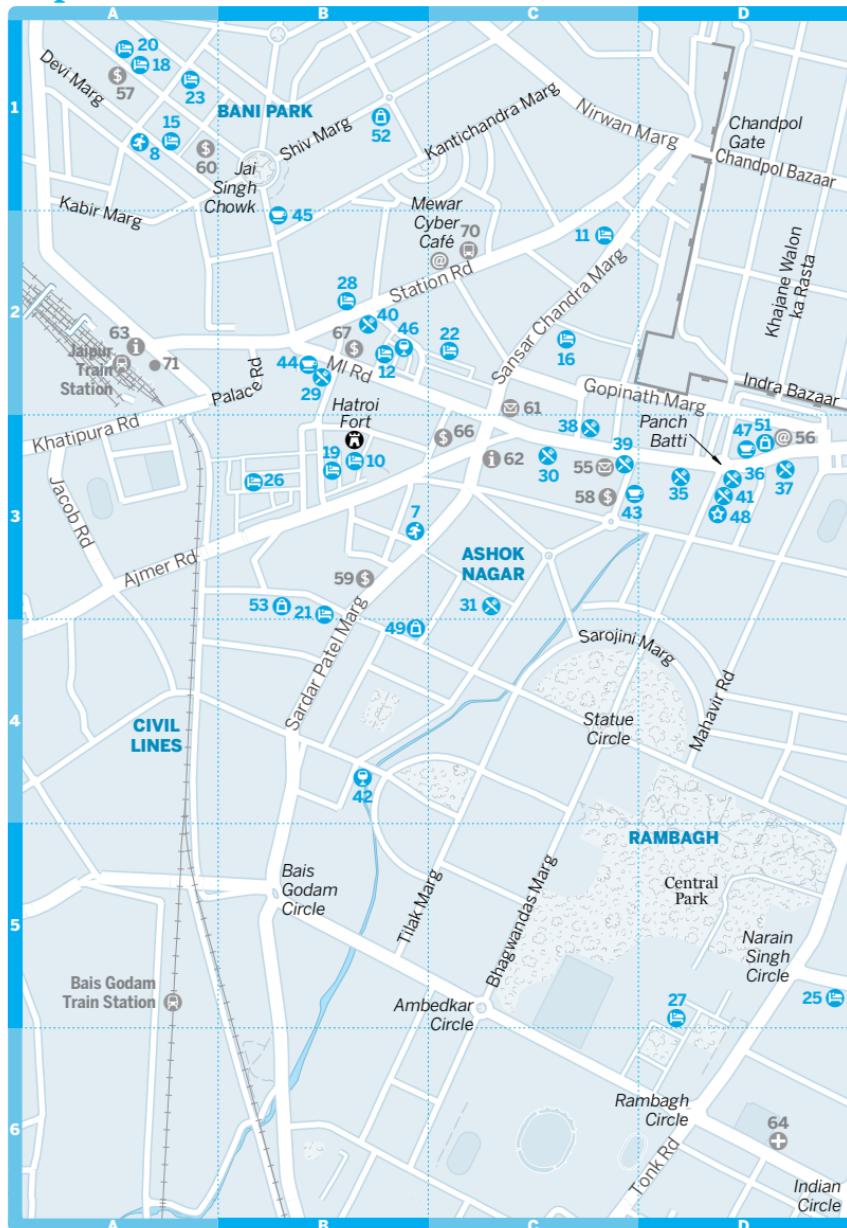
Beyond this *chowk* (square) is the private palace, the Chandra Mahal, which is still the residence of the descendants of the royal family and where you can take a 45-minute guided **tour** (₹2500) of select areas.

#### **Jantar Mantar**

HISTORIC SITE

(Indian/foreigner ₹40/200, audio guide ₹150, human guide ₹200; ☺ 9am-4.30pm) Adjacent to the City Palace is Jantar Mantar, an observatory begun by Jai Singh in 1728 that resembles a collection of bizarre sculptures. The name is derived from the Sanskrit *yanta mantr*, meaning 'instrument of calculation',

## Jaipur



and in 2010 it was added to India's list of Unesco World Heritage Sites.

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



## Hawa Mahal

**HISTORIC BUILDING**  
(Indian/foreigner incl camera ₹10/50, audio guide Hindi/English ₹80/110, human guide ₹200; ☺ 9am-5pm) Jaipur's most distinctive landmark, the Hawa Mahal, or Palace of the Winds, is an extraordinary, pink-sandstone, 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 one way, and over Siredeori Bazaar the other.

There's also a small **museum** (Sat-Thu) with miniature paintings and some rich reliques, such as ceremonial armour, which help evoke the royal past.

Entrance to the Hawa Mahal is from the back of the complex. To get here, return to the roundabout on your left as you face the Hawa Mahal, turn right and then take the first right again through an archway.

## >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. The maharaja commissioned the landscaping of the Ram Niwas Public Gardens, on Jawaharlal Nehru (J Nehru) Rd, and the uproarious splendour of Albert Hall, built in honour of the Prince of Wales' 1876 visit, which now houses the Central Museum.

### Central Museum

MUSEUM

(Albert Hall; Indian/foreigner ₹20/150, audio guide Hindi/English ₹90/124; ☺ 9.30am-5pm) The museum is housed in the spectacularly florid Albert Hall, south of the Old City. It was designed by Sir Swinton Jacob, and combines elements of English and North Indian architecture. The grand old building hosts an eclectic array of tribal dress, clay models of yogis in various positions, dioramas, puppets, 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 mirrorwork swing from Bikaner to a glass bed (for a short queen). The museum is signposted off J Nehru Rd, south of the Central Museum.

# Jaipur

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## City Edge

### Nahargarh

FORT  
(Tiger Fort; Indian/foreigner ₹10/30; ☎ 10am-5pm) Built in 1734 and extended in 1868, this sturdy fort overlooks the city from a sheer ridge to the north. The views are glorious – it's a great sunset spot, and there's a **terrace restaurant** (₹4am-10pm) on a rampart at the far end that's perfect for a beer. Cute **Durgh Cafe** (₹8am-10pm), in a courtyard within the palace building, also does food and booze. 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 path to the top (20 minutes). To drive, you have to detour via the Amber area in a circuitous 20km round trip.

### Royal Gaitor

HISTORIC SITE  
(Gatore ki Chhatryan; Indian/foreigner ₹20/30; ☎ 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.

The **cenotaphs of the maharanis of Jaipur** (Maharani ki Chhatri; Amber Rd; Indian/foreigner ₹20/30; ☎ 9am-5pm) are also worth a visit. They lie between Jaipur and Amber, opposite the Holiday Inn.

## Activities

Several hotels will let you use their pool for a daily fee; the pick of the bunch is the beautiful garden pool at **Narain Niwas Palace Hotel** (nonguests ₹200), beside which is **Orra Spa** (₹2563448; massage treatments from ₹800; ☎ 9am-7pm).

### Kerala Ayurveda Kendra

AYURVEDA  
(₹4006060; www.keralayurvedakendra.com; D-259 Devi Marg, Bani Park; ☎ 9am-9pm) Small, understated yet professionally-run ayurvedic treatment centre. Ordinary massages (full-body from ₹500) are excellent value. Treatments also include *sirodhara* (where a thin stream of oil is poured continuously over your forehead; from ₹1200) and *pizhichil* (where your body is drenched in litres of oil before being fully massaged; from ₹1400).

## DON'T MISS

### HEAVEN-PIERCING MINARET

Looking down over Tripolia Bazaar, near the City Palace, is the unusual **Iswari Minar Swarga Sal** (Heaven Piercing Minaret; admission ₹20; ☎ 9am-4.30pm). This 35m-tall tower was erected by Jai Singh's son Iswari, who later ignominiously killed himself by snake bite (in the Chandra Mahal) rather than face the advancing Maratha army – 21 wives and concubines then did the necessary noble thing and committed *jauhar* (ritual mass suicide by immolation) on his funeral pyre. You can spiral to the top of the minaret for excellent views over the Old City. The entrance is around the back of the row of shops fronting Chandpol Bazaar – take the alley 50m west of the minaret along Chandpol Bazaar or go via the Atishpol entrance to the City Palace compound, 150m east of the minaret.

### Kerala Ayurveda

AYURVEDA

(₹4022422; www.keralaayurveda.biz; 52 Dhuleswar Bagh, Sadar Patel Marg; ☎ 9am-8pm) More upmarket than others, but still friendly and good value, with back massages from ₹800. It also does synchronised massages with a steam bath for couples (₹1300 per person). They sell oils and therapy treatments, and offer consultations (₹150) with an ayurvedic-trained doctor (every day at 5.30pm).

## Courses

### Sakshi

BLOCK PRINTING

(₹2731862; Laxmi Colony, Sanganer Village; half-/full-day ₹1500/3000 per person; ☎ 10am-5pm) You can do block-printing courses in nearby Sanganer village (p125).

### Maharaja Sawai Mansingh

### Sangeet Mahavidyalaya

MUSIC, DANCE

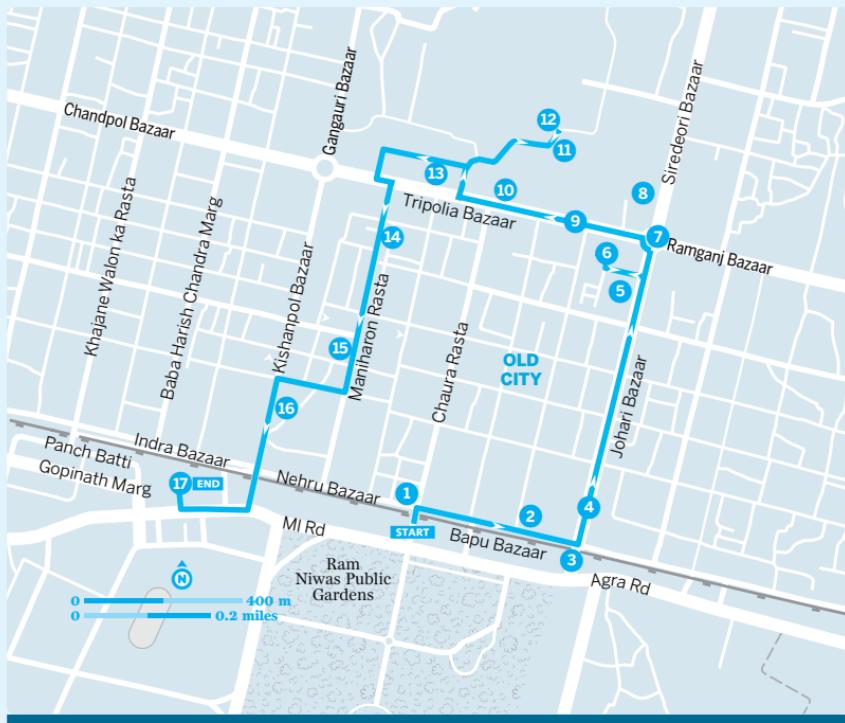
(₹9829789790, 93141292155; www.msmsmv.com; Chandni Chowk, City Palace) Lessons in traditional Indian music and dance are available at this well-established outfit near Jantar Mantar.

## Tours

### RTDC

SIGHTSEEING

(₹2200778; tours@rtdc.in; RTDC tourist information bureau, Platform 1, Jaipur train station; half-/full-day tours ₹250/300; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Sat)



## City Walk Pink City

**START NEW GATE**  
**END INDIAN COFFEE HOUSE**  
**LENGTH 3 KM; TWO TO THREE HOURS**

Entering the Old City from **1 New Gate**, turn right inside the city wall into **2 Bapu Bazaar**. Brightly coloured bolts of fabric, *jootis* (traditional shoes) and aromatic perfumes make the street a favourite 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 also artisans doing highly glazed *meenakari* (enamelling), a speciality of Jaipur.

Continuing north, walk past **5 Jama Masjid**, with its tall minarets, then duck through an archway (between Nos 145 and 146) that leads into a bustling half-covered alleyway, sparkling with the sequined shawls and saris. Turn right at the end for more colourful **6 sari stalls**. Return the way you came, turning left to reach **7 Badi Chaupar**. Take a quick look at the spectacular **8 Hawa Mahal** (p111) before walking

west along **9 Tripolia Bazaar**, leading to **10 Tripolia Gate**. This is the main entrance to **11 Jantar Mantar** (p109) and the **12 City Palace** (p109), but only the maharaja's family may enter here. The public entrance is via the less-ostentatious Atishpol (Stable Gate), a little further along.

Further west is **13 Iswari Minar Swarga Sal** (p113), which is well worth climbing for the city views (enter from the back). Cross the road here and duck into **14 Maniharon ka Rasta** (between Nos 349 and 350), an alleyway specialising in colourful lac (resin) bangles.

Walking south, clothes and crockery stores appear as the lane becomes less touristy. Look out for the green-painted, but rundown **15 haveli** opposite shop No 1129, before turning right through a narrow tunnel, and eventually popping out onto Kishanpol Bazaar. Turn left and walk past a collection of small **16 kite shops** before ending your tour with a well-earned break at the simple but charming **17 Indian Coffee House** (p117), just outside the Old City walls.

Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation (RTDC) offers tours of Jaipur and its surrounds. The full-day tours (9am to 6pm) take in all the major sights (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 include Amber Fort. Some travellers recommend these as you avoid the long lunch break. Fees don't include admission charges. Tours include a shopping stop.

The **Pink City by Night tour** (₹375; 6.30pm to 10.30pm) explores several well-known sights, again including Amber Fort, and includes dinner at Nahargarh fort.

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

## Sleeping

Prepare yourself to be besieged by autorickshaw and taxi drivers when you arrive by train or bus. If you refuse to go to their choice of hotel, many will either snub you or double the fare. To avoid this annoyance, go straight to the prepaid autorickshaw and taxi stands at the bus and train stations. Even better, many hotels will pick you up if you ring ahead.

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 \$** (₹2373700, 9414066311; [www.hotelpearlpalace.com](http://www.hotelpearlpalace.com); Hari Kishan Somani Marg, Hathroi Fort; dm ₹175, r ₹400-1250;   ) Great-value Pearl Palace continues to set the standard for budget digs in Jaipur. There's quite a range of rooms to choose from – small, large, shared bath, private bath, dorms, some balconied, some with air-con or fan cooled, but all are thoughtfully decorated and spotlessly clean. Congenial hosts Mr and Mrs Singh offer all manner of services including free pick-up from bus and train stations (8am to 11pm only), moneychanging and travel advice. The rooftop restaurant is also excellent. The only disappointment is that wi-fi isn't free (₹150 per day), but this place is rightfully popular. Advance booking highly recommended.

## HOT-AIR BALLOONING

For something a little bit special, consider treating yourself to a sunrise balloon ride above Amber Fort with India's leading hot-air balloon company, **Sky Waltz** (₹9717295801; [www.skywaltz.com](http://www.skywaltz.com); US\$240). Run by Aussie expat Paul Macpherson, and with a team of highly experienced foreign pilots, Sky Waltz offers spectacular early-morning balloon flights over the fort and surrounding countryside.

The package includes pick-up from your hotel in Jaipur (at around 6am), tea, coffee and cookies, watching the balloon inflation, the flight itself and drop off at your hotel afterwards. The whole thing lasts around three hours, including the one-hour flight.

Balloon-flight season is September to March.

### Tony Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(₹9928871717; [tonyguesthouse@yahoo.com](mailto:tonyguesthouse@yahoo.com); 11 Station Road; s ₹200, d ₹250-350, with attached bathroom ₹400;  ) A friendly choice for backpackers on a very tight budget, Tony's is well set up for travellers, with a rooftop garden, honest travel advice, internet (₹20 per hour) and free-flowing chai. Rooms are extremely basic, some with plywood partition walls, and only one has a private bathroom (with cold water only). The common shower is hot, though.

### Jwala Niketan

GUESTHOUSE \$

(₹5108303; [jwala\\_niketan@yahoo.com](mailto:jwala_niketan@yahoo.com); C-6 Motilal Atal Marg; s ₹200-400, d ₹300-500, with AC s/d ₹700/800;   ) Neat and tidy, family-run guesthouse with a charming manager and basic but perfectly adequate rooms, some with balconies. No internet.

### Karni Niwas

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(₹2365433; [www.hotelkarniniwas.com](http://www.hotelkarniniwas.com); C-5 Motilal Atal Marg; non-AC/AC from ₹700/850;   ) Very welcoming and trustworthy management running a simple but comfortable guesthouse with large, clean rooms. There's no restaurant, but there is an all-day menu, and tables and chairs are dotted around the place, in alcoves and on shared balconies and terraces, so there are plenty of nice spots to eat and drink. Free pick-up from the train or bus station is available. Free wi-fi throughout.

**Atithi Guest House**

GUESTHOUSE \$\$  
 (2378679; [atithiJaipur@hotmail.com](mailto:atithiJaipur@hotmail.com); 1 Park House Scheme Rd; s/d from ₹750/850, with AC ₹1300/1400; \*@\*) With slightly less character than its rivals, this spotlessly clean hotel can feel a little sterile, but it's the perfect antidote to Jaipur's dusty streets. It's central but peaceful, and the service is friendly and helpful. There's an immaculate kitchen and restaurant (guests only), and you can also dine on the very pleasant rooftop terrace. Wi-fi is ₹75 per day.

**Hotel Arya Niwas**

HOTEL \$\$  
 (4073456; [www.aryaniwas.com](http://www.aryaniwas.com); Sansar Chandra Marg; r from ₹1050, s/d with AC from ₹1150/1600; \*@\*) Housed in a nicely renovated mansion hidden behind a scruffy four-storey block, this is a popular travellers' haunt, with a travel desk, bookshop, yoga lessons (₹100) and good-value massage treatments (from ₹350). The clean rooms face an inner courtyard and vary in layout and size so check out a few. It's a little drab in general, but there's a certain charm, not least because of the extensive colonial-style terrace overlooking a soothing expanse of lawn in front of the hotel's excellent Chitra Cafe.

**All Seasons Homestay**

HOMESTAY \$\$  
 (9460387055; [www.allseasonshomestayjaipur.com](http://www.allseasonshomestayjaipur.com); 63 Hathroi Fort; s ₹1150-1550, d ₹1250-1650) Ranjana and her husband Dinesh run this welcoming homestay in their lovely garden bungalow on a quiet back street behind deserted Hathroi Fort. There are only four guestrooms but each is lovingly cared for and one or two have basic kitchen facilities. There's a pleasant lawn area, home-cooked meals and free internet.

**Karan's Guest House**

GUESTHOUSE \$\$  
 (9828284433; [www.karans.info](http://www.karans.info); D-6 Shiv Heera Path; r ₹1190) Sweet family-run guesthouse (although the family lives down the road) in a quiet residential part of town, but not too far from all the restaurants on MI Rd. Rooms are very spacious and homely and come with air-con, TV and hot-water showers. No internet and no restaurant, although breakfast is provided.

**Pearl Palace Heritage**

HOTEL \$\$\$  
 (2375242, 9414066311; [www.pearlpalaceheritage.com](http://www.pearlpalaceheritage.com); 54 Gopal Bari, Lane 2; r ₹2000-2500; \*@\*) The second hotel for the successful Pearl Palace team is a more upmarket, heritage-style property. As we've come to expect from Mr Singh, the attention to de-

tail is fabulous, with privately commissioned hand-carved panels in the corridors and hand-painted murals in the rooms, which are wonderfully spacious and individually themed (Jaisalmer, Kutch, Indus etc). Each room has its own computer plus free wi-fi, tea/coffee makers, wall-mounted TV and beautifully designed bathrooms.

**Alsisar Haveli**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(2368290; [www.alsisar.com](http://www.alsisar.com); Sansar Chandra Marg; s/d from ₹4680/6160; \*@\*) Beautifully renovated 19th-century *haveli* (this one really is a genuine *haveli*, unlike many namesakes) with immaculate high-ceilinged rooms, elegant Rajput arches and antique furnishings. If you can't afford to stay here, sample its atmosphere by coming for a dip in the lovely garden pool (nonguests ₹250 per hour).

 **Bani Park**

Upmarket Bani Park is a relatively peaceful area (away from the main roads, at least), about 2km west of the Old City (₹50 in a cycle rickshaw).

**Hotel Anuraag Villa**

HOTEL \$\$

(2201679; [www.anuraaggvilla.com](http://www.anuraaggvilla.com); D249 Devi Marg; s ₹600-1850, d ₹790-1850; \*@\*) This quiet and comfortable option has no-fuss, spacious rooms and a large tree-shaded lawn where you can find some quiet respite from the hassles of sightseeing. It has a recommended restaurant with garden seating and open kitchen. Staff members are efficient and helpful.

**Madhuban**

HOTEL \$\$\$

(2200033; [www.madhuban.net](http://www.madhuban.net); D237 Behari Marg; s/d from ₹1800/2000; \*@\*) Elegant Madhuban has cute and cosy rooms with attractive wood furniture, and although they are small for the price, this is a comfortable stay. The pool is tiny (OK for a quick plunge, though), but the restaurant is good, and you can sometimes eat out on the lawn. Free wi-fi and pick-up from the bus or train station.

**Jas Vilas**

GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$

(2204638; [www.jasvilas.com](http://www.jasvilas.com); C9 Sawai Jai Singh Hwy; s/d ₹3700/4000; \*@\*) This small but impressive hotel was built in 1950 and is still run by the same charming family. It offers 11 spacious rooms, most of which face the sparkling courtyard pool. Three garden-facing rooms are wheelchair accessible. In

addition to the relaxing courtyard and lawn, there's a cosy dining room. Management will help with all onward travel planning.

### Hotel Meghniwas

GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$

( 4060100; [www.meghniwas.com](http://www.meghniwas.com); C9 Sawai Jai Singh Hwy; r from ₹3500;   Next door to Jas Vilas, this very similar guesthouse has a nicer garden pool (nonguests ₹250), but rooms are not the same quality.

## Old City

### **Hotel Kailash**

HOTEL \$

( 2577372; Johari Bazaar; s/d ₹425/475, without bathroom ₹340/360) Everything about this hotel is tiny; from the tiniest of entrances – literally just a small doorway between two shops – to the narrow staircase leading up to reception (also tiny), and on into the very small rooms, which come with TVs and are surprisingly clean given the prices. Not much English spoken, but foreigners are given a friendly welcome. No wi-fi. No espresso machine. No airs and graces.

**Ganpati Vishram Guesthouse** GUESTHOUSE \$ ( 9314203050; Chandpol Bazaar; r ₹350-600) Secreted away above shops on Chandpol Bazaar, next to the seemingly forgotten Dina 300-year-old Nadhi Temple, this very basic guesthouse is set around an old, bare courtyard. Rooms are simple, but the tiled floors keep them cool and clean. Cold showers only, but hot-water buckets (₹10) can be provided. To find reception, climb the narrow staircase beside shop No 197.

### **Haveli Kalwara**

HERITAGE GUESTHOUSE \$\$

( 2315736, 7737903825; [neetiraj@hotmail.com](mailto:neetiraj@hotmail.com); off Indra Bazaar; s/d ₹600/800, with AC ₹900/1200) In the heart of the old-city action, but set back from the main bazaar in a quiet side alley, this rundown but charming guesthouse has eight huge spartan rooms with ensuite bathrooms and shared terraces you can sit out on. No restaurant, but staff can provide tea and snacks. Walk down the alley between shops No 94 and 95, turn left at the end, then right.

## Rambagh Environs

### **Nana-ki-Haveli**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

( 2615502; [www.nanakihaveli.com](http://www.nanakihaveli.com); off Moti Dungri Marg, Fateh Tiba; r ₹1800-3000;   This tucked-away, tranquil, 100-year-old family home has attractive, comfortable rooms decorated with traditional flourishes (dis-

creet wall painting, wooden furniture) and is hosted by a lovely family.

### **Narain Niwas Palace Hotel** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

( 2561291; [www.hotelnarainniwas.com](http://www.hotelnarainniwas.com); Narain Singh Rd; r incl breakfast from ₹7400;   Built in 1928 by General Amar Singh, this genuine heritage hotel has a 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 high-ceilinged rooms are varyingly atmospheric and the bathrooms also vary greatly – so inspect before committing. The large secluded garden pool (nonguests ₹200) is heavenly, as is the spa, and the sprawling gardens come complete with wandering peacocks. The restaurant (7.30am to 10.30pm; mains ₹150 to ₹300) and bar (3pm to 11pm) are also open to non-guests. Wi-fi costs ₹500 a day!

### **Rambagh Palace**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

( 2211919; [www.tajhotels.com](http://www.tajhotels.com); Bhawan Singh Marg; r from ₹27,500;   This splendid palace was once the Jaipur pad of Maharaja Man Singh II and, until recently, his glamorous wife Gayatri Devi. Veiled in 19 hectares of gardens, there are fantastic views across the immaculate lawns, and the rooms and facilities are top notch. Nonguests are only made to feel welcome if they dress to impress and flash the cash. Minimum spend in the bar for nonguests: ₹1500 per person. In the restaurants: ₹2500.

## Eating

## Around MI Road

### **Indian Coffee House**

SOUTH INDIAN \$

(MI Rd; mains ₹20-45;  8am-9.30pm) Jaipur's tucked-away branch of the South Indian institution, this 50-year-old, fan-cooled coffee house not only does the cheapest filter coffee in town (₹12), it also whips up a selection of tasty dishes – dosa (wafer-thin savoury crepes), *uttapam* (thick savoury rice pancake), *idli* (spongy round fermented rice cake) and *vada* (doughnut-shaped deep-fried lentil cake) – as well as toast, omelettes and sandwiches. A great spot for a cheap breakfast or lunch.

### **Old Green Tandoori Dhaba**

DHABA \$

(off MI Rd; mains ₹50-200;  10am-midnight) Slightly larger, cleaner and more popular than the very similar Green Tandoori Dhaba next door, Old Green Tandoori Dhaba has

been serving locals since 1985 and is still an atmospheric, down-to-earth, roadside eating experience. Its open-sided structure allows you to see your paneer kebabs or chicken tandoori being grilled on the barbecue out front, while you work your way through the simple but tasty curries on the main menu. Does half portions. No alcohol.

**Old Takeaway The Kebab Shop** KEBABS \$  
(151 MI Road; kebabs ₹80-120; ☎ 6-11pm) One of a few similarly named road-side kebab shops that open up each evening on this stretch of MI Road. This one (at No 151) is the original (so we're told) and the best (we agree). It knocks up outstanding tandoori kebabs, including paneer sheesh, mutton sheesh and the mouthwatering tandoori chicken. Pull up a stool and tuck in.

**The Doors** INDIAN \$  
(Khandaka Mansion, by Raj Mandir Cinema; mains ₹50-100, thalis ₹65-85; ☎ 7am-10pm) Excellent-value local favourite with a range of tasty vegetarian dishes including South Indian and thalis (until 4pm). Our particular favourite is the *paneer do pyaza*, with its thick onion sauce; perfect for being mopped up by the rotis, which here are as thick and textured as naan bread, but only ₹5 each! They do half-portions too, making this ideal for solo travellers. The restaurant is behind the McDonald's to the left of Raj Mandir Cinema, as you're looking at the cinema. No alcohol.

**Rawat Kachori** SWEETS \$  
(Station Rd; kachori ₹20, lassis ₹25; ☎ 6am-10pm) Head to this exceedingly popular place for great Indian sweets (₹10 each, or ₹120 to ₹300 per kg), cooling, creamy lassi (yoghurt drink) and its signature kachori (spicy, round-shaped vegetable samosas).

**Chitra Cafe** CAFE \$  
(Hotel Arya Niwas, Sansar Chandra Marg; mains ₹40-110; ☎ 7am-9.45pm) Hotel Arya Niwas' charming Chitra Cafe conjures up images of a bygone colonial era, with its rattan tables and chairs scattered along a covered terrace overlooking the hotel's cooling front lawn. It's great value too, especially if you plump for the thali (₹125). Also does home-made cakes and cookies, plus shakes and safe-to-eat ice creams.

**Baskin Robbins** SWEETS \$  
(Sanjay Marg; ice creams from ₹50; ☎ noon-11.30pm) Safe-to-eat ice creams from the dependable international chain.

**Peacock Rooftop Restaurant** MULTICUISINE \$\$  
(₹2373700; Hari Kishan Somani Marg, Hotel Pearl Palace; mains ₹70-180; ☎ 7am-11pm) Hotel Pearl Palace's pride and joy, Peacock is one of the best hotel rooftop restaurants you'll find. The traveller-friendly atmosphere is relaxed, the view towards Hathroli Fort is romantic and the beer is ice cold. Most importantly, though, the food is mouthwatering. A number of world cuisines are on offer; all are prepared well, but it's the Indian dishes that truly hit the spot, particularly the tandoori kebabs. They also do fresh juices, filter coffee and breakfast croissants.

**Handi Restaurant** NORTH INDIAN \$\$  
(MI Rd; mains ₹140-300; ☎ noon-3.30pm & 6-11pm) The Indian food here is as good as at any top restaurant in town, but the atmosphere is far less stuffy. Popular with local families, Handi is decked out like a large traditional village eatery, with a dried-mud floor, bamboo-lined walls and wicker roofing. It offers scrumptious tandoori and barbecued dishes as well as rich Mughlai curries. In the evenings it sets up a smoky kebab stall at the entrance to the restaurant. No beer here.

**Moti Mahal Delux** NORTH INDIAN \$\$  
(₹4017733; MI Rd; mains ₹170-300; ☎ 11am-11pm) The original Moti Mahal opened in Peshawar (in modern-day Pakistan), pre-partition, but there are now branches all across India delivering its renowned butter chicken to the masses. The kebabs here are fabulously succulent, and they do a mean *pista kulfi* (pistachio-flavoured sweet similar to ice cream). Beer (from ₹115) and wine (from ₹250) available.

**Four Seasons** VEGETARIAN \$\$  
(₹2374600; Bhagat Singh Marg; mains ₹130-180; ☎ 11am-5pm & 7-11pm) One of Jaipur's best vegetarian restaurants, this is a vastly popular place on two levels, with a glass wall to the kitchens. There's a great range of dishes on offer, including tasty Rajasthani specialities, South Indian dosas and a selection of pizzas. No alcohol.

**Natraj** VEGETARIAN \$\$  
(₹2375804; MI Rd; mains ₹150-250; ☎ 9am-11pm) This classy but low-key vegetarian place has been going since the 1960s and has an extensive menu featuring North Indian, Continental and Chinese cuisine. There's a good selection of thalis and South Indian food –

the *dosa paper masala* is delicious – as well as Indian sweets. No alcohol.

### Copper Chimney

( 2372275; MI Rd, Maya Mansions; mains ₹150-400; ☎ noon-3.30pm & 6.30-11pm) Copper Chimney is casual, almost elegant, and definitely welcoming, with the requisite waiter army and a fridge of cold beer (from ₹100). It offers excellent veg and nonveg Indian cuisine, including aromatic Rajasthani specials. There is also Continental and Chinese food and a small selection of Indian wine, but the curry and beer combos are hard to beat.

### Niro's

( 2374493; MI Rd; mains ₹200-500; ☎ 10am-11pm) Established in 1949, Niro's is a long-standing favourite on MI Rd. It's very plush these days – and has prices to match – but the quality of food is as good as ever; with plenty of Rajasthani specialities amongst its extensive Indian menu. Also does some Chinese and international cuisine, but the Indian dishes are definitely the pick. Beer from ₹160.

### Little Italy

( 4022444; Prithviraj Marg, 3rd fl, KK Square; mains ₹300-500; ☎ noon-11pm) Arguably the best Italian restaurant in town, 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 and first-rate Italian desserts. Also has a decent wine list.

## Old City

### Ganesh Restaurant

VEGETARIAN \$  
(Nehru Bazaar; mains ₹60-120; ☎ 9am-11.30pm) This no-nonsense, pocket-sized rooftop restaurant has a fantastic location on the top of the Old City wall near New Gate. The cook is in a pit on one side of the wall, so you can check out your great-value vegetarian food as it's being prepared. There's an easy-to-miss signpost, but it's up a narrow staircase beside shop No 10.

### LMB

VEGETARIAN \$\$  
( 2560845; Johari Bazaar; mains ₹150-250; ☎ 8am-11pm) Laxmi Misthan Bhandar (LMB) is an upmarket *sattvik* (vegetarian) restaurant in the Old City that's been going strong since 1954. A welcoming air-conditioned refuge from frenzied Johari Bazaar, LMB is a

bit of an institution with its singular decor, attentive waiters and extensive sweet counter. It's also very popular with tourists these days. The Rajasthan thali is excellent, as is its signature *kulfi*, a fusion of *kulfi* and *falooda* with dry fruits and saffron.

## Drinking

### ★ Lassiwala

CAFE  
(MI Rd; ☎ 7.30am till sold out) This famous, much-imitated lassi institution is a simple place that whips up fabulous, creamy lassis in a clay cup (small/large ₹17/34). Get here early to avoid disappointment; they usually sell out by 4pm. Will the real Lassiwala please stand up? Imitators abound, it's the one that says 'Shop 312' and 'Since 1944', directly next to an alleyway.

### 100% Rock

BAR  
(Hotel Shikha, Yudhishtir Marg, C-Scheme; beer from ₹160; ☎ 10am-11.30pm) Attached to, but separate from Hotel Shikha (and formerly known as TC Bar), 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.

### Brewberry's

CAFE  
(G-2 Fortune Heights, opp ICICI Bank; coffee from ₹40; ☎ 8am-midnight) Modern wi-fi-enabled cafe with fresh coffee and a good mix of Indian and Western food and snacks. Has some patio seating.

### Café Coffee Day

CAFE  
(MI Rd, Country Inn Hotel; coffee ₹60-90; ☎ 10am-10pm) Dependable, air-conditioned branch of India's most popular coffee-shop chain. There's another one on the way to Bani Park.

### Hotel Sangam Bar

BAR  
(Hotel Sangam, Motilal Atal Marg; beer from ₹75, shots from ₹30; ☎ 9am-11pm) Low-lit basement bar serving beer, spirits and a few Indian dishes and snacks. The beer and wine shop next door sells big bottles of Kingfisher for ₹100.

## Entertainment

Jaipur isn't a big late-night party town, although many hotels put on some sort of evening music, dance or puppet show. English-language films are occasionally

screened at some cinemas in Jaipur – check the cinemas and local press for details.

### Raj Mandir Cinema

(2379372; Baghwandas Marg; admission ₹60-150; ☎ reservations 10am-6pm, screenings 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm) 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 window Nos 9 and 10 (10am to 6pm) – this is your best chance of securing a seat, although 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 screening. Avoid the very cheapest tickets, which are very close to the screen.

### Chokhi Dhani

THEME PARK

(2225001; Tonk Rd; adult/child aged 3-9 ₹450/350, incl Rajasthani thali ₹650/400; ☎ 6pm-11pm) Chokhi Dhani, meaning 'special village', is a mock Rajasthani village 20km south of Jaipur, and is a fun place to take the kids. There are open-air restaurants, where you can enjoy a tasty Rajasthani thali, and there's a bevy of traditional entertainment – dancers, acrobats, snack stalls – as well as adventure park-like activities for kids to swing on, slide down and hide in. A return taxi from Jaipur, including waiting time, is about ₹600.

## 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, artefacts and crafts that arrive from all over Rajasthan. You'll have to bargain hard – shops have seen too many cash-rich, time-poor tourists, particularly around major tourist centres such as the City Palace and Hawa Mahal.

Most of the larger shops can pack and send your parcels home for you, although it may be slightly cheaper if you do it yourself.

The city is still loosely divided into traditional artisans quarters. The Pink City Walking Tour (p114) will take you through some of these.

**Bapu Bazaar** is lined with saris and fabrics, and is a good place to buy trinkets.

**Johari Bazaar** and **Siredeori 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, trinkets and perfume. MI Rd is another good place to buy jootis. The best place for bangles is Maniharon ka Rasta, near the Shree Sanjay Sharma Museum.

Plenty of factories and showrooms are strung along the length of Amber Rd, between Zorawar Singh Gate and the Holiday Inn, to catch the tourist traffic. Here you'll find huge emporiums selling block prints, blue pottery, carpets and antiques. These shops are used to bus loads 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.

### Kripal Kumbh

HANDICRAFTS

(2201127; B18A Shiv Marg; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) This tiny showroom in a private home is a great place to buy Jaipur's famous blue pottery produced by the late Mr Kripal Singh, his family and his students. Most pieces cost between ₹250 and ₹500.

### Khadi Ghar

CLOTHING, HANDICRAFTS

(MI Rd; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) The best of a handful of *khadi* shops in Jaipur, this branch sells good quality ready-made clothing from the homespun *khadi* fabric, famously endorsed by Gandhi, as well as a small selection of handicrafts. Prices are fixed and pressure to buy is minimal.

### ★ Mojari

CLOTHING

(Shiv Heera Marg; shoes ₹500-750; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) 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. There is a small range of wonderful handmade footwear on display (and loads more out the back), including embroidered, appliquéd and open-toed shoes, mules and sandals. There's a particu-

larily good choice for women, and there's a small selection of handmade leather bags and purses too.

