

Jaipur



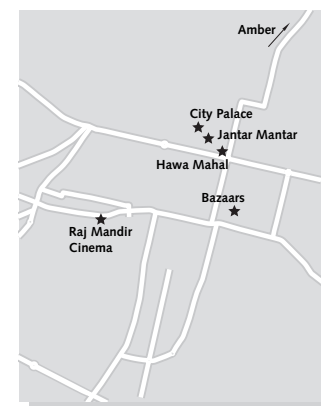
Jaipur's colourful, chaotic streets flow with a heady brew of old and new. Careering buses dodge dawdling camels, leisurely cycle-rickshaws frustrate swarms of motorbikes, and everywhere buzzing autorickshaws watch for easy prey. In the midst of this mayhem, the splendours of Jaipur's majestic past are islands of calm evoking a different pace and another world. Dusky pink and slightly soiled, Old Jaipur was painted a mock-sandstone hue to welcome the Prince of Wales in 1876, and though it doesn't look like it, it is given a fresh coat regularly. At its heart, the City Palace continues to house the royal family, the fascinating Jantar Mantar, the royal observatory, maintains a heavenly aspect, and the honeycomb Hawa Mahal gazes on the bazaar below.

Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan, is an enthralling historical city and the gateway to India's most flamboyant and exciting state. It is also one of India's most vibrant and fastest-growing cities and an axis of the 'Golden Triangle', India's most popular tourist trail. Formidable fortifications surround the city, and just out of sight is the fairy-tale grandeur of not-to-be-missed Amber Fort.

However, it's not all fairy tales. Prepare your senses to be shaken and stirred as you come to grips with this mesmerising and, at times, frustrating metropolis. Jaipur suffers from overcrowding, traffic turmoil and pollution, and persistent touts can wear down your enthusiasm. But give this dishevelled romantic time to weave her magic and the appreciative guest will be tickled pink.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Marvel at the maharaja high-life in the beautiful **City Palace** (p154), a maze of opulence
- Explore the stunning **Amber Fort** (p178), a mighty Rajput citadel rising from the rocks 11km from Jaipur
- Follow your stars among the outsized astronomical instruments at **Jantar Mantar** (p156)
- Hide like the harem at the **Hawa Mahal** (p157), the Palace of the Winds, a multiwindowed hive built for the women of the court
- Hunt and gather through the boisterous **bazaars** (p172) of the Old City
- Join the party and the painted pachyderms at one of Jaipur's colourful **festivals** (p148)
- Catch a Bollywood blockbuster at the swirling pink **Raj Mandir Cinema** (p172)



■ AREA: 65 SQ KM

■ POPULATION: 3.32 MILLION

■ TELEPHONE CODE: 0141

FESTIVALS IN JAIPUR

Jaipur celebrates unique festivals, as well as numerous statewide and national festivals, with vigour and flair. It's worth visiting for any of these to catch the build-up, the dressing up and a few processions. For more information on festivals, see p358.

Makar Sankranti (14 Jan) This kite festival is worth catching. It's celebrated all over India, and heralds the transition of the sun into the northern hemisphere. The sky is full of kites, with special displays and kite fights – participants fiercely compete to cut down each others' kites (the strings are dipped in crushed glass) – anyone is fair game.

Jaipur Heritage International Festival (www.jaipurfestival.org; 21-30 Mar) In celebration of Jaipur's heritage, this festival aims to revive and conserve the regional culture and traditions. Performances are held throughout the Old City, in atmospheric venues from forts to temples. As well as the usual displays of folk, classical, traditional and contemporary dance, there are theatre, film, music and sporting events, as well as concerts, workshops, exhibitions and fashion shows. Contact the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (Intach; ☎ 2228275) for more details.

Elephant Festival (Mar) Takes place on the day before Holi. Elephants painted in amazing patterns and dressed in ribbons and jewellery (spot the females by their jangling anklets) lumber through the streets, along with camels, horses and dancers. Elephantine craziness includes matches of elephant polo at Chaughan Stadium in the Old City, elephant races, and a tug-of-war between elephants and humans.

Gangaur (Mar-Apr) Rajasthan's most important festival, especially for women, celebrates the love between Gan (Shiva) and his consort Gauri (Parvati). Parvati symbolises perfection in married life, so it's considered a good move for both unmarried and married women to worship during this festival. It commences on the day following Holi, the first day of Chaitra, and continues for 18 days. Newlywed women should observe the full 18 days. Unmarried women usually fast during this period. People make small terracotta images of Gan and Gauri to dress and worship. Some families have permanent wooden images of Gauri, which are freshly painted during Gangaur. The last three days are the climax of the festival. The terracotta and wooden images are dressed to impress in beautiful costumes and jewels. An elaborately garbed image of the goddess is carried on a palanquin from the Tripolia Gate, at the City Palace, through the streets of the Old City. The traditional dish to eat in Jaipur at this time is *ghewar*, a kind of sweet.

Teej (Jul-Aug) This is the swing festival, and heralds the onset of the monsoon month, Shraavan. It's celebrated across Rajasthan in honour of the marriage of Gan and Gauri, but is at its best in Jaipur. It's another favourite with Rajasthani women, and a chance for them to get dressed up – traditionally they wear green and sing songs celebrating the onset of the rains. Flower-bedecked swings are hung from trees, and in Jaipur there are glittering processions through the streets for two days – floats feature gods and goddesses and wonderful costumes.

HISTORY

Je na dekkhyo Jaipario to kal main akar kaai kario?

If one has not seen Jaipur, what is the point of having been born?

Jaipur is named after its founder, the great warrior-astronomer Jai Singh II (r 1688–1744), who came to power at age 11 after the death of his father, Maharaja Bishan Singh. The maharaja had been assured by astrologers that the boy would achieve great things in his lifetime, and young Jai (meaning 'victory') received the best education in the arts, sciences, philosophy and military affairs.

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 (p178). The

Kachhwahas had a talent for war and alliances of convenience, so their dominion spread, eventually encompassing a large area abutting the kingdoms of Mewar (in the Udaipur region) and Marwar (in the Jodhpur region).

The Kachhwaha clan recognised the expediency of aligning themselves with the powerful Mughal empire, and subsequently enjoyed the patronage of the Mughal emperors, which brought them great riches and influence. Raja Bihar Mal led an army for Humayun (second Mughal ruler of India), and was the first Rajput to be presented at Akbar's court. When Akbar visited the Muslim shrine at Ajmer, Bihar Mal presented him his daughter, who, as Akbar's wife, gave him his first son, later Emperor Jehangir. The next ruler, Bhagwan Das, also gave a daughter to be Jehangir's wife.

It's said that at 15 years of age, the prodigal Jai Singh – already king for four years – met

the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. When the emperor grasped the lad's hand, the youth retorted that, as the emperor had extended the traditional gesture of protection offered by a bridegroom to his new wife by taking his hand, it was incumbent on Aurangzeb to protect the young ruler and his kingdom in a similar fashion. Luckily Aurangzeb was impressed rather than peeved by such precocious behaviour, and conferred on Jai Singh the title 'Sawai', meaning 'one and a quarter', a title that was proudly borne by all of Jai Singh's descendants – there is still a quarter-sized flag flying above the full-sized version over the City Palace today.

Jai Singh did, however, severely peeve Aurangzeb's successor, Bahadur Shah, who came to power following Aurangzeb's death in 1707. Bahadur Shah's accession was contested by his younger brother, Azam Shah, and Jai Singh backed the wrong Shah. Bahadur responded by demanding his removal from Amber Fort, and installing Jai Singh's younger brother, Vijay, in his place. Jai Singh was unimpressed and eventually succeeded in dislodging his brother. Soliciting the support of other large Rajput states, Jai Singh formed a strong front against the Mughal ruler and eventually clawed his way back.

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 architect, Vidyadhar Bhattacharya. Jai Singh's grounding in the sciences is reflected in the precise symmetry of the new city. The small villages that lay in the vicinity were incorporated into the new city, which was dissected by wide boulevards flanked by stalls of equal size that formed nine *mohallas* (rectangles) of varying size.

The city wasn't just an aesthetic triumph; its stout walls protected its inhabitants from would-be invaders, encouraging merchants and tradespeople to flock here, further serving to enhance the city's growth and prosperity. Jai Singh's interest in the arts, sciences and religion fostered their development, and the royal court became a booming centre of intellectual and artistic endeavour.

Following Jai Singh's death in 1744, power struggles between his many offspring laid the kingdom open to invasion by neighbouring Rajput kingdoms, which appropriated large tracts of territory. The kingdom maintained good relations with the British Raj, although the British gradually undermined the independence of the state, exercising increasing control over its administration.

During the first war of independence, the Indian Uprising of 1857, Maharaja Ram Singh conspicuously helped the British and, in so doing, raised his status with the imperial power. 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 façade. Maharaja Ram Singh also built Ramgarh Lake to supply water to the burgeoning city.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the spacious and carefully planned city within Jai Singh's original city walls was bursting at the seams, and the city began to sprawl outwards, with no notion of the controlled planning at its conception.

In 1922 Man Singh II, Jaipur's last maharaja, took the throne on the death of his adoptive father, Maharaja Madho Singh II. Following Independence in 1947, the status of the princely state changed forever. In March 1949 Jaipur merged with the Rajput states of Jodhpur, Jaisalmer and Bikaner, becoming the Greater Rajasthan Union. Jaipur was honoured above the other former states when the title *rajpramukh*, meaning 'head of state', was conferred on Man Singh II, who was invested with administrative supervision of the new province. The title was later revoked, and Man Singh II was posted as Indian ambassador to Spain. In 1949 Jaipur became the capital of the state of Rajasthan.

Since 1950 the population has exploded from 300,000 to over three million, and it shows: unplanned urban sprawl has disfigured what was once one of India's most beautiful cities. Such massive growth breeds its own problems; overcrowding, pollution and traffic are the most obvious. The city is prosperous and attracts plenty of investment as a commercial, business and tourist centre.

In May 2008, 66 people were killed and hundreds injured in a series of blasts, which targeted busy markets and a Hindu temple in

Jaipur's Old City. At the time of writing, the bombings and associated claims of responsibility were still being investigated. Islamic groups fighting against Indian rule in Kashmir are usually blamed for such attacks.

