

Rajasthan Trip Planner

Keoladeo Ghana National Park (Bharatpur)

The World Heritage-listed Keoladeo Ghana National Park, in Bharatpur, is home to almost 400 different bird species and has emerged as one of the planet's foremost bird-breeding sites. The park is a blissfully serene escape from the hullabaloo of urban India, despite attracting throngs of tourists.

How to Get There

Buses from many centers—including Jaipur, Agra, and Deeg—frequently travel to Bharatpur. There are also limited train services, including one from Delhi.

How to Get Around

In town, there are plenty of cycle rickshaws and autorickshaws. Travel within the Keoladeo Ghana National Park is, apart from walking, restricted to government-approved cycle rickshaws and tongas (horse-drawn carts). You can also explore the bird park by bicycle (these can be hired at the park entrance as well as at many hotels).

Attractions

The star attraction of Bharatpur is, of course, the bird-filled **Keoladeo Ghana National Park**. Covering around 11.5 square miles (30 square kilometers), this flourishing sanctuary attracts a diverse variety of birds that includes herons, cormorants, owls, kingfishers, storks, and wild geese. During the winter, migratory birds make their way to the park from as far away as Siberia. Apart from birds, the park is also home to antelopes, mongoose, a dozen or so snake species (including cobras and pythons), and more than 50 types of butterflies.

If you've got time, check out the 18th-century **Lohagarh Fort**, which is not as impressive as many other forts in Rajasthan but still worth a look. It has a small museum containing a medley of relics, from animal trophies to old paintings.

Places to Stay and Eat

Bharatpur has a pleasing selection of places to stay, which are also the best places to eat. If you don't mind staying a little way outside of the town's center, opt for the Bagh resort, one of Bharatpur's best choices. Set in a pretty 200-year-old, 12-acre (4.8-hectare) garden, this lovely heritage property has just 14 rooms, all very tastefully furnished. Amenities include a swimming pool, restaurant, and coffee shop. Agra-

Achnera Road; tel. +91 (0)5644 225415; e-mail thebagh@hotmail.com.

A popular mid-priced choice is the Birder's Inn, which is conveniently close to the bird sanctuary and owned by a bird-watching enthusiast. This calm place has just ten rooms, which are clean and comfortable and more spacious than many other mid-range lodgings. There's a small garden, and guests can dine at the inn's multi-cuisine restaurant. Bird Sanctuary Road; tel. +91 (0)5644 227346; e-mail birdinn@yahoo.com.

A recommended budget place is the family-run Falcon Guest House, which is not too far from the bird sanctuary and offers well-kept rooms (the more expensive ones come with private balconies). Good meals are available. Bird Sanctuary Road; tel. +91 (0)5644 223815; e-mail falconguesthouse@hotmail.com.

General Tips

To see as many different bird species as possible, visit Keoladeo Ghana National Park between October and February.

For More Information

Tourist Reception Center Corner of Fatehpur Sikri and Bird Sanctuary Roads; tel. +91 (0)5644 222542. Rajasthan Tourism

Jaipur

Jaipur, the frenetic capital of Rajasthan, was planned by and named after the great warrior king, Maharaja Jai Singh II. It has been dubbed the "Pink City" thanks to its sea of pinkish-colored buildings, predominately found in the old city. Apart from its royal legacies, which include the City Palace complex and several forts, Jaipur is renowned for its sensational shopping with a splendid array of modern boutiques and medieval-flavored bazaars.

How to Get There

Jaipur can be reached by plane, bus, and train. There are flights from a number of Indian cities including Jodhpur, Udaipur, Delhi, Mumbai, and Ahmadabad. Scores of state-run and privately operated buses frequently travel here from numerous centers; the main hub is the bus terminal on Station Road. The train network is also extensive, with services from most major Rajasthani towns as well as from Delhi, Agra, and Ahmadabad. Many visitors to Rajasthan hire a private taxi to tour the state, which is an especially good value if there are a few of

you to split the cost.

How to Get Around

There are loads of taxis and autorickshaws to get you around the city, as well as a smaller number of cycle rickshaws. Avoid the packed local buses.

Attractions

Jaipur is a city of vibrant **festivals** such as Teej. Taking place every August (consult the tourist office for exact dates, as they're variable), Teej celebrates the onset of the monsoon and also pays homage to the goddess, Parvati (Lord Shiva's wife). During this happy festival, women wear bright traditional outfits, and the city hosts various cultural displays.

Exhibiting a mélange of classic Rajasthani and Mughal architecture, the large **City Palace** (still partly occupied by the current 'royals') is made up of a series of buildings and courtyards interspersed by patches of garden. Items that can be seen here include ornate regal costumes, elaborate weapons, and devotional paintings.

The terra-cotta-colored **Hawa Mahal** ('Palace of the Winds') was built in 1799 to allow princesses, and other noble women, to watch (without being watched!) the street life below as well as any public parades. The five-story sandstone facade has more than 350 viewing windows and is one of Rajasthan's most photographed sites.