### Anokhi

CLOTHING, TEXTILES  
([www.anokhi.com](http://www.anokhi.com); 2nd fl, C-11, Prithviraj Marg, KK Square; ☎ 9.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-7pm Sun) A classy, upmarket boutique that sells 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 too, and an excellent bookshop in the same building.

### The Silver Shop

JEWELLERY  
(Hari Kishan Somani Marg, Hotel Pearl Palace; ☎ 6-10pm) A trusted jewellery shop on the rooftop of Hotel Pearl Palace, offering a money-back guarantee on all items.

## Information

### INTERNET ACCESS

Internet cafes are thin on the ground, but almost all hotels and guesthouses provide internet access (sometimes for a daily fee), and usually wi-fi too.

**Dhoom Cyber Café** (off MI Rd; per hr ₹30; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm) Down a lane off MI Road, through an arch.

**Mewar Cyber Café** (Station Rd; per hr ₹25; ☎ 7am-11pm) Near the main bus stand.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

Most hotels can arrange a doctor on-site.

#### Santokha Durlabhji Memorial Hospital

(SDMH) (₹ 2566251; [www.sdmh.in](http://www.sdmh.in); Bhawan Singh Marg) Private hospital, with 24hr emergency department, helpful staff and clear bilingual signage. Consultancy fee ₹400.

#### Sawai Mansingh Hospital (SMS Hospital)

(₹ 2518222, 2518597; Sawai Ram Singh Rd) State-run, but part of Soni Hospitals group ([www.sonihospitals.com](http://www.sonihospitals.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 (especially around MI Road), most of which accept foreign cards.

**Thomas Cook** (₹ 2360940; MI Rd, Jaipur Towers; ☎ 9.30am-6pm) Changes cash and travellers' cheques (Amex only) and does advances on credit cards.

## JAIPUR'S 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 corner of the Old City. Here you can see stones being cut and polished in workshops tucked off narrow backstreets.

There is a **gem testing laboratory** (₹ 2568221; [www.gtljaipur.info](http://www.gtljaipur.info); ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) in the Rajasthan Chamber Bhawan on MI Rd (on the second floor, behind the tax office). Deposit your gems between 10am and 4pm, then return the following day between 4pm and 5pm to pick up an authenticity certificate. The service costs ₹1000 per stone, ₹1600 for same-day service, if deposited before 1pm.

A warning: one of the oldest scams in India is the gem scam (see also p1174), where tourists are fooled into thinking they can buy gems to sell at a profit elsewhere.

### POST

**DHL Express** (₹ 2361159; [www.dhl.co.in](http://www.dhl.co.in); G8 Geeta Enclave, Vinoba Marg; ☎ 10am-8pm) Head office is just off MI Rd. Look for the sub-branch on MI Rd (next to Standard Chartered Bank) then walk down the lane beside it. For parcels, the first 500g is expensive (eg ₹3334 to the UK), but each 500g after that is cheap (less than ₹500). All packaging is included in the price. Credit cards and cash are accepted.

**Main Post Office** (₹ 2368740; MI Rd; ☎ 8am-7.45pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5.45pm Sat) Cost-effective and efficient (though the back-and-forth can infuriate). Parcel-packing wallahs in the foyer must first pack, stitch and wax seal your parcel for a fee (₹50 to ₹100 per small package) before you can then send it. As a guide, a 950g parcel cost us ₹600 to send to the UK.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

The Tourism Assistance Force (police) is stationed at the train and bus stations, the airport and at Jaipur's major tourist sights.

**RTDC Tourist Reception Centre** ([www.rajasthan tourism.gov.in](http://www.rajasthan tourism.gov.in)) Main branch (₹ 5155137; Room 21, former RTDC Tourist Hotel; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri); Airport (₹ 2722647); Amber Fort (₹ 2530264; Amber Fort); Jaipur

train station (₹2200778; Platform 1; ☎ 24hr); main bus station (₹5064102; Platform 3; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) Has free maps and brochures on Jaipur and Rajasthan, organises city tours, private taxis and government-registered guides.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Air India** (₹2743500, airport 2721333; [www.airindia.com](http://www.airindia.com); Tonk Rd, Nehru Place) To Delhi and Mumbai daily.

**IndiGo** (₹2743500, 5119993; [www.goindigo.in](http://www.goindigo.in); airport) To Mumbai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

**Jet Airways** (₹1800 225522, 2725025; [www.jetairways.com](http://www.jetairways.com); airport; ☎ 5.30am-9pm) To Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Chandigarh, Indore, Raipur and Hyderabad.

### BUS

Rajasthan State Road Transport Corporation (RSRTC) buses all leave from the **main bus stand** (Station Rd), where there's a left-luggage 'cloakroom' (₹10 per bag for 24 hours), 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; usually with air-con but not always), these vary a lot but are generally much more expensive and comfortable 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 on them can be booked in advance from the **reservation office** (₹5116032) here.

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

### CAR

Most hotels can arrange car and driver hire. Or else go to the RTDC Tourist Reception Centre (p121) at the train station. They have a list of prices for different types of vehicles. At the time of research it was ₹7 to ₹12 per kilometre, depending on the type of car, with a minimum rental rate equivalent to 250km per day. Also expect to pay a ₹150 overnight charge, and note, you will have to pay for the driver to return to Jaipur even if you aren't.

### MOTORCYCLE

Hire, buy or fix a Royal Enfield Bullet (and lesser motorbikes) at **Rajasthan Auto Centre** (₹2568074, 9829188064; [www.royalenfieldsalim.com](http://www.royalenfieldsalim.com); Sanjay Bazaar, Sangani Gate; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), the cleanest little motorcycle workshop in India, run by the affable Mr Salim. To hire a 350cc Bullet costs ₹500 per day (including helmet) within

Jaipur; outside ₹600. No deposit required; just show and photocopy your passport, visa and driving licence. You can buy second-hand Enfields here too (₹40,000 to ₹50,000).

### TRAIN

The efficient **railway reservation office** (₹135; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) 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 on Platform 1, window 10 (closed 6-6.30am, 2-2.30pm & 10-10.30pm). The railway inquiries number is ☎ 131.

Station facilities on Platform 1 include an RTDC tourist information bureau, Tourism Assistance Force (police), a cloakroom for left luggage (₹10 per bag per 24 hours), retiring rooms (s/d ₹225/450, with air-con from ₹750), restaurants and air-conditioned waiting rooms for those with 1st class and 2AC train tickets.

Nine daily trains go to **Delhi** (1am, 2.50am, 4.40am, 5am, 6am, 8.45am, 4.30pm, 5.50pm and 11.15pm), plus others on selected days. The 6am double-decker does the trip in 4½ hours, others take five to six.

Three daily trains leave for **Agra** (6.15am, 3pm and 5.10pm), taking 4½ hours. Second-class seats cost ₹82.

Three go to **Bikaner** (3pm, 9.15pm and 12.50am), taking six, seven and eight hours respectively. Sleeper tickets cost ₹200 to ₹240.

Four go to **Jodhpur** (11.35am, 5pm, 11.45pm and 12.15am), taking five to six hours.

Three go to **Udaipur** (6.45am, 2pm and 10.30pm), in seven to eight hours.

Four go to **Ahmedabad** (4.25am, 9am, 8.35pm and 12.35am). The 12.35am is quickest (9 hours), others take 11 to 13 hours. Sleepers cost around ₹250.

For **Pushkar**, 11 daily trains make the two-hour trip to Ajmer, plus many more on selected days so you rarely wait more than an hour. Unreserved 'general' tickets cost ₹42.

For **Ranthambhore**, six daily trains go to Sawai Madhopur (5.45am, 11.05am, 2.10pm, 5.25pm, 5.35pm and 11.30pm), plus plenty more on selected days. Unreserved 'general' tickets for the two-hour trip cost ₹50.

Only one train (11.45pm) goes to **Jaisalmer**.

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

There are no bus services from the airport, which is 12km southeast of the city, although a

metro line was under construction at the time of research (it won't open for some time, though). An autorickshaw/taxi costs at least ₹200/400. There's a prepaid taxi booth inside the airport.

### AUTORICKSHAW

There are prepaid autorickshaw stands at the bus and train stations. Rates are fixed by the government, which means you don't have to haggle. Keep hold of your docket, though, until

## TRANSPORT FROM JAIPUR

### Main Buses from Jaipur

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY (OF NON-AC SERVICES)
Agra	179, AC 392	5½	half-hourly, 24 hours
Ajmer	120, AC 204	2½	every 10 minutes, 24 hours
Bharatpur	165	4½	half-hourly, 24 hours
Bikaner	241	8	half-hourly until 6pm
Bundi	154, AC 230	5	half-hourly until midnight
Chittorgarh	230, AC 300-570	7	half-hourly until 10pm
Delhi	210, AC 425-750	5½	half-hourly, 24 hours
Jaisalmer	AC 1073	15	1 daily (midnight)
Jhunjhunu	131	5	half-hourly
Jodhpur	262, AC 583	7	hourly, 24 hours
Kota	181, AC 245	5	half-hourly until 11pm
Mt Abu	372	13	1 daily (9.30am)
Nawalgarh	107	4	hourly, 5am-4.30pm
Pushkar (direct)	120	3	6 daily (6.45am, 7.10am, 9.20am, 1pm, 8.40pm, 11.15pm)
Sawai Madhopur	132, AC 180	6	5 daily (6am, 6.15am, 6.40am, 2.30pm, AC 5.30pm)
Udaipur	275, AC 702	10	every 45 minutes, 4am-noon (AC 9.30pm & 11pm)

### Major Trains from Jaipur

DESTINATION	TRAIN	DEPARTURE TIME	ARRIVAL TIME	FARE (₹)
Agra (Cantonment)	19666 Udaipur-Kurj Exp	6.15am	11am	135/362 (A)
Ahmedabad	12958 Ahmedabad SJ Rajdhani Exp	12.35am	9.35am	923/1335 (B)
Ajmer	12195 Intercity Express	9.40am	11.45am	65/230 (C)
Bikaner	12307 Howrah-Jodhpur Exp	12.15am	8am	198/521 (A)
Delhi (New Delhi)	12016 Ajmer Shatabdi	5.50pm	10.40pm	555/1150 (E)
Delhi (S Rohilla)	12985 Dee Double Decker	6am	10.30am	360 (D)
Jaisalmer	14659 Delhi-Jaisalmer Exp	11.45pm	11am	252/703 (A)
Jodhpur	12307 Howrah-Jodhpur Exp	12.15am	6am	178/459 (A)
Sawai Madhopur	12466 Intercity Exp	11.05am	1.15pm	65/140/230 (F)
Udaipur	19665 Kurj-Udaipur Exp	10.30pm	6.10am	194/533 (A)

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

you reach your destination. Your driver won't get paid without it.

In other cases you should be prepared to bargain hard. Expect to pay at least ₹50 from the train or bus station to the Old City.

### CYCLE-RICKSHAW

Slightly cheaper than autorickshaws, but not much (about ₹40 from train station to Old City). Always agree on a fare beforehand, but don't forget to tip – it's a tough job in the Rajasthani heat, this one.

### TAXI

There are unmetered taxis available which will require negotiating a fare, or you can try **Mericar** (✉ 4188888; [www.mericar.in](http://www.mericar.in); flagfall incl 2km ₹50, afterwards per km ₹13, 25% night surcharge 10pm–5am). It's a 24-hour service and taxis can also be hired for sightseeing for four-/six-/eight-hour blocks, costing ₹650/1000/1300.

## Around Jaipur

### Amber

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

### Sights

#### Amber Fort

FORT

(Indian/foreigner ₹25/200, guide ₹200, audio guide Hindi/other ₹100/150; ☉ 8am–6pm, last entry 5.30pm) This magnificent fort is made up largely of a royal palace, built from pale yellow and pink sandstone and white marble, and divided into four main sections, each with its own courtyard.

You can trudge up to the fort from the road in about 10 minutes (cold drinks are available at the top). However, riding up on **elephant back** (₹7.30am–noon & 3.30–5.30pm,

₹900 one way per 2 passengers) is very popular. A return jeep to the top and back costs ₹300 for five passengers, including one hour waiting time.

If you walk or ride an elephant you will enter Amber Fort through **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 Suraj Pol. If you arrive by car you will enter through **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** (₹6am–noon & 4–8pm, photography prohibited). Every day from the 16th century until 1980 (when the government banned the practice), a goat was sacrificed here.

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 mosaics and sculptures. 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** (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.

## Jaigarh

**FORT**  
(Indian/foreigner ₹35/85, camera/video ₹50/200, car ₹50, Hindi/English guide ₹100/150; ☎ 9am-5pm) A scrubby green hill – Cheel ka Teela (Mound of Eagles) – rising above Amber, is topped by the imposing fortress of Jaigarh. This massive fort was planned by Jai Singh I, but what you see today dates from the reign of Jai Singh II. Punctuated by whimsically hatted lookout towers, the fort was never captured and is a splendid example of grand 18th-century defences without the palatial frills that are found in many other Rajput forts. It has water reservoirs, residential areas, a puppet theatre and the world's largest wheeled cannon, Jaya Vana.

The fort is a steep uphill walk (about 1km) beyond Amber Fort (up to the left as you face Amber Fort from the main road) and offers great views from the Diwa Burj watchtower.

Admission is free if you have a ticket to Jaipur's City Palace that is less than two days' old.

**Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing** **MUSEUM**  
(Anokhi Haveli, Kheri Gate; child/adult ₹15/30, camera/video ₹50/150; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun, closed 1 May-15 Jul) Just below Amber Fort, in the village of Amber, is this interesting museum that documents the art of hand-block printing and runs hands-on demonstrations. Take the first left into the village and keep walking until you see the blue painted sign telling you to turn right, then keep following that road until it ends at Kheri Gate. The museum is just inside the gate on your right.

## Sleeping & Eating

The decidedly untouristy village of Amber, with its colourful food market and scattering of temples and palace ruins, makes a low-key alternative to hectic Jaipur as a possible place to stay.

Close to Warahi Gate, the oldest surviving gateway in Amber, is **Amber Bhavan** (₹9829066268; r ₹500-700), a simple but friendly guesthouse with spacious rooms and charming owners. From Amber Fort, keep walking downhill along the main road past the village and you'll soon see it on your right. Look out for two signs; one saying 'A Hostel for Students' and another saying 'Grambharati Samiti'.

For something more comfortable, try the gorgeous French-run **Mosaics Guest-house** (₹2530031, 8875430000; [www.mosaicin.com](http://www.mosaicin.com)

## A DAY WITH THE ELEPHANTS

The hugely popular elephant rides up to the entrance at Amber Fort are fine for a quick bit of fun, but if you want to spend some quality time with elephants and their handlers, treat yourself to an afternoon with **Elefantastic** (₹8094253150; [www.elefantastic.in](http://www.elefantastic.in); 90 Chandra Mahal Colony, Delhi Rd, Amber; 'day with the elephants' afternoon package per person ₹5100).

Set up by Rahul, a former elephant rider, this new, well-run company looks after around 24 elephants at their stables, 2km northeast of Amber Fort. Their 'day with the elephants' package gives you the opportunity to meet, feed, ride, wash and even swim with elephants. It's a particularly incredible experience for young children, who can come along for a negligible price if they are accompanied by paying adults.

The standard package is an afternoon thing, and includes a late-afternoon Rajasthani meal at a family home. You can stay the night too, allowing you to join in with the elephants' early-morning routines.

[squesthouse.com](http://squesthouse.com); Siyaram Ki Doongri, Amber; s/d incl breakfast ₹3200/3500;  ), with four lovely rooms and a roof terrace with beautiful fort views. Meals cost a set-price ₹500. It's about 1km past the fort. Keep going along the main road towards Kunda Village, then, just before you reach the Delhi Hwy, turn sharp right towards Narad Ka Bagh, then turn immediately right to Siyaram Ki Doongri.

## Getting There & Away

There are frequent buses to Amber from near the Hawa Mahal in Jaipur (non-AC/AC ₹10/20, 15 minutes). They drop you opposite where you start your climb up to the entrance of Amber Fort. The elephant rides and jeeps start 100m further down the hill from the bus drop-off.

An autorickshaw/taxi will cost at least ₹200/600 for the return trip. RTDC city tours include Amber Fort.

## Sanganer

The large village of Sanganer, on the outskirts of Jaipur, near the airport, has a **ruined palace**, a group of **Jain temples** with

fine carvings (to which entry is restricted) and two ruined **tripolias** (triple gateways). However, the main reason to visit is to see its handmade paper and block-printing shops, workshops and factories (most shops can be found on or just off the main drag, Stadium Rd), where you can see the products being made by hand.

You can also walk down towards the riverbank to see the enormous, brightly coloured fabrics drying in the sun as they hang on huge racks.

For block-printed fabrics and blue pottery there are a number of shops, including **Sakshi** (✉ 2731862, 978344440; hement\_78@yahoo.com; Laxmi Colony; ☎ shop 8.30am-8.30pm, factory 9am-6pm). You can see a small block-printing workshop here, and even try your hand at block printing. It also runs courses in block printing and blue pottery. Nearby **Salim's Paper** (✉ 2730222; www.handmadepaper.com; Gramodyog Rd, Sanganer; ☎ 9am-5pm) is the largest handmade paper factory in India and conducts free factory tours.

## Getting There & Away

Local buses leave from near Ajmeri Gate in Jaipur for Sanganer every few minutes (₹10, one hour). You'll be dropped at a large junction. Turn right here, under the overpass, and keep walking for about 1km. Sanganer Village is just after you cross the river. Sakshi is on the main road on your right. Salim's Paper is 500m down a lane beside Saini Mishthan Bhander sweet shop, which you'll see on your right before you reach Sakshi.

## Bharatpur

✉ 05644 / POP 252,000

Bharatpur is famous for its Unesco-listed Keoladeo Ghana National Park, a wetland and significant bird sanctuary, which can be explored by bicycle. Apart from the sanctuary, Bharatpur has a few historical vestiges, though it would not be worth making the journey for these alone.

The bird sanctuary lies 2km to the south-east of the town centre.

## Sights & Activities

Nonguests can use the small **swimming pool** at Hotel Pratap Palace.

### Lohagarh

FORT

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 the town, surrounded by a moat. There's a north entrance, at **Austdhatu (Eight-Metal Gate)** – apparently the spikes on the gate are made of eight different metals – and a south 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 seemingly forgotten **museum** (Indian/foreigner ₹10/50, camera/video ₹10/20, no photography inside museum; ☎ 9.45am-5.15pm Tue-Sun). Upstairs is a rather ragtag display of royal artefacts, including weaponry. More impressive is the Jain sculpture gallery, which includes some beautiful 7th- to 10th-century pieces (which were temporarily on display outside in the courtyard at the time of research because of renovations). The most spectacular feature of the museum, though, is the palace's original *hamman* (bathhouse), which retains some fine carvings and frescoes.

## Sleeping & Eating

There are tons of sleeping options near the park (suiting all budgets), either on the stretch of the highway beside Birder's Inn or on the dirt track that the Falcon Guest House is on. So don't worry if everything reviewed here is full.

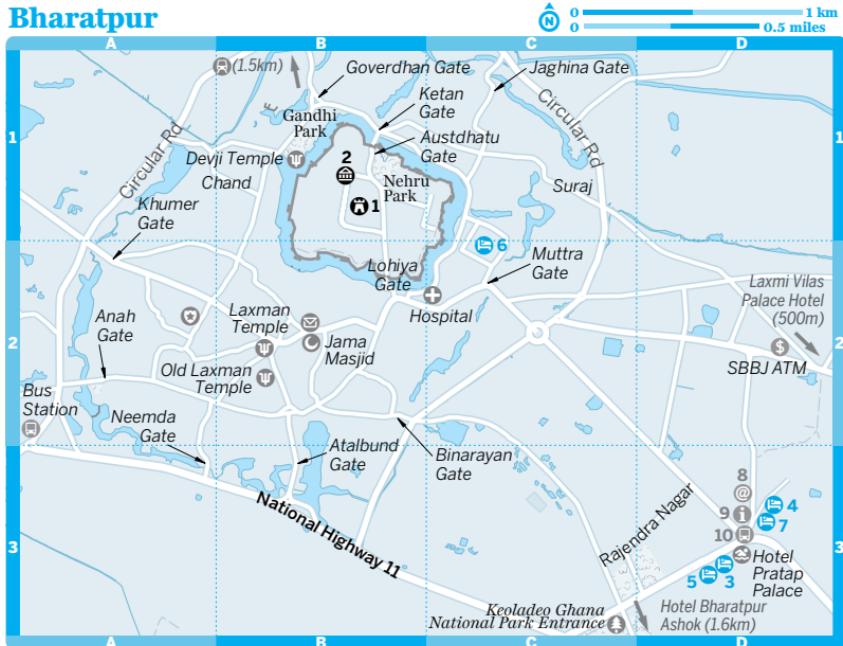
Almost all guesthouses have restaurants, which are open to nonguests too, and even those without a proper bar can sort you out with a cold beer if you ask.

### Shagun Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(✉ 9828687488; rajeevshagun@hotmail.com; d ₹110, s/d without bathroom ₹80/90) Well off the tourist trail, this unusual tree-shaded courtyard guesthouse, hidden away in a quiet corner of the old town, is extremely basic, and has only four rooms, but it comes with bags of character. It's run by the very friendly Rajeev and his young family, who live in an adjacent property. Rajeev speaks excellent English and is a keen environmental campaigner who knows everything about the bird sanctuary and the old fort. If you're entering the old town from the direction of the park, turn right after walking through Muttra Gate then look out for the guest-

## Bharatpur



house name written on a wall in green paint and directing you down an alley to your left.

### Spoonbill

#### Rooms & Restaurant

GUESTHOUSE \$

( 223571; [www.hotelspoonbill.com](http://www.hotelspoonbill.com); Gori Shankur Colony; s ₹200-500, d ₹300-600; ) The original Spoonbill, this place has been catering to budget travellers for more than 20 years. Rooms are simple but neat and tidy, and those on the 2nd floor have plenty of natural light. Some rooms have hot showers. Some don't. The home-cooked food (mains ₹50 to ₹150) is tasty, with curd from the family cow and Rajasthani delicacies, such as *churma* (sugar, cheese and dried fruit fried in butter), the royal dish of Rajasthan. There's sometimes a campfire in winter.

### Falcon Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

( 223815; [falconguesthouse@hotmail.com](mailto:falconguesthouse@hotmail.com); Gori Shankur Colony; s/d from ₹300/600, with AC from ₹1200; @) A lovely, welcoming and homely guesthouse run by the affable Mrs Rajni Singh. Her husband, Tej, is an ornithologist and is happy to answer any bird-related questions. Flavoursome home-cooked food is served in the **garden restaurant** (mains ₹60-150). Rooms, meanwhile, are cozy, clean, well-furnished and come with balconies; some shared, some private. Rates increase

## Bharatpur

### Sights

- 1 Lohagarh ..... B1
- 2 Museum ..... B1

### Sleeping

- 3 Birder's Inn ..... D3
- 4 Falcon Guest House ..... D3
- 5 Hotel Sunbird ..... D3
- 6 Shagun Guest House ..... C2
- 7 Spoonbill Rooms & Restaurant ..... D3

### Information

- 8 Perch Forex & Travels ..... D3
- 9 Tourist Reception Centre ..... D3

### Transport

- 10 Agra-Jaipur Bus Drop-off ..... D3

slightly during colder months because of heating costs.

### Hotel Sunbird

HOTEL \$\$

( 225701; [www.hotelsunbird.com](http://www.hotelsunbird.com); Bird Sanctuary Rd; s/d from ₹800/1100, with AC from ₹1980/2330; ) Another well-run and popular place next door to Birder's Inn. Rooms are clean and comfortable, and there's an appealing **garden bar and restaurant** ( 10am-3pm & 6.30-10.30pm; mains ₹100-200) with a good range of

tasty dishes and cold beer. Packed lunches and guided tours for the park are available. Wi-fi in reception only.

### **★ Birders Inn**

( 227346; [www.birdersinn.com](http://www.birdersinn.com); Bird Sanctuary Rd; s/d incl breakfast from ₹1950/2400;

Rightly the most popular base for exploring the park. The atmospheric garden is a great place for a drink and to compare bird-watching stories. The rooms, which are set around the garden, are airy, spacious and nicely decorated with LCD TVs. There's a small pool, a decent **restaurant** and a **bar** (beer from ₹200). Staff can also arrange pick up from Delhi airport and other taxi services. The free wi-fi does not extend to the rooms.

HOTEL \$\$\$

**Laxmi Vilas Palace Hotel** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$ ( 223523; [www.laxmivilas.com](http://www.laxmivilas.com); Old Agra Rd, Kakaji-ki-Kothi; s/d ₹5500/6500; This exquisite heritage hotel, a short rickshaw ride from both the national park and the town centre, was once owned by the younger son of Maharaja Jaswant Singh. Arched ceilings and heavy old furniture make for atmospheric rooms, set around a courtyard. And the pool is gorgeous. Hotel rates do not include breakfast (₹300), lunch (₹600) or dinner (₹750).

## **i Information**

**Perch Forex & Travels** (New Civil Lines; 7am-10pm) Fast-connection internet cafe (per hour ₹40) that also changes money and offers travel-agency services.

**Tourist Reception Centre** ( 222542; 9am-5pm) Opposite where Agra-to-Jaipur buses drop off passengers; hands out free maps of Bharatpur. Off to one side of the building is a handy **train ticket reservation office** ( 9am-2pm Mon-Sat).

## **i Getting There & Away**

For **car hire** to onward destinations, ask at Birders Inn or at the Tourist Reception Centre.

## **MAJOR TRAINS FROM BHARATPUR**

DESTINATION	TRAIN	DEPARTURE TIME	ARRIVAL TIME	FARE (₹)
Agra Cantonment	19666 Udz-Kurj Exp	9.10am	11am	120/610 (A)
Delhi (Hazrat Nizamuddin)	12059 Kota-Jan Shatabdi	9.25am	12.30pm	82/ 275 (B)
Jaipur	12036 AF-JP Shatabdi	5.05pm	7.50pm	363/ 770 (C)
Sawai Madhopur	12904 Golden Temple Mail	10.30am	1.01pm	140/640 (A)

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

## **BUS**

Buses running between Agra and Jaipur will drop you by the Tourist Reception Centre or outside the park entrance if you ask.

Buses from Bharatpur bus station include:

**Agra** (₹45, 1½ hours, every 30 minutes, day and night)

**Alwar** (₹87, four hours, every hour until 8pm)

**Deeg** (₹29, one hour, every hour until 8pm)

**Delhi** (₹145 to ₹165, five hours, half-hourly from 6am to 7pm, then hourly until 11pm)

**Fatehpur Sikri** (₹25, one hour, every 30 minutes, day and night)

**Jaipur** (₹146, 4½ hours, every 30 minutes, day and night)

## **TRAIN**

There are four daily trains to **Delhi** (6.15am, 8.10am, 9.25am and 3.04pm), plus others which run on selected days. The journey takes around four hours. Second-class seats (or 'general tickets') cost around ₹50; sleeper tickets around ₹120.

Four daily trains also make the two-hour trip to **Agra** (9.10am, 5.32pm, 8.10pm and 8.19pm). Others run on selected days. Second-class seats cost ₹24; sleepers are around ₹120.

Daily trains go to **Jaipur** at 6.10am, 7.16am, 5.05pm, 7pm, 8.48pm and 9.15pm). The journey takes three to four hours. Second-class seats cost around ₹50; sleeper tickets around ₹120.

For **Ranthambore National Park**, six trains run daily to Sawai Madhopur (8.25am, 10.30am, 3.50pm, 5.40pm, 7.42pm, 9.42pm). It takes two to three hours. Second-class seats cost ₹87; sleepers cost ₹140. These trains all continue to **Kota** (four hours) from where you can catch buses to **Bundi**.

## **i Getting Around**

A cycle-rickshaw from the bus station to the park entrance is around ₹20; and shouldn't be much more than ₹30 to any of the hotels. Add an extra ₹10 on top of that for a trip from the train station.

## Keoladeo Ghana National Park

This famous bird sanctuary and **national park** (Indian/foreigner ₹55/400, video ₹400; ☺ 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 over 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.

Keoladeo originated as a royal hunting reserve in the 1850s. It continued to supply the maharajas' tables 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.

Local campaigners have voiced concern in recent years at the increase in forest clearing to make way for small, tourist-related development, such as the carpark to your right as you enter the park. You'll notice that much of the park is no longer tree-shaded. They are also calling for a 2km 'no-construction zone' outside the park boundary. The current limit is 500m.

### Visiting the Park

The best time to visit is from October to February, when you will see many migratory birds.

Admission (₹400; sunrise to sunset) entitles you to one entrance per day. Guides cost ₹100 per hour. 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. You don't pay an admission fee for the drivers, but they charge ₹70 per hour. Some are very knowledgeable. However, these cycle-rickshaws can only travel along the park's larger tracks.

An excellent way to see the park is by hiring a bike/mountain bike (₹25/40 per

six hours) 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 have 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, although the park isn't big so it's difficult to get lost.

## Alwar

₹0144 / POP 315,000

Alwar is perhaps the oldest of the Rajasthani 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 that this partnership was not always amicable.

Alwar is the nearest town to **Sariska Tiger Reserve**, and has a ruined fort and a rambling palace with an above-average museum hidden inside it. The town has relatively few tourists so there's a refreshing lack of hassle here.

### ● Sights

#### Bala Qila

FORT

This imposing fort, with its 5km-long ramparts, stands 300m above the city, its fortifications hugging the steep incline. 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. Now mostly in ruins, the fort houses a radio transmitter station and can only be entered with permission from the superintendent of police. To get this, you need to visit the **Police Control Room** (₹24hr) near the bus station; turn right out of the bus station and it's on your left. It's a 2km uphill slog to the fort (turn right out of the palace), or around 7km by road. Expect to pay at least ₹100 to ₹200 in an autorickshaw.

## SURAJ MAHL'S PALACE, DEEG

Deeg is a small, rarely visited, dusty tumult of a town. At its centre stands an incongruously glorious palace edged by stately formal gardens. **Suraj Mahl's Palace** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Sat-Thu) is one of India's most beautiful and carefully proportioned palace complexes. Pick up a free leaflet with a small map on it at the entrance and note that 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. This *bhavan* was used by the maharajas until the early 1950s, and contains many original furnishings, including faded sofas, huge *punkas* (cloth fans suspended from the ceiling) that are more than 200 years old, chaise longues, a stuffed tiger, elephant-foot stands and fine porcelain from China and France. Upstairs is an unusual marble dining table – a stretched oval-shaped affair raised just 20cm off the floor. Guests would sit around the edge, while food was served from the centre. In the maharaja's bedroom is an enormous bed with silver legs.

The **Keshav Bhavan** (Summer or Monsoon Pavilion) is a single-storey edifice with five arches along each side, which sits beside the complex's other large tank, **Rup Sagar**. Tiny jets once sprayed water from the archways of this *bhavan* and metal balls would 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**, reportedly taken from Delhi and reassembled here, **Kishan Bhavan**, which acted as a conference hall and whose back garden was the elephant stables, and **Nand Bhavan**, which isn't always open.

Food options in town are limited, so bring a picnic and have a peaceful lunch in the palace grounds.

The guy at the palace entrance will let you leave your bags in the ticket office free of charge if you smile sweetly. Don't leave valuables. He can also sell you a brochure (₹20) with a more detailed history and map of the complex than the free leaflet you get.

Deeg is about 36km north of Bharatpur, and is an easy day trip (lucky, because there's nowhere good to stay) from Bharatpur or Alwar by bus. Frequent buses run to and from Alwar (₹64, 2½ hours, until 8pm) and Bharatpur (₹29, one hour, until 9pm). From the bus stand, turn left and follow the road round to the right for about 400m to the palace entrance, known as **Singh Pol**.

### City Palace Complex

HISTORIC BUILDING

Below the fort sprawls the colourful and convoluted City Palace, or Vinay Vilas Mahal, with massive gates and a tank reflecting a symmetrical series of ghats and pavilions. Today, most of the palace is occupied by government offices, overflowing with piles of dusty papers and soiled by pigeon droppings and splats of *paan* (betel-nut chewing tobacco).

Hidden within the City Palace is the excellent **Alwar Museum** (Indian/foreigner ₹25/50, ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). Its eclectic exhibits evoke the extravagance of the maharajas' lifestyle: 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. It's on the top floor.

The palace complex is about 1km from the bus station; turn left out of the station, then right and immediately left at the nearby staggered junction before following the road round to the right and up towards the palace entrance.

### 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.

## Sleeping & Eating

### Hotel Sumangal

HOTEL \$  
( 9413057900; Bus Stand Rd; s/d ₹200/400) One of a handful of very basic cheapies near the bus stand, Sumangal is a little on the grubby side (you'll want to use your own sleeping sheet), and has tap-and-bucket showers only, but it's kept neat and tidy and management is welcoming. Turn right out of the bus stand and it's on your right after 100m.

### Hotel Aravali

HOTEL \$\$  
( 2332883; [www.hotelaravali.co.in](http://www.hotelaravali.co.in); Nehru Rd; s/d from ₹800/1000, with AC from ₹1400/1600; ) Ideal if you arrive by train, Aravali is a long-standing, well-run hotel with large, clean, well-furnished rooms that have bedside reading lamps, cute whitewashed table and chairs, and big bathrooms with hot-water showers. There's a summer-only pool and some garden seating. Has a decent restaurant (mains ₹100 to ₹200) and a bar (beers from ₹75). Free wi-fi, but breakfast is only included with the AC rooms. Turn left out of the train station and it's about 200m down the road on the right.

### Alwar Hotel

GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$  
( 2700012; [www.alwarhotel.com](http://www.alwarhotel.com); 25-26 Manu Rd; s/d incl breakfast ₹1750/2500; ) A 1950s home converted into a lovely little guesthouse, Alwar is a peaceful place to stay with spacious, comfortable, well-renovated rooms, a neatly manicured garden and a good restaurant. The affable owner can be helpful with general information and sightseeing advice, and can help arrange trips to Sariska. Free wi-fi. Turn right out of the bus station then take the first proper turning on your right (about 300m). Alwar is about 400m down this road on your left.

### ★ Prem Pavitra Bhojnalaya

INDIAN \$  
(near Hope Circle; mains ₹40-70; 10.30am-4pm & 6.30pm-10pm) An institution in Alwar, this low-key restaurant has been going since 1957. It is in the heart of the old town and 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 chapatis here are top drawer and the *special*

*kheer* (rice cakes smothered in yoghurt and honey) is worth every one of its 48 rupees. Turn right out of the bus station, take the first left (towards Hope Circle) and it's on your left after 100m.

### Angeethi

MULTICUISINE \$

(Manu Rd, Alwar Hotel; mains ₹75-200; Tue-Sun) Alwar Hotel's restaurant serves decent Indian, Continental and Chinese food; the South Indian selection is particularly good. It's slightly gloomy in the restaurant but you can eat in the pleasant garden.

## Information

There's a handful of ATMs on your right if you turn right out of the bus station, including one at the State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur (SBBJ), which also changes money and travellers' cheques. If you continue past this bank and take the first proper turning on the right, you'll find an internet cafe (per hr ₹20; 10am-9pm) on your right.

**Tourist Reception Centre** ( 2347348; Nehru Rd; 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Near the train station, this helpful office gives out a useful map of the town and can help arrange homestays in Alwar (₹500 to ₹1500). Turn left out of the train station and it's on your right, just before Hotel Aravali.

## Getting There & Around

A cycle-rickshaw between the bus and train stations costs ₹30. Look out for the new shared taxis 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 Hotel Aravali, the Tourist Reception Centre and the train station before continuing on to the bus station and terminating a short walk from Vinay Vilas Mahal (the palace complex). It costs ₹10 per person.

### Bus

Buses to Alwar from Delhi (₹139, four hours) leave regularly from Sarai Kale Khan bus station, which is next to Hazrat Nizamuddin train station.

Services from Alwar bus station include:

**Baratpur** (₹87, four hours, every hour from 5am to 8.30pm)

**Deeg** (₹58, 2½ hours, every hour from 5am to 8.30pm)

**Delhi** (₹134, four hours, every 20 minutes from 5am to 9pm)

**Jaipur** (₹120, four hours, half-hourly from 6am to 10.30pm)

**Sariska** (₹25, one hour, half-hourly from 6am to 10.30pm)

**TRAIN**

There are six daily trains to **Delhi** (6.40am, 7.14am, 11am, 3.40pm, 6.39pm and 7.34pm). It takes three to four hours. Second-class seats cost ₹47; sleepers around ₹140. Most go to (Old) Delhi train station.

It's also three to four hours to **Jaipur** from here. There are seven daily trains (5.05am, 7.13am, 8.40am, 2.15pm, 2.52pm, 6.03pm and 8.52pm). Prices are almost identical to those for Delhi.

**Sariska Tiger Reserve**
 0144

Enclosed within the dramatic, shadowy folds of the Aravallis, **Sariska Tiger Reserve** (Indian/foreigner ₹60/450, vehicle ₹250; ticket sales 7am-3.30pm Oct-Mar, 6.30am-4pm Apr-Sep, park closes at sunset) is a tangle of remnant semideciduous jungle and craggy canyons sheltering streams and greenery. It covers 866 sq km (including a core area of 498 sq km), and is home to peacocks, monkeys, sambar, nilgais, chitals, wild boars, jackals and a handful of tigers.