ORIENTATION

The walled 'Pink City' (Old City) is in the northeast of present-day Jaipur. The city's main tourist attractions are in the Old City, which is partially encircled by a crenellated wall punctuated at intervals by grand gateways. The major gates are Chandpol (*pol* means 'gate'), Ajmeri Gate and Sanganeri Gate. Broad avenues, over 30m wide, divide the Pink City into neat rectangles, each of which is the domain of a particular group of artisans or commercial activities (see Pink City Walking Tour, p162, for details about the locations of these).

There are three main interconnecting roads in the new part of town – Mirza Ismail (MI) Rd, Station Rd and Sansar Chandra Marg. Along or just off these roads are most of the budget and midrange hotels and restaurants, many of the banks and the modern shopping strip. Panch Batti, midway along MI Rd, is a landmark intersection near the southwest corner of the Old City.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Bookwise (Shop 110, Mall 21, Bhagwandas Marg; ☎ 10am–8.30pm Mon–Sat) An excellent selection of Indian and international fiction and nonfiction including glossy picture books focusing on Rajasthan. There's a branch in the Welcome Hotel Rajputana Palace Sheraton and the helpful manager will organise postage.

Books Corner (Shop No 82 MI Rd; ☎ 10am–8pm Mon–Sat) Stocks a range of books and magazines, including some French-language publications. Sells the informative *Jaipur Vision* (Rs 20) and *Jaipur City Guide* (Rs 30).

Corner Bookstore (Mall 21, Bhagwandas Rd; ☎ 10am–10.30pm) A small but focussed collection of fiction and non-fiction books secreted into a branch of the Barista coffee bar.

Crossword (1st fl KK Square, C11, Prithviraj Marg;

☎ 10.30am–9pm Mon–Sat) A modern bookstore boasting a vast selection of fiction and nonfiction books, maps, DVDs and music CDs.

Internet Access

Many places provide internet access including most hotels and guesthouses. However fast or slow, it'll set you back about Rs 20 per hour.

Mewar Cyber Café & Communication (Station Rd; per hr Rs 20; ☎ 24hr) Near the main bus station.

Media

Jaipur Vision and *Jaipur City Guide* are two useful, inexpensive booklets available at bookshops and some hotel lobbies that feature up-to-date listings, maps, local adverts and features. The redoubtable Mr Singh at the Pearl Palace Hotel publishes his free *Jaipur for Aliens* guide which is a handy traveller survival kit with everything from bus timetables to butter-chicken recipes.

Medical Services

At **Galundia Clinic** (☎ 2361040; dagalundia@doctor.com; MI Rd), **Dr Chandra Sen** (☎ 9829061040) is on 24-hour call; a normal consultation costs Rs 300 (however, reports suggest that he may recommend a number of consultations). Most hotels can arrange a doctor on site.

Good hospitals include the following: **Santokha Durlabhji Hospital** (☎ 2566251; Bhawan Singh Marg) **Sawai Mansingh Hospital** (☎ 2560291; Sawai Ram Singh Rd)

Money

There are plenty of places to change money, and masses of ATMs, most of which accept foreign cards, including **HDFC** (Ashoka Marg), **HSBC** (Sardar Patel Marg), **ICICI** (ground fl, Ganpati Plaza, MI Rd), **IDBI** (Sawai Jai Singh Hwy), and **Standard Chartered** (Bhagwat Bhavan, MI Rd), which are open 24 hours. Moneychangers are faster and more efficient than banks for exchanging currency.

Bank of Rajasthan (☎ 2381416; Rambagh Palace; ☎ 7am–8pm)

Thomas Cook (☎ 2360940; Jaipur Towers MI Rd & Sunil Sadan 2, MI Rd; ☎ 9.30am–6pm Mon–Sat) Two convenient branches; changes cash and travellers cheques.

Photography

Most photo labs around town, including those listed here, sell lithium batteries, memory sticks and compact flash cards, and will save your digital photos onto CD for around Rs 100.

Goyal Colour Lab (☎ 2360147; MI Rd; ☎ 10.30am–8.30pm Mon–Sat, 10am–4pm Sun)

Sentosa Colour Lab (☎ 2388748; ground fl, Ganpati Plaza, MI Rd; ☎ 10am–8.30pm Mon–Sat)

Post

DHL Worldwide Express (☎ 2362826; www.dhl.co.in; G8 Geeta Enclave, Vinobha Rd) This reliable international

courier also has a small and friendly office inside the Standard Chartered Bank on MI Rd. Ensure that you ask to pay customs charges for the destination country upfront. Air freight for 10/25kg costs Rs 5685/10,176 to Australia, and Rs 6396/11,532 to Europe or the USA.

Main post office (☎ 2368740; MI Rd; ☎ 8am–7.45pm Mon–Fri, 10am–5.45pm Sat) Efficient and has a parcel-packing wallah (from 10am till 4pm Monday to Saturday) in the foyer, who will pack, stitch and seal your parcels for Rs 10 to 100 per package, depending on size.

Telephone

There are numerous public call offices (PCOs) scattered around Jaipur, which are usually cheaper than the hotels for long-distance calls. The international reverse-charges operator can be reached on ☎ 186.

It is not unusual for telephone numbers to change in Rajasthan. Jaipur has tackled this problem with an excellent automated **changed telephone number service** (in English ☎ 1952, in Hindi ☎ 1951). For local telephone number inquiries call ☎ 197.

Tourist Information

The Tourism Assistance Force (police) is stationed at major tourist traps.

Foreigners' Regional Registration Office (FRRO; ☎ 2618508; City Palace Complex; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat) Any applications for visa extensions should be lodged at the FRRO at least one week before the visa expires. It is somewhat hard to find behind the Hawa Mahal (so ask around), and the likelihood you'll get an extension on a tourist visa is slight – see p369 for more details.

Government of India tourist office (☎ 2372200; Khasa Kothi Circle; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri) Next to Hotel Khasa Kothi. Provides brochures on places all over India.

RTDC Central Reservations Office (☎ 2202586; MI Rd; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat) Handles bookings for RTDC hotels around Rajasthan, accommodation in the RTDC tourist village during the Pushkar Camel Fair (see Pushkar Camel Fair, p209) and reservations for the *Palace on Wheels* train (see the boxed text, p384). Behind RTDC Hotel Swagatam.

RTDC Tourist offices airport (☎ 2722647); Jaipur train station (☎ 2200778; platform 1; ☎ 24hr); main bus station (☎ 2206720; platform 3; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri); RTDC Tourist Hotel (☎ 2375466; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Sat) Several obliging tourist offices around town.

Uttaranchal Tourism (☎ 2378892; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Sat Jul–Apr, 10am–6pm daily May & Jun) Has an office in the RTDC Tourist Hotel compound.

Travel Agencies

There are plenty of travel agencies that can tailor local sightseeing trips, though your

hotel can probably organise the same trips for a competitive price. For a half-day tour it costs around Rs 700/900 for a non-AC/AC car with driver; a full day costs Rs 900/1300. You can hire guides for Rs 800 per day. See p175 for rates on longer trips. The following agencies can arrange cars and jeep or camel safaris, make hotel reservations and book air tickets.

Crown Tours (☎ 2363310; Palace Rd) Opposite the Rajputana Palace Sheraton.

Indo Vacations (☎ 9414312872; www.indien-reise.com, in German; 312-6 Valmiki Rd, Raja Park)

Rajasthan Travel Service (☎ 2389408; www.rajashthantravelservice.com; ground fl, Ganpati Plaza, MI Rd)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