The rather odd-looking structures of **Jantar Mantar**, an observatory constructed by Maharaja Jai Singh II in 1728, were created to measure time and chart the stars. The sundial is particularly impressive.

Located around six miles (ten kilometers) north of the city is the erstwhile capital of the Jaipur area, Amber. The **Amber Fort** dates back to the late 16th century and sprawls along a rocky hill. Its Jai Mandir (Hall of Victory) contains some particularly striking inlaid panels and mirrored ceilings. Today Amber Fort is a major tourist site with jeeps and elephants shuttling visitors up and down the hill.

Jaipur has some fabulous shopping with bazaars selling everything from sparkling gems to embroidered jootis (pointy-toed shoes). There are also some contemporary boutiques such as Anokhi, which sell gorgeous block-printed textiles such as tablecloths, scarves, and clothing. 2 Tilak Marg.

Around ten miles (16 kilometers) from Jaipur is the village of Sanganer, best-known for its production of block-printed fabrics (bedspreads, cushion covers, and scarves) and handmade paper (including diaries, photo frames/albums, and gift boxes). Take a walk to the river to feast your eyes upon the many colorful rows of drying fabrics, gently flapping in the breeze like big butterflies. One of Sanganer's (indeed India's) largest handmade paper outlets is Salim's Paper; they're eco-friendly, using fabric scraps (not trees) to manufacture their products. Gramodyog Road, Sanganer; tel. +91 (0)141 273 0222.

Places to Eat

Rajasthan's capital has no shortage of places to eat—the ones mentioned below are just a few of the many excellent possibilities. Feeding locals and visitors since 1949, Niro's has carved itself a glowing reputation for its Indian, continental, and Chinese fare. It can fill up fast in the evenings (especially on weekends) so try to get here early to avoid possible waits. Mirza Ismail Road.

If you're keen to sample south Indian food, make a beeline for Dasaprakash Restaurant, which cooks up commendable southern specialties including a tempting variety of dosas (type of crispy crepe), as well as spongy idlis (savory, steamed, sourdough rice cake) and a selection of vegetarian curries. Mirza Ismail Road; tel. +91 (0)141 237 1313. To gaze upon the city as you dine, try Om. At 184 feet (56 meters), the views at this revolving restaurant are suitably panoramic. The food is good too, with tasty vegetarian dishes including some sterling Rajasthani specialties. Om is open daily for lunch and dinner. Church Road (just off Mirza Ismail Road); tel. +91 (0)141 236 6683.

Places to Stay

Jaipur is full of hotels and guesthouses to suit all tastes and pockets. Advance reservations are a good idea during the peak tourist season (November to March). More than 150 years old, the beautifully restored Samode Haveli was once an Indian aristocrat's private residence. Located a little out of the city center, this enchanting hotel has 29 rooms—the standard rooms are suitably plush but no match to the dazzling suites. Amenities include a restaurant and swimming pool. Gangapole; tel. +91 (0)141 263 2407.

A recommended mid-priced place is the family-run Madhuban, located in the quiet and classy suburb of Bani Park. The rooms are attractively furnished, many with fine antique pieces and four-poster beds. There's a good restaurant, small swimming pool, and relaxing garden area.

The Madhuban's amiable owner is a good source of local information. D-237 Bihari Marg, Bani Park; tel. +91 (0)141 220 0033.

One of the city's most popular budget offerings is the well-run Hotel Pearl Palace, which has modern, comfortable rooms (some with balconies). The rooftop terrace has views of the small Hathroi Fort, and there's a good multi-cuisine restaurant on-site. Hari Kishan Somani Marg, off Ajmer Road; tel. +91 (0)141 237 3700.

General Tips

Jaipur has one of India's most spectacular cinemas, the Raj Mandir, which is the perfect place to experience your very first Bollywood blockbuster.

For More Information

Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation RTDC Hotel compound, Mirza Ismail Road; tel. +91 (0)141 237 5466. Rajasthan Tourism India Tourism Hotel Khasa Kothi, Mirza Ismail Road.

Udaipur

With its rolling hills and whimsical palaces, including one in the middle of a lake, Udaipur looks like it has been lifted straight from the pages of a fairy tale. Founded by Maharana Udai Singh II in the mid-16th century, this enigmatic city of lakes has been featured in countless magazines and films, and despite all the tourist hype, Udaipur has managed to retain a mystical, pristine charm.

How to Get There

Domestic airlines connect Udaipur to Delhi, Mumbai, Jaipur, and Jodhpur. There are limited rail connections, making it easier to get here by one of the many state-run and privately operated buses that link Udaipur to other Rajasthani cities, as well as to neighboring centers such as Agra (Uttar Pradesh) and Ahmadabad (Gujarat).

How to Get Around

Taxis and autorickshaws are widely available, but make sure you negotiate a fare before jumping in (people arriving at the bus or train stations can use the fairly priced pre-paid autorickshaw stands located there, which don't require haggling). Bicycles and motorcycles can be hired at several outlets around town (inquire at your hotel or ask at the tourist office).