Although Project Tiger has been in charge of the sanctuary since 1979, there has been a dramatic failure to protect tigers here.

**SARISKA'S TIGER TROUBLES**

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 in suspicious circumstances. Later it was confirmed that it had been poisoned. Authorities pointed the finger at 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 – remains largely unresolved despite official plans to relocate and reimburse villagers. At the time of research, though, 25 of the 28 villages within the park had yet to be relocated.

In early 2012 the first cubs were sighted, and plans to relocate another three tigers from Ranthambhore were at an advanced stage at the time of research. That would bring the total number of tigers in Sariska to 10.

Only time will tell if this reintroduction is successful – another concern is that many of the reintroduced tigers are closely related. As things stand, Sariska remains a sad indictment of tiger conservation in India, from the top government officials down to the underpaid forest guards.

In 2005 it was revealed that there were no longer any tigers left in the park. Since then, some tigers have been relocated from nearby Ranthambhore, and cubs have even been born, although some experts are sceptical as to whether or not the relocation program will work in the long run.

Tigers aside, Sariska is a fascinating sanctuary. Unlike most national parks, it usually opens year-round. The best time to spot wildlife is November to March.

 **Sights**

Besides wildlife, Sariska has some fine sights within the park or around its peripheries that are well worth seeking out. If you take a longer tour, you can ask to visit one or more of these. A couple of them are also accessible by public bus.

**Kankwari Fort**

FORT

Deep inside the sanctuary, this imposing small jungle fort, 22km away from Sariska, offers amazing views over the plains of the park, dotted with red mud-brick villages. A four- to five-hour jeep safari (one to five passengers plus guide) to Kankwari Fort from the Forest Reception Office near the

reserve entrance costs ₹1600, plus guide fee (₹150).

### Bhangarh

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 that runs twice daily through the sanctuary (₹35) to nearby Golaka village. Check what time the bus returns, otherwise you risk getting stranded.

### Tours

Private cars, including taxis, are limited to sealed roads. The best way to visit the park is by 4WD gypsy (open-topped, takes six passengers), which can explore off the main tracks. Gypsy safaris start at the park entrance. Each passenger pays ₹450 for park entrance, then shares the gypsy costs (₹1260 per vehicle) with the other passengers. Guides are also available (₹250 per vehicle).

Bookings can be made at the **Forest Reception Office** (₹2841333; Jaipur Rd), directly opposite the Hotel Sariska Palace, which is where buses will drop you.

### Sleeping & Eating

#### Alwar Bagh

HOTEL \$\$\$

(₹2945151412; [www.alwarbagh.com](http://www.alwarbagh.com); r from ₹3999;   

#### Sariska Tiger Heaven

HOTEL \$\$\$

(₹224815; [www.sariskatigerheaven.com](http://www.sariskatigerheaven.com); s/d with full board ₹5500/6500;   

and guides to the park and pick-up from Jaipur (₹1200).

### RTDC Hotel Tiger Den

HOTEL \$\$\$

(₹2841342; s/d incl breakfast & lunch or dinner ₹1600/2250, with AC ₹2100/2900;  ) Hotel Tiger Den is a quasi-Soviet block, backed by a rambling garden. Accommodation and meals are drab, but the rooms have balconies and occupy a pleasant setting close to the reserve entrance. Bring a mosquito net or repellent.

### Getting There & Away

Sariska is 35km from Alwar, a convenient town from which to approach the reserve. There are frequent buses from Alwar (₹25, one hour) and on to Jaipur (₹100). Buses stop in front of the Forest Reception Office. The park entrance and Hotel Tiger Den are both a short walk beyond here (in the direction of Jaipur), on your left.

### Shekhawati

Far less visited than other parts of Rajasthan, the Shekhawati region is most famous for its extraordinary painted *havelis* (traditional, ornately decorated residences which enclose one or more courtyards), highlighted with dazzling, often whimsical, murals. Part of the region's appeal and mystique is due to these works of art being found in tiny towns, connected to each other by single-track roads that run through lonely, arid countryside. Today it seems curious that such care, attention and money was lavished on these out-of-the-way houses, but from the 14th century onwards Shekhawati's towns were important trading posts on the caravan routes from Gujarati ports.

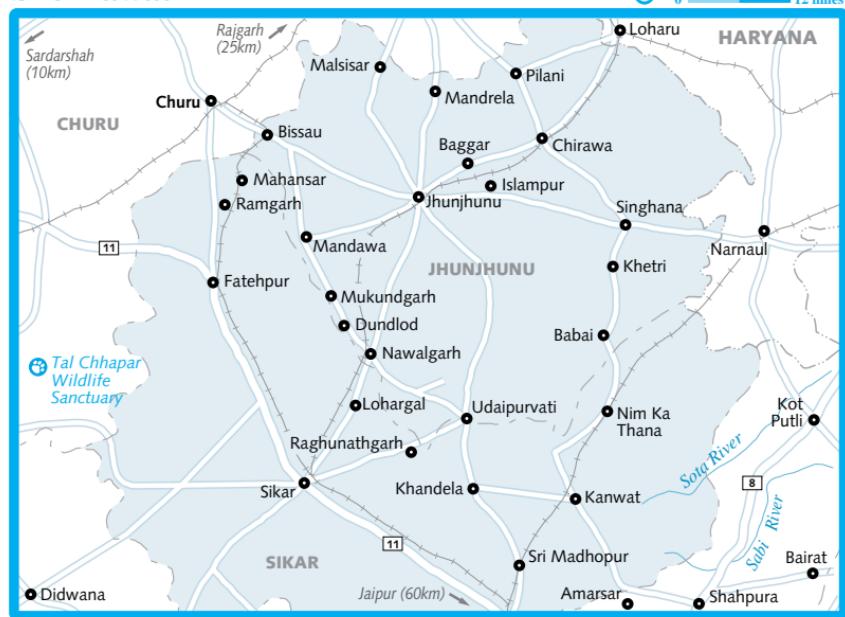
What makes the artwork on Shekhawati's *havelis* so fascinating is the manner in which their artists combined traditional subjects, such as mythology, religious scenes and images of the family, with contemporary concerns, including brand-new inventions and accounts of current events, many of which these isolated painters rendered straight from their imagination.

### Nawalgarh

₹01594 / POP 60,000

Nawalgarh is a small nontouristy town almost at the very centre of the region, and makes a great base for exploring. It boasts several fine *havelis*, a colourful, mostly

# Shekhawati



pedestrianised bazaar and some excellent accommodation options.

## Sights

### Dr Ramnath A Podar Haveli Museum

([www.podarhavelimuseum.org](http://www.podarhavelimuseum.org); admission ₹100, camera ₹30; 8.30am-6.30pm) Built in 1902 on the eastern side of town, and known locally simply 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 repainted rather than cleaned and restored. On the ground floor are several galleries on Rajasthani culture, including examples of different schools of Rajasthani painting, turbans, tabla and polystyrene forts.

### Morarka Haveli Museum

(admission ₹50; 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. Turn left out

### MUSEUM

of Podar Haveli, then first right and it's on your right.

### Bhagton ki Choti Haveli

### HISTORIC BUILDING

(admission ₹50) On the external west wall here is a locomotive and a steamship. Above them, elephant-bodied *gopis* (milk maids) dance. Adjacent to this, women dance during Holi festival. Inside you'll find a host of other murals, including one strange picture (in a room on the west side) of a European-looking man with a cane and pipe, and a small dog on his shoulder. To get here, turn left out of Moraka Haveli, take the first right, then left, then first right again and it's on your left.

## Activities & Tours

Ramesh Jangid at Apani Dhani and his son Rajesh at Ramesh Jangid's Tourist Pension are keen to promote sustainable rural tourism. They organise guided **hiking trips** (two to three days from ₹1750 per person), guided **camel-cart rides** (half-day ₹1400) to outlying villages and guided **tours by car** (full-day from ₹800 per person) to other towns in the region. They also arrange workshops with local craftspeople for **tie-dying** and **bangle-making** (per person ₹300) as well as **cookery classes**.

## Sleeping & Eating

### DS Bungalow

**GUESTHOUSE \$**  
( 9983168916; s ₹350-450, d ₹400-500) Next door to Shekhawati Guesthouse, this simple place is run by a friendly, down-to-earth couple and has small air-cooled rooms and tasty home cooking.

### ★ Apani Dhani

**GUESTHOUSE \$\$**  
( 222239; www.apanidhani.com; s/d from ₹750/1450) This award-winning ecotourism venture is a delightful and relaxing place. Rooms are in traditional, cosy mud-hut bungalows, enhanced by thatched roofs and comfortable beds, around a bougainvillea-shaded courtyard. It's on the west side of the Jaipur road. Multilingual Ramesh Jangid runs the show and 5% of the room tariff goes to community projects. Turn right out of the main bus stand, take the first left and it's on your left after about 500m.

### ★ Ramesh Jangid's

#### Tourist Pension

**GUESTHOUSE \$\$**  
( 224060; www.touristpension.com; s/d/tr from ₹800/1050/1350; This lovely courtyard guesthouse, run by Ramesh's son Rajesh and his family, offers clean accommodation in spacious, well-decorated rooms with big beds. Delicious vegetarian meals (lunch/dinner ₹250/350), made with organic ingredients, are available (breakfast is free), as are safe-to-drink water refills. There's solar heating, recycling bins, an internet terminal, and wi-fi stretches into the rooms. Turn right out of the main bus stand, take

the second left (by the water tower) then the second left again (after about 1km). Then take the first right (signposted), then the first left and it's on your left.

### Shekhawati Guesthouse

**GUESTHOUSE \$\$**  
( 224658; www.shekhawatiguuesthouse.com; s/d /tr ₹500/600/800, cottages s/d/tr ₹ 800/1000/1400; This friendly guesthouse is more like a homestay run by a very friendly couple. There are six rooms in the main building plus five atmospheric, thatch-roofed, mud-walled cottages in the garden. The restaurant has received awards for its delicious organic food and we heartily recommend the *kheer* (rice pudding). It's 4km east of the bus stand (₹60 by taxi). Pick-up from the bus or train station can be arranged, as can cooking lessons. It's about 600m walk from the Morarka and Podar Havelis (turn right out of Morarka Haveli and keep going).

## 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. Frequent services run to **Jaipur** (₹107, 3½ hours, every 15 minutes), **Jhunjhunu** (₹31, 1 hour) and **Mandawa** (₹25, 45 minutes).

## Jhunjhunu

01592 / POP 131,000

Shekhawati's most important commercial centre has a different atmosphere from the smaller towns, with lots of traffic,

## 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 to decorate 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.

*Haveli* walls were frequently painted by the *chajeras* from the ground to the eaves. Often the paintings mix depictions of the gods and their lives with everyday scenes featuring modern inventions, such as trains and aeroplanes, even though these artists themselves had never seen them. Hence, Krishna and Radha are seen in flying motor-cars and Europeans can be observed inflating hot-air balloons by blowing into them.

concrete and the hustle and bustle that befits the district's headquarters. It does, though, have some appealing *havelis* and a colourful bazaar.

## ⦿ Sights

### Rani Sati Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

(admission free; ☎ 4am-10pm) The enormous, multistorey Rani Sati Temple is notorious for commemorating an act of *sati* (self-immolation) by a merchant's wife (after whom the temple is named) in 1595. It's fronted by two courtyards, around which 300 rooms offer shelter to pilgrims. The main hall, in the far courtyard, is made of marble with elaborate silver repoussé work before the inner sanctum. There's a tile-and-mirror mosaic on the ceiling and a relief frieze on one wall depicts the story of Rani Sati. It's a pleasant 10-minute walk north of the private bus stand. Turn left out of the bus stand, take the first left then keep asking for *Rani Sati Mandir*.

### Modi Haveli

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Nehru Bazaar) On the north side of Nehru Bazaar is Mohanlal Ishwardas Modi Haveli, known simply as Modi Haveli, which dates from 1896 and which contains some delightful frescoes. A train runs merrily across the front façade. 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. The Modi family, which own a number of *haveli* in Junjhunu, now lives in Mumbai (Bombay) and Kolkata (Calcutta), so the building is looked after by caretakers, who will expect a small tip for showing you round. To get here, turn right out of the private bus stand and keep walking until you reach a small floodlit roundabout (this is Gandhi Chowk). Continue straight into bustling Nehru Bazaar, then take the first right.

## 🛏 Sleeping & Eating

If you get stuck, there's a bunch of cheap hotels near the main bus stand.

### Hotel Jamuna Resort

HOTEL \$S

(☎ 512696; [www.hoteljamunaresort.com](http://www.hoteljamunaresort.com); r from ₹1200; ✤@₹₹) A popular place for those

on guided tours of the region (there's plenty of parking here), Hotel Jamuna Resort has all that you need. Rooms in the older wing are either vibrantly painted with murals or decorated with traditional mirrorwork, while the rooms in the new wing are modern and airy. Some rooms face onto a small garden, which has restaurant seating and is a pleasant spot for a beer (there's a separate bar too). There's also an inviting pool (non-guests ₹50) and the food from the **restaurant** (mains ₹95-150; ☎ 7am-10pm) is excellent, although the set breakfasts are stingy. Note, the free wi-fi doesn't always work. It's a 20-minute walk from the private bus stand. Turn left out of the bus stand, left at the end of the road and it's on your right.

### Hotel Shiv Shekhawati

HOTEL \$\$

(☎ 232651; [www.shivshekhawati.com](http://www.shivshekhawati.com); Khemi Shakti Rd; s/d from ₹800/1000; ✤@) With the same owners as Jamuna Resort, this is a more basic option (although not much cheaper). Rooms are large and spartan, and there's a boarding-school feel to the empty corridors, but the manager is friendly and gives out free maps of the town to guests. No internet or food, but you're not far from the restaurant or bar at Jamuna Resort or the sweet and snack stalls in Nehru Bazaar. To get here, turn left out of the private bus stand and it's on your left after 400m.

## ➊ Getting There & Away

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. A shared autorickshaw between the two bus stands costs ₹7 per person. A private autorickshaw is ₹50.

Services from the main bus stand:

**Bikaner** (₹164, five to six hours, hourly)

**Delhi** (₹140, five to six hours, hourly)

**Fatehpur** (₹34, one hour, half-hourly)

**Jaipur** (₹130, four hours, half-hourly)

**Mandawa** (₹17, one hour, half-hourly)

**Nawalgarh** (₹31, one hour, half-hourly)

## Mandawa

(☎ 01592 / POP 20,700)

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 too touristy for some (the attention you get from young would-be guides can become

tiresome), 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 and makes a handy point of reference. Most buses drop passengers off on the main drag as well as by the bus stand.

**Binsidhar Newatia Haveli** (now the State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur) has curious paintings on its outer eastern wall – a boy using a phone, a European woman in a chauffeur-driven car, and the Wright brothers in flight. From Hotel Mandawa Haveli, turn left and walk under Sonathia Gate to reach the *haveli* on your right. Other *havelis* worth seeking out include **Murmia Haveli** and the nearby **Goenka havelis** (the wealthy Goenka family own a number of homes here). To reach these, continue past Binsidhar Newatia Haveli, bear right then left and you'll see them on your left and right.

## Sleeping & Eating

There are at least half a dozen *haveli* hotels here, either on or near the main drag. Rooms in them range from ₹1200 to ₹4000. Mandawa is small so wandering around town to find a room is relatively easy.

### Hotel Shekhawati

HOTEL \$

( 9314698079; [www.hotelshewkhati.com](http://www.hotelshewkhati.com); r ₹400-1800; ) The best 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. OK meals (and bottles of beer) are served on the peaceful rooftop, and competitively priced camel, horse and jeep tours can also be arranged. Internet is ₹50 per hour; wi-fi ₹40. From Hotel Mandawa Haveli, walk away from Sonathia Gate, over the mini roundabout, then take the second narrow lane on your right. Hotel Shekhawati is on your left after 200m.

### Hotel Mandawa Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

( 223088; [www.hotelmandawa.com](http://www.hotelmandawa.com); s/d from ₹1750/2200; ) Set in a glorious, restored 19th-century *haveli* with rooms surrounding a painted courtyard, this is one of the nicest places to stay. The cheapest rooms are small, but still lovingly decorated. There's a good rooftop restaurant (set meals ₹325 to ₹400; beer available), shaded garden seating, wi-fi throughout, massage treatments

(from ₹800) and camel-cart tours of the surrounding countryside (₹450).

### Monica Rooftop Restaurant

INDIAN \$\$

(mains ₹100-300; 8am-9pm) This delightful rooftop restaurant sits on top of a small but charming courtyard residence, which you have to walk through as you climb the stairs. It's signposted down an alleyway beside the half-abandoned Mandawa Fort, which in turn is signposted from the main drag, on the other side of Sonathia Gate from Hotel Mandawa Haveli.

### Bungli Restaurant

INDIAN \$\$

(Goenka Chowk; mains ₹130-300; 5am-10pm) A popular open-air travellers' eatery near the bus stand, Bungli serves piping-hot tandoori and cold beer (from ₹160). Early risers can have an Indian breakfast and a yoga class for a total of ₹450. Turn left out of Hotel Mandawa Haveli, bear right at the end of the road and Bungli is in front of you on the left.

## i 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 drag, on your left as the road bears right. It's a few hundred metres walk from Hotel Mandawa Haveli (turn left out of the hotel).

**Bikaner** (₹100, four hours)

**Fatehpur** (₹20, 30 minutes)

**Junjhunu** (₹17, 1 hour)

**Nawalgarh** (₹25, 45 minutes)

## Fatehpur

( 01571 / POP 89,000

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.

Apart from the magnificent Haveli Nadine Le Prince, other sights include the nearby **Jagannath Singhania Haveli**; the **Mahavir Prasad Goenka Haveli** (often locked, but with superb paintings); **Geor Shankar Haveli**, with mirrored mosaics on

the antechamber ceiling; and **Harikrishnan Das Sarogi Haveli**, with a colourful facade and iron lacework.

## ⦿ Sights

**Haveli Nadine Le Prince** HISTORIC BUILDING (233024; [www.cultural-centre.com](http://www.cultural-centre.com); admission incl guided tour ₹200; ☺ 9am-6pm) This 1802 *haveli* has been restored to its former glory by French artist Nadine Le Prince and is now one of the most exquisite *havelis* you can visit in the Shekhawati region. Nadine is only here for part of the year, but often enlists foreign volunteers to help manage the building and conduct the detailed guided tours. There's a **cafe** of sorts (drinks and snacks ₹30 to ₹70) secreted away in a dusty side courtyard, and some of the rooms have been converted into small, but beautifully decorated **guest rooms** (s/d ₹1400/2500). The office isn't always staffed so it's sometimes best to reserve a room through the website rather than trying to phone. Usually, though, you can just turn up and bag a vacant room. 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 turning will eventually be on your right, or hop into a shared autorickshaw (₹5 to ₹10).

## ➊ Getting There & Around

Confusingly, there are three bus stands. The main bus stand is known as Chatriya bus stand and is on Fatehpur's main road. Baori Gate bus stand is 300m north of here, on the same main road. If you turn down the side road beside Baori Gate bus stand, walk 200m then bear left, you'll reach the small Jhunjhunu bus stand.

Services from Chatriya bus stand include: **Bikaner** (₹131, 3½ hours, hourly), **Jaipur** (₹117, 3½ hours, half-hourly) and **Delhi** (₹250, seven hours, 8am, 11am then half-hourly 5pm to 10pm).

Services from Baori Gate bus stand include **Nawalgarh** (₹30, one hour, hourly), while services from the Jhunjhunu bus stand include **Jhunjhunu** (₹34, one hour, frequent) and **Man-dawa** (₹20, 30 minutes, frequent).

## Ajmer

⌚ 0145 / POP 542,000

Ajmer is a bustling chaotic city, 13km from the traveller haven of Pushkar. It skirts the tranquil lake of Ana Sagar, and is itself ringed by the rugged Aravalli Hills. Ajmer is Rajasthan's most important site in terms of

Islamic history and heritage. It contains one of India's prime Muslim pilgrimage sites – the shrine of Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti – and contains some fine examples of early Islamic architecture. It's also a significant centre for the Jain religion. Most travellers, however, use the city as a stepping stone to Pushkar, a supremely sacred town to Hindus, and a former hippy hang-out. Ajmer is an easy half-day trip from Pushkar.

## ⦿ Sights

### Dargah of Khwaja

#### Muin-ud-din Chishti

ISLAMIC SHRINE

([www.dargahajmer.com](http://www.dargahajmer.com); ☺ 5am-9pm winter, 4am-9pm summer) This is the tomb of a 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. 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 Nakarkhana because it has two large *nakkharas* (drums) fixed above it.

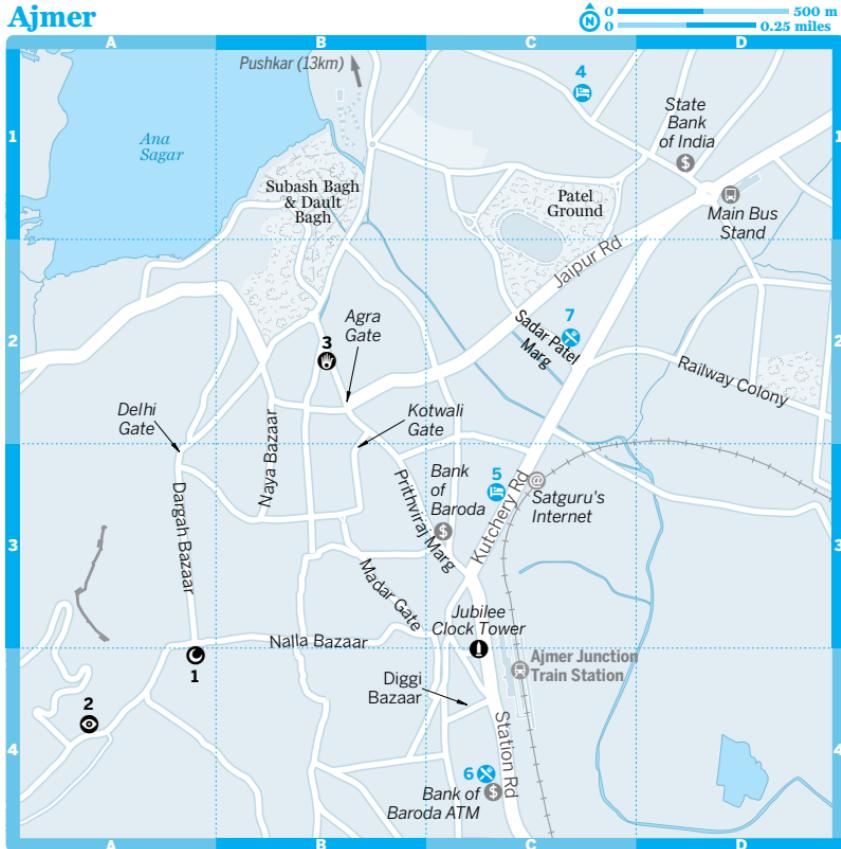
A third gate, **Buland Darwaza** (16th century) leads into the dargah courtyard. Flanking the entrance of the courtyard are the *degs* (large iron cauldrons), one donated by Akbar in 1567, the other by Jehangir in 1631, for offerings for the poor.

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 lunar calendar, Jyaistha.

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

## Ajmer



trance. Shoes should be placed in racks just inside the entrance.

### Dhai-din-ka-Jhonpra

**HISTORIC SITE**  
Beyond the dargah, on the town outskirts, are the ruins of the Dhai-din-ka-Jhonpra (Two-and-a-Half-Day Building) mosque. According to legend, construction in 1153 took 2½ days. Others say it was named after a festival lasting 2½ days. It was 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.

It's a beautiful piece of architecture, with soaring domes, pillars and a lovely arched screen, largely built from pieces of Jain and Hindu temples.

### Nasiyan (Red) Temple

**JAIN TEMPLE**  
(Prithviraj Marg; admission ₹10; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm)  
This impressive temple was built in 1865. It's

## Ajmer

### ➲ Sights

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

### ➲ Sleeping

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

### ➲ Eating

- 6 Honeydew ..... C4
- 7 Mango Masala ..... C2

also known as the Golden Temple, due to its double-storey temple hall being filled with a huge golden diorama depicting the Jain concept of the ancient world.

## Sleeping

### Haveli Heritage Inn

**HOTEL \$\$**  
 (2621607; [www.haveliheritageinn.com](http://www.haveliheritageinn.com); Kutchery Rd; r from ₹875; Set in a 140-year-old *haveli*, this welcoming city-centre oasis has high-ceilinged rooms that are spacious, simply decorated, air-cooled and set well back from the busy road. There's a pleasant courtyard and the hotel is infused with a family atmosphere, complete with home-cooked meals.

### Badnor House

**GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$**  
 (2627579; [www.badnorhouse.com](http://www.badnorhouse.com); d incl breakfast ₹2800; This guesthouse provides an excellent opportunity to stay with locals. Your charming hosts live in a colonial-style bungalow, while the guest rooms are at one end of the garden and are large, well furnished and spotlessly clean. You can get online using a mobile modem the hosts can lend you.

## Eating

### Mango Masala

INDIAN \$

(01452422100; Sadar Patel Marg; mains ₹80-190; 9am-11pm) Easily the best place to eat in Ajmer, and better than most restaurants in Pushkar, this laidback three-in-one affair houses a family-friendly vegetarian restaurant, a curry house serving tandoori sizzlers and a coffee stall which brews fresh coffee (₹25 to ₹69) as well as selling cakes and cookies. There's also a proper pizza oven in the backyard, serving decent pizza which you can eat in either of the restaurants. The vegetarian restaurant (on your right as you walk in) is the pick of the two and does some excellent-value mini meals – the *malai kofta* and butter naan combo is about as close to lunchtime perfection as you can get.

### Honeydew

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(2622498; Station Rd; mains ₹120-300; 9am-11pm) This offers a great selection of veg and nonveg Indian, Chinese and Continental food in a pleasant, clean, but overly dim atmosphere. It has long been one of Ajmer's

## TRANSPORT FROM AJMER

### Government-run Buses from the Main Bus Stand

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY	TIMES
Bikaner	198	8	half-hourly	4am-9.45pm
Bundi	137	5	every 15 minutes	6.30am-9pm
Chittorgarh	147	5	half-hourly	6am-8pm
Delhi	375	9	hourly	6am-11pm
Jaipur	110	2½	every 10 minutes	day & night
Jodhpur	151	6	half-hourly	6am-8pm
Pushkar	10-12	½	every 10 minutes	5am-9pm
Udaipur	210	8	hourly	5.30am-midnight

### Major Trains from Ajmer Junction

DESTINATION	TRAIN	DEPARTURE TIME	ARRIVAL TIME	FARE (₹)
Agra (Agra Fort)	12988 Ajmer-SDA Exp	12.50pm	7.25pm	196/ 511 (A)
Delhi (New Delhi)	12016 Ajmer Shatabdi	3.45pm	10.40pm	669/ 1420 (B)
Delhi (New Delhi)	12957 Swarna J Raj Exp	12.55am	7.30am	684/ 980/ 1670 (C)
Jaipur	12991 Udaipur-Jaipur Exp	11.30am	1.35pm	50/ 230/ 325 (D)
Jodhpur	54802 Ajmer-Jodhpur Fast Passenger	2.30pm	7.40pm	88/ 362 (E)
Udaipur	09721 Jaipur-Udaipur SF SPL	8.55am	1.45pm	81/ 349 (F)

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

best, and is the restaurant of choice for Mayo College students' midterm treat. The ice cream, milkshakes and floats will keep you cool.

## Information

**The Tourist Reception Centre** (⌚ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri), at the train station, has free maps of Ajmer and Pushkar.

**Bank of Baroda** (Prithviraj Marg) Changes travellers cheques and does credit-card advances.

**Bank of Baroda ATM** (Station Rd) By the entrance to Honeydew restaurant.

**Satguru's Internet** (60-61 Kutchery Rd; per hr ₹20; ⌚ 9am-10pm) Opposite Haveli Heritage Inn.

**State Bank of India** Near the bus stand. Changes travellers cheques and foreign currency and has an ATM.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

The table shows a sample of government-run buses leaving from the main bus stand in Ajmer. In addition to these, there are less-frequent 'deluxe' coach services running to major destinations such as Delhi and Jaipur. There is a 24hr cloakroom at the bus stand (per bag per day ₹10).

### TRAIN

Seven trains run daily to **Delhi** (6.10am, 11.05am, 2.15pm, 3.45pm, 8.50pm, 10.45pm and 12.55am) and take around eight hours. Second-class seats cost around ₹108; sleepers ₹196.

The above Delhi trains all stop at **Jaipur** too. In addition, there are a further six daily trains to Jaipur (6.55am, 11.30am, 12.50pm, 3pm, 4.35pm and 7.15pm). The journey takes less than three hours. An unreserved 'general ticket' (2nd-class seat) costs ₹40 to ₹50; sleepers ₹120; AC chairs ₹230.

There are four daily trains for the five-hour journey to **Udaipur** (8.55am, 4.10pm, 12.50am and 2.10am).

Only one direct train goes to **Jodhpur** (2.30pm, 5 hours), while two go to **Agra Fort** (12.50pm and 3pm, 6½ hours, sleeper ₹196).

The quickest of two or three daily trains to **Mumbai** leaves Ajmer at 4.40pm and takes around 16 hours. Sleepers cost around ₹350.

There are three reasonably timed daily trains to **Chittorgarh** (1.25pm, 4.10pm and 8.40pm). They take three to four hours. Second-class seats cost around ₹60; sleepers ₹120.

For **Mount Abu**, three reasonably-timed trains run daily to Abu Road (6.50am, 11.25am and 4.40pm) and take five to six hours. Sleepers cost ₹155.

## Pushkar

⌚ 0145 POP 15,000

Pushkar has a magnetism all of its own, and is 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 *pujas* (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 but separated from it by Nag Pahar, the Snake Mountain.

## Sights

### Temples

HINDU TEMPLE

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

#### ► Brahma Temple

(⌚ 5.30am-1.30pm & 3pm-9pm) Most famous 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 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.

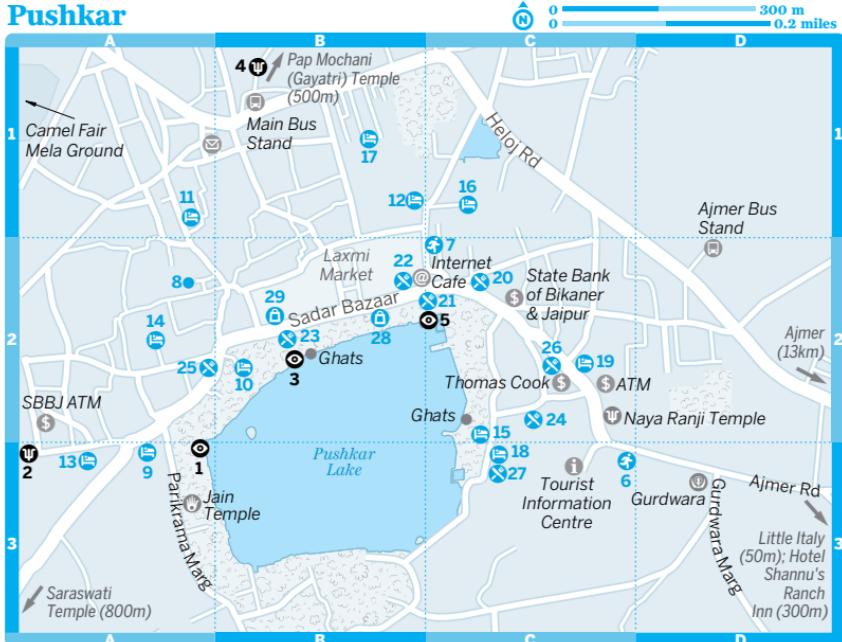
#### ► Saraswati Temple

The one-hour trek up to the hilltop Saraswati Temple overlooking the lake offers fantastic views at any time of day, but this is a particularly good spot for sunset.

#### ► Pap Mochani (Gayatri) Temple

The sunrise views over town from the closer Pap Mochani (Gayatri) Temple are also well worth the 30-minute climb. Walk up through the small **Kali Temple** from the back of the main bus stand.

# Pushkar



## Pushkar

### Sights

- 1 Brahma Ghat .....
- 2 Brahma Temple .....
- 3 Gandhi (Gau) Ghat .....
- 4 Kali Temple.....
- 5 Varah Ghat .....

### Activities, Courses & Tours

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

### Sleeping

- 9 Alka Guest House .....
- 10 Bharatpur Palace .....
- 11 Hotel Everest .....
- 12 Hotel Kanhaia Haveli .....
- 13 Hotel Navaratna Palace .....
- 14 Hotel Paramount Palace .....

### Ghats

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

### GHAT

- 15 Hotel Pushkar Palace .....
- 16 Inn Seventh Heaven.....
- 17 Milkman Guesthouse.....
- 18 Pushkar Inn's Hotel.....
- 19 Shri Shyam Krishna Guesthouse .....

### Eating

- 20 Baba Rooftop Restaurant .....
- 21 Falafel wrap stalls .....
- 22 Honey & Spice .....
- 23 LMB Hotel & GR Restaurant .....
- 24 Om Shiva Garden Restaurant .....
- 25 Out of the Blue .....
- 26 Shri Vankatesh .....
- Sixth Sense .....
- 27 Sunset Café .....

### Shopping

- 28 Khadi Gramodhyog.....
- 29 Lala International .....

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).

## Activities

Nonguests can use the pool at Hotel Navartan Palace (₹100), although, bizarrely, swim times are segregated. Foreigners can swim from noon to 5pm. Indians are allowed to swim only in the morning, and then again after 5pm.

### **Shannu's Riding School**

HORSE RIDING

( 2772043; [www.shannus.weebly.com](http://www.shannus.weebly.com); Panch Kund Marg; ride/lessons per hr ₹400) French-Canadian and long-time Pushkar resident Marc Dansereau can organise riding lessons and horse safaris on his graceful Marwari steeds. You can stay here too.

### **Government**

#### **Homeopathic Hospital**

AYURVEDIC

( 9413094664; Ajmer Rd;  9am-1pm) For a totally noncommercial massage-treatment experience, try the ayurvedic department at the small and basic Government Homeopathic Hospital. A one-hour full-body massage costs ₹450. For an extra ₹50 you get a steam bath afterwards. A half-hour *sirodhara* treatment (where medicated oil is poured continuously onto your forehead) costs ₹400.

### **Roshi Hiralal Verma**

REIKI, YOGA

( 9829895906) For reiki, yoga and shiatsu, Mr Hiralal Verma is based at the Ambika Guesthouse. Costs depend on the duration and type of session.

## Courses

### **Saraswati Music School**

MUSIC

( 2773124, Birju 9828297784; Mainon Ka Chowk) Teaches classical tabla (drums), sitar, flute, singing and *kathak* (classical dance). Contact Birju, who's been playing for around 20 years, and charges from ₹250 per hour, plus ₹700/1000 for the teaching book/CD you need to buy in order to participate. He also sells instruments (sitar/tabla from ₹8000/5000). Dance classes start from ₹300 per hour.

### **Cooking Bahar**

COOKING

( 2773124; [www.cookingbahar.com](http://www.cookingbahar.com); Mainon Ka Chowk) Part of the Saraswati Music School family, Deepa conducts three-hour cooking classes that cover three vegetarian courses.

## Tours

### **Camel Safaris**

Plenty of people in Pushkar offer short **camel rides** (around ₹200 per hour), which

are a good way to explore the starkly beautiful landscape – a mixture of desert and the rocky hills – around town. Sunset rides are most popular. It's best to ask at your hotel. Inn Seventh Heaven is reliable.

For longer camel treks, prices start at around ₹500 per person per day for a group of four. You can head out to Jodhpur (five to six days) or even Jaisalmer (10 to 12 days). Numerous operators line Ajmer Rd, but note, these places are less professional than the operators we recommend in Jaisalmer and Bikaner.

## Sleeping

At the time of the camel fair prices multiply enormously and it's essential to book several weeks ahead. Temporary luxury tented accommodation, which can be booked online, springs up at this time. Check out [www.jodhanaheritage.com](http://www.jodhanaheritage.com) or [www.hotelpushkarpalace.com](http://www.hotelpushkarpalace.com).

### **Shri Shyam**

#### **Krishna Guesthouse**

GUESTHOUSE \$

( 2772461; [skguesthouse@yahoo.com](mailto:skguesthouse@yahoo.com); Sadar Bazaar; s/d ₹300/500, without bathroom ₹150/350;  Housed in a lovely old blue-washed building, and sharing lawns and gardens with a still-active Krishna temple, this sprawling guesthouse has ashram austerity and genuinely friendly management, and makes a great budget choice for families. Some of the cheaper rooms are cell-like, and there's only hot water in the private bathrooms, but all rooms share the simple, authentic ambience.