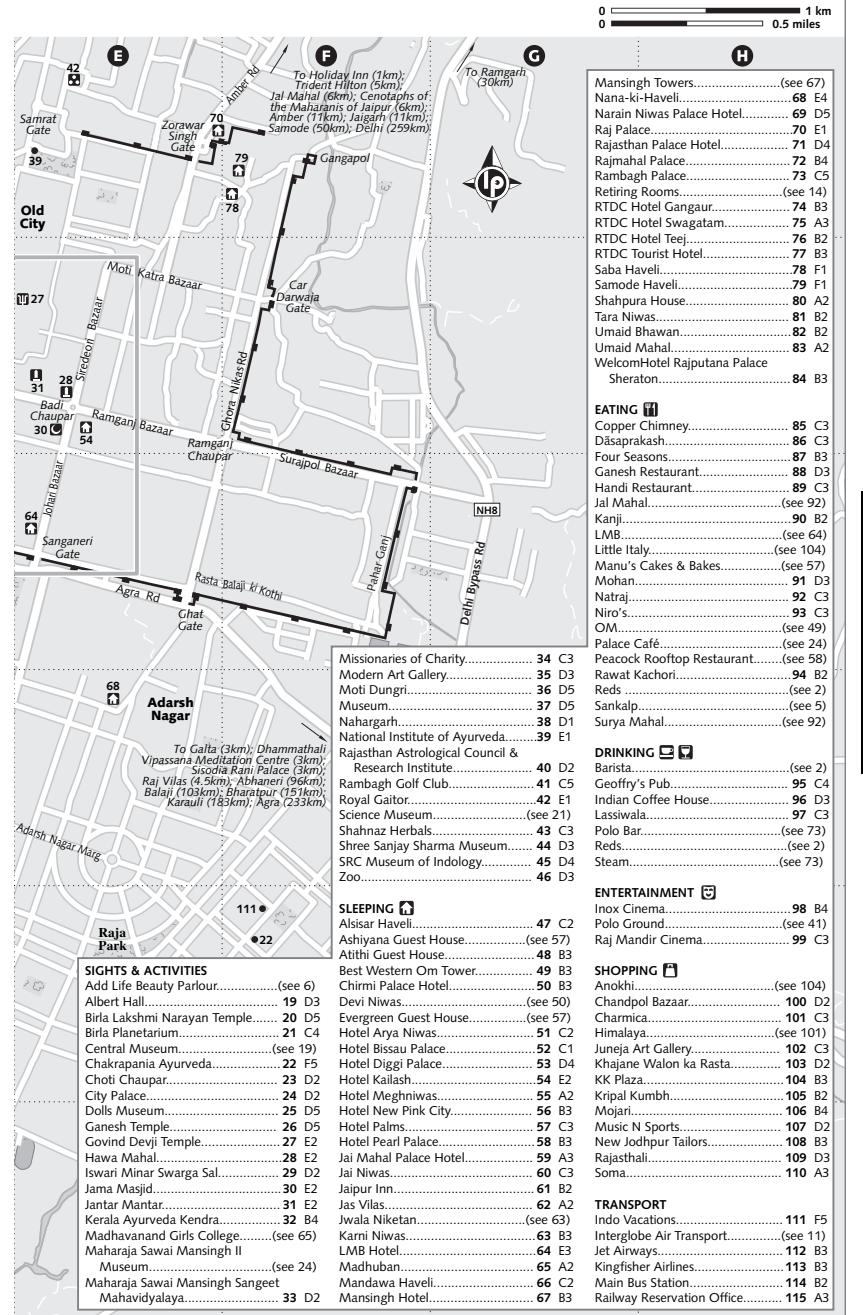
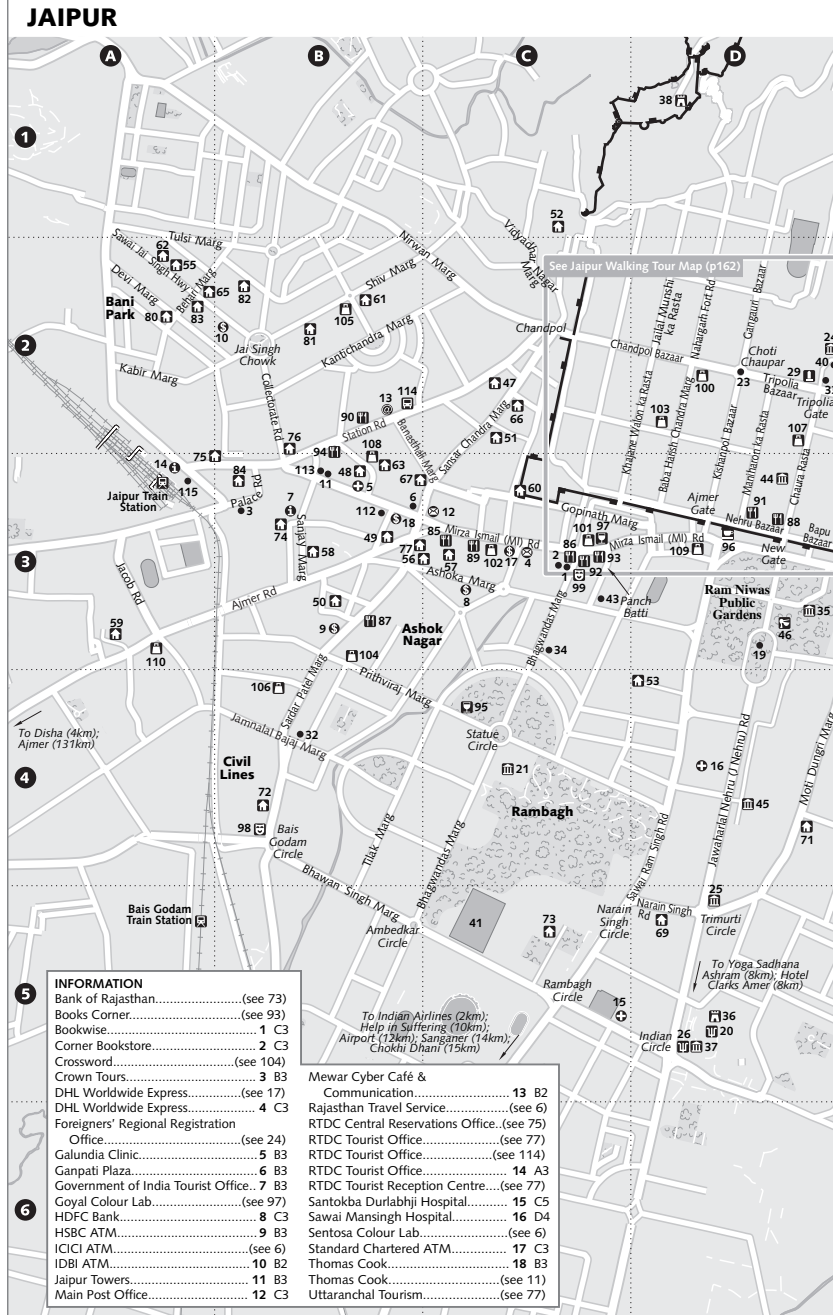
Travellers have reported problems with commission merchants in Jaipur. The town is notorious for gem scams – don't get involved in any get-rich-quick export schemes. So common they even have their own terminology, these *lapkas* (crooked touts) are involved in *dabbabazi* (the business of scamming tourists). They're particularly annoying around the City Palace, at train and bus stations, and at Amber Fort. Usually they'll leave you alone if you steadfastly ignore them, but if this doesn't work, you can report them to the tourist police stationed at these places. Often simply threatening to report them is enough to do the trick. For more information, see Gem Scams – A Warning, p154.

SIGHTS

The sights in and around Jaipur are well and truly on the tourist trail, but you can avoid the majority of the busloads of tourists (and the long queues) by visiting the City Palace and Jantar Mantar in the morning and Amber Fort in the afternoon.

The bustling Old City, often referred to as the **Pink City** for obvious reasons, was laid out by Jai Singh and his talented architect, Vidyadhar, according to strict principles of town planning set down in the *Shilpa Shastra*, an ancient Hindu treatise on architecture. At the centre of the grid is the **City Palace** complex, containing the palace itself, the administrative quarters, the **Jantar Mantar** (Jai Singh's remarkable observatory) and the *zenana mahals* (women's palaces).

Avenues divide the Pink City into neat rectangles, each specialising in certain crafts, as ordained in the *Shilpa-Shastra*. The main



GEM SCAMS – A WARNING

If you believe any stories about buying anything in India to sell at a profit elsewhere, you'll simply be proving (once again) that old adage about separating fools from their money. Precious stones are favourites for this game. Merchants will tell you that you can sell the items back home for several times the purchase price, and will even give you the (often imaginary) addresses of dealers who will buy them. You may also be shown written statements from other travellers documenting the money they have made, even photographs of the merchants shaking hands with their so-called business partners overseas. Don't be taken in, it's all a scam. The gems you buy will be worth only a fraction of what you pay. Often the scams involve showing you real stones and then packing up worthless glass beads to give you in their place. Don't let greed cloud your judgment.

These scams can be elaborate productions and can begin when touts strike up conversations in excellent English while you're waiting for a bus or eating in a restaurant, until you develop a friendly relationship with them. It might be several hours (or even days if they know where you hang out and can organise to see you again) before any mention is made of reselling items.

Tip: beware of anyone who wants to become your best friend in areas that see a lot of tourists, eg hotel and shopping strips and transport hubs.

bazaars in the Old City include Johari Bazaar, Tripolia Bazaar, Bapu Bazaar and Chandpol Bazaar – see the walking tour p162 or Shopping p172 for more details of these bazaars. At dusk the sunset-shaded buildings have a magical glow.

City Palace

A complex of courtyards, gardens and buildings, the **City Palace** (☎ 2608055; www.royalfamilyjaipur.com; Indian/foreigner Rs 40/200, Indian/foreigner child aged 5-12 Rs 25/120, camera Rs 50, video Rs 200; 🕒 9.30am-4.30pm) 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. There are palace buildings from different eras, some dating from the early 20th century. Despite the gradual development, the whole is a striking blend of Rajasthani and Mughal architecture.

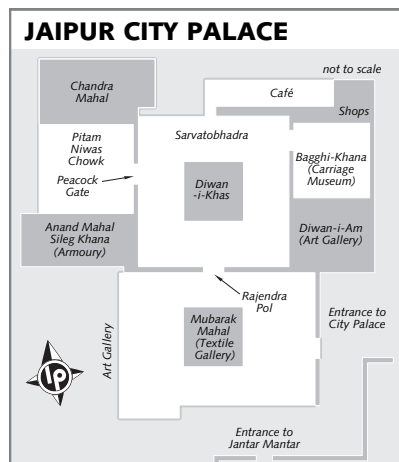
The Kachhwaha Rajputs were patrons of the arts and took pride in their collection of valuable artefacts. For a long time there was a private museum here, for viewing by visiting dignitaries, and in 1959 this became a public museum under Man Singh II. His successor, Maharaja Bhawani Singh, took a keen interest in its development and enlarged the museum substantially. Beyond the main courtyards is the seven-storeyed Chandra Mahal, which is still his residence and therefore not open to visitors.

The price of admission also gets you in to Jaigarh Fort (see p179, a long climb above Amber Fort). This is valid for two days.

There are two entrances to the City Palace: the main entrance, approached through Virendra Pol, and one through Udai Pol near Jaleb Chowk.

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. It's multiarched and colonnaded construction was cooked up in an Islamic, Rajput and European stylistic stew by the architect Sir Swinton Jacob. It now forms part of the **Maharaja Sawai Mansingh II Museum**, contain-



ing a collection of royal costumes and superb shawls, including Kashmiri *pashmina*. The most remarkable exhibit is Madho Singh I's clothing dating from 1760, including a loose quilted dress made from silk brocade woven with *zari* (gold embroidery). It has pale-yellow cotton lining and is almost 2m long, 3.5m around the chest and almost 7m around the hem. The maharaja was a cuddly 2m tall, 1.2m wide and 250kg. Guides will take great delight in telling you how much he supposedly ate for breakfast. Appropriately for such an excessive figure, he had 108 wives.

Also on display here is Maharaja Pratap Singh's more diminutive wedding dress – a red-and-gold piece with a massively pleated skirt dating from 1790. There are also several dresses with exquisite gold embroidery, dating from the 19th century, which were worn by royalty around Diwali.

RAJENDRA POL

North of the Mubarak Mahal is the grand **Rajendra Pol**, flanked by carved elephants with lotus flowers in their mouths – symbolising royalty – that date from 1931. The gate has brass doors and walls embedded with precious and semiprecious stones.

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 (see p156). Overhead, a number of dusty crystal chandeliers serve as roosts for pesky pigeons despite the presence of an attendant with a pigeon-shooting stick.

DIWAN-I-AM

Within the lavish **Diwan-i-Am** (Hall of Public Audience) is the art gallery. Its great array of exhibits includes a touching collection of illustrated manuscripts showing everything from scenes of daily life to tales of the gods. The hall still has its beautifully preserved painted ceiling, with its barely faded, original semiprecious-stone colours, and an enormous crystal chandelier.