Attractions

Take a short boat ride from the jetty (often referred to as Bansi Ghat) at the City Palace to nearby **Jag Mandir Island**, which has the crumbling remains of a small (abandoned) 17th-century palace. Jag Mandir has some stunning carvings, including a row of huge elephants and a finely crafted cenotaph.

The dreamy **Lake Palace Hotel**, poetically placed in the middle of Lake Pichola, was once the exclusive summer residence of Udaipur's royal family. Today it is a sought-after five-star hotel that is often booked out for up to a year, sometimes even longer. Built in 1754 by Maharana Jagat Singh II, this snow-white palace is replete with lotus-pond-strewn courtyards, stylish restaurants, a pool, and luxurious guest rooms. North of Lake Pichola is the less touristy **Fateh Sagar (Lake)**.

Not far from the **Fateh Sagar (Lake)** is **Saheliyon ki Bari** ("Garden of the Maids of Honor"). This slightly neglected decorative garden was established in the 18th century for women of the royal household. Due to the water shortages of recent times, its fountains are now only periodically turned on.

The sprawling **City Palace** complex (Rajasthan's biggest palace) is comprised of several opulent hotels and museums: the **City Palace Museum** houses an assorted collection of royal objects, including historic weapons and superb miniature paintings, while the **Crystal Gallery**, which looks onto a large plush hall (decked out with massive chandeliers), contains priceless crystal pieces including beds.

Places to Eat

There's a good choice of places to eat in Udaipur, from informal rooftop restaurants to posh palace dining halls. Some of the best places are found in the hotels. The trendy Savage Garden has plenty of character, with midnight-blue walls and a soothing courtyard setting. There's an admirable *mélange* of Indian and continental dishes, including some inventive fusion fare. 22 Inside Chandpole; tel. +91 (0)294 242 5440.

Most romantic in the evening, the open-air courtyard restaurant (tables are scattered around the marble pool) at the Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel is recommended, with Indian musicians often playing during the tourist season. Their Indian food is best. Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel, City Palace Complex; tel. +91 (0)294 252 8008. Looking over Lake Pichola, the rooftop restaurant at the Jagat Niwas Palace Hotel is very popular, and deservedly so. The food is tasty and the ambience is relaxing. It's

wise to book ahead—request one of the cushioned alcoves overlooking the water (reservations at tel. +91 (0)294 242 0133). Jagat Niwas Palace Hotel, 23-25 Lal Ghat.

The rooftop restaurant at the Udai Kothi Hotel is also highly recommended, especially in the evening when it's at its most magical. The multi-cuisine food is just as pleasing as its setting, which offers panoramic views. Udai Kothi Hotel, Hanuman Ghat; tel. +91 (0)294 243 2810.

Places to Stay

Most travelers choose to stay close to Lake Pichola, and there are some appealing possibilities in this area, spanning all budgets. The very swish Lake Palace Hotel, in the middle of Lake Pichola, has lovely rooms with Rajasthani touches such as carved wooden furniture and rich fabrics. Facilities include several restaurants, a bar, a swimming pool, small shopping arcade, and relaxing open-air courtyards. The more expensive rooms have lake views. Needless to say, advance bookings are essential. Lake Pichola; tel. +91 (0)294 252 8800. Two other incredibly lavish places to stay are the Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel and the Fateh Prakash Palace Hotel, both part of the City Palace Complex. The cheapest rooms offered at both places are appropriately posh but not nearly as palatial as the suites. Facilities (shared by both) include a marble pool, cozy bar, and several restaurants. City Palace Complex; tel. +91 (0)294 252 8008.

For those with less cash to splash, the mid-priced Udai Kothi is sure to put a smile on your face. The rooms are immaculate, with pretty furnishings and an understated elegance. There's a rooftop terrace that has superb lake views and one of Rajasthan's only rooftop swimming pools. Hanuman Ghat; tel. +91 (0)294 243 2810.

Another popular mid-range choice is the Jagat Niwas Palace Hotel, which is known for its lovely lake-facing restaurant. The rooms in this old haveli (traditional-style residence) are clean and comfortable; you pay extra for the lake-view rooms. 23-25 Lal Ghat; tel. +91 (0)294 242 0133; e-mail mail@jagatniwaspalace.com.

A sound budget option is the friendly Hotel Udai Niwas which has clean and tidy rooms, some with traditional Rajasthani flourishes such as colorful wall-hangings and paintings. This place is not right on the lake, but the rooftop restaurant has views of it, as well as of the old city. Gangaur Marg; tel. +91 (0)294 241 4303.

General Tips

The best place to watch the sunset in Udaipur would have to be at the aptly named Sunset View Terrace (part of the City Palace Complex), which overlooks Lake Pichola.

For More Information

Tourist Reception Center Fateh Memorial Building, south of Delhi Gate; tel. +91 (0)294 241 1535. Rajasthan Tourism Udaipur Tourism India Tourism.