### **Pushkar Inn's Hotel**

HOTEL \$

( 2772010; [hotelpushkarinns@yahoo.com](mailto:hotelpushkarinns@yahoo.com); Pushkar Lake; r ₹800, without bathroom ₹200, with AC ₹1500;  A charming little hotel set around a series of lush gardens with well-tended lawns, papaya trees and plenty of peace and tranquillity. Rooms themselves are fairly basic but clean, and some open out onto a front lawn with lake views. The air-conditioned rooms have a TV. The bathroomless cheapies fill up quickly. The family who owns this place also runs the excellent Sunset Café next door, while the garden restaurant Alpine Pizzeria is within the hotel grounds.

### **Hotel Everest**

HOTEL \$

( 2773417; [www.pushkarhoteleverest.com](http://www.pushkarhoteleverest.com); r ₹200-600, with AC ₹850;  This welcoming budget hotel is secreted in the quiet

## 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 here, bringing with them some 50,000 camels, horses and cattle. The place becomes an extraordinary swirl of colour, sound and movement, thronging 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 is bizarre: moustache contests, turban-tying contests or seeing how many people can balance on a camel.

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 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.

It usually takes place in October or November and because dates can change the following are indicative only:

- 2013: 9 to 17 November
- 2014: 30 Oct to 6 November
- 2015: 18 to 25 November

laneways north of Sadar Bazaar. Rooms vary in size, but are colourful and spotless, and the beds are comfortable. The roof is a pleasant retreat for meals or relaxation.

### Bharatpur Palace

HOTEL \$  
(2772320; [bharatpurpalace\\_pushkar@yahoo.co.in](mailto:bharatpurpalace_pushkar@yahoo.co.in); r ₹300-600; \*) Lovely location overlooking the lake, and although very few of the rooms have a lake view there are plenty of common seating areas that do. Basic, but friendly.

### Hotel Paramount Palace

HOTEL \$  
(2772428; [www.pushkar-paramount.com](http://www.pushkar-paramount.com); r ₹200-1000; \*) Perched on one of the highest points in town, and overlooking an old temple, this welcoming hotel has excellent views over the town and lake (and lots of stairs). The rooms vary widely. The best ones (106, 108, 109) have lovely balconies, stained glass and are good value; smaller rooms can be dingy. Staff are laidback, there's wi-fi throughout and a dizzyingly magical rooftop restaurant.

### Milkman Guesthouse

GUESTHOUSE \$  
(2773452; [vinodmilkman@hotmail.com](mailto:vinodmilkman@hotmail.com); dm/r without bathroom ₹100/250, r ₹300-700; \*@@\*) A cosy guesthouse in a backstreet location, the friendly Milkman has brightly painted rooms with plenty of character, as well as a 2nd-floor cafe and a 3rd-floor garden lawn.

### Alka Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$  
(2773082, 9782642546; Brahm Chowk, Badi Basti; s/d ₹300/400) Run by a welcoming but quiet family, Alka has rooms overlooking a large, tree-shaded courtyard. Each is small and basic but neat and tidy, and they come with unusual dressing areas that lend more space. Common bathrooms only, but showers are always hot.

### ★ Inn Seventh Heaven

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$  
(5105455; [www.inn-seventh-heaven.com](http://www.inn-seventh-heaven.com); Chotti Basti; r ₹950-2800; \*@@\*) You enter this lovingly converted *haveli* through heavy wooden doors into an incense-perfumed courtyard, centred with a marble fountain. There are 12 individually decorated rooms

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

#### **Hotel Shannu's Ranch Inn GUESTHOUSE \$\$**

( 2772043; [www.shannus.weebly.com](http://www.shannus.weebly.com); Panch Kund Marg; s/d ₹500/600) Especially for horse lovers but not exclusively so, this relaxed, family-run hotel is a 10-minute walk from the lake. Rustic, brick-walled rooms with white-tiled bathrooms share a garden with the horse stables housing Marc Dansereau's beloved Marwari horses. Marc, a French-Canadian who has been in India for almost 30 years, is a self-confessed hippy, a wonderfully laid-back guy and great to hang out with. Horse riding and home-cooked meals are available. To get here, walk along Ajmer Rd, away from the lake, and take the second right after the large gurdwara (Sikh temple), then fork left at Little Italy restaurant; Shannu's will be on your left.

#### **Hotel Kanhaia Haveli HOTEL \$\$**

( 2772146; [www.pushkarhotelkanhaia.com](http://www.pushkarhotelkanhaia.com); Chotti Basti; r ₹300-1750; With a vast range of rooms, from cheap budget digs to smart air-conditioned doubles and suites, you are sure to find a room and price that suits at this converted courtyard hotel. As you spend more the rooms get bigger and lighter with more windows and even balconies.

#### **Hotel Navaratna Palace HOTEL \$\$**

( 2772145; [www.pushkarnavaratnopalace.co.in](http://www.pushkarnavaratnopalace.co.in); s/d from ₹400/500, with AC ₹700/800; Slightly characterless but well-run hotel with simple clean rooms and a lovely enclosed garden with swimming pool. Note the hotel's strange decision to segregate pool users so that foreigners (noon to 5pm) and Indians (9.30am to 11.30am and 5.30pm to 7pm) cannot swim together.

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

( 2772001; [www.hotelpushkarpalace.com](http://www.hotelpushkarpalace.com); r incl breakfast ₹7000; Once belonging to the Maharaja of Kishangarh, this top-end hotel boasts a romantic lakeside setting. Beautifully appointed rooms have carved wooden furniture and separate dressing areas leading into exquisite bathrooms. Rooms open onto a shared verandah which overlooks the central garden and has views of the lake. No

internet and no swimming pool, but rooms do have coffee makers and flat-screen TVs. Expect 40% discounts when it's quiet.

#### **Eating**

Almost all accommodation in Pushkar has its own cafe-restaurant, open to nonguests and often located on a rooftop.

#### **Honey & Spice**

MULTICUISINE \$ (Laxmi Market off Sadar Bazaar; mains ₹90-150; 7.30am-6.45pm) This unassuming cafe-restaurant is pretty much unique in Pushkar, with its emphasis on super-healthy food rather than lake views. It's tucked away behind shops on Sadar Bazaar so that nothing can distract you from the fabulous menu, which is small but outstanding. Offerings such as 'exotic stir fry in ginger and honey sauce' share space with a selection of imaginative salads, pastas, juices and herbal teas. There are vegan options too and the breakfast menu – brown toasts, fresh fruits, porridge, muesli – is equally healthy, while the fresh coffee (from ₹50) includes blends infused with spices such as cardamom and cinnamon.

#### **Sunset Café**

MULTICUISINE \$ (mains ₹75-200; 7.30am-midnight; Right on the eastern ghats, this cafe has uninterrupted lake views. It offers the usual traveller menu, including well-priced Indian dishes, pizza and pasta, plus there's a German bakery serving OK cakes. As the name suggests, the lakeshore setting is perfect at sunset, but this is also a pleasant spot for breakfast (espresso ₹60).

#### **Shri Vankatesh**

DHABA \$ (Choti Basti; mains ₹40-90; 9am-10pm) If you're sick of pizza, pasta and espresso, head to this no-nonsense local favourite and tuck into some dhal, paneer or kofta, before mopping up the sauce with freshly baked chapatis and washing it all down with some good chai (₹10). The thalis (₹60 to ₹100) are good value too, and there's some upstairs seating overlooking the street. Not much English spoken, but has an English menu.

#### **Om Shiva Garden Restaurant**

MULTICUISINE \$ ( 5105045; mains ₹70-170; 7.30am-late) This traveller stalwart continues to satisfy with its well-priced Indian dishes, wood-fired pizzas and decent sandwiches. The shaded garden setting is cool and peaceful and there's fresh coffee too.

**Falafel Wrap Stalls**

MIDDLE EASTERN \$

(wraps ₹60-120; ☎ 7.30am-10.30pm) Perfect for quelling a sudden attack of the munchies, and a big hit with Israeli travellers, these two adjacent roadside falafel joints knock up a choice selection of filling falafel-and-hummus wraps. Eat them on stools on the side of the road or devour them back at your hotel room.

**LMB Hotel & GR Restaurant**

DHABA \$

(Sadar Bazaar; meals ₹70; ☎ 10am-9pm) Established in 1921, this local favourite has a ground-floor sweet shop selling snacks such as kachori (round-shaped spicy pasties; ₹10) and an upstairs restaurant that serves just one thing; a ₹70-thali that includes two vegetable curries, dhal, rice, chapati and curd.

**★ Out of the Blue**

ITALIAN \$\$

(mains ₹100-200; ☎ 8am-11pm; ☎) Arguably the best restaurant in Pushkar, Out of the Blue does decent Indian, Israeli and even Tibetan dishes, but it's the Italian food that steals the show, with excellent thin-crust pizzas sharing the menu with some delicious pasta options. It also does the best coffee in town (from ₹40), making this a smart choice for breakfast too.

**★ Sixth Sense**

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Inn Seventh Heaven; mains ₹120-200; ☎ 8.30am-4pm & 6-10pm; ☎) This chilled rooftop restaurant is a great place to head even if you didn't score a room in its popular hotel. Seasonal Indian vegetables and rice, vegetable sizzlers, pasta and pizzas are all excellent, as are the filter coffee and fresh juice blends. Its ambience is immediately relaxing and the pulley apparatus that delivers the delicious food from the ground-floor kitchen is enthralling.

**Baba Rooftop Restaurant**

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(₹2772858; mains ₹90-180; ☎ 8.30am-11pm) The food is similar to that at many other traveller-friendly restaurants in Pushkar (pizza, pasta, burgers, Indian, Israeli) – tasty, but nothing to write home about. But the location, looking down onto a bustling street market, and across at the lake and mountains, sets this place apart. There's a free pool table one floor down, and you can even snag a bottle of beer (₹150) if you ask discreetly.

**Shopping**

Pushkar's Sadar Bazaar is lined with enchanting little shops and is a good place for picking up gifts. Many of the vibrant textiles come from the Barmer district south of Jaisalmer. There's plenty of silver and beaded jewellery catering to foreign tastes, and some old tribal pieces, too.

**Lala International**

CLOTHING

(Sadar Bazaar; ☎ 9.30am-8pm) Brilliantly colourful women's clothing. Modern designs, but Indian in theme. Dresses and skirts start from around ₹500. Prices are clearly labelled and fixed.

**Khadi Gramodhyog**

CLOTHING

(Sadar Bazaar, Pushkar Lake; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Small fixed-price *khadi* shop selling traditional hand-woven shirts, scarves, shawls and men's kurta-pyjamas.

**i Information**

Foreign-friendly ATMs and unofficial money-changers are dotted around Sadar Bazaar. The Sadar Bazaar branch of **State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur** (SBBJ; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) changes cash and travellers' cheques, as does **Thomas Cook** (₹9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat), also on Sadar Bazaar.

**BUS SERVICES FROM PUSHKAR'S MAIN BUS STAND**

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY
Ajmer	12	½	every 10 minutes
Bundi	137	6	11am
Delhi	seat/sleeper 350/450	10½	5pm, 7.30pm & 8.30pm
Jaipur	150	4	9.30am-4pm frequent
Jaisalmer	seat/sleeper 450/550	10½	9pm & 10pm
Jodhpur	250	5	7am & 8.30am
Udaipur	250	6	8am

Internet cafes are sprinkled around the lanes, and tend to charge ₹30 per hour. Most guest-houses and many restaurants and cafes have free wi-fi these days.

**Internet Cafe** (Sadar Bazaar) Handy internet cafe near Honey & Spice cafe.

**Post Office** (off Heloj Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5pm)

**Tourist Information Centre** (✉ 01452772040; ☎ 10am-5pm) In the grounds of Hotel Sarovar; staff will give out a free map.

### DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Priests – some genuine, some not – will approach you near the ghats and offer to do a *puja* (prayer) for which you'll receive a 'Pushkar passport' (a red ribbon around your wrist). Others proffer flowers (to avoid trouble, don't take any flowers you are offered). Some of these priests genuinely live off the donations of others and this is a tradition that goes back centuries. Others can be pushy and aggressive. Walk away if you feel bullied and be aware that you may be pressured into making a donation later on, even if the ribbons and flowers are at first given to you for free.

During the camel fair, Pushkar is besieged by pickpockets working the crowded bazaars. Take extra care at this time.

Fortunately, there is very little motorised traffic in Pushkar's lanes, making it a pleasurable place to explore at leisure – but do watch out for stray motorbikes.

### Getting There & Away

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

Frequent buses to/from Ajmer (₹10 to ₹12, 30 minutes, every 10 minutes) use Pushkar's dedicated Ajmer bus stand, although Ajmer buses also leave from the main bus stand.

Be careful to check that your bus is direct, 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.

### Getting Around

There are no autorickshaws, but it's a breeze to get around on foot. If you want to explore the surrounding countryside, you could try hiring a scooter (₹200 per day) from one of the many places round town. For something more substantial, try **Shreeram Enfield Gairej** (₹9.30am-7.30pm) on Ajmer Rd. They hire Enfield Bullets for ₹500 per day (₹50,000 deposit) and sell them from ₹55,000.

## Ranthambore National Park

✉ 07462

This famous national park, open from 1 October to 30 June, is the best place to spot wild tigers in Rajasthan. Comprising 1334 sq km of wild jungle scrub hemmed in by rocky ridges, at its centre is the 10th-century Ranthambore 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 (there were 28 at last count) 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 Ranthambore) to the first gate of the park, and another 3km to the main gate and Ranthambore Fort. There's a bunch of cheap (and rather grotty) hotels near Sawai Madhopur train station, but the nicest accommodation is stretched out along Ranthambore Rd, which eventually leads to the park.

It's ₹50 to ₹100 for an auto from the train station to Ranthambore Rd, depending on where you get off. Many hotels, though, 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). But turn left to reach all the accommodation reviewed here. We've mentioned in each review how far accommodation is from Hammir Circle.

### Sights & Activities

**Safaris** take place in the early morning and late afternoon, starting between 6am and 7am, and between 2pm and 3pm, 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 jeep; price per safari per person Indian/foreigner ₹528/927).

You still have a good chance of seeing a tiger from a **canter** (20-seater open-topped truck; Indian/foreigner ₹400/800), though sometimes other passengers can be rowdy.

Be aware that the rules for booking safaris (and prices) are prone to change. At the time of research, hotels and agents could no longer book you onto a safari. You either had to book online through the park's official website ([www.rajasthanwildlife.com](http://www.rajasthanwildlife.com)), which we highly recommend you do, or go in person to the **Safari Booking Office**, which was inconveniently located 1.5km from Hammir Circle, in the opposite direction to the park from the accommodation on Ranthambore Rd. You couldn't book safaris in person in advance of the day you wanted to do the safari (you could only do that online). And to be sure of bagging a seat in a vehicle, you needed to start queuing at least an hour (if not two) before the safaris were due to begin, meaning a *very* early start for morning safaris!

To visit the magical 10th-century **Ranthambore Fort** (admission free; ☰ 6am-6pm) on the cheap, join the locals who go there to visit the temple dedicated to Ganesh. Shared jeeps (₹30 to ₹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 jeeps (₹20 per person) shuttle to and from the fort, which is inside the park.

## Sleeping

### Hotel Aditya Resort

HOTEL \$

(⌚ 9414728468; [www.adityaresort.com](http://www.adityaresort.com); Ranthambore Rd; r ₹300-650; ✉ @) Friendly and good value, this place has a mixed bag of rooms, some with private bathrooms, some without. But all are clean and tidy, and there’s a small rooftop restaurant (mains ₹50 to ₹100). About 2km from Hammir Circle, just past Hotel Tiger Safari Resort.

### Asha Guest House

HOTEL \$

(⌚ 9414910019; Ranthambore Rd; r ₹400; ✉) Small hotel above a corner shop. Clean rooms have tiled flooring, TV and small en suite bathrooms. About 1km from Hammir Circle. No internet. No restaurant.

### ★ Hotel Tiger Safari Resort

HOTEL \$\$

(⌚ 221137; [www.tigersafariresort.com](http://www.tigersafariresort.com); Ranthambore Rd; r ₹1300-1800; ✉ @ ☎) All-in, this is the best-value option. Rooms are clean, comfortable and spacious and come with cable TV, hot-water showers and free wi-fi.

There’s a decent restaurant, a well-tended garden, a lovely little swimming pool and it’s run by management who are knowledgeable, honest and friendly. About 2km from Hammir Circle.

### Vatika Resort

HOTEL \$\$\$

(⌚ 222457; [www.ranthambhorevatikaresort.com](http://www.ranthambhorevatikaresort.com); Ranthambore Rd; r ₹1800, incl breakfast/all meals ₹2250/3000; ✉ @ ☎) Lovely little guesthouse with simple but immaculate rooms, each with terrace seating overlooking a beautifully tended, flower-filled garden. It’s about 1km beyond the main strip of accommodation on Ranthambore Rd (although still 5km before the park’s main gate) so much quieter than elsewhere. About 3km from Hammir Circle.

### Ranthambore Bagh

HOTEL \$\$\$

(⌚ 221728; [www.ranthambhore.com](http://www.ranthambhore.com); Ranthambore Rd; r/tent ₹3522/4041, incl meals ₹5626/6141; ✉ @ ☎) This has more of a safari-camp feel to it than other places on Ranthambore Rd, with tents dotted around a forested garden as well as well-appointed rooms in the main building. There’s no pool, but the gardens have swings and a slide, making this a solid choice for young families. About 2.5km from Hammir Circle.

## Eating & Drinking

All the accommodation we’ve listed does food, except Asha Guest House. Most can get you a bottle of beer if you ask.

### Manisha Restaurant

DHABA \$

(Ranthambore Rd; mains ₹50-100; ☰ 7am-3.30pm & 5-9.30pm) Streetside shack serving cheap Indian nosh to customers perched on plastic chairs. A friendly, no-nonsense alternative to all the hotel restaurants. About 2km from Hammir Circle, on the right just before Hotel Tiger Safari Resort.

## Information

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

**Safari Booking Office** ([www.rajasthanwildlife.com](http://www.rajasthanwildlife.com)) From Hammir Circle it’s 1.5km. Turn right at the circle and office will eventually be on your right. It’s ₹50 to ₹70 in an autorickshaw from accommodation on Ranthambore Rd.

**Tiger Track Internet** (per hr ₹60; ☰ 7am-10pm) It’s 1½km from Hammir Circle, on the left before you reach Hotel Tiger Safari Resort.

**Tourist Office** (⌚ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri) At the train station; has a free map of the area.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

There are very few direct buses to anywhere of interest so it's always preferable to take the train. Three direct buses leave for **Bundi** (6am, 6.45am & 2pm, ₹93, five hours) from the Tonk bus stand (take the second left out of the train station and the bus stand is on your right after the petrol station).

### TRAIN

Trains run almost hourly to **Kota** (from where you can catch buses to **Bundi**). It takes less than two hours. Just buy an unreserved 'general ticket' (₹44) and pile in.

There are five daily trains to **Jaipur** (5.50am, 9.45am, 10.40am, 2.35pm and 6.55pm), although plenty of others run on selected days so you rarely have to wait more than an hour. The journey takes two hours. Unreserved 2nd-class seats cost ₹50; sleepers cost ₹140.

Five trains run daily to **Delhi** (6.28am, 7.05am, 12.30pm, 9.15pm and 11.02pm). Journey times vary. They arrive at 10.55am, 12.30pm, 6.35pm, 5.25am and 4.30am respectively. Sleeper/3AC tickets cost around ₹190/490.

Two daily trains go to **Agra**. The 13238 Kota-PNBE Express to Agra Cantonment leaves at 4.47pm, arrives at 11.05pm and costs ₹144 for a sleeper. The 59811 Haldighati Passenger leaves at 11.25pm, arrives at 6am and costs ₹85 for a sleeper.

For **Keoladeo Ghana National Park**, four daily trains go to Bharatpur (7.05am, 12.30pm, 4.47pm and 9.15pm). They take 2½ hours; 2nd-class seats/sleepers ₹87/140.

Only one direct train goes to **Udaipur**: the 12963 Mewar Express. It leaves at 11.50pm, arrives at 7.20am and costs ₹201/529 for a sleeper/3AC ticket.

## SOUTHERN RAJASTHAN

### Bundi

₹ 0747 / POP 102,000

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 like Jaipur or Udaipur, nor are its streets choked with noisy, polluting vehicles or dense throngs of people. 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 Ghor, they wrested the Bundi area from the Mina and Bhil tribes and made Bundi the capital of their kingdom, known as Hadoti.

### • Sights

There are plenty of interesting villages to explore in the Bundi region. Akoda (a merchant's village) and Thikardha (with potteries) are both within cycling distance, around 6km north of town.

#### Bundi Palace

PALACE

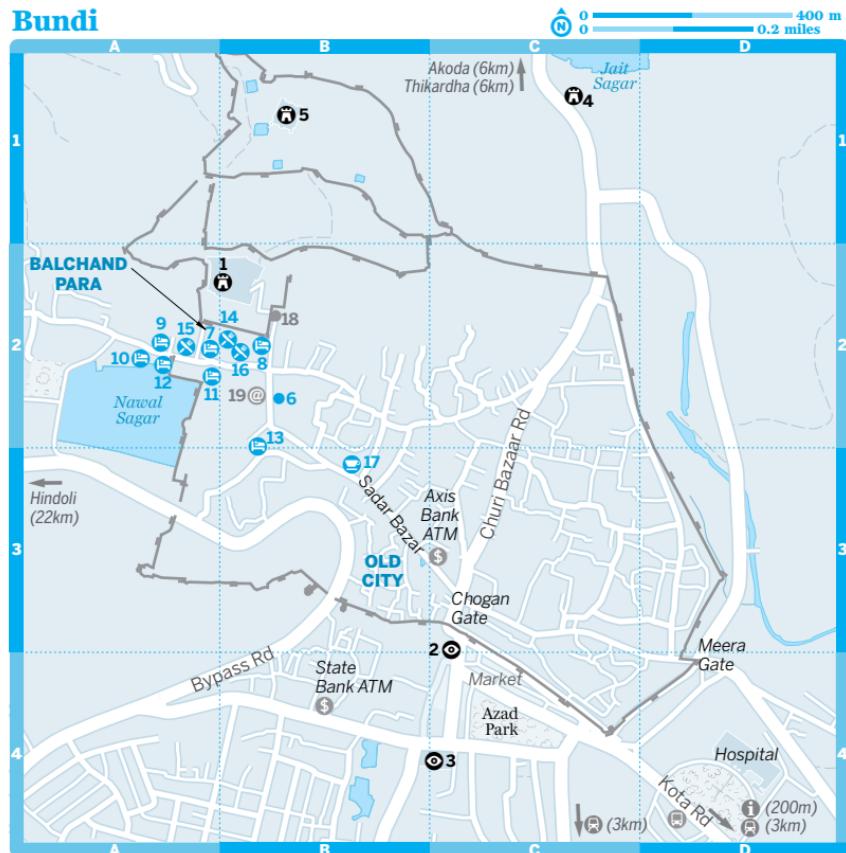
(Garh Palace; Indian/foreigner ₹10/100, camera/video ₹50/100; ☺ 8am-5pm) This extraordinary, partly decaying edifice – described by Kipling as 'the work of goblins rather than of men' – almost seems to grow out of the rock of the hillside it stands on. Though large sections are still closed up and left 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 was constructed in the reign of Rao Raja Ratan Ji Heruled (Ratan Singh; 1607–31) and added to by his successors.

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, a 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), whose murals 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.

Within the complex is the **Chitrasala**, a small 18th-century palace built by Rao Ummed Singh. To find it, exit through Bundi Palace's 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

## Bundi

RAJASTHAN BUNDI



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

### Taragarh

**FORT**  
(Star Fort; Indian/foreigner ₹10/100, camera/video ₹50/100; ☰ 8am-5pm) This ramshackle, partly overgrown 14th-century fort, on the hilltop above the palace, is great 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.

### Baoris

Bundi has around 60 beautiful *baoris* (step-wells), 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 by the rubbish that collects in them which

### NOTABLE BUILDINGS

no one bothers to clean up. The most impressive, **Raniji-ki-Baori** (Queen's Step-Well), 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.

### Sukh Mahal

**PALACE**  
(₹10am-5pm) About 2km north of the centre, the stately Sukh Mahal is a small palace, where Rudyard Kipling once stayed and wrote part of *Kim*. It's on the edge of the beautiful Jait Sagar, a picturesque 1.5km-long lake, flanked by hills.

### Bhimlat Waterfall

**WATERFALL**  
The impressive Bhimlat Waterfall is about 35km from Bundi. There's a temple at the top and a large natural pool you can swim in at the bottom. It's about ₹500 to ₹600 return in an autorickshaw.

## Bundi

### ➲ Sights

1	Bundi Palace .....	B2
2	Nagar Sagar Kund.....	C3
3	Raniji-ki-Baori.....	C4
4	Sukh Mahal.....	C1
5	Taragarh.....	B1

### ➲ Activities, Courses & Tours

6	Kukki's World .....	B2
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### ➲ Sleeping

7	Haveli Braj Bhushanjee .....	A2
8	Haveli Elephant Stable .....	B2
9	Haveli Katkoun .....	A2
10	Haveli Uma Megh .....	A2
11	Kasera Heritage View.....	A2
12	Nawal Sagar Palace .....	A2
13	RN Haveli .....	B2

### ➲ Eating

14	Out of the Blue .....	B2
15	Rainbow Cafe .....	A2
16	Tom & Jerry.....	B2

### ➲ Drinking & Nightlife

17	Bundi's Coffee Comforts .....	B3
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### ➲ Information

18	Bundi Palace Entrance.....	B2
19	Roshan Tour & Travel .....	B2

## 👉 Tours & Activities

### Kukki's World

TOURS

(✉ 9828404527; [www.kukkiworld.com](http://www.kukkiworld.com); ☎ 8.30am-5pm) Passionate amateur archaeologist OP 'Kukki' Sharma conducts tours of the surrounding countryside, showing visitors the numerous prehistoric rock paintings he has found over the years, and swinging by the odd tribal village en route. If you're on your own, Kukki will take you on the back of his motorbike at no extra cost. If you are in a group of two or more, you'll need to hire a car (about ₹1000 for a full day). Kukki has a 'pay whatever you feel is fair' fee system. As a guideline, other guides in Rajasthan charge between ₹500 and ₹800 per day.

## 🛏️ Sleeping

### Haveli Elephant Stable HERITAGE GUESTHOUSE \$

(✉ 9928154064; [rajnandini1979@gmail.com](mailto:rajnandini1979@gmail.com); ₹250-350) This basic but unique guesthouse used to house 15 royal elephants, but is now a shanty home-from-home for backpackers with a sense of history. The six rooms are simple affairs, with concrete walls and floors (but 20ft-high ceilings!) and only one

has hot water in its attached bathroom. But your hosts Raj and Neema are wonderfully welcoming (as well as being good cooks) and the huge garden – dotted with elephant tether stones – is a great place to hang out.

### Haveli Uma Megh

GUESTHOUSE \$

(✉ 2442191; [haveliumamegh@yahoo.com](mailto:haveliumamegh@yahoo.com); r without bathroom ₹200-350, r ₹400-650) Wonderfully charming, albeit somewhat dilapidated, this welcoming guesthouse has some pokey rooms, but others that are bright and breezy with lake views. The large well-kept lakeside garden is perfect for food, tea or just lazing around in.

### RN Haveli

GUESTHOUSE \$

(✉ 2443278, 9784486854; [rnhavelibundi@yahoo.co.in](mailto:rnhavelibundi@yahoo.co.in); Rawle ka Chowk; s/d without bathroom ₹200/300, s/d ₹400/500, with AC ₹700/800; ✉) This old, slightly rundown house, with a cute garden where you eat your meals, has reasonably well-decorated rooms and delicious home cooking. A sound budget choice.

### ★ Haveli Braj Bhushanjee

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(✉ 2442322; [www.kiplingsbundi.com](http://www.kiplingsbundi.com); r ₹750-4500; ✉) This rambling, authentic, 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 an enchanting place with original stone interiors (plenty of low doorways), splendid rooftop views, beautiful and well-preserved murals, and all sorts of other historic and valuable artefacts. The terrific range of accommodation includes some lovely, recently modernised rooms that are still in traditional style.

### Haveli Katkoun

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(✉ 2444311; [havelikatkoun.free.fr](http://havelikatkoun.free.fr); s from ₹350, d ₹500-1800; ✉) A reasonably modern courtyard home that's been turned into a friendly family guesthouse with spotless rooms, hot-water showers and some palace views.

### Kasera Heritage View

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(✉ 2444679; [www.kaseraheritageview.com](http://www.kaseraheritageview.com); s/d from ₹500/700; ✉) Friendly, welcoming guesthouse with bright, spacious, spotlessly clean rooms, a rooftop cafe with sweeping views and wi-fi throughout. Its nearby sister property, **Kasera Paradise**, has similar accommodation options (although rooms are slightly gloomier) and is topped by the excellent restaurant **Out of the Blue**.

**Naval Sagar Palace**

( 2447050; [www.navalsagarpalace.com](http://www.navalsagarpalace.com); ₹ 1500-3000) This 300-year-old former royal residence, once home to the ladies of the court, has a beautiful location, with buildings, including a **restaurant** (mains ₹80-200), overlooking a grassy lawn, which in turn overlooks the lake. Rooms are huge, with some interesting old furniture (including enormous beds) and artwork, and some have lake views. There's no TV or internet and the atmosphere is far from homely, but there's a certain historical charm that's hard not to fall for.

**Eating & Drinking****Tom & Jerry**

MULTICUISINE \$  
(₹80-150; 8am-10pm; ) A friendly, laid-back rooftop restaurant with Indian vegetarian dishes plus pasta and pizza.

**Rainbow Cafe**

MULTICUISINE \$  
(mains ₹100-150; 7am-11pm; ) Bohemian ambience with chillout tunes, floor-cushion seating and two types of special (bhangu) lassi. Located up on the roof to one side of the town's West Gate and caged off from marauding macaques with a bamboo trellis.

**Out of the Blue**

ITALIAN \$\$  
(mains ₹130-220; 8am-10.30pm; ) Following in the footsteps of the successful original branch in Pushkar, Bundi's Out of the Blue also offers excellent Italian pizza and homemade pasta as well as the best coffee in town (₹40 to ₹70).

**Bundi's Coffee Comforts**

CAFE  
(coffee ₹40-80, tea ₹35-45; 9am-9pm) Hard to believe it now, but there was a time when this roadside cafe was the only place in Bundi with fresh coffee. It still does a number of coffee brews plus a range of teas, although for the real deal in Indian chai, sneak across to the simple tea stall next door (chai ₹10 to ₹20).

**Information**

There's an Axis Bank ATM on Sadar Bazar and a State Bank ATM west of Azad Park.

**Roshan Tour & Travel** ( 8am-10pm) An internet cafe (per hr ₹40), money-changer, bicycle-rental place (per day ₹80) and transport-ticket seller all rolled into one.

**Tourist Office** ( 2443697; Kota Rd;

9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri) This very helpful office has bus and train schedules, and offers free maps and helpful advice on most practical questions you can ask.

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

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

For Ranthambore, it's usually quicker to catch a bus to Kota, then hop on a train to Sawai Madhopur.

Direct services from Bundi bus stand:

**Ajmer** (₹14, four hours, every 15 minutes from 5am to 11pm)

**Jaipur** (₹154, five hours, every 15 minutes from 5am to 1am)

**Kota** (₹27 to ₹29, one hour, every 15 minutes from 6am to 10pm)

**Pushkar** (₹150, 4½ hours, 8am)

**Sawai Madhopur** (₹93, four to five hours, 7.45am, noon and 2pm)

**Udaipur** (₹200, 6 hours, 7.15am, 9am and 11.15am)

**TRAIN**

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.

Two trains travel daily to **Chittorgarh**. The 7.20am takes 3½ hours; the 9.38am takes 2½ hours. Sleepers cost ₹80 and ₹120 respectively.

Two daily trains also go to **Delhi** (Hazrat Nizamuddin). The 5.35pm takes 12 hours; the 10.42pm takes just eight hours. Sleepers cost ₹192 and ₹232 respectively.

Only one daily train goes to **Agra** (Agra Fort); the 59811 Haldighati Passenger (sleeper ₹109, 5.50pm, 12 hours).

And only one train goes daily to **Udaipur**; the 12963 Mewar Express (sleeper/3AC ₹157/398, 2.04am, five hours).

**i Getting Around**

An autorickshaw to/from the train station costs ₹50 to ₹70, ₹70 to ₹100 at night.

**Kota**

0744 / POP 1,000,000

An easy day trip from Bundi, Kota is an industrial and commercial town on Rajasthan's only permanent river. You can take boat trips on the river here, but it's only really worth visiting Kota for its palace, which is, admittedly, quite spectacular.

**o Sights****City Palace & Fort**

PALACE, FORT

The fort and the palace within it make up one of the largest such complexes in Rajasthan. This was the royal residence and centre of power, housing the Kota princedom's treasury, courts, arsenal, armed forces

and state offices. Some of its buildings are now used as schools. The **City Palace** (Indian/foreigner ₹20/150, camera/video ₹50/100; ☎10am-4.30pm), entered through a gateway topped by rampant elephants, contains the excellent **Rao Madho Singh Museum**, where you'll find all the stuff necessary for a respectable Raj existence – silver furniture, an old-fashioned ice-cream maker, and ingenious, beautiful weapons. The oldest part of the palace dates from 1624. Downstairs is a durbar (royal audience) hall with beautiful mirror work, while the elegant, small-scale apartments upstairs contain exquisite, beautifully preserved paintings, particularly the hunting scenes for which Kota is renowned.

It's around ₹30 to ₹40 in an autorickshaw from the bus stand, and at least ₹60 from the train station.

## Information

**Tourist Reception Centre** (✉2327695; RTDC Hotel Chambal; ☎9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) Handy for its free map of the town. Turn left out of the bus stand, right at the second round-about and it's on your right.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

Services from the main bus stand include:

**Ajmer** (₹165, four to five hours, half-hourly from 4.15am to 11.45pm)

**Bundi** (₹27 to ₹29, every 15 minutes from 6am to 10pm)

**Chittorgarh** (₹150, four hours, half-hourly from 5am to 7.30pm)

**Jaipur** ₹181, five hours, half-hourly from 4am to 11.45pm)

**Pushkar** (₹200, four to five hours, 7am and 11.15pm)

**Udaipur** (₹250, six to seven hours, hourly from 5am to 7.30pm)

### TRAIN

For **Ranthambhore**, seven trains run daily to Sawai Madhopur (5.25am, 5.55am, 8am, 8.50am, 11.15am, 12.35pm and 2.50pm); many more run on selected days so you rarely have to wait more than an hour. The journey takes one to two hours. An unreserved 'general ticket' costs ₹44.

Likewise, trains run almost hourly to **Delhi** (sleepers ₹220, five to eight hours).

Five trains run daily to **Jaipur** (8am, 8.50am, 12.35pm, 2.55pm and 11.45pm), but again there are many others on selected days so you rarely have to wait long. It takes about four hours. Unreserved 'general ticket' seats cost around ₹70; sleepers around ₹150.

Three daily trains go to **Chittorgarh** (1.25am, 6.25am and 9am) and take three to four hours. Sleepers cost ₹80 to ₹120.

Six fast trains (around 14 hours) go daily to **Mumbai** (2.35pm, 5.35pm, 9.15pm, 9.55pm, 11.25pm and 11.45pm). Sleepers cost around ₹340.

## Getting Around

Minibuses and shared autorickshaws link the train station and central bus stand (₹6 to ₹10 per person). A private autorickshaw costs around ₹30.