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. There are Persian translations of the Ramayana and Mahabharata; the latter was made specially for Akbar, and has illustrations by the greatest Mughal painters. Some beautiful Sanskrit books are also on display, as are early manuscripts on palm leaf, and particularly fine miniature paintings from the Rajasthani, Mughal and Persian schools depicting religious themes. You will see various ornate howdahs, and exquisitely detailed paper cutouts that are incised with a thumbnail.

On the walls are some beautiful carpets, made in Lahore in the 17th century and probably bought to decorate the new fort-palace at Amber. One of the carpets is made from *pashmina* exquisitely decorated with a floral pattern.

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.

Fearsome daggers are arranged over the entrance to say 'Welcome'. Many of the ceremonial weapons are elegantly engraved and inlaid belying their real purpose. They include two-bladed steel daggers that, at the flick of a catch, become scissors inside their victims; walking-stick swords; swords with pistols attached to their blades; and beautiful crystal-, ivory- and silver-handled daggers. There is also chain-mail armour, one complete set of which can weigh up to 35kg. Some pieces have a history attached to them, such as a sword inscribed for Shah Jahan, and a sword encrusted with rubies and emeralds that was presented by Queen Victoria to Maharaja Ram Singh, ruler of Jaipur from 1835 to 1880. Gun-lovers fear not, there is a fine array, including some that also serve as walking sticks; a gun the size of a small cannon for use on camel back; and double-barrelled pistols, which held bullets made of lead, dipped in poison and packed with gunpowder.

If bloody weaponry isn't your bag, however cunningly vicious and finely engraved, the 19th-century mirrored and gold-inlaid ceilings, decorated with a gorgeous floral pattern and women in various moods, are well worth a gaze.

HUGE URNS OF HOLY WATER

Holding pride of place in the pink Diwan-i-Khas pavilion are two enormous silver *gan-gajalis* (urns), 1.6m tall and each weighing about 345kg. They were made for Maharaja Madho Singh II, a devout Hindu, so that he could take sufficient holy Ganges water to England for bathing when he visited for Edward VII's coronation in 1902. These enormous vessels each have a capacity of over 4000L, and have been listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the largest sterling-silver objects in the world. They were beaten into shape from silver sheets – each made from 14,000 melted silver coins – without any soldering.

BAGGHI-KHANA – THE CARRIAGE MUSEUM

This museum houses a ramshackle collection of carriages and palanquins, featuring special covered versions for palace women, with the purpose of maintaining *purdah* (the custom among some Muslims and Hindus of keeping women hidden from men outside their own family). It's interesting also to see 19th-century European cabs adapted to Indian conditions, such as the small Victoria *bagghi* (carriage) given to the maharaja by the Prince of Wales in 1876 (the same year Jaipur was painted pink). An unusual piece is the *mahadol* – a palanquin with a single bamboo bar – usually used by priests and carried by bearers. Also on display here is the Thakurji ka Rath, a chariot used for carrying the state religious icon on special occasions.

PITAM NIWAS CHOWK & CHANDRA MAHAL

Located towards the palace's inner courtyard is **Pitam Niwas Chowk**. Here four glorious gates represent the seasons. The **Peacock Gate** depicts autumn, with zigzagging patterns and peacock motifs – around the doorway are five beautiful repeated peacock bas-reliefs in all their feathered glory. The **Lotus Gate**, signifying summer, is just as splendid, and is covered in repeated flower and petal patterns. The **Green Gate** (or *Leheriya*, literally 'waves') representing spring is more subdued, but still beautiful with its simple green design, and winter is embodied by the **Rose Gate**, again with repeated flower patterns, but less colourful than the autumn or summer gates.

Beyond this *chowk* (square) is the private palace, the **Chandra Mahal**, where Iswari Singh – son of Jai – killed himself by a snakebite (see p158). This is where the royal family still lives, a seven-storeyed building with fantastic views over the city from the top floor. Flying above the building, you can see the one and a quarter flags that signify the presence of the maharaja. If he is away, the queen's flag will fly in its place.

GOVIND DEVI TEMPLE

This early-18th-century Krishna temple is part of the City Palace complex, though outside the walls. It's decorated with a mixture of European and Indian designs – the chandeliers are European, the paintings Indian. The ceiling is decorated in gold. A popular place of worship, it's set in gardens and was situated so that the maharaja could see the deity from his palace, the neighbouring Chandra Mahal. The deity is unveiled seven times daily for *aarti* (worshipping ritual).

Jantar Mantar

Adjacent to the City Palace is **Jantar Mantar** (Indian/foreigner Rs 20/100; optional guide Rs 100; ☎ 9.30am–4.30pm). The name is derived from the Sanskrit *yanta mantr* meaning 'instrument of calculation'. The building, begun by Jai Singh in 1728, is an observatory that resembles a collection of bizarre sculptures. Paying for the half-hour to one-hour guide is well worthwhile. Guides provide explanations of how each fascinating instrument works.

Jai Singh liked astronomy even more than he liked war and town planning. Before constructing the observatory, he sent scholars abroad to study foreign constructs. He built five observatories in total, and this is the largest and best preserved (it was restored in 1901). Others are in Delhi, Varanasi and Ujjain. No traces of the fifth, the Mathura observatory, remain.

Each construction within Jantar Mantar has a specific purpose, for example, measuring the positions of the stars, altitude and azimuth, and calculating eclipses.

The most striking instrument is the **Brihat Samrat Yantra** (King of the Instruments) sundial, a massive edifice with a staircase running to the top. It has a 27m-high gnomonic arm set at an angle of 27° – the same as the latitude of Jaipur. The shadow this casts moves up to 4m in an hour, and aids in the calculation

of local and meridian time and various attributes of the heavenly bodies, including declination (the angular distance of a heavenly body from the celestial equator) and altitude. It's still used by astrologers and is the focus of a gathering during the full-moon in June or July, when it purportedly helps predict local monsoon rains, and subsequent success or failure of crops.

If you tour the *yantras* in a clockwise direction, to the left as you enter the compound is the **Laghu Samrat Yantra**, a small sundial of red sandstone and white marble, inclined at 27 degrees. It does not measure as precisely as the Brihat Samrat Yantra, but does calculate the declination of celestial bodies, and the shadow cast by its gnomon enables local time (which differs from 10 to 40 minutes from Indian Standard Time) to be determined. On either side are two quadrants and local time can be determined by the shadow cast on each quadrant (one for the morning, one for the afternoon). Nearby is the **Dhruva Darshak Yantra**, used to find the location of the Pole Star and the 12 zodiac signs.

The large circular object nearby, known as the **Narivalaya Yantra**, is actually two small sundials. The two faces of the instrument represent the northern and southern hemispheres, and enable calculation of the time within a minute's accuracy.

Two large disks suspended from the wooden beams nearby comprise the **Yantra Raj**, a multipurpose instrument that, among other things, can help determine the positions of constellations and calculate the date of the Hindu calendar. A telescope is at the centre. The similar-looking **Unnatansha Yantra** lies in the northeastern corner of the observatory complex. This metal ring is divided into four segments by horizontal and vertical lines. A hole where these lines intersect, in the centre of the instrument, aids in the calculation of the altitude of celestial bodies. Nearby is **Dakhinavrith Bhatti Yantra**, which serves a similar function to the Unnatansha Yantra.

West of the Brihat Samrat Yantra, near the southern wall of the observatory, you come to a cluster of 12 yellow instruments, the **Rashi Yantras**. Each *rashi* (individual instrument) represents one of the 12 zodiac signs. The gradient of each *rashi* differs in accordance with the particular sign represented and its position in relation to the ecliptic.

The **Jai Prakash Yantra**, resembling two huge slotted bowls, was the last instrument installed at the observatory and was invented by Jai Singh, after whom it was named. The instrument is used in celestial observations, but can also verify the calculations determined by other instruments at the observatory. Each of the two cavities is divided into six marble slabs, which are marked with minutes and seconds, and also with signs of the zodiac. The metal ring suspended in the centre represents the sun, and calculations can be made from the shadow cast by it on the marble slabs. This instrument may be used to calculate auspicious days for weddings, business negotiations and so on.

The two other sunken concave structures in the western section of the observatory compound comprise the **Kapali Yantra**. The eastern Kapali Yantra is inscribed with lines to which astronomers refer in their deliberations, and is used for graphical analysis. The western Kapali Yantra is used to determine the position of a celestial body. Between the two bowls stands the **Chakra Yantra**, a pair of metal wheels, which can revolve parallel to the earth's axis, and can be fitted with a brass tube in order to calculate the declination of celestial bodies.

Two other impressive instruments are the **Ram Yantras**, which look like miniature colosseums made of 12 upright slabs and 12 horizontal slabs. They are used in the calculation of the altitude and azimuth of celestial bodies. Between them is another circular instrument, the **Digansha Yantra**, with a pillar in the middle and two outer circles. It's used for calculating azimuths, particularly of the sun. It can also be used to determine the time of sunrise and sunset.

Hawa Mahal

Jaipur's most distinctive landmark, the **Hawa Mahal** (Palace of the Winds; admission incl museum Rs 5, camera Indian/foreigner Rs 10/50, video Rs 20/70; ☎ 9am–4.30pm Sat–Thu) is an extraordinary, fairy-tale, pink-sandstone, delicately honeycombed hive that rises a dizzying five storeys. Constructed in 1799, the building is an amazing example of Rajput artistry, built to enable ladies of the royal household to watch the life and processions of the city. Inside it's barely a building at all, only around one room deep, with narrow, delicately scalloped walkways, under bulbous canopies. It's still a great

THE RANI OF RAMBAGH

The life story of Gayatri Devi, the celebrated maharani of Jaipur, is an allegory of 20th-century Rajasthan, capturing the state's ambivalence towards its transition from princely rule to part of post-Independence, democratic India.

In her heyday, Gayatri Devi was an icon of royal glamour, adored by gossip columnists and dubbed one of the most beautiful women in the world by *Vogue* magazine. She was born in 1919, a princess from the small state of Cooch Behar (now in West Bengal). At the age of 19 she fell in love with Man Singh II, the last maharaja of Jaipur. Although Man Singh already had two wives, they were married in 1939 and settled down to the life of luxury enjoyed by Indian royalty of the time. There were polo matches, hunting jaunts, dinner parties and summers in England.