Jaisalmer

Rising out of a vast, barren desert, Jaisalmer—the "Golden City"—is sheer magic. Dominated by its huge honey-colored fort, this remote desert outpost, once on the strategic trading route between central Asia and India, is today a veritable magnet for tourists. A camel ride through the windswept Thar Desert has become a must-do on most people's travel itineraries.

How to Get There

There are presently no domestic flights operating to/from Jaisalmer; however, this could change in the future (inquire with your travel agent). There are frequent train services from Jodhpur, as well as rail connections between Jaipur and Delhi. State-operated and privately owned buses travel here from a number of Rajasthani cities including Jodhpur, Jaipur, and Bikaner.

How to Get Around

There are autorickshaws and jeeps to get you around town; jeeps can also be hired to explore Jaisalmer's environs. Be aware that Jaisalmer's autorickshaw drivers invariably inflate fares for foreign tourists, so make sure you have some idea of what you should be paying (ask at the tourist office or at your hotel).

Attractions

Built in 1156, the magnificent sandstone **Jaisalmer Fort** contains narrow, winding lanes lined with private homes, small hotels, restaurants, and shops. It also has a seven-story palace (partly accessible to visitors), as well as an open courtyard and several temples, including some superb Jain ones.

Jaisalmer has some outstanding, intricately carved sandstone havelis (traditional-style residences) that were constructed by prosperous traders. The most stunning of these is the 19th-century Patwon ki Haveli, but you should also take a look at the beautiful Nathmal ki

Haveli and Salim Singh ki Haveli.

There are oodles of camel-safari operators eager to whisk away tourists on Thar Desert jaunts that range from a few hours to a few days. Most safaris take place in the **Sam sand dunes**, situated about 25 miles (40 kilometers) out of Jaisalmer. It's also possible to take camel treks to the village of Khuri, also around 25 miles (40 kilometers) from **Jaisalmer**.

Places to Eat

Given the catastrophic effects tourism is having on the fragile Jaisalmer Fort—it has been classified as one of the most endangered monuments in the world—we have refrained from recommending places to eat in the fort itself.

The Natraj Restaurant serves sensational Indian food and has some good views over the nearby Salim Singh ki Haveli. The prices are very reasonable and the staff courteous. Adjacent to the Salim Singh ki Haveli.

Trio offers very satisfying Indian and continental food on its rooftop and has entertainment on most evenings in the form of Rajasthani musicians. You can get a view of the fort from here. Gandhi Chowk. Also popular is Desert Boy's Dhani, which has seating in an enclosed garden setting. It specializes in (yummy) Indian vegetarian food at competitive prices. Seemagram Campus.

Places to Stay

Given the dire effects tourism is having on the fragile fort—it has been classified as one of the most endangered monuments in the world—we have refrained from recommending places to stay in the fort itself. The welcoming family-run Hotel Renuka has budget-priced rooms that are a good value—the more expensive ones (which are still wonderfully inexpensive) come with attached bathrooms and balconies. The rooftop has a decent restaurant and sports fort views. Chinpura Street, tel. +91 (0)2992 252757; e-mail hotelrenuka@rediffmail.com.

The mid-priced Shahi Palace Hotel is a handsome sandstone property that offers quaint rooms with carved window frames and rustic furniture. The small open-air rooftop restaurant is just the spot to relax after a hectic day of sightseeing. Shiv Road; tel. +91 (0)2992 255920.

A recommended top-end hotel is Fort Rajwada, several miles east of

the center. Surrounded by landscaped gardens, the rooms are sumptuously appointed with traditional Rajasthani design styles combined with modern amenities. There are several very good restaurants, a health club, billiard room, and swimming pool. 1 Hotel Complex, Jodhpur-Barmer Link Road; tel. +91 (0)2992 253233.

For More Information

Tourist Reception Center Station Road; tel. +91 (0)2992 252406.
Rajasthan Tourism Jaisalmer Tourism India Tourism

Jodhpur

Dubbed the "Blue City" thanks to the old city's ocean of blue-colored houses (best seen from the Mehrangarh Fort), Jodhpur was founded by Rao Jodha in 1459 and is located in the parched western pocket of Rajasthan. Apart from its massive fort, Jodhpur is also the site of an enormous palace, part of which still houses the current maharaja and his family.

How to Get There

You can get to Jodhpur by air, with domestic carriers flying from Delhi, Mumbai, Jaipur, and Udaipur. State-run and private buses travel here from various Rajasthani cities including Jaisalmer, Udaipur, Ajmer, Jaipur, and Bikaner, as well as Delhi. There are train connections to Jaipur, Jaisalmer, and Delhi.

How to Get Around

Taxis and autorickshaws are widely available in Jodhpur.

Attractions

Atop a rocky hill overlooking the city is the mighty **Mehrangarh Fort**, one of Rajasthan's most impressive fort complexes. Within the fort is a clutch of historic palace buildings and courtyards, as well as an interesting museum exhibiting royal memorabilia. About 0.62 miles (one kilometer) away is the finely sculptured **Jaswant Thada**, a marble memorial built in 1899.