## Chittorgarh (Chittor)

✉01472 / POP 153,000

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

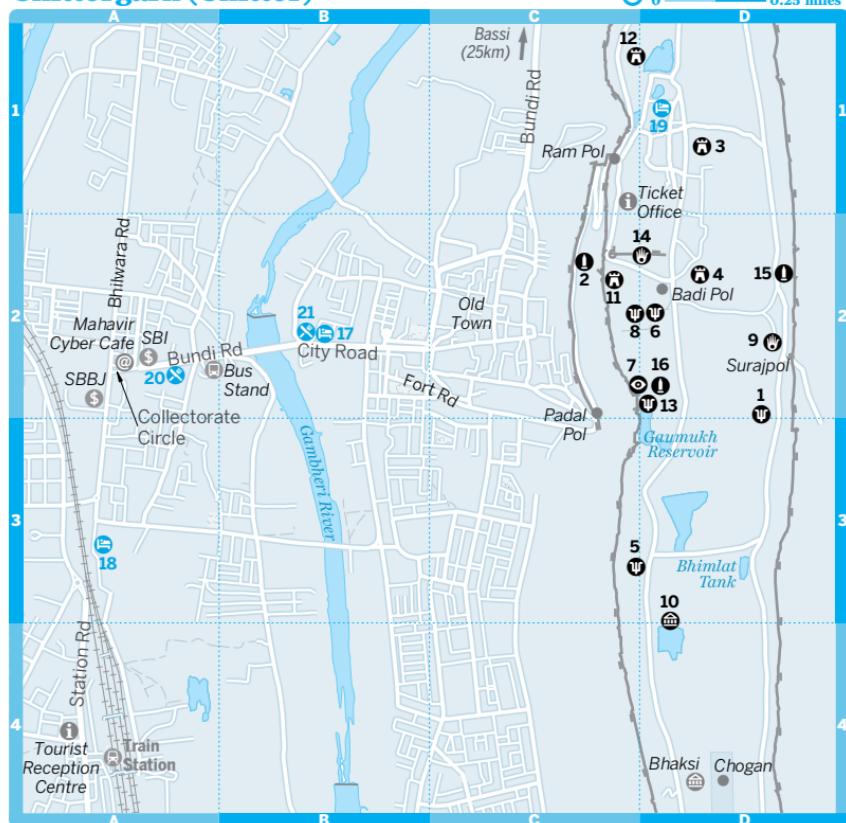
## MAJOR TRAINS FROM KOTA

DESTINATION	TRAIN	DEPARTURE TIME	ARRIVAL TIME	FARE (₹)
Chittorgarh	29020 Dehradun Express	9am	12.05pm	120/610 (A)
Delhi (Nizamuddin)	12964 Mewar Express	11.55pm	6.30am (next day)	220/582 (A)
Jaipur	12465 Ranthambhore Express	12.35pm	4.45pm	71/153 (B)
Mumbai	12956 JP-BCT Superfast	5.35pm	7.40am (next day)	349/931 (A)
Sawai Madhopur	12903 Golden Temple Mail	11.15am	12.25pm	44/140 (C)

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

## Chittorgarh (Chittor)

### RAJASTHAN CHITTORGARH (CHITTOR)



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

FORT

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/100, sound & light show Indian/foreigner ₹75/200; ☺ sunrise-sunset, Sound & Light Show sunset) A zigzag ascent of more than 1km starts at **Padal Pol** and leads

through six outer gateways to the main gate on the western side, **Ram Pol** (the former back entrance). Inside Ram Pol is a still-occupied village that takes up a small north-western part of the fort. You can enter the fort here, via the village, without having to pass the ticket office at the official entrance. To get to the ticket office, though, turn right after Ram Pol. The rest of the plateau is deserted except for the wonderful palaces, towers and temples that remain from its heyday, with the addition of a few more recent temples. A loop road runs around the plateau, which has a deer park at the southern end.

#### ► Rana Kumbha Palace

Past the ticket office, you arrive almost immediately at this ruined palace group, which takes its name from the 15th-century ruler who renovated and added to earlier palaces on this site. The complex includes elephant and horse stables and a Shiva temple. Across from the palace is the **Sringar Chowri Tem-**

## Chittorgarh (Chittor)

### ➲ Sights

- 1 Adhbudhnath Shiva Temple ..... D2
- 2 Chhatris ..... C2
- 3 Chittorgarh Fort ..... D1
- 4 Fateh Prakash Palace ..... D2
- 5 Kalika Mata Temple ..... C3
- 6 Kumbha Shyam Temple ..... D2
- 7 Mahasati ..... C2
- 8 Meera Temple ..... C2
- 9 Neelkanth Mahadev Jain Temple ..... D2
- 10 Padmini's Palace ..... D3
- 11 Rana Kumbha Palace ..... C2
- 12 Ratan Singh Palace ..... C1
- 13 Sammidheshwar Temple ..... D2
- 14 Singar Chowri Temple ..... D2
- 15 Tower of Fame ..... D2
- 16 Tower of Victory ..... D2

### ➲ Sleeping

- 17 Hotel Bhagwati ..... B2
- 18 Hotel Pratap Palace ..... A3
- 19 Padmini Haveli ..... D1

### ➲ Eating

- 20 Chokhi Dhani Garden Family Restaurant ..... A2
- 21 Saffire Garden Restaurant ..... B2

**ple**, a Jain temple built by Rana Kumbha's treasurer in 1448 and adorned with attractive, intricate carvings of elephants, musicians and deities. Just past here is **Badi Pol**, the gateway through which you pass to access the rest of the fort.

### ► Meera & Kumbha Shyam Temples

Both 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 Meerabai, 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 is dedicated to Vishnu and its carved panels illustrate 15th-century Mewar life.

### ► 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* (widow suicide by immolation) stones – this was the royal cremation ground and was also where 13,000 women committed *jauhar* in 1535. The **Sammidheshwar 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 Sammidheshwar 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** (across from Padmini's Palace, Fort), 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. Legend relates that, as Padmini sat in this pavilion, Ala-ud-din Khilji saw her reflection in mirrors from the palace, and this glimpse convinced him to destroy Chittorgarh in order to possess her.

### ► Surajpol & Tower of Fame

Surajpol, on the fort's east side, was the main gate and offers fantastic views across the empty plains. A little further north, the 24m-high Tower of Fame (Kirtti Stambha) is older (dating from 1301) and 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. Next door is a 14th-century Jain temple.

### ➲ Sleeping & Eating

If you fancy a beer with your meal, head to the restaurant at Hotel Pratap Palace.

#### Hotel Bhagwati

(246226; City Rd; s ₹200-300, d ₹300-400, s/d with AC ₹550/650) The best of Chittorgarh's budget bunch, Bhagwati has more charm than its rivals. Rooms surround an open-air

inner courtyard and are simple but kept clean, and come with TV and a bathroom with squat toilet.

### Hotel Pratap Palace

HOTEL \$\$

( 240099; [www.hotelpratappalacechittaurgarh.com](http://www.hotelpratappalacechittaurgarh.com); r without/with AC ₹1250/1850; ) The Pratap's rooms are smart, spacious and clean, and come with cute bay-window seating. Staff members are helpful and there's a good **restaurant** (mains ₹150-250; 7am-10.30pm) with tables spilling out into a pleasant garden. They have wi-fi in the lobby, and even a bar (beer ₹250). The only downside is the location – a long trek from the fort (although admittedly handy for the train station).

### ★ Padmini Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

( 241251, 9414140090; [www.thepadminihaveli.com](http://www.thepadminihaveli.com); Annapoorna Temple Rd, Shah Chowk, Chittorgarh Fort; r incl breakfast ₹3200; ) Housed in a 90-year-old converted school, and the only nonpilgrim accommodation within the fort itself, this fabulous guesthouse was designed by a Swiss couple, but is now run locally. Stylish but understated rooms come with spotless, granite-clad bathrooms, and are dotted around open-air courtyards in a design that makes wonderful use of limited space. There's home-cooked vegetarian meals (in fact, you can just drop by for lunch; ₹400), rooftop views, bicycle rental (per day ₹100) and free wi-fi throughout. The staff (who speak French and English) can act as guides for your exploration of the fort (per three-hour tour ₹500). The village location is charming too. After walking through Ram Pol on your way up to the fort, take the lane at the far left-hand corner of the small square, then take the first left (just after the lane bears round to the right). Walk a short way down here then take the second right (just before a tall pink build-

ing) and look for a whitewashed building with a chunky wooden door as its entrance. There's no number and no name, but if you ask locals for 'haveli' they'll point you in the right direction.

### Chokhi Dhani

#### Garden Family Restaurant

DHABA \$

(Bundi Rd; mains ₹50-130; 11am-10pm) Fan-cooled roadside *dhaba* with extra seating in the backyard. Does a range of good-value vegetarian dishes including South Indian and thalis.

### Saffire Garden Restaurant

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(City Rd; mains ₹100-150; 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. Saffire is located behind – and shares its grounds with – Hotel Vishal, a decent budget hotel (rooms from ₹500) which, annoyingly, tends not to accept foreigners.

## i Information

You can access an ATM and change money at the **SBBJ** (Bhilwara Rd), and there's an ATM at **SBI** (Bundi Rd).

**Mahavir Cyber Cafe** (Collectorate Circle; per hr ₹25; 9am-10pm)

**Tourist Reception Centre** ( 241089; Station Rd; 10am-1.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) Friendly and helpful, with a town map and brochure to give out.

## i Getting There & Away

### BUS

There are no direct buses to Bundi. Services from Chittorgarh include:

**Ajmer** (₹149, four hours, hourly from 7am to 3pm)

## MAJOR TRAINS FROM CHITTORGARH

DESTINATION	TRAIN	DEPARTURE TIME	ARRIVAL TIME	FARE (₹)
Ajmer	12991 Udaipur-Jaipur Exp	8.42am	11.25pm	75/273/395 (A)
Bundi	29019 NMH-Kota Exp	2.55pm	5.33pm	120/610 (B)
Delhi (Nizamuddin)	12964 Mewat Exp	8.50pm	6.30am	274/742 (C)
Jaipur	12991 Udaipur-Jaipur Exp	8.42am	1.25pm	102/374/565 (A)
Sawai Madhopur	29019 NMH-Kota Exp	2.55pm	9.10pm	146/610 (B)
Udaipur	19329 Udaipur City Exp	4.35pm	7pm	120/244 (C)

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

**Jaipur** (₹226-243, seven hours, every 90 minutes from 7.15am to 10pm)

**Kota** (₹150, four hours, hourly from 5.15am to 6.45pm)

**Pushkar** (₹159, four to five hours, 10am)

**Udaipur** (₹90, 2½ hours, half-hourly from 6am to 10pm)

## TRAIN

Three trains run daily to **Bundi** (2pm, 2.55pm and 8.50pm). They take 3½, 2½ and 2 hours respectively. Sleepers cost ₹120.

Five daily trains make the two-hour trip to **Udaipur** (4.10am, 5.05am, 5.33am, 4.35pm and 7.25pm). Unreserved 'general tickets' cost around ₹45; sleepers around ₹120.

Three trains make the 5½-hour trip to **Jaipur** daily (8.42am, 12.35am and 2.45am). Sleepers cost around ₹160.

Three trains also make the three-hour trip to **Ajmer** daily (8.42am, 10.10am and 7.30pm). Sleepers cost around ₹160. Unreserved 2nd-class seats cost ₹60.

Two fast trains go to **Delhi** (7.30pm and 8.50pm), arriving at 5.10am and 6.30am respectively.

For **Ranthambore**, three trains (varying greatly in speed) travel daily to Sawai Madhopur (2pm, 2.55pm and 8.50pm). They take nine, six and four hours respectively. Sleepers cost around ₹150.

## i Getting Around

A full tour of the fort by autorickshaw should cost around ₹300 return. You can arrange this yourself in town. Hotel Pratap Palace gives jeep tours of the fort for ₹600.

## Udaipur

₹0294 / POP 451,000

Beside shimmering Lake Pichola, with the ochre and purple ridges of the wooded Aravalli Hills stretching away in every direction, Udaipur has a romantic setting unmatched in Rajasthan and arguably in all India. Fantastical palaces, temples, *havelis* and countless narrow, crooked, colourful streets add the human counterpoint to the city's natural charms. Its 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 ever so slightly thin as Udaipur strains to exploit this reputation for tourist rupees. In the parts of the city nearest the lake, almost every building is a hotel, shop, restaurant, travel agent – or

all four rolled into one – and noisy, dirty traffic clogs some of the streets that were made for people and donkeys.

Take a step back from the hustle, however, and Udaipur still has its magic, not just in its marvellous palaces and monuments but in its matchless setting, the tranquillity of boat rides on the lake, the bustle of its ancient bazaars, the quaint old-world feel of its better hotels, its tempting shops and lovely surrounding countryside, which can be explored on foot, by bike or on horseback.

Udaipur was founded in 1568 by Maharaṇa 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 invasions 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

### Lake Pichola

(boat rides adult/child 10am-2pm ₹200/100, 3-5pm ₹500/250; ☺ boat rides 10am-5pm) Limpid and large, Lake Pichola reflects the cool grey-blue mountains on its rippling mirror-like surface. It was enlarged by Maharaṇa 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 in severe droughts. The City Palace complex, including the gardens at its south end, extends nearly 1km along the lake's eastern shore.

**Boat rides** leave roughly hourly from Rameshwar Ghat, within the City Palace complex (note, you have to pay ₹25 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, because those sold on the island are extortionately expensive. You can also take 30-minute boat rides from **Lal Ghat** (₹200 per person; ☺ 9.30am and 5pm), without the need to enter the City Palace complex.

## Udaipur

RAJASTHAN UDAIPUR



### ► Jagniwas Island

The world-famous Lake Palace hotel island of Jagniwas is about 15,000 sq m in size, entirely covered by the opulent palace built by Maharana Jagat Singh II in 1754. Once the royal summer palace, it was greatly extended and converted into the **Lake Palace hotel** in the 1960s by Maharana Bhagwat Singh, and it is now in the hands of the Indian-owned Taj hotel group. One of the world's top luxury hotels, with gleaming courtyards, lotus ponds and a pool shaded by a mango tree, it has been largely responsible for putting Udaipur on the international tourist map. You may also remember it from that classic Bond film, *Octopussy*, along with the Shiv Niwas Palace and the Monsoon Palace. Sadly, the Taj Lake Palace doesn't welcome casual visitors.

### ► Jagmandir Island

The palace on Jagmandir Island, about 800m south of Jagniwas, was built by Ma-

harana Karan Singh 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. 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. As well as the seven hotel rooms, the island has a restaurant, bar and spa, which are open to visitors.

### City Palace

PALACE  
 (www.etalnemewar.in; adult/child ₹25/15, not charged if visiting City Palace Museum; ☎ 7am-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.

# Udaipur

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Construction was begun by Maharana Udai Singh II, the city's founder, and it later became a conglomeration of structures built and extended by various maharanas, though it still manages to retain a surprising uniformity of design.

Most people enter the complex at **Badi Pol** (Great Gate; 1615) at the north end, but you can also enter at **Sheetla Mata Gate** to the south. Tickets for the City Palace Museum are sold at both entrances. Note, you must pay the ₹25 City Palace entrance ticket in order to pass south through **Chandra Chowk Gate**, en route to the Crystal Gallery or Rameshwar Ghat for the 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 **Tipolia Gate** (1711) into a large courtyard, **Manek Chowk**. Spot the tiger-catching cage, which worked rather like an oversized mousetrap, and the smaller one for leopards.

### City Palace Museum

MUSEUM

(adult/child ₹100/50, camera or video ₹200, audio guide ₹225, human guide ₹250; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm, last entry 4.30pm) The main part of the palace is open as the City Palace Museum, with rooms extravagantly decorated with mirrors, tiles and paintings, and housing a large, 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 (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 south 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. 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

(adult/child incl compulsory audio guide ₹500/300, plus ₹25 City Palace ticket; ☎ 9am–7pm) The Crystal Gallery houses rare crystal that Maharana Sajjan Singh 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. Below, and included on the same admission ticket – along with tea or a soft drink in the Gallery Restaurant – is the grand **Durbar Hall**, one of India's largest and most lavish royal reception halls, with some of the country's biggest chandeliers. Tickets are available at Badi Pol, at Chandra Chowk Gate or at the Crystal Gallery entrance.

#### Government Museum

MUSEUM

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/50; ☎ 9.45am–5.15pm Tue–Sun) Right beside the entrance to the City Palace Museum, this small, quirky 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 a stuffed monkey holding a lamp.

#### Jagdish Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

(₹5.30am–2pm & 4–10pm) Entered by a steep, elephant-flanked flight of steps 150m north of the City Palace's Badi Pol entrance, 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 a brass image of the Garuda (Vishnu's man-bird vehicle) in a shrine facing the main structure.

#### Bagore-ki-Haveli

NOTABLE BUILDING

(admission ₹30; ☎ 10am–5pm) 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 been carefully restored. There are 138 rooms set around courtyards on three levels, some arranged to evoke the period during which the house was inhabited, and others housing cultural displays, including – intriguingly enough – the world's biggest turban. The *haveli* also houses an interesting art gallery, featuring contemporary and folk art, and an eclectic selection of world-famous monuments lovingly carved out of polystyrene.

#### Sajjan Garh (Monsoon Palace)

PALACE

Perched on top of a distant mountain like a fairy-tale castle, this melancholy, neglected late 19th-century palace was constructed 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. However, visitors stream up here for the marvellous views, particularly at sunset. It's 5km west

### ANIMAL AID UNLIMITED

This spacious **animal refuge**

(₹9950531639, 9352511435; [www.animalaidunlimited.com](http://www.animalaidunlimited.com)) 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: make contact in advance to fix a time between 9am and 5pm any day. It's in Badi village, 7km northwest of Udaipur: a round trip by auto-rickshaw, including waiting time, costs around ₹250. Call Animal Aid Unlimited if you see an injured or ill street animal in Udaipur.

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 ₹20/160, car ₹60, camera/video free/₹200). A good way to visit is with the daily sunset excursion in a minivan driven by an enterprising **taxis driver** (₹9784400120) who picks up tourists at the entrance to Bagore-ki-Haveli every day at 5pm. The round trip costs ₹200 per person, including waiting time. His minivan has 'Monsoon Palace-Sajjangarh Fort' written across the front of it. You have to pay the ₹160-sanctuary fee yourself as you enter the park. Alternatively, take an autorickshaw (₹200 including waiting time) to the sanctuary gate, which they are not allowed to pass. Taxis then ferry people the final 4km up to the palace for about ₹100 per person.

**Vintage & Classic Car Collection MUSEUM** (Lake Palace Rd, Garden Hotel; admission ₹150, incl lunch or dinner ₹250; 9am-9pm) The maharanas' car collection makes a fascinating diversion, both for what it tells about their elite lifestyle and for the vintage vehicles themselves. Housed in the former state garage are 22 splendid vehicles, including a seven-seat 1938 Cadillac complete with pur-dah system, the beautiful 1934 Rolls-Royce Phantom used in *Octopussy* and the Cadillac convertible that whisked Queen Elizabeth II to the airport in 1961. If you enjoy an unlimited vegetarian thali (and let's face it, who doesn't?), the combined museum-and-meal ticket is a very good option (lunch 11.30am to 3pm, dinner 7.30pm to 10pm). It's a 10-minute walk east along Lake Palace Rd (bear to the right at the staggered junction).

## Activities

### Horse Riding

The wooded hills, villages and lakes around Udaipur make lovely riding country. Several operators offer horse rides from a couple of hours to multi-day safaris. Expect to pay about ₹900 for a half-day ride, including lunch or snacks and transport to/from your hotel.

### Krishna Ranch

HORSE RIDING (₹9828059505; [www.krishnaranch.com](http://www.krishnaranch.com); full-day incl lunch ₹1200) A Dutch-Indian company specialising in guided horse safaris (but also does guided walks) through the beautiful countryside around Udaipur. The ranch, where accommodation is also available

(single/double including meals and pick-up ₹1500/2500), is near Badi village, around 7km from town. Can also be contacted through Kumbha Palace guesthouse.

### Massage

#### Ayurvedic Body Care

AYURVEDA

(₹2413816; [www.ayurvedicbodycare.com](http://www.ayurvedicbodycare.com); 38 Lal Ghat; 10am-8pm) A small and popular old-city operation offering ayurvedic massage at reasonable prices, including a 15-minute head, back or foot massage (₹250) and a 50-minute full-body massage (₹750). It also has ayurvedic products such as oils, moisturisers, shampoos and soaps for sale.

### Walking

The horse-riding specialists at Krishna Ranch also offer guided hikes through the same beautiful countryside, passing through small tribal villages en route. Multi-day hikes can be arranged too.

#### Millets of Mewar

CITY WALKS

(₹8890419048; [www.milletsofmewar.com](http://www.milletsofmewar.com)) Management at the excellent restaurant Millets of Mewar also help organise 2½-hour city walking tours where you can meet local artisans who live and work in Udaipur. Tours, which should be booked a day in advance, start from the restaurant at 10am.

### Swimming

Several hotels allow nonguests to use their pools, including **Karohi Haveli** (₹200) and **Udai Koti** (₹300), which has the only rooftop pool in town.

## Courses

### Cooking

Apart from organising city walks, the restaurant Millets of Mewar also runs cooking classes (₹500); choose any five dishes from their wonderful menu and staff will teach you how to cook them.

#### Queen Cafe

COOKING

(₹2430875, 9783786028; 14 Bajrang Marg, Hanuman Ghat; 2/4hr class ₹900/1500; 8.30am) Learn how to make Indian tea, flat breads, rice and four types of curries with the affable Meenu; owner, chef and busy mum at this homely little eatery. Class sizes: two to five people.

### Music

#### Prem Musical Instruments

MUSIC

(₹2430599; 28 Gadiya Devra; per hr ₹400; 10.30am-6pm) Suresh Kumar Prajapati is

a successful local musician who gives sitar, tabla and flute lessons. He also sells and repairs instruments (sitar from ₹8500) and can arrange performances. You can buy signed CDs of his performances for around ₹300.

## Painting

### Hotel Krishna Niwas

PAINTING

(✉ 2420163; [www.hotelkrishnaniwas.com](http://www.hotelkrishnaniwas.com); 35 Lal Ghat; 2hr class ₹850; ☺ 11am-7pm) Jairaj Soni is a renowned artist who teaches miniature and classical painting. You can buy miniature paintings here too.

### Ashoka Arts

PAINTING

(Hotel Gangaur Palace; per hr ₹150) Here you can learn the basics of classic miniature painting.

## Festivals & Events

In March or April the procession-heavy **Me-war Festival** is Udaipur's own version of the springtime Gangaur festival, with free cultural programs.

## Sleeping

Accommodation clusters where most people want to stay – close to the lake, especially on its eastern side near Lal Ghat. This area is a tangle of streets and lanes (some quiet, some busy and noisy), close to the City Palace and Jagdish Temple. It's Udaipur's tourist epicentre and the streets are strung not just with lodgings but also with tourist-oriented eateries and shops whose owners will be doing their best to tempt you in.

Directly across the water from Lal Ghat, Hanuman Ghat has a slightly more local vibe and often better views. It's much more hassle-free, though you're certainly not out of the tourist zone.

To bypass rickshaw drivers looking for commissions from hotels, use the prepaid autorickshaw stand outside the train station. If you're heading for the Lal Ghat area to find accommodation, you can avoid discussions about individual lodgings by taking a autorickshaw to the nearby Jagdish Temple (about ₹40 from the main bus stand), then walking.

## Lal Ghat Area

### Lal Ghat Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(✉ 2525301; [www.lalghat.com](http://www.lalghat.com); 33 Lal Ghat; dm ₹150, r without/with bathroom from ₹200/600; ☺ ☎) This mellow guesthouse by the lake

has been run by the same family since 1982 and was one of the first to open in Udaipur. It's still an excellent budget choice, with an amazing variety of older and newer rooms. Most rooms have lake views and those in the older part of the building (17th century) have plenty of character, although some are pretty basic. There's a small kitchen for self-caterers, wi-fi in some areas and the shaded central courtyard is a pleasant space.

### Nukkad Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(✉ 2411403; [nukkad\\_raju@yahoo.com](mailto:nukkad_raju@yahoo.com); 56 Ganesh Ghati; r ₹300-500, s/d without bathroom ₹100/200; ☺ ☎) Always busy with travellers, Nukkad has a relaxed atmosphere and a sociable, breezy upstairs restaurant with good Indian and international dishes (mains ₹60 to ₹85). Your hosts Raju and Kala are helpful, and you can join afternoon cooking classes and morning yoga sessions without stepping out the door. Rooms are simple, fan-cooled, clean and decent value; there's plenty of hot water and many rooms have cushioned window seats. Wi-fi wasn't working when we were here, but should be available.

### Jheel Palace Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(✉ 2421352; [www.jheelguesthouse.com](http://www.jheelguesthouse.com); 56 Gan-gaur Ghat; r ₹1000-3000; ☺ ☎) Right on the lake edge (when the lake is full), Jheel Palace has three nice rooms with little balconies and four-poster beds, and three more ordinary ones. All are small but well kept. Staff are accommodating and hands-off, and there's a good Brahmin pure veg **rooftop restaurant** (mains ₹95-125, no beer). To one side of the the lobby, and right beside the water's edge, is **Jheel's Ginger Coffee Bar** (coffee ₹50-100; ☺ 8am-8pm), which has free wi-fi and does excellent coffee. Across the street, **Old Jheel Guest House** has three budget rooms (₹300, ₹400 and ₹500) which are clean and comfortable, if a little spartan.

### Hotel Gangaur Palace

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(✉ 24222303; [www.ashokahaveli.com](http://www.ashokahaveli.com); Gadiya Devra; s ₹400-2000, d ₹500-2500; ☺ ☎) This elaborate and faded 250-year-old *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. The hotel also boasts an in-house palm reader, an art school, the good Cafe Namaste and a rooftop restaurant. Wi-fi reaches to some rooms.

**Poonam Haveli**

HOTEL \$\$

( 2410303; [www.hotelpoonamhaveli.com](http://www.hotelpoonamhaveli.com); 39 Lal Ghat; r ₹800-1800; ) A fairly modern place decked out in traditional style, friendly Poonam has 16 spacious, spotlessly clean rooms with big beds and spare but tasteful decor, plus pleasant sitting areas. None of the rooms enjoys lake views, but the rooftop restaurant does, and boasts 'real Italian' pizzas among the usual Indian and traveller fare. The ground-floor cafe **Bon Appetite** ( 8am-10pm) does filter coffee (from ₹60) and cakes. Wi-fi throughout.

**★ Jagat Niwas****Palace Hotel**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

( 2420133; [www.jagatniwaspalace.com](http://www.jagatniwaspalace.com); 23-25 Lal Ghat; non-lake facing ₹1850-2950, lake facing ₹3250-4250; ) This leading Lal Ghat hotel set in two converted lakeside *havelis* takes the location cake. The lake-view rooms are charming, with carved wooden furniture, cushioned window seats and pretty prints. Non-lake-facing rooms are almost as comfortable and attractive, and considerably cheaper. The building is full of character with lots of attractive sitting areas, terraces and courtyards, and it makes the most of its position with a picture-perfect rooftop restaurant. Wi-fi in lobby only.

**Kankarwa Haveli**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

( 2411457; [www.kankarwahaveli.com](http://www.kankarwahaveli.com); 26 Lal Ghat; r incl breakfast ₹3000-5000; ) This is one of Udaipur's few hotels that is a genuine old *haveli*. It's right by the lake, and the white-washed rooms, set around a courtyard, have a lovely simplicity with splashes of colour. They are very small for the price, but have bags of character and the pricier ones look right onto Lake Pichola. Wi-fi in ground-floor courtyard only.

**Jaiwana Haveli**

HOTEL \$\$\$

( 2411103; [www.jaiwanahaveli.com](http://www.jaiwanahaveli.com); 14 Lal Ghat; s/d ₹1690/2250; ) Professionally run by two helpful, efficient brothers, this smart hotel has spotless, unfussy rooms with good beds, some decorated with attractive block-printed fabrics. Book corner room 11, 21 or 31 for views. Wi-fi throughout.

**Hanuman Ghat Area****★ Dream Heaven**

GUESTHOUSE \$

( 2431038; [www.dreamheaven.co.in](http://www.dreamheaven.co.in); r ₹200-1000; ) The best-value digs in Udaipur, Dream Heaven has a fabulous location (the views from the rooftop restaurant are sub-

lime), simple but well-looked-after rooms and a friendly manager who is very helpful without being too keen to please. Deservingly popular. Wi-fi only on rooftop and upper rooms.

**Karohi Haveli**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

( 2430026; [www.karohihaveli.com](http://www.karohihaveli.com); r from ₹3500; ) A beautifully renovated, three-storey 19th-century *haveli* with tastefully-decorated rooms off a cool central marble courtyard. Quiet but welcoming. Has a rooftop restaurant, bar, garden lawn with lake views, lovely pool (nonguests ₹200) and wi-fi throughout.

**Amet Haveli**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

( 2431085; [www.amethaveliudaipur.com](http://www.amethaveliudaipur.com); s/d ₹4800/5700; ) This 350-year-old heritage building on the lake shore has delightful rooms with cushioned window seats and coloured glass with little shutters. They're set around a pretty little courtyard and pond. Splurge on one with a balcony or giant bathtub. One of Udaipur's most romantic restaurants, Ambrai, is part of the hotel. A swimming pool was under construction at the time of research.

**City Palace Area****Kumbha Palace**

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

( 2422702, 9828059505; [www.hotelkumbhapalace.com](http://www.hotelkumbhapalace.com); 104 Bhattiyan Chotta; s/d ₹500/550, with AC ₹900; ) This wonderfully peaceful place, tucked up a quiet alley off Bhattiyan Chotta, is run by the same couple behind the excellent horse-riding company at Krishna Ranch. This property overlooks a lush lawn which is shaded by a section of the huge City Palace wall and is a lovely place to relax. The 10 rooms are simple but comfortable (just one has air-con), and the restaurant knows how to satisfy homesick travellers. Wi-fi throughout.

**★ Taj Lake Palace**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

( 2428800; [www.tajhotels.com](http://www.tajhotels.com); r from ₹40,000; ) 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. Service is superb. Access is by boat from the hotel's own jetty in the City Palace gardens. Rates can vary a lot with season and demand: check the website.

**Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$ (2528016; [www.etalnalmewar.in](http://www.etalnalmewar.in); City Palace Complex; r from ₹15,000; ) This hotel, in the former palace guest quarters, has opulent common areas like its pool courtyard, bar and lovely lawn garden with a 30m-long royal procession mural. Some of the suites are truly palatial, filled with fountains and silver, but the standard rooms are not great value. Go for a suite, or just come for a drink (beer from ₹475), meal (mains ₹500 to ₹1000), or swim in the gorgeous marble **pool** (nonguests ₹300; 9am-6pm). Rates drop dramatically from April to September.

## Further Afield

### ★ Krishna Ranch

COTTAGES \$\$

(3291478, 9602192902; [www.krishnaranch.com](http://www.krishnaranch.com); s/d incl meals ₹1500/2500) This delightful countryside retreat has five cottages set around the grounds of a small farm. Each comes with attached bathroom (with solar-heated hot-water shower), tasteful decor and farm views. All meals are included in the price and are prepared using organic produce grown on the farm. It's an ideal base for the hikes and horse treks which the management – a Dutch-Indian couple – organises from here, although you don't have to sign up for the treks to stay. The ranch is 7km from town, near the village of Badi, but there's free pick-up from Udaipur.

## Eating

Udaipur has scores of sun-kissed rooftop cafes, many with mesmerising lake views but often with uninspired multicuisine fare. Fortunately there's also a healthy number of places putting a bit more thought into their food; beer is plentiful.

## Lal Ghat Area

### Lotus Cafe

MULTICUISINE \$

(15 Bhattiyan Chotta; dishes ₹50-150; 9am-10.30pm) Run by an Australian-Indian couple, this funky little restaurant produces fabulous chicken dishes (predominantly Indian, including some Rajasthani specialties), plus salads, baked potatoes and plenty of vegetarian fare. It's ideal for meeting and greeting other travellers, with a mezzanine to loll about on and cool background sounds. The management's latest venture, a multicuisine rooftop restaurant called

**Hinglish**, was about to open two doors up from here when we last visited.

### Jagat Niwas Palace Hotel

INDIAN \$\$

(2420133; 23-25 Lal Ghat; mains ₹150-375; 7-10am, noon-3pm & 6-10pm) A classy rooftop restaurant with superb lake views, delicious Indian cuisine and good service. Choose from an extensive selection of rich curries (tempered for Western tastes) – mutton, chicken, fish, veg – as well as the tandoori classics. There's a tempting cocktail menu (from ₹255) and the beer (from ₹165) is icy. It's wise to book ahead for dinner.

### O'Zen Restaurant

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(mains ₹100-300; 8.30am-11pm) A trendy new addition to City Palace Rd, this stylish first-floor restaurant-cafe does a range of Indian curries plus Italian pizza and pasta. It's bright and modern, does good coffee (₹50 to ₹70), beer (₹180), has free wi-fi and some interesting views of the street below.

### Savage Garden

MEDITERRANEAN \$\$

(2425440; 22 Inside Chandpol; mains ₹190-320; 11am-11pm) Has a winning line in soups, chicken and homemade pasta dishes with assorted sauces, though portions aren't huge. There are some Middle Eastern influences too. The setting is atmospheric, in a 250-year-old *haveli* with indigo walls, bowls of flowers and tables in alcoves or a pleasant courtyard.

## Hanuman Ghat Area

### ★ Millets of Mewar

INDIAN \$

([www.milletsofmewar.com](http://www.milletsofmewar.com); Hanuman Ghat; ₹80-140; 8.30am-10.30pm; ) Our favourite restaurant in Udaipur, this place not only does the healthiest food in town, but its dishes are also super tasty and fabulous value for money. Local millet is used where possible instead of less environmentally sound wheat and rice, there are vegan options, gluten-free dishes, fresh salads, and juices and herbal teas. There are multigrain sandwiches and millet pizzas, but also regular curries, Indian street-food snacks, pasta and even pancakes. The coffee is deliciously unhealthy, and there's ice cream and chocolate pudding to go with the millet cookies on the unusual dessert menu. The manager is young, friendly and laidback, and organises cookery classes and guided city walks.

**Jasmin**

**MULTICUISINE \$**  
(mains ₹60-90; ☺ 8.30am-11pm) Tasty vegetarian dishes are cooked up here in a lovely, quiet, open-air spot looking out on the quaint Daiji footbridge. There are plenty of Indian options, and some original variations on the usual multicuisine theme including Korean and Israeli dishes. The ambience is super-relaxed and service is friendly. Next door the **Little Prince** (mains ₹80-130) has the same setting and a very similar menu with slightly higher prices.

**Queen Cafe****INDIAN \$**

(14 Bajrang Marg; mains ₹60-75; ☺ 8am-10pm) This friendly, pocket-sized eatery, on the ground floor of the family home of ace chef Meenu, serves up fabulous home-style Indian vegetarian dishes. Try the pumpkin curry with mint and coconut, and the Kashmiri pulao with fruit, vegies and coconut. Don't pass on the chocolate desserts either! Meenu also runs cookery classes from here.

**★ Ambrai****NORTH INDIAN \$\$**

(₹ 2431085; Amet Haveli hotel; mains ₹250-400; ☺ 12.30-3pm & 7.30-10.30pm) The cuisine at this scenic restaurant – at lake-shore level, looking across to the Lake Palace Hotel, Lal Ghat and the City Palace – does justice to its fabulous position. Highly atmospheric at night, Ambrai feels like a French park, with its wrought-iron furniture, dusty ground and large shady trees, and there's a terrific bar to complement the dining. Call ahead to reserve a table by the water's edge.

**City Palace**

Note, you have to pay the ₹25 City Palace entrance fee to access the following.

**Paantya Restaurant****INDIAN \$\$\$**

(₹ 2528016; Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel; mains ₹500-1000; ☺ noon-3pm & 7-10.30pm) Most captivating in the evening, this semiformal restaurant in the ritzy Shiv Niwas Palace has indoor seating, but if the weather's warm enough it's best in the open-air courtyard by the pool. Indian classical music is performed nightly, and the food is great. For local flavour try the very tasty *laal maas dhungar*, a Rajasthani spiced and smoked mutton dish. A beer will set you back a cool ₹475.

**Palki Khana****ITALIAN \$\$\$**

(City Palace; mains ₹300-500; ☺ 9am-6pm) This informal terrace restaurant is the most

popular place to refuel during a tour of the City Palace complex. Located centrally in the large open courtyard beside the entrance to the museum, it does mostly Italian dishes as well as good-quality wine, beer (from ₹350) and coffee (₹110 to ₹150). Note, drinks are half price between 4.30pm and 5.30pm.

**Drinking**

Most guesthouses have a roof terrace serving up cold Kingfishers with views over the lazy waters of Lake Pichola. Particularly worth considering are **Jagat Niwas Palace Hotel** and **Dream Heaven**. For a drink beside the water's edge, try **Jasmin** restaurant or its equally shanty neighbour **Little Prince**. For something more upmarket, head to **Ambrai** restaurant.

**Cafe Edelweiss****CAFE**

(73 Gangaur Ghat Rd; coffee from ₹50; ☺ 8.30am-8pm; ☺) The Savage Garden restaurant folks run this itsy piece of Europe that appeals to homesick and discerning travellers with its baked snacks (sticky cinnamon rolls, squidgy blueberry chocolate cake, apple strudel) and good strong coffee.

**Cafe Namaste****CAFE**

(coffee ₹40-70; ☺ 7am-10pm) A European-themed street-side cafe on the ground floor of Gangaur Palace Hotel that delivers the goods with scrumptious muffins, apple pies, cinnamon rolls, brownies and particularly good chocolate cake. The pride and joy, though, is the shiny silver espresso machine, which squirts out some fine cups of coffee.

**Jheel's Ginger Coffee Bar****CAFE**

(Jheel Guest House; coffee ₹50-100; ☺ 8am-8pm; ☺) Small but slick air-conditioned cafe by the water's edge on the ground floor of Jheel Palace Guest House. Large windows afford good lake views, and the coffee is excellent. Also does a range of cakes and snacks. Note, you can take your coffee up to the open-air rooftop restaurant if you like, but there's no alcohol served here.

**Panera Bar****BAR**

(Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel; beer from ₹475, shots from ₹250; ☺ 11.30am-10pm) Sink into plush sofas surrounded by huge mirrors, royal portraits and beautiful paintwork, or sit out by the pool, and be served like a maharaja.