Man Singh converted his former hunting lodge, 3km southwest of the old city, into the magnificent Rambagh Palace for Gayatri Devi. Today the palace is surrounded by Jaipur's sprawling suburbs, but it was once a secluded retreat. Here the couple entertained some of the world's rich and famous, including Eleanor Roosevelt and Jackie Kennedy.

By this time, however, the Man Singhs were adjusting to their new role in post-Independence India. Rajasthan's ancestral rulers had been stripped of their powers, but many were still held in high regard by a large proportion of their former subjects. Banking on this support, Gayatri Devi, like many other royals, decided to enter politics. She stood against the Congress Party in the national elections in 1962 and enjoyed a stunning victory. In the 1967 and 1971 elections she retained her seat.

Indira Gandhi's Congress Party, however, was quick to act against the royals who were successfully challenging its hold on power. The privileges that the maharajas were promised following Independence (notably the privy purses paid to the royals from public funds) were abolished and investigations into their financial affairs were mounted. In the early 1970s Gayatri Devi was convicted of tax offences and served five months in Delhi's notorious Tihar Jail. On her release she penned her fascinating autobiography, *A Princess Remembers*. Now in her 90s, Gayatri Devi retains residential quarters at the Rambagh Palace, which, in 1958 was the first former palace in Rajasthan to be converted into a hotel (see p169).

place for people-watching from behind the small broken shutters, which are patterned by light. The top offers stunning views over Jantar Mantar and the City Palace one way, and over Siredeori Bazaar the other. The palace was built by Pratap Singh and is part of the City Palace complex.

There's also a small **museum** (☎ 9am-4.30pm Sat-Thu), with miniature paintings and some rich relics, 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 intersection on your left as you face the Hawa Mahal, turn right and then take the first right again through an archway.

Iswari Minar Swarga Sal

Piercing the skyline in this part of town is the unusual **Iswari Minar Swarga Sal** (Heaven-Piercing Minaret; Indian/foreigner Rs 5/10; ☎ 9am-4.30pm), near Tripolia Gate. The minaret was erected by Jai Singh's son Iswari, who later ignominiously killed himself by snakebite (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 climb to the top of the minaret for excellent views over the old city. The entrance is around the back – take the alley 50m west of the minaret along Chandpol Bazaar.

New City

By the mid-19th century it became obvious that the well-planned city was bulging at the seams. During the reign of Maharaja Ram Singh (1835–80) the seams ruptured and the city burst out beyond its walls. Civic facilities, such as a postal system and piped water, were introduced. This period gave rise to a part of town very different from the bazaars of the Old City, with wide boulevards, landscaped grounds and florid buildings. 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 (right). It was designed by Sir Swinton Jacob, and combines elements of English and North Indian architecture. It was known as the pride of the new Jaipur when it opened in 1887. The gardens were in part a famine-relief project – to provide work for the unemployed.

These civic improvements were continued by Jaipur's last maharaja, Man Singh II, who is credited with the university, the Secretariat, residential colonies, schools, hospitals and colleges. Unfortunately the city has developed wildly outwards, in an unplanned urban sprawl, where private interests and political expediency have outweighed aesthetic considerations.

Opposite Albert Hall is Jaipur's **zoo** (Indian/foreigner Rs 10/100; ☎ 9am-5pm Wed-Mon), one of the oldest in India, and housing the usual motley array of disconsolate animals.

An old theatre houses Jaipur's **Modern Art Gallery** (admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), on the 1st floor of the Ravindra Manch building, a very peaceful place with some striking contemporary work – well worth a visit.

To the south, looming above J Nehru Rd, is the small, romantic fort of **Moti Dungri**. It has served as a prison, but today remains in the possession of the former royal family, and entry is prohibited.

Birla Lakshmi Narayan Temple (J Nehru Rd; admission free; ☎ 6am-noon & 3-8.30pm) is a large, splendid, modern marble edifice at the foot of Moti Dungri Fort. The wealthy industrialist Birla, born in Palani, Rajasthan, bought the land on which the temple now stands from the maharaja for a token Rs 1. Stained-glass windows depict scenes from Hindu scriptures. Ganesh, the protector of households, is above the lintel, and the fine quality of the marble is evident when you enter the temple and look back at the entrance way – Ganesh can be made out *through* the marble, which is almost transparent. The images of Lakshmi and Narayan were carved from one piece of marble. Many of the deities of the Hindu pantheon are depicted inside the temple, and on the outside walls great historic personages and figures from other religions are shown, including Socrates, Zarathustra, Christ, Buddha and Confucius. There is a small **museum** (J Nehru Rd; admission free; ☎ 8am-noon & 4-8pm) next to the temple. The collec-

tion includes Birla family household objects and clothing.

Just down the road is the popular **Ganesh Temple** (J Nehru Rd; photography prohibited; ☎ 5am-9pm Thu-Tue, 5am-11pm Wed). If you don't like crowds avoid the temple on Wednesdays (the auspicious day), when there are throngs of devotees. You can buy *laddos* (sweet balls made from gram flour) to offer to Ganesh from the sweet stalls outside the temple.

Another construction that is funded by the wealthy Rajasthan industrialist, **Birla Planetarium** (Statue Circle; admission Rs 20; ☎ 11am-8pm, closed last Wed of month) is at the BM Birla Science & Technology Centre, near Statue Circle. All shows (35 minutes) are in Hindi. Next door there's a worthy **science museum** (☎ 2384224; admission Rs 10).

Other Museums

The **Central Museum** (☎ 2570099; Indian/foreigner Rs 5/30; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Sat-Thu) is housed in the spectacularly florid Albert Hall, south of the old city. It opened in 1887 but was closed and undergoing extensive renovation at the time of writing. When it reopens the grand old building will hopefully boast rejuvenated exhibits. The old array of tribal dress, models of yogis in various positions, dioramas, puppets, carpets, and musical instruments was looking a little tired.

Shree Sanjay Sharma Museum (☎ 2323436; 1670 off Chaura Rasta; Indian/foreigner Rs 35/80, photography prohibited; ☎ 10am-5pm) is a fascinating jumble of precious objects gathered by the parents of Shree Sanjay Sharma (who died as a boy) in his memory. It includes many rare manuscripts and some wonderful, historic Indian art from around the country. There's a set of 18th-century paintings of yoga postures showing which poses to strike if you're drowning, going deaf or suffering from gas. The collection also features elaborate locks, bookstands, drawings of temple architecture, beautiful royal games, 19th-century paper cut-outs, illustrated alchemy books and much more.

The collection of shoes is particularly fascinating: 18th-century atonement slippers (with only a toe hold), special acupressure slippers and one tiny 17th-century brass pair. All were used by sadhus or maharajas. On an upper floor is a room containing 125,000 manuscripts, dramatically shown off by the curator, but which seem to be slowly disintegrating and turning to dust in their cupboards. The

museum is signposted (though not all that clearly) off Chaura Rasta.

The ramshackle, dusty treasure trove of the **SRC Museum of Indology** (Prachyavidya Path, 24 Gangwell Park; Indian/foreigner incl guide Rs 20/40; ☎ 8am-6pm) is another 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. There are (long-term) plans to move the collection to a new building on Amber Rd, 6km from Jaipur.

Close to the Museum of Indology, in the Deaf, Dumb & Blind compound on J Nehru Rd, is the little **Dolls Museum** (admission by donation; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat). The collection includes dolls wearing traditional costumes from around India and the world, including two Irish leprechauns.

Nahargarh

Built in 1734 and extended in 1868, sturdy **Nahargarh** (Tiger Fort; ☎ 5148044; Indian/foreigner Rs 15/20, camera Rs 10/20, video Rs 20/70; ☎ 10am-5pm) overlooks the city from a sheer ridge to the north. An 8km-long road runs up through the hills from Jaipur, or the fort can be reached along a zigzagging 2km-long footpath, which starts northwest of the Old City. The views are glorious – it's a great sunset spot, and there's a restaurant that's perfect for a beer. The story goes that the fort was named after Nahar Singh, a dead prince whose restless spirit was disrupting construction. Whatever was built in the day crumbled in the night. He agreed to leave on condition that the fort was named for him.

The fort was built in 1734 by Jai Singh to increase the Amber defences, and was adapted in 1868 to its present form by Maharaja Ram Singh, to house the maharaja's numerous wives. You can visit the **Madhavendra Bhawan**, which has the nine apartments of Maharaja Ram Singh's nine other halves, with a separate suite for the king himself. There are bathrooms, toilets, boudoirs and kitchens.

Doors and windows had coloured panes, of which a few remain. Some of the boudoirs retain Belgian mirrors, and all are decorated with floral and bird motifs.

The rooms are linked by a maze of corridors – used so that the king could visit any queen without the others' knowledge.

You can even stay at the fort (see p166).

Royal Gaitor

The royal **cenotaphs** (admission free, camera Indian/foreigner Rs 5/10, video Rs 10/20; ☎ 9am-4.30pm), just outside the city walls, are an appropriately restful place to visit and feel remarkably undiscovered. Surrounded by a straggling village, the monuments bear much beautiful, intricate carving. 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** (Amber Rd) are between Jaipur and Amber.

Jal Mahal

Near the cenotaphs of the maharanis of Jaipur, on Amber Rd, is the red-sandstone **Jal Mahal** (Water Palace; ☎ closed to public), built in 1799 by Madho Singh as a summer resort for the royal family – they used to base duck-hunting parties here. It's accessed via a causeway, beautifully situated in the middle of the watery expanse of Man Sagar, which is variously full, dry or choked with hyacinths. Suffering from subsidence, much of the palace is waterlogged and its future is uncertain, though it is pitched to be developed for tourism, in a massive project partly funded by the government that will also mean a massive cleanup of the lake. The lake is home to a variety of migratory and resident birds.

Sisodia Rani Palace

Six kilometres from the city, on Agra Rd (leave by the Ghat Gate), are a pair of formal gardens that are enjoyable to wander around and take in a breath of fresh air. The first, grand formal **terraced gardens** (Indian/foreigner Rs 5/10; ☎ 8am-5pm), with fountains and statuary, were built in the 18th century for Maharaja Jai Singh's second wife, a Sisodian princess. They're overlooked by the **Sisodia Rani Palace** (☎ closed to public), whose outer walls are decorated with murals depicting hunting scenes and the Krishna legend. The nearby Vidyadharji-ka-Bagh are similar gardens currently closed to the public.