Take a wander through the old city's lively **Sadar Bazaar** (easily spotted by its tall clock tower), which has meandering lanes lined with little shops selling everything from spices to bangles.

The gigantic **Umaid Bhawan Palace** took more than 15 years to finish (construction started in 1929). It has an austere charm, with large sandstone domes and a rather impersonal—but suitably

palatial—interior. Part of it has been converted into a luxury hotel as well as a museum, the latter housing some particularly impressive antique clocks.

Places to Eat

Jodhpur's range of restaurants is not bad, with something to suit all budgets. The better places are usually found in hotels. Open for dinner, the open-air Mehran Terrace is superbly situated on a terrace of the Mehrangarh Fort. The Rajasthani thalis (all-you-can-eat meals) are recommended. Advance reservations are required (call tel. +91 [0]291 254 9790). Mehrangarh Fort.

The Garden Restaurant is, as the name suggests, set in a garden, which is lit up at night with twinkling candles. The menu offers a good range of tasty Indian and continental food at fair prices. Airport Road, near the Ajit Bhawan hotel.

If you can't afford to stay at the Umaid Bhawan Palace, you can at least treat yourself to dinner at either the Pillars or the more formal Risala. Umaid Bhawan Palace, Palace Road.

Places to Stay

Be wary of taxi and autorickshaw drivers who urge you to stay at a hotel of their choice, as it often means you'll end up paying a premium for the room, due to the commission paid to the driver by the hotel. Built in 1847, the family-run Pal Haveli is a popular mid-priced choice, with just 12 rooms, all full of old-style charm. There's a small museum on the premises, as well as dining facilities. Gulab Sagar; tel. +91 (0)291 329 3328.

Also in the mid-range price bracket is the small, colonial-flavored Newtons Manor, which has just five rooms, each very comfortable and furnished with antique pieces. Hearty meals are available. 86 Jawahar Colony, Ratanada; tel. +91 (0)291 243 0686.

Another atmospheric mid-range possibility is Ratan Vilas, a lovely family-run villa set in a green garden. The rooms are cozy and well kept, and the kitchen prepares some of the tastiest home-cooked Indian food you'll eat in Rajasthan. Old Loco Shed Road, Ratanada; tel. +91 (0)291 261 4418; e-mail ratanvilas_jod@rediffmail.com.

General Tips

One of the best places to sample Jodhpur's famous makhani lassi (a creamy saffron-flavored, yogurt-based beverage) is at the simple little

Shri Mishrilal Hotel, near the clock tower in Sadar Bazaar.

For More Information

Tourist Reception Center RTDC Hotel Ghoomar compound, High Court Road; tel. +91 (0)291 254 5083. Rajasthan Tourism

Pushkar

This holy little town is centered on a sacred lake that, according to legend, appeared at the spot where Lord Brahma dropped a lotus flower from the sky, which has made it an important Hindu pilgrimage site. On an international level, Pushkar is famous for its colorful camel fair, which takes place every October/November and attracts thousands of tourists.

How To Get There

Pushkar can be reached by bus from a handful of Rajasthani towns that include Ajmer, Jaipur, Udaipur, and Jodhpur. There are no train services to Pushkar, but you could catch a train to nearby Ajmer and get a bus from there to Pushkar (Ajmer is about seven miles [11 kilometers] away).

How To Get Around

You get around (small) Pushkar by foot. Alternatively, rent a bicycle or motorcycle (just ask around to find rental outlets). There aren't any cycle rickshaws or autorickshaws in Pushkar, but jeeps can be hired for trips to surrounding areas.

Attractions

The **Pushkar Camel Fair** is a major tourist draw, and although the festival is rooted in spirituality, it has taken on somewhat of a carnival flavor. Tens of thousands of camels and cattle are traded during the fair, while sadhus (ascetics) converge on the town to take a soul-cleansing dip in the holy lake. There's ample entertainment for tourists, with musicians, dancers, snake-charmers, and magicians flocking to the town.

The dates of the fair vary annually according to the Indian lunar calendar, taking place in late October or November (consult the tourist office for exact dates).

There are scores of **temples** in Pushkar including the Brahma Temple and the hilltop Savitri Temple.

Places to Eat

Pushkar is a vegetarian town so no restaurants serve meat. Sporting lake views, the rooftop Raju Terrace Garden Restaurant is a travelers' favorite, with plenty of comfort food such as hot baked potatoes and crispy pizzas. There's also a good range of Indian dishes. Sadar Bazaar.

Sun-n-Moon is a mellow spot, set in a relaxing courtyard. The menu offers everything from curry to mashed potatoes, and they also cook good breakfasts. Northwest of Pushkar Lake. Although the food is nothing special, the Sunset Café, right by Pushkar Lake, is indeed a good place to watch the sun go to bed. The menu has a bit of everything—Indian, Chinese, and continental. Eastern Ghat area.