**Anand Bar****BAR**

(Ambrai Restaurant, Amet Haveli Hotel; beer from ₹150; ☺ 11.30am-10.30pm) The fabulous

lakeside restaurant Ambrai, at Amet Haveli hotel, doubles up as a terrace bar, and is a classy place for a predinner drink. You can grab a small bottle of Kingfisher for ₹150, but there are also cocktails (from ₹375) and a reasonable wine list (from ₹450 per glass).

## ★ Entertainment

### Dharohar

DANCE, PUPPETRY

(2523858; Bagore-ki-Haveli; admission Indian/foreigner ₹60/100, camera ₹100; 7-8pm) The beautiful Bagore-ki-Haveli hosts the best (and most convenient) opportunity to see Rajasthani folk dancing, with nightly one-hour shows of colourful, energetic Mewari, Bhil and western Rajasthani dances, as well as some traditional Rajasthani puppetry.

### Mewar Sound & Light Show

CULTURAL PROGRAM

(Manek Chowk, City Palace; lower/upper seating English show ₹150/400, Hindi show ₹100/200; 7pm Sep-Feb, 7.30pm Mar-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, bangles and other jewellery, traditional shoes, spices, leather-bound handmade-paper notebooks, ornate knives, camel-bone boxes and a large variety of textiles – line the streets radiating from Jagdish Chowk. Bargain hard.

Udaipur is known for its local crafts, particularly its miniature paintings in the Rajput-Mughal style. To find out more, ask at the art workshop at Hotel Krishna Niwas.

### Sadhna

CLOTHING

(2454655; www.sadhna.org; Jagdish Temple Rd; 10am-7pm) This is the outlet for Seva Mandir, an NGO set up in 1969 to help rural women. The small shop sells attractive fixed-price textiles, including women's clothing, bags and shawls, plus a small range of jewellery. Profits go to the artisans and towards community development work.

## i Information

### EMERGENCY

**Police** (2414600, 100) There are police posts at Surajpol, Hatipol and Delhi Gates.

## INTERNET ACCESS

There are plenty of internet cafes, particularly around Lal Ghat, but also around Hanuman Ghat, where you can get online for around ₹30 per hour. Many places double as travel agencies, bookshops, art shops etc.

## MEDICAL SERVICES

**GBH American Hospital** (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 Lal Ghat area.

## MONEY

Annoyingly, the ATMs near Jagdish Chowk are often out of service. If so, keep walking north-east, beyond the Old Clock Tower, and you'll find some more. There are lots of unofficial money-changers around Lal Ghat.

**Thomas Cook** (Lake Palace Rd; 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Changes cash, travellers' cheques and gives cash advances on credit cards.

## POST

**Post Office** (City Palace Rd; 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) This handy branch is beside the City Palace's Badi Pol ticket office. It's tiny, but sends parcels abroad, does packaging and has practically no queues.

## i Getting There & Away

### AIR

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

**Jet Airways** (5134000; www.jetairways.com; airport) Flies direct to Delhi and Mumbai daily.

### BUS

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

The main bus stand is 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 ₹30 to ₹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.

See the table for a selection of services leaving from the main bus stand.

## 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, though, so use that when you arrive.

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

For **Pushkar**, four daily trains make the five-hour journey to Ajmer (6.15am, 2.15pm, 5.20pm and 10.20pm). An unreserved 'general ticket' costs around ₹80.

Five daily trains make the two-hour trip to **Chittorgarh** (6.15am, 5.20pm, 6.15pm, 8.35pm and 10.20pm). An unreserved 'general ticket' costs around ₹45.

Three trains run daily to **Jaipur** (6.15am, 2.15pm and 10.20pm), taking around seven hours.

Two daily trains (5.20pm and 6.15pm) make the 12-hour trip to **Delhi**.

Only one train runs daily to **Bundi** (6.15pm).

Likewise, only one daily train runs to **Agra** (10.20pm).

## i Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The airport is 25km east of town. A prepaid taxi to the Lal Ghat area costs ₹400.

### BICYCLE & MOTORCYCLE

Some guesthouses can arrange bicycles to rent. **Lakeside Cycle Tourism** (per hour/day ₹15/100; ☎ 8am-9.30pm) is a small bicycle-rental outfit near Hanuman Ghat.

Bicycle, scooters and motorbikes (including Enfield Bullets) can be rented from **Heera Cycle Store** (₹7.30am-9pm), just off Gangaur Ghat Rd. Costs per day are ₹50/350/400/500 for bicycles/scooters/motorbikes/Enfields with a deposit of ₹1500/10,000/10,000/25,000 or your passport. You'll also need your driving licence.

## TRANSPORT FROM UDAIPUR

### Major Buses from Udaipur

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY & TIMES
Ahmedabad	200	5	hourly, 5am-10pm
Ajmer	215	7	hourly, 6am-9.30pm
Bundi	200	6	5.30am, 8am & 9.30am
Chittorgarh	90	2½	every 30 minutes, 5.30am-11.30pm
Delhi	550	15	11am, 3.30pm, 4pm & 11.30pm
Jaipur	330	9	hourly, 4am-9.30pm
Jodhpur	210	6-8	hourly, 5.30am-10pm
Kota	230	7	half-hourly, 6am-10.30pm
Mt Abu (Abu Road)	230	4	hourly, 5.30am-5.15pm
Mt Abu (direct)	230	4½	5am

### Major Trains from Udaipur

DESTINATION	TRAIN	DEPARTURE TIME	ARRIVAL TIME	FARE (₹)
Agra (Cantonment)	19666 Udaipur-Kurj Exp	10.20pm	11am	267/748 (A)
Ajmer	09722 Udaipur-Jaipur SF SPL	2.15pm	7.10pm	96/349 (B)
Bundi	12964 Mewar Exp	6.15pm	10.40pm	157/398 (A)
Chittorgarh	12982 Chetak Exp	5.20pm	7.10pm	140/275 (A)
Delhi (Nizamuddin)	12964 Mewar Exp	6.15pm	6.30am	305/831 (A)
Jaipur	19666 Udaipur-Kurj Exp	10.20pm	6am	194/533 (A)

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

**TAXI**

Most hotels, guesthouses and travel agencies (many of which are on the road leading down to the lake from Jagdish Temple) can organise you a car and driver to just about anywhere you want. As an example, a return day trip to Ranakpur and Kumbhalgarh will cost you around ₹1500 per vehicle.

**Around Udaipur****Kumbhalgarh**

02954

About 80km north of Udaipur, **Kumbhalgarh** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☺ 9am-6pm) is a fantastic remote fort, fulfilling romantic expectations and vividly summoning up the chivalrous, warlike Rajput era. One of the many forts built by Rana Kumbha (r 1433–68), under whom Mewar reached its greatest extents, the isolated fort is perched 1100m above sea level, with endless views melting into the blue distance. And 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 Amer, Marwar and Mughal emperor Akbar to breach its strong defences, and they only managed to hang onto it for two days.

The fort's thick walls stretch for about 10km to 12km; they're wide enough in some places for eight horses to ride abreast and it's possible to walk a complete circuit on top of the wall in around four hours. 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.

Note, 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** (₹200) at the fort every evening at 6.30pm.

The large and rugged Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary can be visited from Kumbhalgarh. Ask at the Aodhi hotel about organising jeep, horse or walking trips in the sanctuary.

### Sleeping & Eating

#### **Lucky Restaurant and Guest House**

GUESTHOUSE \$

( 9783828309; huts/tents/rooms ₹200/300/300) Located 200m up the approach road to the fort (so about 1.5km from the fort itself), and set down from the road amongst rice paddies and surrounding farmland, this shanty guesthouse is about as basic as it gets, but it's a magical spot. There are five simple rooms, a couple of tents and two thatched huts on wooden stilts that are just about big enough for a double mattress. It's shared bathrooms only and hot water by the bucket, but the rural setting is hard to beat and the friendly manager keeps you well fed and ensures a constant flow of chai.

#### **Aodhi**

HOTEL \$\$\$

( 8003722333, 242341; [www.etalnemewar.in](http://www.etalnemewar.in); Kumbhalgarh; r from ₹7200; ) On the main road about 100m before the start of the approach road to the fort, and just under 2km from the fort itself, is this luxurious

**KUMBHALGARH WILDLIFE SANCTUARY**

Ranakpur is a great base for exploring the hilly, densely forested **Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary** (Indian/foreigner ₹20/160, jeep or car ₹130, camera/video free/₹400, guide per day ₹200; ☺ dawn-dusk), which extends over some 600 sq km to the northeast and southwest. It's known for its leopards and wolves, although the chances of spotting antelopes, gazelles, deer and possible sloth bears are higher, especially from March to June. You will certainly see some of the sanctuary's 200-plus bird species. Some of the best safaris and treks are offered (to guests and nonguests) by Shivika Lake Hotel: options include jeep safaris (per person ₹700 to ₹1200), day-long forest walks (₹750), a guided round trip to Kumbhalgarh (bus there, hike back; ₹650) and even overnight camping trips.

Note, there is 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, near Shivika Lake Hotel.

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 (lunch/dinner ₹850/1100), where good standard Indian fare is the pick of the options on offer, have a drink in the cosy Chowpal Bar, or swim in the pool (₹400). Room rates plummet from April to September.

## Getting There & Away

From Udaipur's main bus stand, catch a Ranakpur-bound bus as far as Saira (₹57, 2½ hours, at least hourly), a tiny crossroads town where you can change for a bus to Kumbhalgarh (₹30, 1 hour, hourly). That bus, which will be bound for Kelwara, 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 accommodation we list is within walking distance from the bus drop-off.

The last bus back to Saira swings by at 5.30pm (and is always absolutely jam-packed with villagers). 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 (₹14, 40 minutes, at least hourly).

A day-long round trip in a private car from Udaipur to Kumbhalgarh and Ranakpur will cost around ₹1500 per car.

## Ranakpur

 02934

At the foot of a remote, steep, wooded escarpment of the Aravalli Hills, **Ranakpur** (camera/video ₹100/300; ☺ Jains 6am-7pm, non-Jains noon-5pm) is one of India's biggest and most important Jain temple complexes. It's 75km northwest of Udaipur (and an easy day trip), and 12km west of Kumbhalgarh as the crow flies (although 50km by road, via Saira). The main temple, the **Chaumukha Mandir** (Four-Faced Temple), is dedicated to Adinath, the first Jain *tirthankar* (depicted in the many Buddha-like images in the temple), and was built in the 15th century in milk-white marble. An incredible feat of Jain devotion, this is a complicated series of 29 halls, 80 domes and 1444 individually engraved pillars. The interior is covered in knotted, lovingly wrought carving, and has a calming sense of space and harmony. Shoes, cigarettes and leather articles must be left

at the entrance; menstruating women are asked not to enter.

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

Buses from Udaipur and Saira will drop you by the entrance to the temple complex, before continuing past Shivika Lake Hotel (2km), and then going on to Jodhpur.

## Sleeping & Eating

### **Shivika Lake Hotel**

GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$

( 0799118573, 285078; [www.shivikalakehotel.com](http://www.shivikalakehotel.com); r ₹600-1600, tent ₹1200; ☺ ☻) Less than 2km beyond the temple complex, Shivika is a welcoming, rustic, family-run guesthouse that provides free pick-ups to and from the bus drop-off at the temples. You can stay in small, cosy rooms amid leafy gardens or safari-style tents. Beautiful Nalwania Lake is a short scramble up a pathway from the guesthouse. There's a swimming pool beside the lake, as well as a sprinkling of tables and chairs where guests can eat breakfast. Boat trips on the lake are also available. The menu (mains ₹100 to ₹150) is mostly Indian and very tasty.

### **Ranakpur Hill Resort**

HOTEL \$\$\$

( 286411; [www.ranakpurhillresort.com](http://www.ranakpurhillresort.com); Ranakpur Rd; s/d from ₹2000/2500; ☺ ☻) About 3km beyond the temple complex, this well-run hotel has a lovely pool in grassy gardens, around which are attractive, air-conditioned rooms sporting marble floors, stained glass and floral wall paintings.

## Getting There & Away

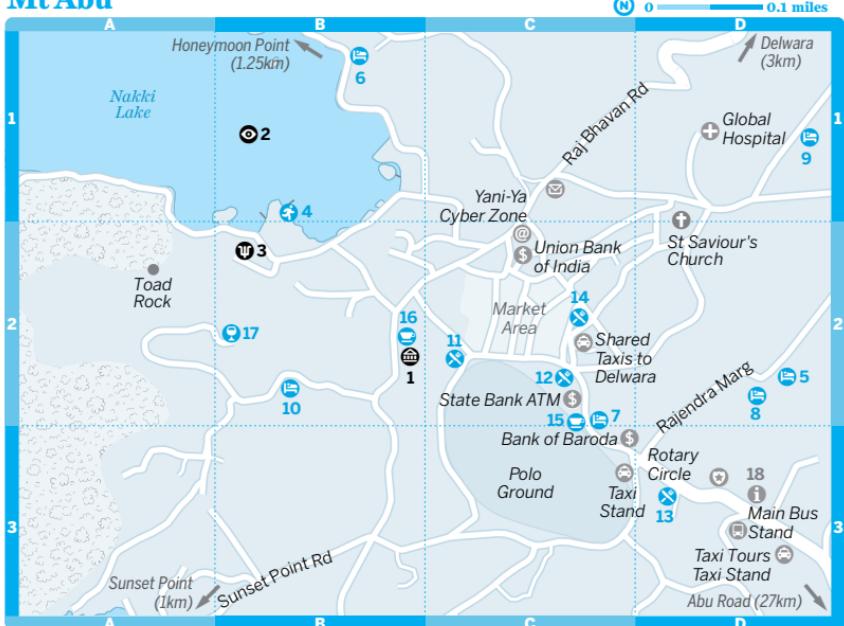
There are direct buses to Ranakpur from the main bus stands in both Udaipur (₹70, three hours, hourly) and Jodhpur (₹109, four to five hours). You'll be dropped outside the temple complex unless you state otherwise. Return buses start drying up at around 7.30pm.

## Mt Abu

 02974 / POP 30.000 / ELEV 1200M

Rajasthan's only hill station sits amongst green forests on the state's highest mountain at the southwestern end of the Aravalli Range, close to the Gujarat border. Quite unlike anywhere else in Rajasthan, Mt Abu

## Mt Abu



## Mt Abu

### Sights

- 1 World Renewal Spiritual Museum.....B2  
Brahma Kumaris Peace Hall &  
Museum .....(see 1)
- 2 Nakki Lake .....B1
- 3 Raghunath Temple .....B2

### Activities, Courses & Tours

- 4 Boat Rental.....B1  
Mt Abu Treks .....(see 6)

### Sleeping

- 5 Connaught House.....D2
- 6 Hotel Lake Palace .....B1
- 7 Hotel Samrat .....C2
- 8 Kishangarh House .....D2
- 9 Mushkil Aasan .....D1

- 10 Shri Ganesh Hotel .....B2

### Eating

- 11 Arbuda .....C2
- 12 Chacha Cafe.....C2
- 13 Kanak Dining Hall .....D3
- 14 Sher-e-Punjab Hotel .....C2

### Drinking & Nightlife

- 15 Cafe Coffee Day.....C2
- 16 Cafe Shikib.....B2
- 17 Polo Bar .....B2

### Information

- Railway Reservation Centre.....(see 18)
- 18 Tourist Reception Centre.....D3

provides Rajasthani, Gujaratis and a steady flow of foreign tourists with respite from scorching temperatures and arid beige terrain elsewhere. It's a particular hit with honeymooners and middle-class families from Gujarat.

Mt Abu town sits towards the southwest end of the plateau-like upper part of the mountain, which stretches about 19km from end to end and 6km from east to west. The town is surrounded by the flora- and fauna-

rich, 289-sq-km Mt Abu Wildlife Sanctuary, which extends over most of the mountain from an altitude of 300m upwards.

The mountain is of great spiritual importance for both Hindus and Jains and has more than 80 temples and shrines, most notably the exquisite Jain temples at Delwara, built between 400 and 1000 years ago.

Try to avoid arriving in Diwali (October or November) or the two weeks following, when prices soar and the place is packed. Mt

Abu also gets pretty busy from mid-May to mid-June, before the monsoon. This is when the Summer Festival hits town, with music, fireworks and boat races. In the cooler months, you will find everyone wrapped up in shawls and hats; pack something woolly to avoid winter chills in poorly heated hotel rooms.

## Sights & Activities

### Nakki Lake

LAKE

Scenic Nakki Lake, the town's focus, is one of its 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. The 14th-century **Raghunath Temple** (₹dawn-dusk) stands near the lake's south shore. **Boating** (₹110-450 per boat, 30min) is also popular.

### 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 jolly hill-station entertainment.

### Brahma Kumaris

#### Peace Hall & Museum

MEDITATION, MUSEUM

The white-clad people you'll see around town are either armed forces or members of the **Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University** ([www.bkwsu.com](http://www.bkwsu.com)), a worldwide or-

ganisation whose headquarters are here in Mt Abu. The university's **Universal Peace Hall** (Om Shanti Bhawan; ₹8am-6pm), is just north of Nakki Lake. Free 30-minute tours are available, including an introduction to the Brahma Kumaris philosophy. The organisation also runs the small **World Renewal Spiritual Museum** (admission free; ₹8am-8pm) in the town centre.

## Tours

The RSRTC runs full-day (₹85) and half-day (₹30) bus tours of Mt Abu's main sights, leaving from the bus stand at 9.30am and 1pm respectively, and returning at around 6pm. A full-day taxi tour costs ₹150. Admission, camera fees and the ₹20 guide fee are extra. Buy tickets for the bus tour at the main bus stand, and tickets for the taxi tour at the nearby taxi stand.

## Sleeping

Room rates can double or worse during the peak seasons – mid-May to mid-June, Diwali and Christmas/New Year – but generous discounts are often available at other times in midrange and top-end places. If you have to come here at Diwali, you'll need to book way ahead and you won't be able to move for crowds. Most hotels have an ungenerous 9am checkout time.

### Shri Ganesh Hotel

HOTEL \$

(₹237292; [laith\\_ganesh@yahoo.co.in](mailto:laith_ganesh@yahoo.co.in); dm ₹150-200, without bathroom ₹100, s ₹300, d ₹400-1200; @) Deservedly the most popular budget spot, Shri Ganesh is well set up for travellers, with an inexpensive cafe, a small internet room

## 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, Adivasis (tribal people), orchids, wild fruits, plants used in ayurvedic medicine, sloth bears, langurs, 150 bird species and even the occasional leopard. For safety reasons, it's highly recommended you take a guide. Foreign tourists have been injured by wild animals here in the past, and a lone Israeli tourist was murdered while hiking here in 2008.

Mt Abu-born Mahendra Dan ('Charles') of **Mt Abu Treks** (₹9414154854; [www.mountain-abu-treks.blogspot.com](http://www.mountain-abu-treks.blogspot.com); Hotel Lake Palace) is a passionate and knowledgeable nature lover who leads excellent tailor-made treks ranging from three or four hours close to Mt Abu (₹500 per person) to day-long (₹1000 per person) or overnight treks (₹2000 per person) to Adivasi villages. There's a two-person minimum, and on some routes wildlife-sanctuary entrance fees (Indian/foreigner ₹20/160) and/or transport costs (₹300 to ₹2500 for a car drop-off and pick-up) have to be paid too.

Either call Charles directly, or ask for him at Hotel Lake Palace.

## DELWARA TEMPLES

These remarkable **Jain temples** (⌚ Jains 6am-6pm, non-Jains noon-6pm) are Mt Abu's outstanding attraction and feature some of India's finest temple decorations. They predate the town of Mt Abu by many centuries and were built when this site was just a remote mountain fastness. 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, financed by a Gujarati chief minister named Vimal, began in 1031. 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. It's difficult to believe that this huge lace-like filigree started life as a solid block of marble.

As at other Jain temples, leather articles (belts as well as shoes), cameras and mobile phones have to be left at the entrance. Menstruating women are asked not to enter.

Delwara is about 3km north of Mt Abu town centre: you can walk here 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 ₹50, or ₹150 round trip with one hour's waiting. There are tea and snack stalls by the entrance to the temples.

and plenty of helpful travel information. Rooms are well used but colourful and clean and have TV and hot-water showers (from 6am to 10am only). Some have squat toilets; some sit-down versions. Daily forest walks and cooking lessons are on offer.

### ★ **Mushkil Asan**

GUESTHOUSE \$\$  
 (⌚ 235150; 9429409660; [crrps@yahoo.com](mailto:crrps@yahoo.com); s/d/q ₹1100/1200/1800) Cute colonial-style guesthouse run by a welcoming family and set in a beautifully maintained, tree-shaded garden, which receives daily visits from a passing troop of langurs. Nine homely rooms include three 'family rooms' that can sleep four people. There are home-cooked meals, but no internet access.

### **Hotel Samrat**

HOTEL \$\$  
 (⌚ 238453; [samrat.hotel@yahoo.in](mailto:samrat.hotel@yahoo.in); r from ₹1200; ✩) Modest, unassuming hotel with clean, well turned-out rooms that come with TV, comfortable beds and views of the polo ground. No internet.

### **Connaught House**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$  
 (⌚ 235439; [www.welcomheritagehotels.com](http://www.welcomheritagehotels.com); Rajendra Marg; r incl breakfast ₹6700; ✩@) A charmingly stuck-in-time colonial bun-

galow that looks like an English cottage, with lots of sepia photographs, dark wood, angled ceilings and a gorgeous shady garden. The management are a bit keen to please, but that does mean you can fish for discounts.

### **Kishangarh House**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$  
 (⌚ 238092; [www.royalkishangarh.com](http://www.royalkishangarh.com); Rajendra Marg; cottage/room ₹3000/4500; ✩@) The former summer residence of the maharaja of Kishangarh is now a low-key, but enchanting heritage hotel. The rooms in the main building are big with extravagantly high ceilings. The cottage rooms at the back are smaller but cosy. There is a delightful sun-filled drawing room and the lovely terraced gardens are devotedly tended.

### **Hotel Lake Palace**

HOTEL \$\$\$  
 (⌚ 237154; <http://savshantihotels.com>; r incl breakfast ₹2100-2700; ✩@) Spacious and family-friendly, Hotel Lake Palace has an attractive lakeside location and a well-tended lawn with a small children's play area. Rooms are simple, uncluttered, bright and clean. All have air-con and some have semiprivate lake-view terrace areas. Rooftop restaurant.

## Eating

### Sher-e-Punjab Hotel

(mains ₹75-130; ☎ 10am-4pm & 7-11pm) This place in the market area has bargain Punjabi food and is very popular. Has plenty of regular veg curries that won't stretch the budget, plus tandoori chicken.

### Chacha Cafe

MULTICUISINE \$

(mains ₹60-160; ☎) A very neat, bright eatery with red-check tablecloths and welcome air-con. The presentable fare includes dosa (particularly good), pizza, vegetarian burgers, cashew curry and biryani. Wi-fi is ₹50 per hour.

### Kanak Dining Hall

INDIAN \$

(Gujarati/Punjabi thali ₹60/130; ☎ 8.30am-3.30pm & 7-11pm) The excellent all-you-can-eat thalis (₹140 to ₹170) are contenders for Mt Abu's best meals; there's seating indoors in the busy dining hall or outside under a canopy.

### Arbuda

INDIAN \$\$

(Arbuda Circle; mains ₹100-150; ☎ 7am-10.30pm) This busy restaurant is set on a sweeping open terrace filled with chrome chairs and overlooking the street. It's popular for its Gujarati, Punjabi and South Indian food.



## Drinking

### Polo Bar

BAR

(Jaipur House; ☎ 8am-10pm) The heritage hotel, Jaipur House, has a fabulous hilltop location, but it's overpriced, so come here instead for a beer (from ₹180) or a cocktail (from ₹200). Make sure you sit out on the roof terrace – the views over the town and the lake are stunning. You can eat here too (mains ₹160 to ₹300).

### Cafe Shikib

CAFE

(coffee from ₹60; ☎ 9am-10pm) Cool, comfortable, modern cafe with fresh coffee, free wi-fi, sandwiches and chips.



## MT ABU PRECAUTIONS

Unless you are in a group, it is very unwise to visit Sunset Point or Honey-moon Point any time other than sunset when lots of people will be around. It is also unwise to wander off the streets alone – for example along some of the town's surrounding paths shown on Tourist Reception Centre maps. Muggings, wild-animal attacks and even a murder have happened in recent years to foreign tourists who have ignored these precautions.

### Cafe Coffee Day

CAFE

(Rotary Circle; coffee from ₹60; ☎ 9am-11pm) Abu's branch of India's most popular caffeine-supply chain. There's another branch on Collectorate Rd.

## Information

There are State Bank ATMs on Raj Bhavan Rd, opposite Hotel Samrat and outside the Tourist Reception Centre, and a Bank of Baroda ATM on Lake Rd.

**Union Bank of India** (Main Market; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm Sat) The only bank changing travellers cheques and currency.

**Yani-Ya Cyber Zone** (Raj Bhavan Rd; internet per hr ₹30; ☎ 9am-10pm) Has wi-fi too.

**Global Hospital** (✉ 238847)

## 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 nearest train station is. Some buses from other cities go all the way up to Mt Abu, others only go as far as Abu Road. Buses (₹29, 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 ₹300 by day or ₹400 by night.

## SELECTED TRAINS FROM ABU ROAD

DESTINATION	TRAIN	DEPARTURE TIME	ARRIVAL TIME	FARE (₹)
Ahmedabad	19224 Jammu Tawi-Ahmedabad Express	10.57am	3pm	120/308 (A)
Delhi (New Delhi)	12957 Swarna J Raj Express	8.54pm	7.30am	1068/1530 (B)
Jaipur	19707 Aravalli Express	10.02am	6.55pm	194/533 (A)
Jodhpur	19223 Ahmedabad-Jammu Tawi Express	3.22pm	8pm	143/385 (A)
Mumbai	19708 Aravalli Express	5.10pm	6.35am	264/740 (A)

Fares: (A) sleeper/3AC, (B) 3AC/2AC

There's a charge of ₹10 for each person (including bus passengers) and car as you enter Mt Abu.

## BUS

Services from Mt Abu bus stand include:

**Ahmedabad** (₹150, seven hours, hourly from 6am to 9pm)

**Jaipur** (seat/sleeper ₹718/768, 11 hours, 6.30pm)

**Jodhpur** (₹224, six hours, 6.45am, 8.30am and 12.30pm)

**Udaipur** (₹153 to ₹160, 4½ hours, 8am, 9.15am, 1pm and 4.30pm)

## 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 ₹10. Mt Abu has a **railway reservation centre** (⌚ 8am-2pm Mon-Sat) above the tourist office.

## Around Mt Abu

### Guru Shikhar

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 jeep will cost at least ₹500 return.

## WESTERN RAJASTHAN

### Jodhpur

⌚ 0291 / POP 1 MILLION

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. Traditionally, blue

signified the home of a Brahmin, but non-Brahmins have got in on the act too. As well as glowing with a mysterious light, the blue tint is thought to repel insects.

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, and it often seems you can't speak to anyone without them trying to sell you something. 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](http://www.mehrangarh.org); museum admission ₹300/250, camera/video ₹100/200, guide ₹200; ⌚ 9am-5pm) 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.

Mehrangarh's main entrance, at the northeast gate, **Jai Pol**, is a 300m walk up

from Hill View Guest House in the old city. Or you can take a winding 5km autorickshaw ride (around ₹100). The audio tour, included with the museum ticket, is in multiple languages and requires a deposit of passport, credit/debit card or ₹2000. You don't need a ticket to enter the fort itself, only the museum section.

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 (down to the right is the way to **Chokhelao Bagh** gardens and the fort's back entrance at **Fateh Pol**), 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 handprints, the *sati* (self-immolation) marks of royal widows who threw themselves on their maharajas' funeral pyres – the last to do so were widows of Maharaja Man Singh 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.

#### ► Museum

This beautiful network of stone-latticed courtyards and halls, formerly the fort's palace, is a superb example of Rajput architecture, 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.

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 **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 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, whose lovely latticed windows (from which the women could watch the goings-on in the courtyards) are said to feature over 250 different designs. 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 for official meetings and receptions, with gorgeously colourful stained glass.

#### ► Flying Fox

This 45-minute circuit of six **zip lines** ([www.flyingfox.asia](http://www.flyingfox.asia); ₹1400; ☺ 9.30am, 10.30am, 11.30am, 2.30pm, 3.30pm, 4.30pm) flies back and forth over walls, bastions and lakes on the north side of Mehrangarh. Safety standards are good and 'awesome' is the verdict of most who dare.

#### Jaswant Thada

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Indian/foreigner ₹15/30, camera/video ₹25/50; ☺ 9am–5pm) This milky-white marble memorial to Maharaja Jaswant Singh II, sitting above a small lake, within walking distance 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.

#### Clock Tower

MONUMENT

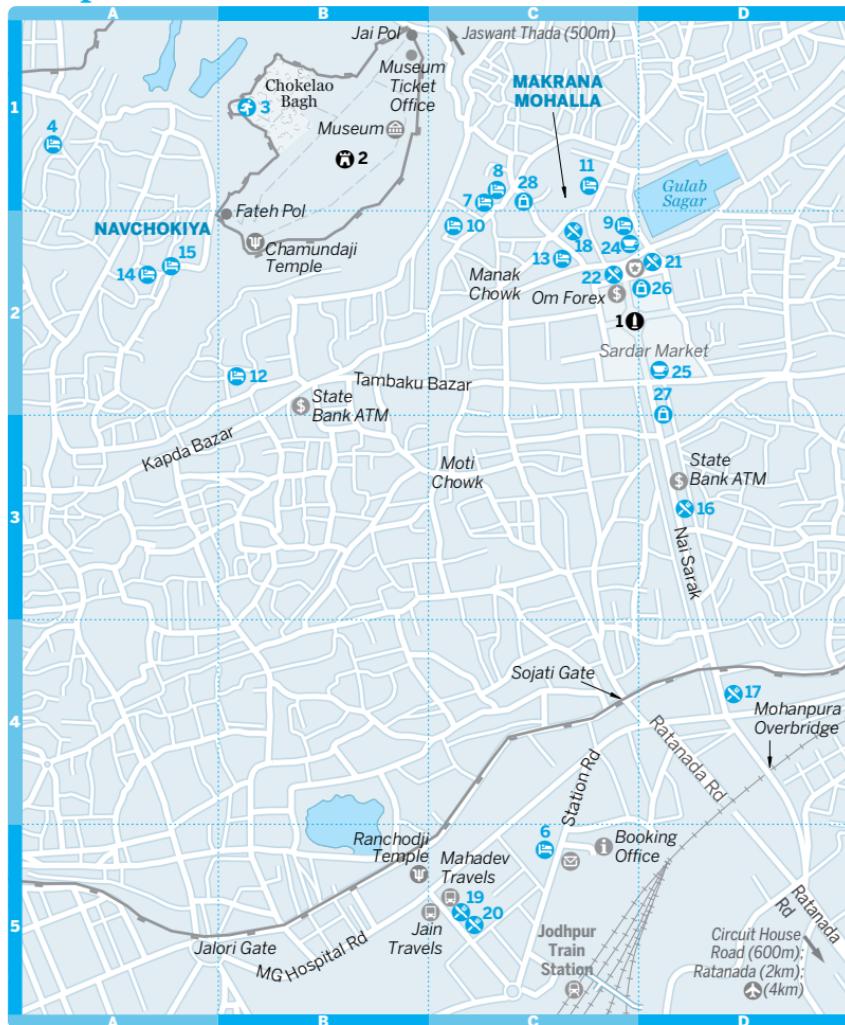
The century-old clock tower is an old-city landmark surrounded by the vibrant sounds, sights and smells of Sardar Market, which is marked by triple gateways at its north and south ends. The narrow, winding lanes of the old city spread out in all directions from here. Westward, you plunge into the old city's commercial heart, with crowded alleys and bazaars selling vegetables, spices, sweets, silver and handicrafts.

#### Umaid Bhawan Palace

PALACE

(museum Indian/foreigner ₹25/60; ☺ museum 9am–5pm) Consider taking an autorickshaw (about ₹50) to this hilltop palace, 3km southeast of the old city. The current royal incumbent, Gaj Singh II (known as Bapiji), still lives in part of the building. Built in 1929, the 365-room edifice was designed by

## Jodhpur

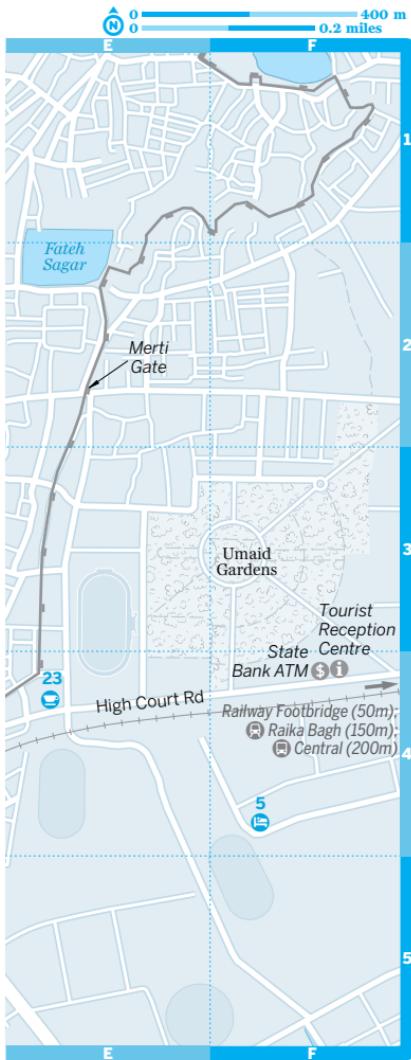


the British architect Henry Lanchester for Maharaja Umaid Singh. It took more than 3000 workers 15 years to complete, at a cost of around ₹11 million. The building is mortarless, and incorporates 100 wagon loads of Makrana marble and Burmese teak in the interior. Apparently its construction began as a royal job-creation program during a time of severe drought. Much of the building has been turned into a suitably grand hotel ([www.tajhotels.com](http://www.tajhotels.com)).

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.

To walk here, first go to the Tourist Reception Centre to pick up a map, then cross the nearby railway footbridge, walk straight ahead, turn left at the roundabout and keep following the road round to the left, past Rani Handicrafts and Ajay Art Emporium, before turning right just after Monarch Garments.



## Jodhpur

### Sights

- 1 Clock Tower ..... C2
- 2 Mehrangarh ..... B1

### Activities, Courses & Tours

- 3 Flying Fox ..... B1
- Sambhal Trust ..... (see 5)

### Sleeping

- 4 Cosy Guest House ..... A1
- 5 Durag Niwas Guest House ..... F4
- 6 Govind Hotel ..... C5
- 7 Hare Krishna Guest House ..... C1
- Haveli Inn Pal ..... (see 9)
- 8 Krishna Prakash Heritage Haveli ..... C1
- 9 Pal Haveli ..... C2
- 10 Push Paying Guest House ..... C2
- 11 Raas ..... C1
- 12 Shahi Guest House ..... B2
- 13 Shivam Paying Guest House ..... C2
- 14 Singhvi's Haveli ..... A2
- 15 Veggie Guest House ..... A2

### Eating

- 16 Darbar ..... D3
- 17 Priya Restaurant ..... D4
- Indique ..... (see 9)
- 18 Hankar Choti Haveli ..... C2
- 19 Kalinga Restaurant ..... C5
- 20 Mid Town ..... C5
- 21 Omelette Shop ..... D2
- 22 Vicky Chouhan Omelettes ..... C2

### Drinking & Nightlife

- 18 Century Bar ..... (see 9)
- 23 Café Coffee Day ..... E4
- 24 Cafe Sheesh Mahal ..... C2
- 25 Shri Mishrilal Hotel ..... D2

### Shopping

- 26 Krishna Book Depot ..... D2
- 27 MV Spices ..... D2
- 28 Sambhal Boutique ..... C1

## Festivals & Events

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 guesthouses, most of which scramble for your custom as soon as you get within breathing distance of Sardar Market.

If a rickshaw rider or friendly local is clamouring to take you to a particular guesthouse or hotel, it's probably because he is aiming to

receive a commission from them. There's a growing anticommission movement among hoteliers here, but many still pay touts, or your rickshaw/taxi driver an absurd 50% of what you pay for your room. Don't believe drivers or strangers on the street who tell you the place you want has closed, is full, is under repair, is far from the centre etc.

Many lodgings can organise a pick-up from the train station or bus stops, even at night, if you call ahead. 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

**Shivam Paying Guest House** GUESTHOUSE \$  
 (✉ 2610688; [www.shivamguesthouse.com](http://www.shivamguesthouse.com); r ₹200-800;  Decent, hassle-free budget guesthouse run by honest management. Has cosy rooms, (very) steep staircases and a lovely little rooftop restaurant with free wi-fi.

**Pushp Paying Guest House** GUESTHOUSE \$  
 (✉ 2648494; [sunokash2003@yahoo.co.in](mailto:sunokash2003@yahoo.co.in); Manak Chowk, Pipli-ki-Gali, Naya Bass; r ₹200-600;  A small guesthouse with a warm and friendly welcome and five clean, colourful rooms with windows and wi-fi. Dramatic fort views from the rooftop restaurant.