Regular local buses leave from Ghat Gate for the Sisodia Rani Palace (Rs 7). An autorickshaw will cost around Rs 250 return from the city centre to visit both.

Galta & Surya Mandir

Perched between the cliff faces of a rocky valley, **Galta** (Monkey Temple) is a desolate

and barren, if evocative, place. You will find hundreds of monkeys living here – bold and aggressive macaques and more tolerable langurs. The macaques converge on the temple and you can purchase peanuts at the gate to feed to them. Be prepared to be mobbed.

The temple houses a number of sacred tanks, into which some daring souls jump from the adjacent cliffs. The water is claimed to be 'several elephants deep' and fed from a spring that falls through the mouth of a sculptured cow. The walls are decorated with frescoes, although very heavy rains destroyed many of the original paintings and the restored frescoes do not exhibit the same skill as the originals.

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

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

ACTIVITIES

Astrology

Dr Vinod Shastri is the medal-laden general secretary of the **Rajasthan Astrological Council & Research Institute** (☎ 2613338; Chandani Chowk, Tripolia Gate; ☎ consultations 9am-8pm), who will read your palm or prepare a computerised horoscope if you have your exact time and place of birth. Prices for basic readings and predictions start at around Rs 600 and quickly enter the stratosphere from there. Dr Shastri can be found in his shop near the City Palace. Though he should know when you're arriving, it's best to make an appointment.

Dr Shastri also conducts astrology lessons for (groups of) beginners (see p163).

Ayurvedic Clinics

Is Jaipur making your nerves jangle? **Kerala Ayurveda Kendra** (☎ 5106743; www.keralaayurvedakendra.com; F-30 Jammalal Bajaj Marg; ☎ 8am-noon & 4-8pm) offers help through Ayurvedic massage and therapy. Treatments include *sirodhara* (Rs 1500), where medicated oil is streamed

steadily over your forehead for 1½ hours to reduce stress, tone the brain and help with sleep disorders. Massages (male masseur for male clients and female for female) cost from Rs 500 for 55 minutes.

Or try **Chakrapania Ayurveda** (☎ 2624003; www.chakrapaniaayurveda.com; 8 Diamond Hill, Tulsi Circle, Shanti Path; ☎ 9am-2pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), where you can get your body type analysed before having it massaged (from Rs 650) and you can have 30 to 45 minutes of *sirodhara* for Rs 600.

If you are seeking treatment for a specific ailment, you can visit the **National Institute of Ayurveda** (Madho Vilas), located close to Samrat Gate. This government hospital provides free Ayurvedic therapies, which include oil massages, steam baths and purification programmes. You first consult a doctor who will determine the appropriate treatment for you.

Beauty Parlours & Gyms

Jaipur has plenty of beauty parlours, which usually cater for both women and men.

Shahnaz Herbals (☎ 2378444; 50-55 Ashoka Marg, C-Scheme; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm) is long standing and feels it, rather like stepping into a 1940s' beauty parlour. Here you can have manicures, pedicures and good massages (female masseurs for women). The head massage (Rs 1500) is a 15-minute massage, after which an electric tea cosy is placed on your head to warm the oils.

The **Add Life Beauty Parlour** (☎ 2388691; F143 Pt C, Ganpati Plaza, MI Rd; ☎ 8.30am-6pm), below Pizza Hut, is a much more contemporary place, offering gym membership and aerobics classes (Rs 1200 per month) for long-term visitors, as well as soothing massages (Rs 375 to Rs 625) and facials (Rs 250 to Rs 600).

Golf

Rambagh Golf Club (Bhawan Singh Marg; ☎ 6am-6.30pm), near the Rambagh Palace, has a scenic 18-hole course that was once part of the polo grounds. There are caddie charges and a small green fee; equipment is available.

Swimming

Many hotels will let you use their pool for a daily fee. Try the pools at the **Jai Mahal Palace Hotel** (p169; Rs 250), the **Mansingh Hotel** (p168; Rs 225), the **Narain Niwas Palace Hotel** (p168; Rs 150) or the **Hotel Palms** (p167; Rs 100).

PINK CITY WALKING TOUR

This walking tour will take you through Jaipur's bazaars passing the main attractions in the Old City. Allow about half a day for the tour (longer if you linger at the sights), and bring a hat, camera and plenty of water.

Entering the old city from **New Gate (1)**, turn right into **Bapu Bazaar (2)**, on the inside of the southern city wall. In stark contrast to most Indian cities, the Old City is made up of grids of streets such as this one, straight and wide and lined with uniformly sized shops. This bazaar also has an added and unusual advantage – it's mostly traffic-free. Brightly coloured bolts of fabric, leather *jootis* (traditional, pointy-toed shoes), trinkets and aromatic perfumes make the street a favourite destination for Jaipur's women. At the end

of Bapu Bazaar you'll come to **Sanganeri Gate (3)** on your right, but turn left here into **Johari Bazaar (4)**, the jewellery market, one of the city's main shopping strips. Johari Bazaar and the small lanes that dissect it are where you will find jewellers, goldsmiths and silversmiths. Of particular interest are the artisans doing *meenakari* (enamelling). This highly glazed and intricate work, in shades including ruby, bottle green and royal blue, is a speciality of Jaipur. On Johari Bazaar you can also find cotton merchants – cloth here is usually cheaper than at Bapu Bazaar. Interspersed with the uniform shop fronts are the grand pink *havelis* (mansions) of Jaipur's wealthy merchants.

Continuing north you'll pass the well-known **LMB Hotel (5; p170)**, an ideal stop to rest the legs and partake of a cold drink or famous *kulfi* (pistachio ice cream), and then the **Jama Masjid (6)**, with its tall minarets. Beyond, the traffic congests around **Badi Chaupar (7)**, the Old City's major square – be extra careful crossing the road. To the north of the square is **Siredeori Bazaar (8)**, also known as Hawa Mahal Bazaar. The name is derived from the extraordinary **Hawa Mahal (9; Palace of the Winds; p157)**, a

short distance to the north on the left side of the street. The building's exterior is most spectacular, but it's also worth going inside. You enter via the rear entrance, which you'll find if you head back to Badi Chaupar and turn right (west) into Tripolia Bazaar and right again down a small lane.

Back on **Tripolia Bazaar (10)**, continue west and you'll be confronted by stall after stall crammed with domestic kitchen utensils, textiles, trinkets and ironware. The stalls are closed on Sunday.

A few hundred metres along is the triple-arched **Tripolia Gate (11)**, after which the bazaar is named. This is the main entrance to the **Jantar Mantar (12; p156)** and **City Palace (13; p154)**, but only the maharaja's family may enter here. The public entrance to the palace complex is via the less-ostentatious **Atishpol (Stable Gate)**, a little further along.

After visiting the City Palace complex, head back to Tripolia Bazaar and resume your walk west. To your right you'll see the **Iswari Minar Swarga Sal (14; Heaven-Piercing Minaret; p158)**, the highest structure in the old city and well worth the climb. Cross the road and you'll see a small archway directly opposite the minaret. If you head west from here, the next lane on the left is **Maniharon ka Rasta (15)**, the best place to buy lac (resin) bangles – it's packed by colourful stalls.

Back on Tripolia Bazaar, continue west to **Choti Chaupar (16)**, a busy spot where villagers from outlying regions come to trade their produce. Cross this square and you'll find yourself in **Chandpol Bazaar (17)**. Follow this road west until you reach a traffic light, where you turn left into the bustling **Khajane Walon ka Rasta (18)**. Here you'll find Jaipur's marble and stoneware carvers at work. Continue down Khajane Walon ka Rasta until you reach a broad road, just inside the city wall, **Indra Bazaar (19)**. Follow the road east towards **Ajmeri Gate (20)**, near the end of this tour. Further east is Nehru Bazaar, with further shopping opportunities, or go through the gate and across MI Rd to the large shopping emporium, **Rajasthali (21; p172)**.

COURSES

Astrology

Dr Vinod Shastri at the **Rajasthan Astrological Council & Research Institute** (☎ 2613338; Chandani Chowk, Tripolia Gate; ☎ consultations 9am-8pm) offers lessons in astrology. The charge is Rs 3000 per

person (minimum of five people) for 15 one-hour lectures, given over a period of five days. More-advanced lessons are also available.

Block Printing & Pottery

You can do block-printing courses in nearby Sanganeri village, around 16km south of Jaipur. **Sakshi** (☎ 2731862; Laxmi Colony; ☎ shop 8.30am-8.30pm, factory 9am-6pm) offers basic block-printing or blue-pottery courses (eight hours per day). You can also do two- to three-month courses. Costs depend on numbers of students; contact Sakshi for more details.

At **Kripal Kumbh** (☎ 2201127; B18A Shiv Marg, Bani Park) you can take free lessons in blue pottery (although it's not possible during the monsoon, from late June to mid-September). Advance bookings are essential. Here you will also find an excellent range of pottery for sale (see p173).

Meditation

Vipassana is one of India's oldest forms of meditation. The aim of this form is to achieve peace of mind and a content and useful life through a process of mental purification and self-examination.

Located in beautiful surroundings, **Dhammathali Vipassana Meditation Centre** (☎ 2680220) runs courses (for a donation) in meditation for both beginners and more-advanced students throughout the year. Courses are for 10 days, minimum, throughout which you must observe 'noble silence' – no communication with others. This serene meditation centre is tucked away in the hilly countryside near Galta, about 5km east of the city centre. Accommodation is in single rooms (some with private bathroom) and vegetarian meals are available. Courses are offered in Hindi, English, German, French, Spanish, Japanese, Hebrew, Italian, Korean, Portuguese, Mandarin and Burmese. Bookings are essential.