Places to Stay

During the Pushkar Camel Fair, hotel tariffs skyrocket due to the incredibly high demand for rooms; advance reservations at this time are essential. The nicest place to stay in Pushkar is the Jagat Singh Palace Hotel, which is modern but with traditional architecture and interiors. The rooms are delightful, with wood-carved furniture. There's also a lovely swimming pool. A couple of miles east of the center. tel. +91 (0)145 277 2953.

The mid-priced inn Seventh Heaven is a restored century-old haveli that has just 11 rooms, set around a courtyard. The rooms are individually designed, with carved wooden furniture and homey touches. There's a good rooftop restaurant as well as a meditation/yoga area. Chotti Basti; tel. +91 (0)145 510 5455.

General Tips

If you're keen to see the animal trading at its peak during the camel fair, get to Pushkar about a week prior to the published (official) festival dates.

For More Information

Tourist Information Center Hotel Sarovar compound; tel. +91 (0)145 277 2040. Rajasthan Tourism

Shekhawati

This little-visited region lies in the semi-arid northeast of Rajasthan and is known for its many painted havelis (traditional-style residences) that are found in the small towns sprinkled across Shekhawati. Some of the best frescoes are seen in the towns of Jhunjhunu (Shekhawati's district headquarters), Mandawa, Nawalgarh, Fatehpur, Churu,

Ramgarh, and Parasrampura.

How to Get There

Most of Shekhawati's towns can be reached by bus, with Jaipur and Bikaner being particularly well connected. There are limited rail connections.

How to Get Around

It's easy to get around by foot in many areas, but within most towns there are autorickshaws. Private taxis are also available and are recommended if you intend to tour the region extensively.

Attractions

The predominant attraction of this region is its frescoes, found on the walls (inner and outer) of private residences and other buildings. Many of the painted havelis are open to visitors, but for those that aren't, you can often see at least some frescoes on the outer walls. The paintings, some of which are in a tragic state of disrepair, depict a curious range of topics, from mythology to modern gadgets.

Places to Stay and Eat

There's limited accommodation in the towns of Shekhawati; hotels are usually the best places to dine. In Jhunjhunu, recommended options include the Hotel Jamuna Resort and the Hotel Shiv Shekhawati, both of which have clean, pleasantly furnished rooms at mid-range prices. The Jamuna Resort has a pool. Both properties are run by the same owner, who is a gold mine of information. Jhunjhunu; tel. +91 (0)1592 232651.

In Nawalgarh, the budget-priced Ramesh Jangid's Tourist Pension (Nawalgarh; tel. +91 [0]1594 224060) is recommended. The large rooms are well-maintained and the owner is happy to share his knowledge of the region. The owner also runs the award-winning Apani Dhani (Nawalgarh; tel. +91 [0]1594 222239), an eco-friendly resort that has accommodations in comfortable mud huts.

In Mandawa, a popular choice is the mid-priced Hotel Mandawa Haveli, which is a beautifully restored old haveli with pleasing rooms (the suites are best) around a courtyard. Mandawa; tel. +91 (0)1592 223088.

For More Information

Tourist Reception Center, Jhunjhunu Churu bypass, Mandawa Circle,

Jhunjhunu; tel. +91 (0)1592-232909. Rajasthan Tourism

Ranthambore National Park

Ranthambore National Park, located in the east of Rajasthan, is home to tigers as well as a variety of other wildlife, including leopards, crocodiles, and sloth bears. It is also good bird-spotting territory, with several hundred different bird species. The closest major town to the park is Sawai Madhopur (situated around 7.5 miles [12 kilometers] away).

How To Get There

Sawai Madhopur can be accessed by bus and train. There are buses from various Rajasthani towns such as Jaipur and Kota, while train services include those from Delhi, Kota, and Bharatpur.

How To Get Around

You can get around by autorickshaw and taxi. Bicycles can also be rented (inquire at your hotel).

Attractions

Apart from wildlife, the lush **Ranthambore National Park** contains some run-down temples as well as a tenth-century fort. The best time to view wildlife is between October and April (the park is shut during the monsoon). Jeep safaris are available at the park; these last for about three hours. Wildlife officials urge visitors to take a few safaris to maximize their chances of seeing a big cat.

Places to Stay and Eat

Most travelers prefer to stay near the park rather than in busy Sawai Madhopur, which is about 7.5 miles (12 kilometers) away. The hotels are the nicest places to eat. A comfortable mid-priced choice is the Hotel Tiger Safari Resort, which has regular rooms or cottages, all well kept. Meals are available. Ranthambore Road; tel. +91 (0)7462 221137. Also in the mid-priced category is the Ankur Resort, which offers standard rooms and cottages. These are clean, airy, and comfortable. There's a pool and restaurant on-site. Ranthambore Road; tel. +91 (0)7462 220792.