**Hare Krishna Guest House** GUESTHOUSE \$  
 (✉ 2635307; [www.harekrishnaguesthouse.net](http://www.harekrishnaguesthouse.net); r ₹200-800) This is another old house that has been extended upwards and squeezes in rooms and stairs wherever possible. The range of rooms is impressive – from the cave-like cheapie to the spacious fort-view rooms. Friendly staff, free wi-fi and, of course, a rooftop restaurant.

**Krishna Prakash Heritage Haveli** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$  
 (✉ 2633448; [www.kpheritage.net](http://www.kpheritage.net); Nayabas; r incl breakfast ₹1000-4000;  This multi-level 1902 *haveli* right under the fort walls is good value and a peaceful choice. It has prettily painted furniture, murals and old family portraits, and rooms are well proportioned; the deluxe ones are a bit more spruced up, generally a bit bigger, and set on the upper floors, so airier. There's a small covered swimming pool and a relaxing terrace restaurant.

**Shahi Guest House** HERITAGE GUESTHOUSE \$\$  
 (✉ 2623802; [www.shahiguesthouse.net](http://www.shahiguesthouse.net); Gandhi St, City Police; r ₹1500-2750;  Shahi is an interesting guesthouse developed from a 350-year-old zenana. There's lots of cool stone, and narrow walkways surrounding a petite courtyard. The six rooms are individual and spacious yet cosy, and Anu and her family, who run the place, are charming. There is a delightful rooftop restaurant with fort views.

**Pal Haveli** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$  
 (✉ 3293328; [www.palhaveli.com](http://www.palhaveli.com); Gulab Sagar; r incl breakfast ₹3500-8500;  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 cool central courtyard. The family still lives here and can show you its small museum. Three restaurants serve excellent food, including rooftop Indique with its fine views.

**Haveli Inn Pal** HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$  
 (✉ 2612519; [www.haveliinnpal.com](http://www.haveliinnpal.com); r incl breakfast ₹2050-2550;  The smaller, 12-room sibling of Pal Haveli. It's 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.

**Raas** BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$  
 (✉ 2636455; [www.raasjodhpur.com](http://www.raasjodhpur.com); Tunvarji-ka-Jhalar; incl breakfast ₹17,000-21,000;  Developed from a 19th-century city mansion, Jodhpur's first contemporary-style boutique hotel is a splendid retreat of clean, uncluttered style, hidden behind a big castle-like gateway. If you fancy a change from the heritage aesthetic that prevails in Rajasthan's top-end hotels, Raas' clean, uncluttered style and subtle lighting are just the ticket. The red-stone-and-terrazzo rooms are not massive, but they come with plenty of luxury touches and have balconies with great Mehrangarh views or small private gardens. The terrace restaurant (mains ₹400 to ₹800) is also a classy affair.

## Old City (Navchokiya)

One of the most atmospheric yet least touristy parts of the old city, Navchokiya's narrow, twisting lanes lie in the shadow of the western end of Mehrangarh, which you can enter at Fateh Pol gate.

**Cosy Guest House** GUESTHOUSE \$  
 (✉ 2612066, 9829023390; [cosyguesthouse@gmail.com](mailto:cosyguesthouse@gmail.com); Chuna Ki Choki, Navchokiya; r ₹350-850, 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 for Navchokiya Rd, from where the guesthouse is signposted, or call genial Mr Joshi.

**Veggie Guest House** GUESTHOUSE \$  
 (✉ 2611010; Ramdevji-ka-Chowk, Navchokiya; r ₹400-800;  Run by a welcoming elderly couple, this quiet but large family courtyard

home has simple rooms that are spartan, but neat and tidy. Each has a hot-water shower. Some have TV and air-con. Home-cooked meals are available, as is internet (₹40 per hour). No wi-fi.

**Singhvi's Haveli** HERITAGE GUESTHOUSE \$\$  
 (2624293; [www.singhvhaveli.com](http://www.singhvhaveli.com); Ramdevji-ka-Chowk, Navchokiya; r ₹400-2400; This red-sandstone, family-run, 500-year-old *haveli* is an understated gem. Run by two friendly brothers, Singhvi's has 13 individual rooms, ranging from the simple to the magnificent Maharani Suite with 10 windows and a fort view. The relaxing and romantic vegetarian restaurant is decorated with sari curtains and floor cushions, and the interior lounge is a delight.

## Train Station Area

**Govind Hotel** HOTEL \$\$  
 (2622758; [www.govindhotel.com](http://www.govindhotel.com); Station Rd; r ₹600-2000; Well set up for travellers, with helpful management, an internet cafe and conveniently close to the train station. All rooms are clean and tiled, with fairly smart bathrooms. There's a rooftop restaurant and **coffee shop** (₹7am-10pm) with excellent espresso and cakes and free wi-fi.

## South of the Old City

**Durag Niwas Guest House** GUESTHOUSE \$  
 (2512385; [www.durag-niwas.com](http://www.durag-niwas.com); 1st Old Public Park Lane; r ₹400-600, with AC ₹1000-1400; A warm, friendly and well-established family guesthouse set away from the hustle of the old city. It has good home-cooked food, a cute interior courtyard, a cushion-floored, sari-curtained area on the roof for relaxing, and honest, helpful staff. Management also offers cultural tours – including half-day Bishnoi Village tours – and the opportunity to do volunteer work with the women's empowerment NGO, **Sambhal Trust** ([www.sambhal-trust.org](http://www.sambhal-trust.org)). To get here, cross the railway footbridge near Raika Bagh train station then take the second right. Note, don't confuse this place with the next-door Durag Villas Guesthouse, another colourful place.

## Eating

As well as the places reviewed here, remember that most guesthouses have restaurants (usually on the roof, with a fort view).

### Darbar

DHABA \$

(133 Nai Sadak; mains ₹40-100; ₹8am-10.30pm) Pocket-sized roadside *dhaba* with Rajasthani specialities leading the way on a tiny but tasty menu. The *daal bati* (wheat balls dipped in dhal) is a particular favourite, and usually eaten with the *churma* (coarsely-ground wheat crushed and cooked with ghee and sugar). We also enjoyed the *shahi masala paneer* curry; mop up the sauce with some *tawa roti*.

### Jhankar Choti Haveli

MULTICUISINE \$

(mains ₹90-150; ₹8am-10pm; Stone walls, big cane chairs, prettily painted woodwork and whirring fans set the scene at this front-garden travellers' favourite. It serves up Rajasthani specialities as part of its pure veg Indian menu (the owners are Jain, so no eggs or alcohol either). It has fresh coffee for breakfast and there's candlelit seating on the rooftop come evening.

### Omelette Stalls

CAFE \$

(Sardar Market) 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 delicious omelettes. Some folks swear that **Omelette Shop** (omelettes from ₹25; ₹10am-10pm) is the better of two. Others wouldn't dream of going anywhere but **Vicky Chouhan Omelettes** (omelettes from ₹20; ₹8.30am-8pm). In truth, they both do a decent job, and are both run by characters worth spending a few minutes with.

### Priya Restaurant

DHABA \$

(181-182 Nai Sarak; mains ₹50-73; ₹7am-midnight) Open late, and always busy, this clean, brightly lit, street-facing *dhaba* has a certain cheerful glamour, and serves up reliable North and South Indian cuisine. The thalis (₹89) are good and the *chaat* (savoury snacks) are popular.

### Kalinga Restaurant

INDIAN \$\$

(off Station Rd; mains ₹130-300; ₹8am-11pm) This smart restaurant near Jodhpur train station has air-con, a well-stocked bar (beer from ₹130), and tasty veg and nonveg North Indian tandooris and curries, including a selection of kebabs. Try the *lal maans*, a mouthwatering Rajasthani mutton curry.

### Mid Town

INDIAN \$\$

(off Station Rd; mains ₹100-150; ₹7am-10.30pm) This clean, air-conditioned place does great

vegetarian food, including some Rajasthani specialities, and some particular to Jodhpur, such as *chakki-ka-sag* (wheat dumpling cooked in rich gravy), *bajara-ki-roti pachkuta* (bajara wheat roti with local dry vegetables) and kabuli (vegetables with rice, milk, bread and fruit). It also serves beer (from ₹188). It's right beside Kalinga Restaurant.

### Indique

INDIAN \$\$\$  
( 3293328; Pal Haveli; mains ₹250-350) This candlelit rooftop restaurant at the Pal Haveli hotel is the perfect place for a romantic dinner. Even murky Gulab Sagar glistens at night and the views to the fort, clock tower and Umaid Bhawan are superb. The food covers traditional tandoori, biryanis and North Indian curries, and you won't be disappointed by the old favourites – butter chicken and rogan josh. Has a full drinks menu too (beer from ₹200).

### Drinking

Coffee drinkers will enjoy the precious beans and espresso machines at the deliciously air-conditioned **Cafe Sheesh Mahal** (Pal Haveli; coffee from ₹80;  9am-9pm), which also has free wi-fi. Plenty of rooftop restaurants do real coffee too, with varying results. For a reliable dose of double-shot espresso, there's a branch of **Café Coffee Day** (High Court Rd, Ansals Plaza; coffee from ₹50;  10am-11pm) in the shopping mall on High Court Rd.

### **Shri Mishrilal Hotel**

CAFE

(Sardar Market; lassi ₹30;  8.30am-10pm) Just inside the southern gate of Sardar Market, this place has been going since 1927 and although it looks nothing fancy it whips up the most superb creamy *makhania* lassis; the best you're likely to try anywhere on

your travels. Also does tasty kachori (₹30) and other Indian snacks.

### 18 Century Bar

BAR

(Pal Haveli; beer from ₹200;  11am-5pm) Pal Haveli's delightful hotel bar, halfway up the stairs to the rooftop restaurant Indique, is replete with horse-saddle stools and enough heritage paraphernalia to have you ordering pink gins. It closes at 5pm, after which you can continue ordering drinks on the rooftop until the restaurant closes.

### Shopping

Plenty of Rajasthani handicrafts are available, with shops selling textiles and other wares clustered around Sardar Market and along Nai Sarak (you'll need to bargain hard).

Jodhpur is famous for antiques, with a concentration of showrooms along Palace Rd, 2km southeast of the centre (cross the railway footbridge just before Raika Bagh train station, walk straight on, then turn left at the roundabout). These warehouse-sized shops are fascinating to wander around, but they're well known to foreign antique dealers, so you'll be hard-pressed to find any bargains. Also remember that the trade in antique architectural fixtures may be contributing to the desecration of India's cultural heritage (beautiful old *havelis* are often ripped apart for their doors and window frames). Restrictions apply to the export of Indian items more than 100 years old. However, most of these showrooms deal in antique reproductions, and can make a piece of antique-style furniture and ship it home for you. The best bets for quality replica antiques are **Ajay Art Emporium** (Palace Rd;  10am-7pm) or **Rani Handicrafts** ([www.ranihandicrafts.com](http://www.ranihandicrafts.com); Palace Rd;  10am-7pm), which also have more portable and often

## JODHPUR'S JODHPURS

A fashion staple for self-respecting horsey 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 his polo team, the Jodhpur Lancers. When he led the team on a tour of England in 1897, the design caught on in London and then spread around the world.

If you fancy taking home an authentic pair from the city they originated in, head to **Monarch Garments** ( 9352353768; [www.monarch-garments.com](http://www.monarch-garments.com); A-13 Umaid Bhawan Palace Rd;  10.30am-8.45pm), opposite the approach road leading up to Umaid Bhawan Palace, where you can buy ready-made jodhpurs or have a pair tailored for you within two days. Prices start at ₹3500 for cotton, ₹5500 for linen.

less expensive items than furniture, such as textiles, carvings and silverware.

### MV Spices

FOOD & DRINK

([www.mvspices.com](http://www.mvspices.com); ☎ 9am-9pm) The most famous and reputable spice shop in Jodhpur (and believe us, there are lots of pretenders!), MV Spices has several small branches around town (including a stall outside the entrance to the fort) that are run by the seven daughters of the founder of the original stall. It will cost around ₹80 to ₹100 for 100g bags of spices, and the owners will email you recipes so you can use your spices correctly when you get home.

### Sambhali Boutique

CLOTHING, ACCESSORIES

(₹10am-8pm Mon-Sat, noon-8pm Sun) This small but interesting fixed-price shop sells colourful clothes and handicrafts made by women who have learned craft skills with the Sambhali Trust.

### Krishna Book Depot

BOOKS

(Sardar Market; ₹10.30am-7.30pm) Upstairs is an Aladdin's Den of new and used books, piled high in no apparent order; great fun for browsing. Downstairs is filled with handicrafts.

## Information

There are foreign-friendly ATMs dotted around the city. We've marked some on our map. There are very few in the old city, though, one exception being near Shahi Guest House. Internet cafes charge around ₹30 to ₹40 per hour. Again, they're dotted around town, especially in the old city.

**Main Post Office** (Station Rd; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, stamp sales only 10am-3pm Sun)

**Om Forex** (Sardar Market; internet per hr ₹30; ☎ 9am-10pm) Internet place which also exchanges currency and travellers cheques.

**Police** (Sardar Market; ☎ 24hr) Small police post inside the market's north gate.

**Tourist Reception Centre** (₹2545083; High Court Rd; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) Offers a free city map and willingly answers questions.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Jet Airways** (₹2515551; [www.jetairways.com](http://www.jetairways.com); airport) and **Air India** (₹2510758, airport office 2512617; [www.airindia.com](http://www.airindia.com); 2 West Patel Nagar, Circuit House Rd, airport) both fly daily to Delhi and Mumbai. To find the Air India office, walk along Ratanada Rd then turn left.

### BUS

Government-run buses leave from **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:

**Bikaner** (₹182, 5½ hours, frequent from 5am to 7pm)

**Jaipur** (₹252, 7 hours, frequent from 4am to midnight)

**Jaisalmer** (₹193, 5½ hours, frequent from 6.30am to 7pm)

**Mt Abu** (Abu Road) (₹191, 7½ hours, 11am and noon)

**Osiyan** (₹47, 1½ hours, half-hourly until 10pm)

**Pushkar** (₹143, 5 hours, 7.15am, 9.15am, 10am, 3.30pm and 8.30pm)

**Rohet** (₹32, 1 hour, every 15 minutes)

**Udaipur** (₹209, 7 hours, frequent from 5.30am to 10.30pm)

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** (₹2633831; [www.jaintravels.com](http://www.jaintravels.com); ☎ 7am-11pm) is reliable, as is **Mahadev Travels** (₹2633927; Station Rd; ☎ 7am-10pm) opposite them. 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 through Jain Travels are as follows:

**Ajmer** (₹220, 5 hours, 7am, 11am, 1.30pm, 2pm, 10pm and 11pm)

**Bikaner** (₹200, 5 hours, 5am, 6am, 9am, 4pm, 5pm, 10pm and 11pm)

**Delhi** (seat only) (₹400, 12 hours, 6pm)

**Jaipur** (₹220, 7 hours, 7am, 11am, 1.30pm, 2pm, 10pm and 11pm)

**Jaisalmer** (₹230, 5½ hours, hourly from 7am-10pm)

**Mt Abu** (direct; seat/sleeper) (₹250/400, 7½ hours, 9.30pm)

**Mumbai** (seat only) (₹200 to ₹300, 19 hours, 2pm)

### TAXI

You can organise taxis for intercity trips (or longer) through most accommodation places, or deal directly with drivers. There's a taxi stand outside Jodhpur train station. Expect to pay around ₹9 per kilometre (for a comfortable Toyota Innova; less for a smaller car such as a Tata Indica). The driver will charge at least ₹100 for overnight stops and will charge for his return journey.

### TRAIN

The computerised **booking office** (Station Rd; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1.45pm Sun) is 300m northeast of Jodhpur train station. Trains

## BORDER CROSSING – TO/FROM PAKISTAN

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 Saturdays only, reaching Munabao on the India–Pakistan border at 7am. 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 2nd-class and sleeper only, with a total sleeper fare of around ₹400 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.

to and from Bikaner also stop at Raika Bagh Train Station.

Two daily trains make the six-hour trip to **Jaisalmer** (5.10am and 11.45pm).

Four daily trains go to **Bikaner** (10am, 10.45am, 2pm and 8.15pm). Most take 5½ hours, although the 2pm takes more than seven.

Five daily trains go to **Jaipur** (6.10am, 9.45am, 8pm, 8.30pm and 11pm) in five to six hours.

Two daily trains go to **Delhi** (8pm and 11pm), arriving at 6.25am and 11.10am respectively.

Two also go to **Mumbai** (3pm and 6.45pm), arriving at 9.40am and 11.35am respectively.

For **Mount Abu**, three daily trains go to Abu Road (6am, 3pm and 6.45pm) in 4½ hours. Sleepers cost around ₹150.

For **Pushkar**, only one train per day goes to Ajmer (7am).

There are no direct trains to **Udaipur**.

## i Getting Around

### TO & FROM THE AIRPORT

The airport is 5km south of the city centre; at least ₹100/200 by auto/taxi.

### AUTORICKSHAW

Autorickshaws between the clock tower area and the train stations or central bus stand should be about ₹20 to ₹30.

## Around Jodhpur

The mainly arid countryside around Jodhpur is dotted with surprising lakes, isolated forts and palaces, and intriguing villages. It's home to a clutch of fine heritage hotels where you can enjoy the slower pace of rural life.

### Osian

This ancient Thar Desert town, 65km north of Jodhpur, was an important trading centre between the 8th and 12th centuries. It was dominated by the Jains, whose wealth left a legacy of exquisitely sculptured, well-preserved temples. The **Mahavira Temple** (Indian/foreigner free/₹10, camera/video ₹50/100; ☎ 6am–8.30pm) surrounds an image of the 24th *tirthankar* (great teacher), formed from sand and milk. **Sachiya Mata Temple** (₹6am–7.15pm) is an impressive walled complex where both Hindus and Jains worship.

Prakash Bhanu Sharma, a personable Brahmin priest, has an echoing **guesthouse** (₹02922274331, 9414440479; s/d without bathroom ₹250/300), geared towards pilgrims, opposite the Mahavira Temple.

**Gemar Singh** (₹9460585154; [www.hacra.org](http://www.hacra.org)), a native of Bhikamkor village northwest of Osian, arranges camel safaris, homestays, camping, desert walks and jeep trips in the deserts around Osian and their Rajput and Bishnoi villages. His trips receive

## MAJOR TRAINS FROM JODHPUR

DESTINATION	TRAIN	DEPARTURE TIME	ARRIVAL TIME	FARE (₹; SLEEPER/3AC)
Ajmer	54801 Jodhpur-Ajmer Fast Passenger	7am	12.40pm	88/362
Bikaner	14708 Ranakpur Exp	10am	3.35pm	146/394
Delhi	12462 Mandor Exp	8pm	6.25am	272/734
Jaipur	14854 Marudhar Exp	9.45am	3.30pm	158/428
Jaisalmer	14810 Jodhpur-Jaisalmer Exp	11.45pm	5.30am	155/419
Mumbai	14707 Ranakpur Exp	3pm	9.40am	323/912

rave reviews. The cost is around ₹1000 per person per day (minimum two people). Pick-up from Osian bus station, or from Jodhpur, can be arranged.

There are frequent buses from Jodhpur to Osian. Trains between Jodhpur and Jaisalmer also stop here. A return taxi from Jodhpur costs about ₹1200.

## 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 long before it was popular to do so. Many visitors are surprised by the density – and fearlessness – of wildlife such as blackbuck, bluebulls (nilgai), chinkara gazelles and desert fox around the Bishnoi villages. The Bishnoi hold all animal life sacred. 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.

Bishnoi village tours tend to last four hours in total and cost around ₹600 to ₹800 per person. We recommend those arranged by Durag Niwas Guest House, but loads of other places do them.

## Rohet

**Rohet Garh** (02936-268231; [www.rohetgarh.com](http://www.rohetgarh.com); s/d ₹5000/6000;   ), in Rohet village, 40km south of Jodhpur on the Pali road, is one of the area's most appealing heritage hotels. This 350-year-old, lovingly tended manor has masses of character and a tranquil atmosphere, which obviously helped Bruce Chatwin when he wrote *The Songlines* here, and William Dalrymple when he began *City of Djinns* in the same room, No 15. Rohet Garh has a gorgeous colonnaded pool, charming green gardens, great food (breakfast/lunch/dinner ₹500/600/700) and lovely, individual rooms. It also possesses a stable of fine Marwari horses and organises rides, from two-hour evening trots (₹2000) to six-day countryside treks, sleeping in luxury tents. The quirky **Om Bana Temple** is a short bus ride from here.

A taxi here will cost around ₹800 from Jodhpur. There are also frequent buses; once here, turn right out of Rohet's tiny bus stand, take the first right and keep walking for about 1km.

## Jaisalmer

02992 / POP 78,000

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.

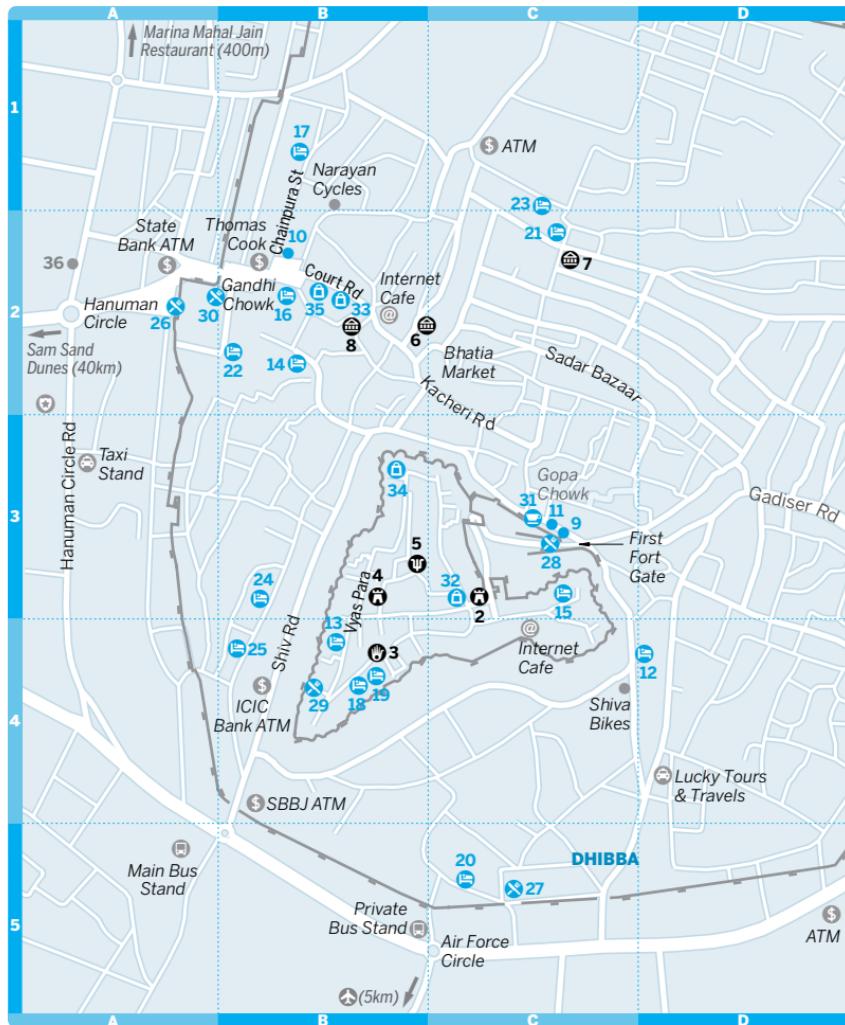
A city that has come back almost from the dead in the past half-century, Jaisalmer may be remote but it's certainly not forgotten – indeed it's one of Rajasthan's biggest tourist destinations, and few people come here without climbing onto a camel in the

## THE MOTORCYCLE TEMPLE

One of the strangest temples in all India stands beside a main road, 8km south of Rohet. The deity at **Om Bana Temple** is a garland-decked Enfield Bullet motorcycle, known as Bullet Baba. The story goes that local villager Om Bana died at this spot in the 1980s when his motorbike skidded into a tree. The bike was taken to the local police station, but then mysteriously twice made its own way back to the tree, and travellers along the road started seeing visions of Om Bana – inevitably leading to the machine's deification.

Buses from Jodhpur to Rohet (₹32, one hour) should continue on to Om Bana, but check with the driver. Otherwise, you can hop on almost any passing bus from Rohet (₹10).

## Jaisalmer



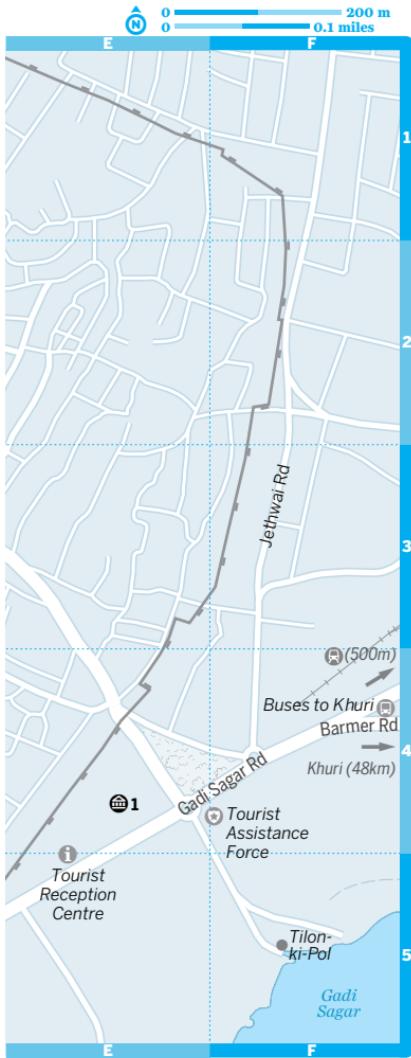
surrounding Thar Desert. Competition to get *your* bum into a camel saddle can be fierce, with some operators adopting unpleasant hard-sell tactics. Generally speaking, though, this is a much more laidback, hassle-free place to stay than the likes of Jaipur or Jodhpur.

Jaisalmer celebrates its desert culture in January or February each year with the action-packed **Desert Festival**, featuring camel races, camel polo, folk music, snake charmers, turban-tying contests and the famous Mr Desert competition. Many events take place at the Sam sand dunes.

### 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. Maharawal Sabal Singh, in the mid-17th century, expanded the Jaisalmer princedom 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

## Jaisalmer

### ④ Sights

- 1 Desert Cultural Centre & Museum .... E4
- 2 Fort Palace ..... C3
- 3 Jain Temples ..... B4
- 4 Jaisalmer Fort ..... B3
- 5 Laxminarayan Temple ..... B3
- 6 Nathmal-ki-Haveli ..... B2
- 7 Patwa-ki-Haveli ..... C2
- 8 Thar Heritage Museum ..... B2

### ④ Activities, Courses & Tours

- 9 Sahara Travels ..... C3
- 10 Thar Desert Tours ..... B2
- 11 Trotters ..... C3

### ④ Sleeping

- 12 1st Gate ..... D4
- 13 Desert Boy's Guest House ..... B4
- 14 Dylan Cafe & Guesthouse ..... B2
- 15 Hotel Killa Bhawan ..... C3
- 16 Hotel Nachana Haveli ..... B2
- 17 Hotel Renuka ..... B1
- 18 Hotel Siddhartha ..... B4
- 19 Hotel Suraj ..... B4
- 20 Hotel Tokyo Palace ..... C5
- 21 KB Lodge ..... C2
- 22 Mandir Palace Hotel ..... B2
- 23 Residency Centre Point ..... C1
- 24 Roop Mahal ..... B3
- 25 Shahi Palace ..... B4

### ④ Eating

- 1st Gate ..... (see 12)
- 26 Chandan Shree Restaurant ..... A2
- 27 Desert Boy's Dhani ..... C5
- 28 Jaisal Italy ..... C3  
Saffron ..... (see 16)
- 29 Sun Set Palace ..... B4
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### ④ Drinking & Nightlife

- 31 Lassi Shop ..... C3

### ④ Shopping

- 32 Bellissima ..... C3
- 33 Desert Handicrafts Emporium ..... B2
- 34 Hari Om Jewellers ..... B3
- 35 Jaisalmer Handloom ..... B2

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- 36 Hanuman Travels ..... A2  
Swagat Travels ..... (see 36)

the 1960s the Indira Gandhi Canal to the north has brought revitalising water to the desert.

Today tourism and the area's many military installations are the pillars of the city's economy.

## Sights

### Jaisalmer Fort

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. You enter the fort from its east side, near Gopa Chowk, and pass through four massive gates on the zigzagging route to the upper part. The fourth gate opens into a square, Dashera Chowk, where Jaisalmer Fort's uniqueness becomes apparent: this is a living fort, with about 3000 people residing within its walls. It's honeycombed with narrow, winding lanes which are lined with houses and temples – along with a large number of handicraft shops, guesthouses, restaurants and massage/beauty parlours.

#### ► Fort Palace

(Indian/foreigner incl compulsory audio guide ₹50/300, camera/video ₹100/200; ☺ 8am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-6pm Nov-Mar) Towering over the fort's main square, and partly built on top of the Hawa Pol (the fourth fort gate), is the former rulers' elegant seven-storey palace. The 1½-hour audio-guide tour, available in six languages, is included in your ticket price (whether you want it or not). It's worthwhile, but you must deposit ₹2000 or an official form of photo ID to get it. Highlights 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 spec-

tacular 360-degree views from the rooftop. One room contains an intriguing display of stamps from the former Rajput states.

#### ► Jain Temples

(Indian/foreigner ₹30/150, camera ₹50; ☺ Chandraprabhu 7am-1pm, other temples 11am-1pm) Within the fort walls is a mazelike, interconnecting treasure trove of seven beautiful yellow-sandstone Jain temples dating from the 15th and 16th centuries. The intricate carving almost 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.

**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*, whose intensely sculpted pillars form a series of *toranas*. To the right of Chandraprabhu is the tranquil **Rikhab-dev** 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 north wall leads to the enchanting, dim chamber of **Sambhavant** – in the front courtyard, Jain priests grind sandalwood in mortars for

### A CASTLE BUILT ON SAND

A decade ago the whole structure of Jaisalmer Fort was in danger of being undermined by water leakage from its antique drainage system. The main problem: material progress, in the form of piped water for the fort's inhabitants. Three of the ancient bastions had collapsed and parts of the fort palace were leaning at an alarming rate.

Since then, British-based **Jaisalmer in Jeopardy** ([www.jaisalmer-in-jeopardy.org](http://www.jaisalmer-in-jeopardy.org)) and several Indian organisations, including the **Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage** (INTACH; [www.intach.org](http://www.intach.org)), have raised funds and carried out much-needed conservation works to save the fort. Most important has been the renewal of the fort's drainage system and repaving of the streets, as well as repair works inside the fort palace.

Things have improved, although some conservationists still believe the fort's structure is in danger, and there are calls for the fort's inhabitants, and those who work in the fort, to be forced to leave. The fort's current population has been established since the 1960s; before then, the fort's inhabitants numbered in the few hundreds; made up mostly of royal family and their workers, plus monks and priests connected to the fort's temples. Visitors should be aware of the fort's fragile nature and conserve resources, especially water, as much as possible. Accommodation outside the fort is available.

devotional use. Steps lead down to the **Gyan Bhandar**, a fascinating, 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**

The Hindu Laxminarayan Temple, in the centre of the fort, is simpler than the Jain temples and has a brightly decorated dome. Devotees offer grain, which is distributed before the temple. The inner sanctum has a repoussé silver architrave around its entrance, and a heavily garlanded image enshrined within.

#### **Havelis**

Inside the fort but outside it, too (especially in the streets to the north), Jaisalmer is replete with the fairy-tale architecture of *havelis* – gorgeously carved stone doorways, *jali* (carved lattice) screens, balconies and turrets.

#### **Patwa-ki-Haveli**

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Indian/foreigner ₹20/50; ☺10am-5pm) The biggest fish in the *haveli* pond is Patwa-ki-Haveli, which towers over a narrow lane, its intricate stonework like honey-coloured lace. It is divided into five sections and was built between 1800 and 1860 by five Jain brothers who made their fortunes in brocade and jewellery. It's most impressive from the outside, though the first of the five sections is open as the privately owned **Kothari's Patwa-ki-Haveli Museum** (Indian/foreigner ₹50/150, camera/video ₹50/70), which richly evokes 19th-century life. Touts in the lane outside can be a pain here.

#### **Nathmal-ki-Haveli**

HISTORIC BUILDING

(☺8am-7pm) This late-19th-century *haveli* also used to be a prime minister's house and is still partly inhabited. It also contains some tourist shops. It has an extraordinary exterior, dripping with carvings, and the 1st floor has some beautiful paintings using 1.5kg of gold. A doorway is surrounded by 19th-century British postcards and there's a picture of Queen Victoria. 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.

#### **Museums**

**Desert Cultural Centre & Museum** MUSEUM (Indian/foreigner ₹20/50, camera/video ₹20/50, puppet shows Indian/foreigner ₹30/50, camera/video ₹20/50, combined museum-show ticket ₹70; ☺9am-8pm, puppet shows 6.30pm, 7.30pm) Next to the Tourist Reception Centre, this interesting little museum has material on the history of Rajasthan's different princely states, and exhibits on traditional Rajasthani culture. Features include Rajasthani music (with video), textiles and a *phad* scroll painting. It also hosts nightly half-hour **puppet shows** with English commentary.

#### **Thar Heritage Museum**

MUSEUM

(off Court Rd; admission ₹40) This privately run museum near Gandhi Chowk has an intriguing assortment of Jaisalmer area artefacts. It's brought alive by the guided tour you'll probably get from its founder, local historian and folklorist LN Khatri. Opening hours are variable, but if it's closed, you should find Mr Khatri at his shop, Desert Handicrafts Emporium, nearby on Court Rd.

#### ⇒ **Tours**

The Tourist Reception Centre runs a handful of tours, including sunset tours to the Sam sand dunes (₹200 per person, minimum four people). Add ₹100 if you'd like a short camel ride too.

#### 🛏️ **Sleeping**

Staying in the fort is the most atmospheric and romantic choice, but be aware of the pressure tourism is exerting on the fort's infrastructure. Outside the fort, the lanes to the north are more atmospheric than the recently renovated lanes west of Shiv Rd, or the wider, more exposed roads south of the fort. You'll get massive discounts between April and August, when Jaisalmer is hellishly hot.

#### ➲ **Outside the Fort**

##### **Residency Centre Point**

GUESTHOUSE \$

(252883, 9414760421; residency\_guesthouse@yahoo.com; Kumbhara Para; r ₹450; ☺) Near to Patwa-ki-Haveli, this friendly, family-run guesthouse has five clean, spacious doubles in a lovely 250-year-old building. Rooms vary in size – budget in price but midrange in quality. The rooftop restaurant has superb fort views and offers home-cooked food.

## 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 whose neck-bells tinkle in the desert silence – a welcome change after the sound of belching camels.

Most trips now include jeep rides to get you to less frequented areas. The camel riding is then done in 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 you'll gain understanding of the desert's villages, oases, wildlife and people.

The best-known dunes, at Sam (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 jeep transfers included, typical rates are between ₹1100 and ₹1700 per person for a one-day-one-night trip (leaving one morning, and returning the next). This should include meals, mineral water and 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 (₹900 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 ₹550 per person, including jeep transfer. At the other end of the scale, you can arrange for a 20-day trek to Bikaner. Expect to pay between ₹1000 and 2000 per person per day for long, multiday trips, depending on the level of support facilities (jeeps, camel carts, etc).

### Roop Mahal

( 251700; [www.hotelroopmahal.com](http://www.hotelroopmahal.com); r ₹300-1500) Clean spacious rooms in a new building, trustworthy management, fort views from the rooftop restaurant (mains ₹80 to ₹180) and free wi-fi throughout. A solid budget choice, but with some fancier rooms too.

### Hotel Renuka

( 252757; [hotelrenuka@rediffmail.com](mailto:hotelrenuka@rediffmail.com); Chainpura St; r ₹250-650, with AC ₹800; ) Spread over three floors, Renuka has squeaky clean

### HOTEL \$

rooms – the best have balconies, private bathrooms and air-con. It's been warmly accommodating guests since 1988, so management knows its stuff. The roof terrace has great fort views and a good restaurant.

### Hotel Tokyo Palace

### HOTEL \$

( 255483; [www.tokyopalace.net](http://www.tokyopalace.net); Dhibba Para; dm ₹150, s ₹300-1200, d ₹500-2000; ) Well-run by honest, traveller-friendly management, this new place has clean mid-

## What to Take

Women should consider wearing a sports bra, as a trotting camel is a bumpy ride. A wide-brimmed hat (or *Lawrence of Arabia* turban), long trousers, long-sleeved shirt, insect repellent, toilet paper (don't forget to burn it after use), torch, sunscreen, water bottle (with a strap) and some cash (tip the camel men, if nothing else) are also recommended. 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?