Music & Dance

Lessons in music and dance are available at **Maharaja Sawai Mansingh Sangeet Mahavidyalaya** (☎ 2611397; www.sangeetmahavidyalaya.org; Chandni Chowk, City Palace), behind Tripolia Gate. The sign is in Hindi – ask locals to point you in the right direction. Tuition is given in traditional Indian instruments, such as tabla, sitar and flute. It costs from Rs 500 per month in a small group for regular students. There is also tuition in *kathak*, the classical Indian

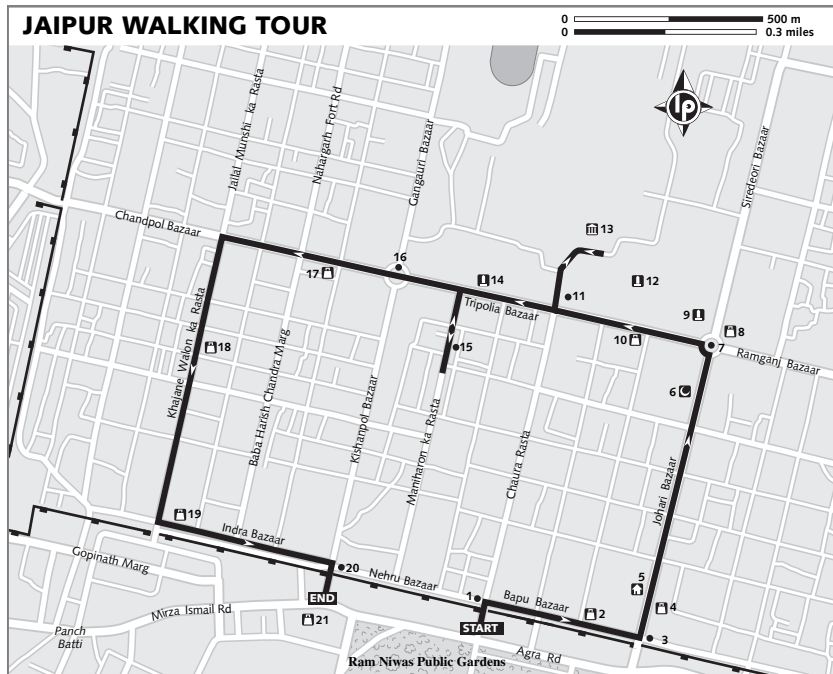
WALK FACTS

Start New Gate

Finish Ajmeri Gate

Distance 4.5km

Duration three to five hours



dance. Classical Indian vocal tuition can also be undertaken. For details contact the school principal, Mr Shekhawat.

Yoga

There are several places in Jaipur that conduct yoga classes, including **Yoga Sadhana Ashram** (Bapu Nagar; ☎ Wed-Mon), which nestles among trees off University Rd (near Rajasthan University). Classes incorporate breathing exercises, yoga asanas (poses) and exercise. Most of the classes are in Hindi, but some English is spoken in the 7.30am to 9.30am class.

Alternatively you could try the casual classes held at **Madhavanand Girls College** (☎ 2200317; C19 Behari Marg, Bani Park), next door to the Madhuban guesthouse. There are free daily classes, in Hindi and in English, from 6am to 7am.

TOURS

The **RTDC** (☎ 2202586; RTDC Tourist Hotel, MI Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) offers half-/full-day tours of Jaipur and its surrounds for Rs 120/170. 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 are confined to the city limits (8am to 1pm, 11.30am to 4.30pm and 1.30pm to 6.30pm) – some travellers recommend these, as you avoid the long lunch break. Fees don't include admission charges. Their **Pink City by Night** tour (Rs 200) departs at 6.30pm, explores several well known sights, and includes dinner at Nahargarh Fort. Tours depart from Jaipur train station (depending on demand), and pick customers up from the RTDC Hotel Teej, RTDC Hotel Gangaur and RTDC Tourist Hotel. You are not necessarily immune to prolonged stops at emporiums along the way. Book all tours at the **office** (☎ 7am-8pm) at the RTDC Tourist Hotel.

Approved guides for local sightseeing can be hired through the **tourist office** (☎ 2375466; RTDC Tourist Hotel, MI Rd; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat). A half-day tour (four hours) costs Rs 350. A full-day tour (eight hours) is Rs 450. An extra fee of Rs 100 to 150 for both tours is levied for guides speaking French, German, Italian, Japanese or Spanish.

Jaipur Virasat (☎ 2367678; www.jaipurvirasatfoundation.org; 9 Sardar Patel Marg, C-Scheme), a community group in association with the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (Intach), organises City Heritage Walks. The worth-

while two-hour guided walks, which are run by volunteers, take you through the walled city and focus on Jaipur architecture, local artisans and the homes of famous people. The walks are free (donations appreciated), and leave on Saturday from Albert Hall (the Central Museum) at 8.15am in winter (November to March) and 8am in summer (April to October). Bookings are essential.

SLEEPING

Prepare yourself to be besieged by autorickshaw drivers when you arrive by train or bus. If you refuse to go to their choice of hotel, many will either snub you or will double the fare. Some rickshaw drivers will openly declare their financial interest, which at least is honest.

To avoid this annoyance, go straight to the prepaid autorickshaw 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%.

All of the rooms listed here have private bathrooms unless otherwise indicated. Prices quoted for midrange and top-end options exclude luxury taxes (officially 8% and applicable to rooms with rates over Rs 1000).

A recommended alternative to the hotels is the homestay programme run by **Jaipur Pride** (www.jaipurpride.com; r incl breakfast Rs 2500-6500). Currently there are about 40 homes participating in the project divided into three price categories. All are comfortable, friendly and offer an unsurpassed way to get under the skin of the city.

Budget

Although it's diminishing in size, there is a ghetto of cheap backpacker hotels at Chameliwala Market tucked into a network of alleys between MI Rd and Ashok Marg.

RTDC Tourist Hotel (☎ 2360238; MI Rd; dm Rs 50, s/d from Rs 200/300) Near the main post office and fronted by lawns, this government-run hotel has a certain faded appeal, though its courtyards feel like a cross between a colonial mansion and a prison yard. Rooms have high ceilings and are almost clean, but common areas are worse for wear. Still, it's OK for the price.

Retiring rooms (male-only dm Rs 60, s/d Rs 150/300, r with AC Rs 500; ☎) Located at the train station.

Handy if you're catching an early-morning train. Make reservations on the inquiries number (☎ 131).

our pick **Hotel Pearl Palace** (☎ 2373700, 9414236323; www.hotelpearlpalace.com; Hari Kishan Somani Marg, Hathroi Fort; dm Rs 100, s Rs 300-750, d Rs 350-800; ☎ ☑) The delightful Pearl Palace continues to raise the bar for budget digs. Congenial hosts Mr and Mrs Singh are constantly upgrading and improving the accommodation, facilities and roof-top restaurant. There's a range of comfortable rooms to choose from – small, large, shared bath, private bath, some balconied, some with air-con or fan cooled, and all are spotless. This 'one-stop shop' offers all manner of services including free pick-up, money-changing and travel services, and it boasts one of Jaipur's best restaurants (see p169). Rightfully popular, advance booking is highly recommended.

RTDC Hotel Swagatam (☎ 2200595; Station Rd; dm Rs 100, s/d Rs 500/600, s/d with AC Rs 800/900; ☎) The closest budget digs to the train station, this government hotel has a rather institutional feel and a neatly clipped lawn. Rooms are drab but spacious and acceptable.

RTDC Hotel Teej (☎ 2203199; www.rajjasthan-tourism.gov.in; Collectorate Rd; dm Rs 100, s/d Rs 600/700, with AC Rs 990/1200; ☎) Located opposite the Moti Mahal Cinema, Hotel Teej is set in a garden, and is better and more welcoming than many RTDC joints. The unexciting rooms are spacious, with high ceilings, and quite pleasant. The AC rooms are overpriced.

Ashiyana Guest House (☎ 2375414; Chameliwala Market; s/d from Rs 200/250, without bathroom Rs 150/200) A real budget choice, this is small, homey and family run. The grubby-mark-on-wall count is lower than at some other low-end places nearby. Rooms are petite and the hot water comes in buckets (though plumbing is planned!)

Jwala Niketan (☎ 5108303; C6 Motilal Atal Marg; s Rs 150-650, d Rs 200-700; ☎) This quiet yet centrally located guesthouse has a range of good-value, clean but bland rooms. The host family lives on the premises and the atmosphere is decidedly non-commercial – almost monastic. There is no restaurant or room service other than a Rs 20 Indian breakfast.

Hotel Kailash (☎ 2577372; Johari Bazaar; s/d Rs 460/525, without bathroom Rs 250/275) This hotel, opposite the Jama Masjid, is one of the few places to stay within the old city, and is right in the thick of it. It's nothing fancy and the

undersized rooms are basic and stuffy despite the central air-cooling. Rooms at the back are quieter and management is buoyantly friendly and welcoming.

Devi Niwas (☎ 2363727; singh_kd@hotmail.com; Dhuleswar Bagh, Sadar Patel Marg, C-Scheme; s/d Rs 250/400, s/d with AC & TV Rs 300/600; ☎) This paying guesthouse is a genuine family affair in a spacious pale-yellow building nestled in the middle-class C-scheme. It has a homier feel than most with the extended family living downstairs. There are just seven rooms and happy guests have left their compliments on the walls. Food is home-cooked and tasty, and there's a small garden.

Evergreen Guest House (☎ 2361284; www.hotel-evergreen.net; Chameliwala Market; s/d Rs 300/400; ☑) This backpacker stalwart was morphing into the midrange Hotel Palms (same owners) at the time of research. The small section of backpacker rooms still remaining are accessed just off MI Rd, in the backpacking ghetto of Chameliwala Market. Even the management were a little unsure of the future of the remaining budget rooms, where cleanliness and service are erratic. The swimming pool has been commandeered by the Hotel Palms.

Hotel New Pink City (☎ 2363774; off MI Rd; s/d Rs 400/600) Opposite the main post office, this is tucked off MI Rd, down a lane. The accommodation is fronted by a lawn and garden, and it's surprisingly peaceful considering its central location. Mosquitoes love the garden, the rooms are basic with bucket hot water, and reception is somewhat frosty. It's a popular marriage venue, so one to avoid in the wedding season (November to February).

Atithi Guest House (☎ 2378679; atithijaipur@hotmail.com; 1 Park House Scheme Rd; r Rs 550-950; ☎ ☑) This family-run guesthouse, set between MI and Station Rds, offers strikingly clean, simple rooms around a quiet courtyard. It's central but peaceful, a bit uninspiring but the service is friendly and helpful. There's a restaurant (guests only), room service and you can eat on the pleasant rooftop terrace. Rickshaw drivers don't like it here because the owner won't pay commission.