More upmarket is the 70-year-old Sawai Madhopur Lodge. Run by the reputable Taj Group, this charming hotel has appealing rooms, a multi-cuisine dining room, swimming pool, and 12 acres (4.8 hectares) of well-tended gardens. The lodge was once a prince's private hunting abode. Ranthambore Road; tel. +91 (0)7462 220541.

For More Information

Tourist Reception Center Sawai Madhopur train station; tel. +91 (0)7462 220808. Rajasthan Tourism

Mount Abu

Rajasthan's only hill station, Mount Abu is a wildly popular summer escape, especially for Rajasthani and Gujarati families who flock here to enjoy the cool temperatures of this 3,937-foot-high (1,200-meter) town. Apart from its natural beauty, Mount Abu also has several Jain temples with some of the most amazingly intricate carvings.

How to Get There

Buses from various Rajasthani towns make the trip to Mount Abu, but make sure you get one of the buses that go all the way up, as many stop at the base of the mountain (Abu Road) and require a change of bus. Share-jeps frequently make the 17-mile (27-kilometer) ascent from Abu Road. There are train services (from Abu Road) including to/from Delhi, Jaipur, and Jodhpur.

How to Get Around

You can get around by foot or take a share-jeep for longer trips. Mount Abu does not have any autorickshaws. Local buses travel to nearby attractions.

Attractions

With their exquisite carvings, the **Jain Dilwara Temples** are a must-see. Among the temples, the most stunning include the 11th-century Vimal Vasahi and the 13th-century Luna Vasahi; each of these temples took workers about 15 years to complete. Photography is prohibited. With its beautiful **woodland scenery**, Mount Abu is a great place to simply stroll about at leisure. Apart from Nakki Lake, there are some popular viewpoints, such as Sunset Point, Honeymoon Point, Shanti Shikhar, and the Crags.

Places to Eat

There's a bounty of (mostly run-of-the-mill) eateries in Mount Abu, with most focusing on Indian cuisine. One of the most popular places among locals and foreigners alike is the Kanak Dining Hall, which has super Gujarati thalis (all-you-can-eat meals) that cost about one dollar. There's indoor and outdoor seating. Rajendra Road.

For scrumptious South Indian fare (the dosas are terrific) try the busy

Madras Café, which also does a good job of Punjabi food (the restaurant is strictly vegetarian). Prices are delightfully low. Rajendra Road.

Places to Stay

Hotel tariffs spiral upwards in the peak season from around April to late June, and during the time around the Diwali Festival (see the "General Tips" section, following). At other times, you should be able to negotiate a discount. With a sterling position, atop a hill overlooking the lake, 19th-century Jaipur House has elegant suites—avoid the rather plain standard rooms. Located on a hill south of Nakki Lake; tel. +91 (0)2974 235176.

An interesting option is Connaught House, which belongs to the maharaja of Jodhpur. It's a colonial-flavored cottage in a nice garden, which has cozy living areas and rooms. The rooms in the main house are more charming than those in the new wing. Off Rajendra Road; tel. +91 (0)2974 238560; e-mail welcom@ndf.vsnl.net.in.

The lovely 19th-century Palace Hotel (Bikaner House) is set in large, leafy grounds (there's even a small lake here) and has well-furnished rooms. Good meals are available in the dining hall. Bikaner House, Delwara Road; tel. +91 (0)2974 238673.

General Tips

Plan your trip so you don't visit Mount Abu during, and a week or so after, the Diwali festival (October/November; for exact dates, which vary annually, consult any Indian tourist office), as Mount Abu attracts swarms of vacationers at this time. The hotel rates and noise level both rise significantly.

For More Information

Tourist Reception Center Rajendra Road, opposite the bus stand; tel. +91 (0)2974 235151. Rajasthan Tourism

Ranakpur

Scenically situated in a verdant valley of the Aravalli Range is the sublime Ranakpur temple complex. Located about 56 miles (90 kilometers) north of Udaipur, this is one of India's most brilliant displays of temple architecture, and it's an important Jain pilgrimage site.

How to Get There

There are a few daily buses to Ranakpur from Udaipur as well as services from Mount Abu and Jodhpur. To see both Khumbalgarh and Ranakpur, it's best to hire a private taxi.

How to Get Around

You walk around the temple complex. Jeep taxis can be hired for longer trips.

Attractions

The **Ranakpur temple complex** is comprised of several temples. The main temple is the marble Chaumukha Mandir, constructed in 1439, which has 29 halls and a staggering 1,444 pillars (all carved a little differently from each other). The intricate carvings of this temple are truly phenomenal. The Ranakpur complex also contains the Neminath and Parasnath Jain temples.

If you're traveling to Ranakpur from Udaipur and have your own vehicle, consider pausing in peaceful, remote **Khumbalgarh**. If possible spend a night or two here so you can arrange a permit to visit the wildlife sanctuary (inhabited by leopards, wolves, antelopes, and sloth bears) and explore the enormous 15th-century Khumbalgarh Fort at an enjoyable pace.