► **Sahara Travels** (✉ 252609; [www.saharatravelsjaisalmer.com](http://www.saharatravelsjaisalmer.com); Gopa Chowk) Now run by the son of the late LN Bissa (aka Mr Desert), a real Jaisalmer character who sadly died in 2012, this place is still very professional and transparent. Trips are to 'nontouristy' areas only. Prices for an overnight trip (9am to 11am the next day): ₹1400 per person, all inclusive.

► **Trotters** (✉ 9828929974; [www.trotterscamelsafarijaisalmer.com](http://www.trotterscamelsafarijaisalmer.com); ☎ 5.30am-7.30pm) Run by 'Del Boy' – who else? – this company is also run transparently, with a clear price list in the office showing everything on offer. Does trips to 'nontouristy' areas as well as cheaper jaunts to Sam or Khuri. Prices for an overnight trip (8am to 10am the next day): ₹1100 to ₹1200 per person, all inclusive.

► **Thar Desert Tours** (✉ 255656; [www.tharcamelsafarijaisalmer.com](http://www.tharcamelsafarijaisalmer.com); Gandhi Chowk; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm) Located at Gandhi Chowk, this well-run operator charges ₹950 per person per day, adjusting prices accordingly depending on trip times. They are slightly pricier than Sahara or Trotters, but we also receive good feedback about them. Their system is for customers to pay 80% up front. There are several other options, including hotel-organised safaris. Note that recommendations here should not be a substitute for doing your own research. Whichever agency you go for, insist that all rubbish is carried back to Jaisalmer.

## 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.

Take care of your possessions, particularly on the return journey. Any complaints you do have should be reported, either to the **Superintendent of Police** (✉ 252233), the Tourist Reception Centre, or the intermittently staffed Tourist Assistance Force posts inside the First Fort Gate and on the Gadi Sagar access road.

The camel drivers will expect a tip or gift at the end of the trip; don't neglect to give them one.

range rooms as well as plenty of budget options, including separate dorms for men and women in the basement. Wi-fi only extends to some rooms and although it does have a pool, it is tiny.

**Dylan Cafe & Guesthouse** GUESTHOUSE \$ (✉ 9828561818; [dylancafe.guesthouse@yahoo.in](mailto:dylancafe.guesthouse@yahoo.in); ₹ 200-350; ☎) Dirt cheap digs for young backpackers who like to chillout or party or both. Rooms are acceptable, but most of

your time will be spent drinking and smoking with the young owners on the rooftop. Free wi-fi. Fresh coffee.

### Desert Moon

GUESTHOUSE \$\$ (✉ 250116, 9414149350; [www.desertmoonguesthouse.com](http://www.desertmoonguesthouse.com); Achalvansi Colony; s ₹500-800, d ₹800-1200; ☎) Run by Lois (a New Zealander who's been living in Jaisalmer for more than 12 years) and her Rajasthani husband, Chanesar, this smart guesthouse,

a 10-minute walk from Gandhi Chowk, enjoys a wonderfully peaceful location beneath the royal *chhatri*. Rooms are cool, clean and comfortable, and the rooftop vegetarian restaurant has fort and *chhatri* views. It's ₹50 to ₹60 in an auto from the train station, but there's free pick-up if you call ahead. If you're walking here, head north from Hanuman Circle until you reach Marina Mahal Jain Restaurant (500m) on your left. Desert Moon is down a track about 100m behind this restaurant.

### Shahi Palace

HOTEL \$\$\$

( 255920; [www.shahipalacehotel.com](http://www.shahipalacehotel.com); off Shiv Rd; r ₹550-2050; ) A modern building in traditional style with some lovely carved sandstone, Shahi has attractive rooms, though a limited number have natural light. The multicuisine rooftop restaurant (mains ₹80 to ₹200) is also decent. Reasonably popular, but there are plenty of spillover rooms in their nearby sister properties **Star Haveli** and **Oasis Haveli**.

### KB Lodge

HOTEL \$\$\$

( 253833; [www.killabhawan.com](http://www.killabhawan.com); Patwa Haveli; r ₹1800, with AC ₹2500; ) Under the same management as the luxury Hotel Killa Bhawan, KB Lodge has more of a guesthouse feel to it, with just five stylish rooms in a small building overlooking the plaza behind Patwa Haveli. There's wi-fi throughout and the pleasant rooftop restaurant, KB Cafe, has delightful views of the old town and the fort.

### Hotel Nachana Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

( 252110; [www.nachanahaveli.com](http://www.nachanahaveli.com); Gandhi Chowk; s/d ₹3150/3500; ) This 280-year-old royal *haveli*, set around three courtyards – one with a tinkling fountain – is a fascinating hotel. The raw sandstone rooms have arched stone ceilings and the ambience of a medieval castle. They are sumptuously and romantically decorated, though some lack much natural light.

### 1st Gate

HOTEL \$\$\$

( 8696008365; [www.1stgate.in](http://www.1stgate.in); r incl breakfast ₹6500; ) Italian-designed and super slick, this newcomer is Jaisalmer's most sophisticated modern hotel and it is beautiful throughout. The location lends it one of the most dramatic fort views in town, especially from its split-level open-air restaurant-cafe. Rooms are immaculate and the food (Italian and Indian) and coffee are top notch. Wi-fi throughout. No pool.

### Mandir Palace Hotel

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

( 252788; [www.mandirpalace.com](http://www.mandirpalace.com); Gandhi Chowk; s/d ₹6000/7000; ) Jaisalmer's erstwhile royal family still lives in this sprawling 18th-century palace just inside the town walls. Some rooms are full of character, the newer ones less so. Staff can be distant.

## In the Fort

### Hotel Siddhartha

HOTEL \$

( 253614; [hotelsiddhartha@gmail.com](mailto:hotelsiddhartha@gmail.com); r ₹400-800; ) Just past the Jain temples, little Siddhartha has well-kept, tile-floored rooms, plus one lovely stone-walled room that hasn't been renovated.

### Desert Boy's Guest House

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

( 253091; [www.desertboysguesthouse.com](http://www.desertboysguesthouse.com); ₹500-3000) Has 15 beautifully decorated rooms. The cheaper ones have interior windows, but others have sweeping desert views. Rooms are bright and colourful, bathrooms are modern and the place is littered with antique-looking furniture. Wi-fi in some areas only. Restaurant has great views.

### Hotel Suraj

HERITAGE GUESTHOUSE \$\$

( 251623; [www.hotelsurajaisalmer.webs.com](http://www.hotelsurajaisalmer.webs.com); r ₹850-1550) Enchanting family-run guesthouse with four unique rooms that come with cute alcoves, side rooms, stone floors, stone pillars and even faded old paintings on some of the stone walls. Bathrooms are very basic, but have hot-water showers. Two rooms have good views. The same family that lives here runs the small but modern Hotel Suraj Vilas opposite (r ₹500 to ₹1000).

### Hotel Killa Bhawan

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

( 251204; [www.killabhawan.com](http://www.killabhawan.com); 445 Kotri Para; r incl breakfast ₹6500-11,000; ) A mini-labyrinth of a place combining three old houses set right on the fort walls. French-owned and designed, it has vividly coloured rooms, attractive little sitting areas and all sorts of intriguing arts and crafts. Rooms are small for the prices, but are decorated exquisitely. No restaurant, but tea, coffee and breakfast are all included.

## Eating

### Chandan Shree Restaurant

PUNJABI \$

(near Hanuman Circle; mains ₹50-130; 7am-11pm) Very popular local favourite and a great spot for South Indian breakfasts. The speciality, though, is Punjabi vegetarian. Also does thalis. No booze.

**Sun Set Palace**

MULTICUISINE \$

(Fort; mains ₹90-200) This restaurant has floor cushions and low tables on an airy terrace on the fort's west side. Pretty good vegetarian Indian dishes are prepared, as well as Chinese and Italian options. Beer available.

**Desert Boy's Dhani**

INDIAN \$\$

(mains ₹100-135; ☎ 11am-4pm & 7-11pm) An unusual walled-garden restaurant where tables are spread around a large stone-paved courtyard with a big tree. Rajasthani music and dance is performed from 8pm to 10pm most nights, and it's a very pleasant place to eat excellent, good-value Rajasthani and other Indian veg dishes. Does beer too (from ₹200).

**Jaisal Italy**

ITALIAN \$\$

(First Fort Gate; mains ₹120-200; ☎ 8.30am-10.30pm; ☎) Though it's run by the same family as Lassi Shop, you won't have to worry about bhang-laced pizzas. Instead you'll find superb all-veg bruschetta, antipasti, pasta, pizza, salad and desserts, plus Spanish omelettes, served in an exotically decorated indoor restaurant (cosy in winter, deliciously air-conditioned in summer) or on a delightful terrace with cinematic views atop the lower fort walls. Fresh coffee. Free wi-fi.

**Trio**

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(₹ 252733; Gandhi Chowk; mains ₹100-190) Under a tented roof atop the wall of the Mandir Palace, this long-running restaurant does Indian (including some Rajasthani specialities), Chinese and Continental. The thalis, biryanis and tandoori items are all excellent, and the restaurant has a lot more atmosphere than most places in town. Musicians play in the evening and there's a partial fort view.

**Saffron**

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Gandhi Chowk; mains ₹100-300) This romantic open-air restaurant, on the spacious roof terrace of Hotel Nachana Haveli, has candlelit tables overlooking a fountain courtyard below. The Indian food – including tandoori kebabs – is hard to beat, though the Italian comes a close second. Has a range of beers (small bottle ₹160) and a wine list.

**1st Gate**

ITALIAN \$\$\$

(mains ₹150-300; ☎ 7am-11pm; ☎) A small but excellent menu of authentic Italian dishes as well as some delicious Indian food served on a split-level, open-air terrace with dramatic

fort views. Also does good strong Italian coffee (₹100 to ₹150) as well as some fine wines.

## Shopping

Jaisalmer is famous for stunning embroidery, bedspreads, mirror-work wall hangings, oil lamps, stonework and antiques. Watch out when buying silver items: the metal is sometimes adulterated with bronze.

**Hari Om Jewellers**

HANDICRAFTS

(Chougan Para, Fort; ☎ 10am-8.30pm) This family of silversmiths makes beautiful, delicate silver rings and bracelets featuring world landmarks and Hindu gods. Asking prices for rings start at ₹1800 (at a rate of ₹300 per day's work).

**Jaisalmer Handloom**

HANDICRAFTS

(www.jaisalmerhandloom.com; Court Rd; ☎ 9am-10pm) 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, and doesn't belabour you with too much of a hard sell.

**Desert Handicrafts Emporium**

HANDICRAFTS

(Court Rd; ☎ 9.30am-9.30pm) With some unusual jewellery, paintings and all sorts of textiles and other knick-knacks, this is one of

### AN EXTRA-SPECIAL LASSI SHOP

Jaisalmer's, if not India's, most famous bhang-lassi shop is a simple, pocket-sized place now called **Lassi Shop** (Gopa Chowk; normal lassi ₹25-60, bhang lassi ₹50-120; ☎ 9.30am-10.30pm), but it has been running under various guises since the late '70s. It does a huge range of normal lassis (yoghurt drinks), but can add bhang (cannabis buds and leaves mixed into a paste with milk, ghee and spices) to any of them, which transforms them into so-called 'special lassis', and doubles their price. They also do a range of bhang-laced cookies (₹500 to ₹700 for 10) for travellers to take on their camel safaris. Bhang is perfectly legal here, but be aware that it doesn't agree with everyone so if you're not used to this sort of thing, go easy on it (or avoid it altogether). It can be very strong.

the most original and intriguing of the numerous craft shops around town.

### Bellissima

(Fort; ☎ 8am-9pm) Small shop selling 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.

### HANDICRAFTS

## Information

### INTERNET ACCESS

There are several internet cafes scattered around town. Typical cost is ₹40 per hour.

### MONEY

Foreign-friendly ATMs are dotted round town, although none are inside the fort.

**Thomas Cook** (Gandhi Chowk; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) A reliable money-changer, changing travellers' cheques and cash, and providing credit- and debit-card advances.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tourist Reception Centre** (₹252406; Gadi Sagar Rd; ☎ 9.30am-6pm) Friendly office with a free map of town, and basic sand-dune tours.

### TRAVEL AGENCIES

**Hanuman Travels** (₹9413362367)

**Swagat Travels** (₹252557)

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

Government-run buses leave from the **main bus stand**. Services are very limited, though. One daily air-conditioned coach goes to **Delhi** (₹1750, 15 to 17 hours, 5pm) via **Jodhpur** (₹512), **Ajmer** (₹800) and **Jaipur** (₹1060), but it's reclining seats only.

There are, though, daily services to **Jodhpur** (₹197, 5½ hours) on an ordinary bus at 6.30am, 8am, 9am, 10.30am, 1pm and 4pm.

A number of private bus companies have ticket offices at Hanuman Circle. Hanuman Travels and Swagat Travels are typical. The buses them-

selves leave from the **private bus stand**. Typical services include the following:

**Bikaner** (₹180 to ₹200, three to four daily)

**Jaipur** (₹350 to ₹400, 11 hours, two or three daily)

**Jodhpur** (₹180 to ₹200, five hours, half-hourly from 6am to 10pm)

**Pushkar** (₹350 to ₹400, nine hours, two or three daily)

**Udaipur** (₹350, one or two daily)

### TAXI

One-way taxis should cost from around ₹3000 to Jodhpur, ₹4000 to Bikaner or ₹6000 to Udaipur. There's a **taxi rank** south of Hanuman Circle, or try **Lucky Tours & Travels** (₹251818), behind Hotel Maru Palace. They sometimes have cheaper 'returning taxis' available.

### TRAIN

Three daily trains go to **Jodhpur** (8am, 5.15pm and 11.30pm). They take eight, five and six hours respectively. Unreserved 'general tickets' cost ₹50 to ₹75.

Two daily trains go to **Bikaner** (10.30am and 10.40pm) in around six hours; unreserved 'general' seats cost around ₹75, reserved sleepers around ₹160. One daily train goes to **Delhi** (5.15pm, 18 hours) via **Jaipur** (12 hours).

## Getting Around

### AUTORICKSHAW

Around ₹30 from the train station to Gandhi Chowk.

### BICYCLE

A number of places hire bicycles, including **Narayan Cycles** (near Gandhi Chowk; per hr/day ₹10/60; ☎ 8am-7pm).

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

It's possible to hire taxis or jeeps from the stand near Hanuman Circle Rd. To Khuri or the Sam sand dunes expect to pay ₹800 to ₹1000 one way.

**Shiva Bikes** (scooter/motorbike per day ₹300/400; ☎ 8am-9pm) is a licenced hire place with adequate motorbikes and scooters for exploring town and nearby sights (helmets and area maps included).

## MAJOR TRAINS FROM JAISALMER

DESTINATION	TRAIN	DEPARTURE TIME	ARRIVAL TIME	FARE (₹)
Bikaner	14701 Jaisalmer-Bikaner Exp	10.40pm	4.35am	158 (A)
Delhi (Old Delhi)	14660 Jaisalmer-Delhi Exp	5.15pm	11.10am	317/862 (B)
Jaipur	14660 Jaisalmer-Delhi Exp	5.15pm	5.08am	252/703 (B)
Jodhpur	14809 Jaisalmer-Jodhpur Exp	11.30pm	5.15am	155/419 (B)

Fares: (A) sleeper, (B) sleeper/3AC

## 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. On arrival in Jaisalmer, most buses are surrounded by a swarm of touts baying for your attention. If an autorickshaw driver has a sign with the name of the accommodation you want, by all means take the free ride offered (after checking that it is free). Otherwise, 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'.

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 and their objective is to get 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.

## Around Jaisalmer

### Sam Sand Dunes

The silky **Sam sand dunes** (admission vehicle/camel ₹50/80), 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 dressed-up dancing children and tenacious camel owners offering short rides. Plenty more people stay overnight in one of the couple of dozen tent resorts near the dunes. All in all 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 sunset experience.

If you're organising your own camel ride on the spot, expect to pay ₹200 to ₹300 for a one-hour sunset ride, but beware of tricks from camel men such as demanding more money en route.

### Khuri

 03014

The village of Khuri, 48km southwest of Jaisalmer, makes a lovely base for exploring the desert. There's quite an extensive dune area about 2km away, attracting its fair share of sunset visitors, but it's very quiet the rest of the time. There are a couple of

smallish 'resorts' on the approach into the village, and the village itself has a couple of low-key guesthouses where you can stay in tranquillity in a traditional-style hut with clay-and-dung 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 or bluebull (a large antelope), and some unusual bird life including the endangered great Indian bustard.

If you just want a quick camel ride on the sand dunes, expect to pay around ₹100 per person.

### Sleeping & Eating

#### **Badal House**

HOMESTAY \$

( 8107339097; per person incl full board r or hut ₹300) Run by the charming Badal Singh, this simple but spotlessly clean family home in the centre of the village has basic but clean mud-walled, thatch-roofed huts and equally spotless rooms off two small yards. There's one shared bathroom, good home cooking and a very warm welcome. Prices include three meals a day. Mr Singh can also arrange overnight camel trips (₹550 per person), although he doesn't pressure you into taking them. From the bus drop-off, turn left up the main village road then left again at the signpost (200m).

**Arjun Family**

**GUESTHOUSE \$**  
( 274132; arjunguesthouse@yahoo.co.in; per person incl full board huts/r ₹150/200) A couple of doors from Badal House, this is another family offering clean budget lodgings and camel rides, although they tout the buses to get you here.

**Hotel Pansari Palace**

**HOTEL \$\$\$**  
( 9784480781; www.hotelpansaripalace.com; r ₹2500) Opposite Badal House, this new two-storey heritage-style hotel is an eyesore in the village, but has comfortable air-con rooms with hot-water showers.

**i 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 roughly at 8am, 9am, 10.30am, 11.30am and 2.30pm.

**Bikaner**

0151 / POP 530,000

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.

Around the full moon in January or very late December, Bikaner celebrates its three-day **Camel Festival**, with one day of events at the Karni Singh Stadium and two days out at Ladera, 45km northeast of the city.

**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 Afghan War. In 1886 it was the first desert princely state to install electricity.

**Sights****Junagarh**

FORT

(Indian/foreigner ₹30/200, video ₹100, audio guide incl camera ₹250; 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 Pole** gate on the east side and pass through three more gates before the ticket office for the palace-museum.

The admission price includes a group tour in Hindi and/or English with an official guide. The one-hour tours leave every 15 to 20 minutes. The audio guide (requiring an identity document as a deposit), is available in English, French, German and Hindi, is very informative and allows you to visit at a more leisurely pace.

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), whose walls 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 the **Vikram Vilas Durbar Hall**, where pride of place goes to a WWI De Havilland DH-9 biplane bomber.

**Old City**

AREA

The old city still has a medieval feel despite the motorbikes and autorickshaws. A labyrinth of narrow, winding streets, it conceals a number of fine *havelis*, some up to 300 years old. The best known are the **Rampuria Havelis**, owned by the same family and scattered around the lanes, although the carvings and frescoes on the hard-to-find **Poonam Chand**

**Kothari Haveli** are even more attractive. There are a couple of notable Jain temples, the 15th-century **Bhandasar Temple** being the oldest and most important. Next door, Bikaner's most revered Hindu temple, **Laxmi Nath**, hums with activity during its morning and evening *aarti* (prayers). **Spice stalls** also dot the lanes; head for **Bada Bazar**. Look out too for the large wooden double-bed-sized community tables dotted around the streets. Originally placed around the city so that bhang-smoking locals had somewhere to hang out, they are used mostly for card games these days. If you come early in the morning you may see women panning for silver in the open sewers at the side of the lanes, looking for discarded slivers of silver that have been washed away from old-city workshops. It all makes for a fascinating wander, during which we guarantee you will get lost at least once.

The old city is encircled by a 7km, 18th-century wall, punctuated by five gates. The main entrance from the city centre is the triple-arched **Kothe Gate**. There are great

old-city views from the top of Bhandasar Temple, just inside the southern wall.

Gouri, a friendly and honest local man, who runs the small old-city guesthouse Shanti House, conducts informal, but highly recommended **guided tours of the old city** (per person per hr ₹30).

## Sleeping

### Shanti House

GUESTHOUSE \$

( 2543306; [inoldcity@yahoo.com](mailto:inoldcity@yahoo.com); New Well, near City Kotwali; dm ₹80, r ₹250-400, with AC ₹700;   ) This tiny old-city building with a narrow staircase and four simple rooms is a lovely budget option on account of its welcoming hosts. Gouri, who doubles as an unofficial old-city tour guide, and his wife will soon make you feel part of their young family by dishing out home-cooked meals, plenty of chai and trustworthy travel tips. Rooms are basic – squat toilets, bucket hot water – but lovingly looked after with some nice wall paintings and bedspreads. And the bustle of old Bikaner is at your doorstep. Gouri can also help you rent bicycles (per day ₹20) or mopeds (per day ₹200) to get

## BIKANER SAFARIS

Bikaner is an excellent alternative to Jaisalmer's camel-safari scene and is increasingly popular with travellers. There are fewer people running safaris here, so the hassle factor is quite low. Camel trips tend to focus on desert villages and the interesting wildlife.

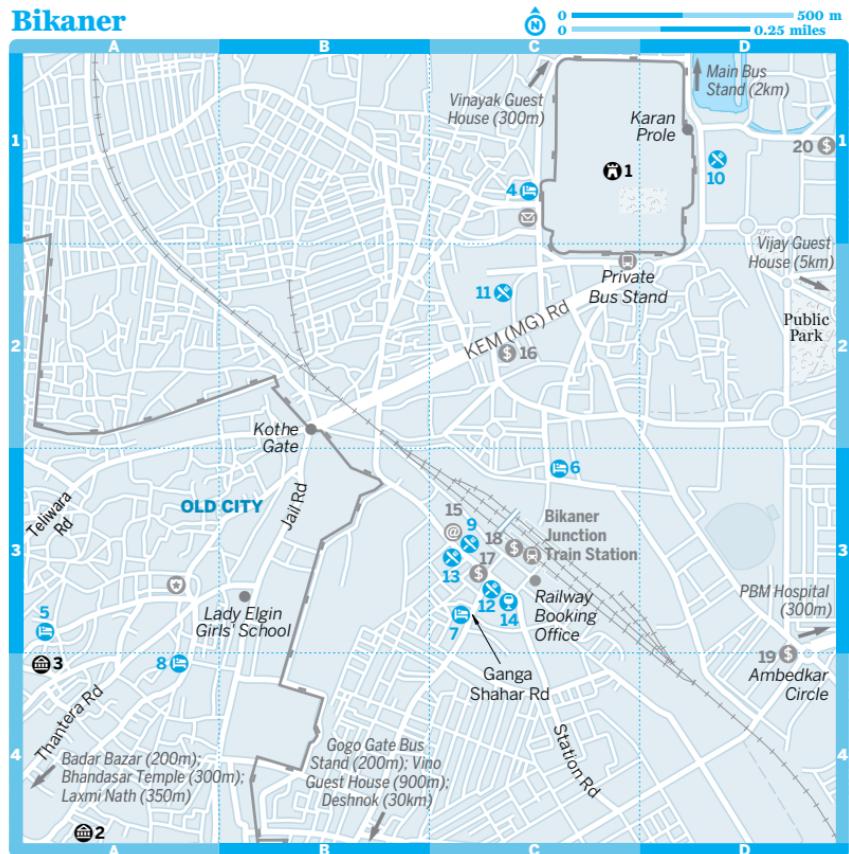
Three days and two nights is a common camel-safari duration, but half-day, one-day and short overnight trips are all possible. If you're after a serious camel trek, go for a cross-country trip to Jaisalmer (two weeks) or Kichan (about six days), famous for its concentration of large, graceful demoiselle cranes from September to March.

Typical prices are around ₹1200 to ₹1800 per person per day, including overnight camping with tents, mattresses, blankets, meals, mineral water, one camel per person, a camel cart to carry the 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, so start and end with a jeep trip to and from Bikaner.

The standout operator in terms of quality, reliability and transparency of what's on offer is Vijay Singh Rathore, aka **Camel Man** ( 2231244, 9829217331; [www.camelman.com](http://www.camelman.com); Jaipur Rd, Vijay Guest House; half-/full-/multi-day trips per person from ₹700/1000/1200 per day, one day-one night per person ₹1600). Contact him through his website or at his lovely family guesthouse, Vijay Guest House, 4km out of town. Also popular and long-established is **Vino Desert Safari** ( 2270445, 9414139245; [www.vinodesertsafari.com](http://www.vinodesertsafari.com); Vino Paying Guest House; one day-one night per person ₹1800, multi-day treks per person ₹1500-2000), run by Vinod Bhojak, who runs Vino Paying Guest House. There's a touch of the salesman about Vinod, but his tours are professional. You can also arrange higher-end camel safaris through Bikaner's more expensive hotels. Try Bhairon Vilas or Bhanwar Niwas. For something a little different, **Vinayak Desert Safari** ( 2202634, 9414430948; [www.vinayakdesertsafari.com](http://www.vinayakdesertsafari.com); Vinayak Guest House; half-day jeep safari per person ₹500, full- or multi-day jeep safaris per person ₹900-2000) is run by wildlife expert Jitu Solanki. He takes people on fascinating jeep safaris around the vast surrounding desert scrubland – although camel rides can be arranged too – and focuses on desert mammals, reptiles and birds. He also runs the quiet family guesthouse, Vinayak Guest House.

# Bikaner

**RAJASTHAN** BIKANER



around on, and will pick you up from the station if you call ahead.

### Hotel Marudhar Heritage

**HOTEL \$** (2522524; hmheritage2000@hotmail.com; Ganga Shahar Rd; s/d from ₹400/500; ) Friendly, well-run and good-value option a short walk from the train station. There are plain and comfortable rooms with TV to suit most budgets, and the *haveli*-style inner courtyard design is pleasing. There's wi-fi in the lobby, hot-water showers in all rooms and 24-hour checkout.

### Vijay Guest House

**GUESTHOUSE \$** (2231244, 9829217331; www.camelman.com; Jaipur Rd; r ₹400-800, with AC ₹1200; ) About 4km east of the centre, this is a home away from home with spacious, light-filled rooms and a friendly family. Owner Vijay is a camel expert and a recommended safari operator. This is an ideal base for taking a safari, with good home-cooked meals (breakfast/lunch

or dinner ₹100/200), which you can eat inside or in the garden. As well as camel trips, they offer free pick-up and drop-off from the train and bus stations, and jeep outings to Deshnok and other sights around Bikaner. It's ₹10/30 in a shared/private autorickshaw between here and the train station.

### Vinayak Guest House

**GUESTHOUSE \$**

(2202634, 9414430948; vinayakguesthouse@gmail.com; r ₹150-400, s without bathroom ₹100; ) A short walk north of the fort, this small guesthouse offers six varied and clean rooms in a quiet family home with a little garden. On offer are free pick-up, good home-cooked food, cooking lessons and bicycle rental (per day ₹25). The owner also runs Vinayak Desert Safari, which runs recommended desert-wildlife jeep tours.

### Vino Paying Guest House

**GUESTHOUSE \$**

(2270445, 9414139245; www.vinodesertsafari.com; Ganga Shahar; s ₹200-250, d ₹350-400;

## Bikaner

### ⦿ Sights

1 Junagarh .....	C1
2 Poonam Chand Kothali Haveli .....	A4
3 Rampuria Haveli.....	A4

### ⦿ Sleeping

4 Bhairon Vilas .....	C1
5 Bhanwar Niwas .....	A3
6 Hotel Jaswant Bhawan .....	C3
7 Hotel Marudhar Heritage .....	C3
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### ⦿ Eating

Bhanwar Niwas .....	(see 5)
9 Chhotu Motu Joshi.....	C3
10 Gallops.....	D1
11 Garden Café .....	C2
12 Heeralal's.....	C3
13 Laxmi Hotel .....	C3

### ⦿ Drinking & Nightlife

Bhairon Vilas .....	(see 4)
14 Heeralal Hotel.....	C3

### ⦿ Information

15 Agarwal Internet.....	C3
16 ATM .....	C2
17 Bank of Baroda ATM .....	C3
18 SBBJ ATM .....	C3
19 State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur.....	D4
20 State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur.....	D1

⦿ This guesthouse is in a family home 3km south of the main train station. It's a cosy choice and is the base of one of Bikaner's best-known camel-safari operations. It's good value, the family is welcoming and there's home-cooked food available. It's opposite Gopeshwar Temple; free pick-up from the main train station.

#### Hotel Jaswant Bhawan

HOTEL \$\$

(2548848, 9001554746; [www.hoteljaswantbhawan.com](http://www.hoteljaswantbhawan.com); s/d ₹800/1000; ⚡) You'll get a lovely welcome at this peaceful, unassuming 200-year-old family home, which has been converted into a simple but elegant guesthouse. Rooms are large, bright and spotlessly clean and come with family photographs and quality furniture. The pleasant garden contains a vegetable patch and a chicken coop. It's just outside the back entrance of the train station.

#### Bhairon Vilas

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(2544751, 9928312283; <http://hotelbhaironvilas.tripod.com>; r from ₹2000; ⚡) This delightful hotel on the west side of the fort is run

by a former Bikaner prime minister's great-grandson. Rooms are mostly large and are eclectically decorated with antiques, gold-threaded curtains and old family photographs (some of the wiring and fittings seem to be of the same vintage). The restaurant and quirky bar both have outdoor seating in the well-kept gardens. Fish for discounts when it's quiet. You can sometimes get rooms for around half price.

#### Bhanwar Niwas

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(2529323; [www.bhanwarniwas.com](http://www.bhanwarniwas.com); Rampuria St; r ₹4500; ⚡) Charming rather than luxurious, this fine hotel has been developed out of the beautiful 1927 Rampuria Haveli – a gem in the old city, 300m southwest of the City Kotwali police station. It has 26 individual, 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 internal courtyard, which doubles as a venue for cultural events. Nonguests can eat dinner here (from 7.30pm to 9.30pm) for a set ₹600 per person.

#### ✖ Eating

All the hotels and guesthouses we cover also serve food.

#### Chhotu Motu Joshi

CAFE \$

(Station Rd; snacks & sweets ₹10-30; ⚡ 7am-10pm) A hidden gem near the train station, this no-nonsense local favourite not only does Bikaner's best lassi (small/large ₹15/25), it also knocks up very tasty *kachori samosa* (two for ₹20) plus lip-smackingly delicious Bengali sweets such as spongy *rasgulla* (three for ₹10) or syrupy *gulab jamun* (four for ₹30). It's also a good spot for breakfast *puri* (₹6 each) and vegetable *danamethi* (an unusual Rajasthani speciality with a fenugreek sauce; ₹25). Not much English spoken, but there's an English menu chalked on the wall behind the counter.

#### Heeralal's

MULTICUISINE \$

(Station Rd; mains ₹50-150; ⚡ 7.30am-10.30pm) This bright and popular 1st-floor restaurant serves up pretty good Indian dishes, plus a few Chinese dishes and pizzas, amid large banks of plastic flowers. The ground floor is more of a canteen and is popular for South Indian breakfasts, lunchtime thalis and its range of *chaat* (spicy snacks; ₹25 to ₹60).

**Laxmi Hotel**

DHABA \$

(Station Rd; mains ₹50-90, thalis ₹60-100; ☎ 8am-10pm) One of a number of simple roadside *dhabas* near the train station, Laxmi is open to the street and dishes up tasty, fresh vegetarian thalis. You can see the roti being flipped in front of you.

**Garden Café**

CAFE \$

(off KEM Rd; dishes ₹50-100; ☎ 8am-8pm) Previously the excellent Pause Café, this one-time travellers' hang-out, housed in part of a 160-year-old building, has changed names and management and is more rundown these days. It still boasts a nice garden setting, though. Food is simple – toast, salads, rice, dhal – but tasty enough for the price. Coffee is instant only, but the lassis are good. A warning: camel-safari operators tout for business here and can be annoying if all you're after is a cup of tea.

**★ Gallops**

INDIAN \$\$

(mains ₹200-400; ☎ 10am-10pm) This modernish cafe-restaurant, known as 'Glops' to rickshaw-wallahs, is close to the Junagarh entrance and has walls adorned with old photographs of royal polo matches. There are snacks such as pizzas, pakoras and sandwiches, but it's the good range of delicious Indian curries that stands out, plus the cold beer (₹250) and espresso coffee (₹100). You can cool off in the air-conditioned interior or sit outside on the large patio.

**Bhanwar Niwas**

INDIAN \$\$\$

(₹2529323; Rampuria St; set dinner ₹600; ☎ 7.30-9.30pm) A splendid place to eat, this beautiful hotel welcomes nonguests to its veg dining hall for dinner (reservations essential). You can have a drink beforehand in the courtyard.

**Drinking**

Gallops restaurant is also a pleasant spot for a beer.

**Bhairon Vilas**

BAR

(beer ₹175; ☎ 6.30-10.30pm) Like something off the set of *The Addams Family*, this ec-

centric hotel bar is full of nooks and crannies, moody lighting and quirky heritage decor. The manager is young, friendly and chatty, and there's outdoor seating too, on a well-kept lawn. The menu extends to whiskey, rum and vodka as well as beer and wine.

**Heralal Hotel**

BAR

(beer small/large ₹90/150; ☎ noon-10.30pm) Dark and seedy-looking, low-lit basement bar with well-priced beers and spirits.

**i Information**

You'll find a number of ATMs outside the main train station. The State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur changes cash and travellers cheques.

**Agarwal Internet** (per hr ₹25; ☎ 10am-10pm) Fast connection. Has Skype facilities.

**Main Post Office** (₹9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Near Bhairon Vilas hotel.

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

There's a private bus stand outside the south 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 include the following. Note, for Jaisalmer, you must change at Pokaran.

**Delhi** (₹333, 11 hours, 4.15am, 7am, 7.45am, 8.30am, 9.15am and 6.30pm)

**Deshnok** (₹25, one hour, half-hourly until 5.30pm)

**Fatehpur** (₹130, 3½ hours, half-hourly until 5.45pm)

**Jaipur** (₹238, 7 hours, half-hourly until 5.45pm)

**Jhunjhunu** (₹200, five hours, 4.15am, 7am, 7.45am, 8.30am, 9.15am and 6.30pm)

**Jodhpur** (₹181, five hours, half-hourly until 5.30pm)

**Pokaran** (₹167, five hours, hourly until 2.30pm)

**Pushkar** (₹186, six hours, half-hourly until 6pm)

**MAJOR TRAINS FROM BIKANER JUNCTION**

DESTINATION	TRAIN	DEPARTURE TIME	ARRIVAL TIME	FARE (₹; SLEEPER/3AC)
Delhi (S Rohilla)	12458 Bikaner-Dee SF Exp	11pm	6.20am	220/582
Jodhpur	14887 KLK-BME Exp	11.05am	3.45pm	146/394
Jaipur	09733 HMH-Kota Special	11pm	5.30am	178/496

**DON'T MISS****THE TEMPLE OF RATS**

The extraordinary **Karni Mata Temple** (camera/video ₹20/50; ☺ 4am-10pm) at Deshnok, 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.

Karni Mata lived in the 14th century and performed many miracles during her lifetime. When her youngest son, Lakan, 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 Lakan'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 Deshnok 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 out food for them. And you do have to take your shoes off to enter the temple.

You can find food and drinks for yourself at the numerous snack stalls outside.

There are frequent buses here from Bikaner's main bus stand. A return autorickshaw from Bikaner with a one-hour wait costs ₹350.

**TRAIN**

The main train station is Bikaner Junction, with a **computerised reservations office** (☺ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) in a separate building just east of the main station building. A couple of other useful services go from Lalgarh station in the north of the city (₹50 in an autorickshaw).

For **Jaisalmer**, an evening train with reserved ticketing options runs only on Tuesdays (sleeper ₹178, 5 hours, 6.30pm) from Bikaner Junction. On all other days there is only a morning train with unreservable seats. It leaves from Lalgarh station at 7.20am and takes around six hours. The desert views are superb and there are always plenty of seats. Turn up 30 minutes or so before departure, buy an unreserved 'general ticket' (₹76) and climb aboard.

Four daily trains go to **Jodhpur** (12.35am, 6.15am, 9.30am and 11.05am) in around five hours.

Three daily trains go to **Delhi** (9.15am, 7.45pm and 11pm). They usually take seven to eight hours, although the 7.45pm takes more than 11 hours.

Three daily trains go to **Jaipur** (6am, 6.45pm and 11pm) in around 6½ hours.

There are no direct trains to Ajmer for **Pushkar**.

**Around Bikaner****National Research Centre on Camels**

The **National Research Centre on Camels** (✉ 01512230183; Indian/foreigner ₹20/50, camera ₹30, rides ₹30; ☺ 2-6pm) is 8km southeast of central Bikaner. While here you can visit baby camels, go for a short ride and look around the small museum. There are about 400 camels, of three different breeds. Guides are available for ₹50-plus. There's an on-site Camel Milk Parlour dishing out small plastic bags of camel milk (₹5) for you to sample through a straw. Camel grazing time is 3pm to 6pm and is the best time to come. The round trip, including half an hour waiting time, is around ₹150/300 for an autorickshaw/taxi. You could also consider cycling or riding a moped out here.