Places to Stay and Eat

There are some delightful accommodation options in Ranakpur and Khumbalgarh, and these are also the best places to eat. The most beautiful place to stay in Ranakpur is the Maharani Bagh Orchard Retreat, which has upmarket modern cottages scattered in a shady mango grove. There's a good restaurant as well as a swimming pool. Ranakpur; tel. +91 (0)2934 285105.

In Khumbalgarh, the charming Aodhi Hotel, which is cut into a hillside, has lovely rooms with a funky wilderness lodge ambience (tiger skin-print bedspreads and the like). The tranquillity at this hotel is one of its highlights. Meals are available, and there's a nice swimming pool. Khumbalgarh; tel. +91 (0)2954 242341.

For More Information

Tourist Reception Center, Udaipur Fateh Memorial Building, near Surajpol Gate, Udaipur; tel. +91 (0)294 241 1535. Rajasthan Tourism

Bikaner

A large number of travelers come to Bikaner solely to visit the nearby

Karni Mata Temple (often referred to as the Temple of the Rats), but Bikaner also has some fine attractions, most notably the glorious Junagarh Fort, that warrant more than just a fleeting visit.

How To Get There

There are buses to Bikaner from a range of Rajasthani towns, including Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Ajmer, Udaipur, and Jaipur. Buses also operate from Delhi and Agra. Train services are another option, with Bikaner connected to a handful of towns, including Jaipur, Jodhpur, and Delhi. To get to the Karni Mata Temple (located about 19 miles [30 kilometers] from Bikaner) catch a local bus or take an autorickshaw or taxi; a taxi is more advisable given the distance of the trip.

How To Get Around

There are plenty of autorickshaws to zip you around Bikaner. Taxis are also available.

Attractions

Built in the second half of the 16th century, Bikaner's **Junagarh Fort** is one of Rajasthan's most remarkable fort complexes, with almost 40 bastions punctuating its ramparts. The complex is made up of a number of palaces that include the Badal Mahal (Palace of Clouds) and Phool Mahal (Palace of Flowers).

Also worth a look in Bikaner is the red-sandstone **Lalgarh Palace**, which has a museum containing some truly intriguing pieces of royal paraphernalia, such as a former maharaja's roller skates!

The mind-boggling **Karni Mata Temple**, located in the small village of Deshnok (about 19 miles [30 kilometers] south of Bikaner), is dedicated to rats, and there are thousands of them here. These rodents are believed to be manifestations of auspicious storytellers and ancestors of Karni Mata, to whom the temple is dedicated. As this is a place of worship, shoes must be removed before entering the temple—if a rat scurries over your feet it's deemed to be good luck. Catching sight of a white rat is considered even more propitious.

Places to Eat

Bikaner has few outstanding places to eat—some of the mid-range and top-end hotels have the city's most interesting dining options. Part of a hotel, the dining room at Bhanwar Niwas is a popular choice, offering delicious, wholesome vegetarian creations (mainly Indian). Those not staying at the hotel must make an advance booking (tel. +91 [0]151 252 9323). Rampuri Haveli, Old City (near the police station).

To tuck into some of Bikaner's best mithai (Indian sweets), go to the Chhotu Motu Joshi Sweet Shop, which showcases a colorful pastiche of sticky delights, including old favorites barfi (a milk-based type of fudge) and gulab jamun (deep-fried balls of dough, doused in sweet syrup). Station Road.

If you're looking for somewhere to fill up before catching a train, try Amber, which is nothing fancy in terms of its decor, but is conveniently close to the railway station. It serves inexpensive vegetarian dishes, including some south Indian choices. Station Road.

Places to Stay

Apart from its hotels, Bikaner also offers travelers the opportunity to stay with an Indian family (as a paying guest)—for details contact the Tourist Reception Center (see the "For More Information" section, below).

Full of charisma, Bhanwar Niwas is one of Bikaner's most character-filled places to stay. Set in an old haveli (traditional-style residence), its 26 spacious and lovingly decorated rooms are arranged around a courtyard. In the lobby are two vintage cars, including a Buick. Rampuri Haveli, Old City (near the police station); tel. +91 (0)151 252 9323.

Also worth considering is the elegant Laxmi Niwas Palace, which is part of the Lalgarh Palace compound. The good-size rooms have been beautifully refurbished, retaining many original pieces, such as old paintings and gorgeous wood (or brass) four-poster beds. There's a multi-cuisine restaurant, which includes some excellent local specialties. Lalgarh Palace, Dr. Karni Singhji Road; tel. +91 (0)151 252 1188.

The moderately priced, 120-year-old Bhairon Vilas is another good choice. The rooms are imaginatively decorated and filled with old furnishings, including some art deco pieces and lovely antique fittings. Meals are available, and the owner is happy to proffer information about the city.

For More Information

Tourist Reception Center RTDC Hotel Dhola Maru compound, near Pooran Singh Circle; tel. +91 (0)151 222 6701. Rajasthan Tourism