Karni Niwas (☎ 2365433; karniniwas@hotmail.com; C5 Motilal Atal Marg; s Rs 550-950, d Rs 650-1000; ☎ ☑) Tucked behind Hotel Neelam, this has clean, cool and comfortable rooms, often with balconies. There is no restaurant but there are relaxing plant-decked terraces to enjoy room service on. And being so central restaurants

aren't far away. The owner shuns commissions for rickshaw drivers and free pick-up from the train or bus station is available.

Nahargarh (Tiger Fort; ☎ 5148044; d Rs 750) Nahargarh is a would-be romantic choice set high above the old city. There's only one very basic double room, in one of the fort's parapets behind the restaurant – the views from the bed are unparalleled. Unfortunately the condition of the room (broken windows, centuries of dust, dirty linen etc) and the mischievous monkeys make for a truly unforgettable stay. Bring your own mosquito protection, flashlight and bed sheet.

Midrange BANI PARK

The Bani Park area is relatively green and restful (away from the main roads), about 2km west of the old city.

Jaipur Inn (☎ 2201121; www.jaipurinn.com; B17 Shiv Marg, Bani Park; s/d from Rs 750/950, 🏠 🚶) Once a budget travellers' favourite, with a vast range of accommodation, this hotel has shrunk and now offers an eclectic mishmash of varying, overpriced rooms. Some are air-conditioned and some have balconies and you should inspect a few rooms before settling in. Plus points include the friendly manager and several common areas where travellers can make a coffee, pick-up wi-fi, or grab a meal. There's also free pick-up from the train or bus station and a rooftop restaurant.

Tara Niwas (☎ 2203762; www.aryaniwas.com; B-22-B Shiv Marg; s/d Rs 1200/1500; s/d per month from Rs 15,000/16,500; 🏠 🚶) Run by the people behind Hotel Arya Niwas, Tara Niwas offers well furnished, long-stay apartments (minimum stay 15 days) at bargain prices. Some rooms have attached kitchenettes, and there's also a dining room. A new development by this company, Om Niwas (same website), features purpose-built serviced apartments in Bani Park for long-term visitors.

our pick Madhuban (☎ 2200033; www.madhuban.net; D237 Behari Marg, Bani Park; s Rs 1400-1900, d Rs 1500-2900; 🏠 🚶 🚶) Madhuban is an elegant, heritage hotel/guesthouse run by the convivial Dicky and Kavita Singh (the family once ruled Patan, 70 miles northeast). It features a range of bright, spotless, antique-furnished rooms including a suite with a Jacuzzi. Most guests gravitate quickly to the peaceful lawn where they can drink tea, read a newspaper over breakfast, watch a puppet show at night or just

pat the dog. The brightly frescoed restaurant features a small, focussed menu and sits beside the petite courtyard pool, which is lit in the evening. Money-changing and travel services are available as is free pick-up from the bus or train station.

Umaid Bhawan (☎ 2206426; www.umaidbhawan.com; Behari Marg, via Bank Rd, Bani Park; s/d Rs 1400/1600, ste Rs 2000/2400; 🏠 🚶 🚶) This mock-heritage hotel, behind the Collectorate, is situated in a quiet dead-end street and is extravagantly decorated in traditional style. The cascading stairways and numerous private balconies have you feeling you have entered a miniature Rajasthani painting. Rooms are stately, full of marble and carved-wood furniture. Free pick-up is available from the train or bus station and all taxes and breakfast are included in the tariff.

Hotel Meghniwas (☎ 2202034; www.meghniwas.com; C9 Sawai Jai Singh Hwy; s/d from Rs 1800/2000, ste Rs 3200; 🏠 🚶 🚶) In a building erected by Brigadier Singh in 1950 and run by his gracious descendants, this very welcoming hotel has comfortable and spotless rooms, with traditional carved-wood furniture and leafy outlooks. There's a first-rate restaurant and an inviting pool set in a pleasant lawn area.

Jas Vilas (☎ 2204638; www.jasvilas.com; C9 Sawai Jai Singh Hwy, Bani Park; s/d Rs 2400/2800; 🏠 🚶 🚶) 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 large sparkling pool set in a romantic courtyard. In addition to the relaxing courtyard and lawn, there is a cosy dining room and management will help with all onward travel planning.

Umaid Mahal (☎ 206426; www.umaidmahal.com; C-20, B/2 Behari Marg, Bani Park; s/d Rs 2500/3000; 🏠 🚶 🚶) This extravagantly decorated hotel is run by the same family behind the popular Umaid Bhawan. It may not be a castle but it has plenty of front. Rooms are spacious, elaborate and regal, while downstairs a pool, bar and restaurant were under construction at the time of writing. Smokers have their own zenana-style screened balconies. Free pick-up is available from the train or bus station.

Shahpura House (☎ 2203069; www.shahpurahouse.com; D257 Devi Marg, Bani Park; s/d from Rs 2500/3000, ste Rs 3000/4000; 🏠 🚶 🚶). Elaborately built and decorated in traditional style, this heritage hotel offers immaculate rooms, some with balconies, featuring murals, coloured-glass lamps, even ceilings covered in small mirrors

(in the suites). This rambling palace boasts a durbar hall with huge chandelier and a cosy cocktail bar. There's an elegant rooftop terrace and an inviting swimming pool. It's another prime choice in the Bani Park area, though lacking the family-run feel you get in other hotels in this category.

OTHER AREAS

Rajasthan Palace Hotel (☎ 2611542; 3 Peelwa Garden, Moti Dungri Marg; r without/with AC Rs 500/1000; 🏠 🚶) This rather forgotten-feeling option has a quiet lawn area, a small pool and keen management. Apparently popular with the rickshaw drivers, as are other hotels in the vicinity. The high-ceilinged rooms are a bit shabby but pretty clean. The cheaper rooms may seem good value but you will want to carry mosquito protection.

Hotel Arya Niwas (☎ 2372456; Sansar Chandra Marg; www.aryaniwas.com; s from Rs 700, s/d with AC Rs 950/1300; 🏠 🚶) Just off Sansar Chandra Marg, behind a ugly high-rise tower, this is a very popular travellers' haunt with a good range of travel services. For a hotel of 92 rooms it is very well-run, though its size means it is not as personal as smaller guesthouses. The spotless rooms vary in layout and size so check out a few. There's an extensive terrace facing a soothing vegetarian restaurant doesn't serve beer (so bring your own).

Chirmi Palace Hotel (☎ 2365063; www.chirmi.com; Dhuleshwar Bagh, Sardar Patel Marg; s/d from Rs 850/950, deluxe Rs 1350/1500; 🏠 🚶) Set in a grand 150-year-old *haveli*, Chirmi Palace is run by a traditional Rajput family. Rooms are atmospheric with high ceilings and make up in character what they lack in luxury and dust-free status. There are also a few cheaper rooms upstairs that might be worth investigating for those on a budget. The dining room is ornate and the pool is a summer-only affair.

RTDC Hotel Gangaur (☎ 2371641; www.rajasthan tourism.gov.in; Sanjay Marg; s/d from Rs 990/1200; 🏠) This, another RTDC option, is just off MI Rd and has a crazy-paving exterior and small lawn, but that's where any exception to the other government hotels ends – inside are lackadaisical staff and typically drab and functional rooms.

Hotel Diggi Palace (☎ 2373091; www.hoteldiggi palace.com; off Sawai Ram Singh Rd; r without/with AC Rs 1000/1800; 🏠 🚶) About 1km south of Ajmeri Gate, the splendid former residence of the

thakur (nobleman) of Diggi is surrounded by beautiful, shaded lawns. Once a budget hotel, it remains a good-value heritage hotel although the more expensive rooms are substantially better than the cheaper options. The tariff includes all taxes and breakfast and there's free pick-up from the bus and train stations. The management also prides itself on using organic produce in the restaurant from the hotel's own gardens and farms. However it's a shame the staff can be grouchy towards independent travellers.

Nana-ki-Haveli (☎ 2615502; www.nanakhaveli.com; Fateh Tiba, Moti Dungri Marg; r without AC Rs 1200-1800, r with AC Rs 2200; 🏠) Found off Moti Dungri Marg is this tucked-away, tranquil place with attractive, comfortable rooms decorated with traditional flourishes (discreet wall painting, wooden furniture). It's hosted by a lovely family for whom nothing is too much trouble. It's a quiet, simple place fronted by a relaxing lawn and offers home-style cooking and discounted rooms in summer.

Jai Niwas (☎ 2363964; www.aryaniwas.com; 3 Jalupura Scheme, Gopinath Marg; r from Rs 1300, 4-bed ste Rs 1800; 🏠) Another option under the Arya Niwas umbrella, this modern bungalow is peaceful (fronted by a smart lawn), yet centrally located just off MI Rd. Rooms are functional, spacious and comfortable, if a little bland.

Hotel Palms (☎ 2362415; www.palmsthehotel.com; Ashok Marg, C-Scheme; d from Rs 1800; 🏠 🚶) With a grand front door facing Ashok Marg, this 'new' hotel features the bland, rather ordinarily renovated rooms of erstwhile backpacker hangout Evergreen Guest House. There's a shady garden courtyard and swimming pool, which nonguests can use for Rs 100.

LMB Hotel (☎ 2565844; info@lmbsewets.com; Johari Bazaar; s/d Rs 1925/2325, deluxe Rs 2325/2525; 🏠) In the old city above the renowned restaurant of the same name. The rooms offer a prime vantage point from where you can check out the mayhem of the bazaar. Standard rooms are large, but generally grubby and depressing. The renovated deluxe rooms are much brighter and cleaner though still overpriced.

Hotel Bissau Palace (☎ 2304391; www.bissau palace.com; outside Chandpol; s/d from Rs 2100/2400; 🏠 🚶) This is a worthy choice if you want to stay in a palace on a budget. It has heritage charm, and lots of antique furnishings and mementos, such as moustached photos and hunting paraphernalia. It feels a bit run down or past its prime, but it is atmospheric nonetheless.

It's only 10 minutes walk from Chandpol (a gateway to the Old City) where there is a very earthy produce market. There's a swimming pool, handsome wood-panelled library, and three restaurants (one on the rooftop offering splendid views, for guests only).

Rajmahal Palace (☎ 5105665; www.royalfamilyjaipur.com; Sadar Patel Marg; s/d Rs 2300/2800, superior Rs 2850/3000, ste Rs 3500/3995; 🍷 🍷 🍷) In the south of the city, this place is a more modest, relaxed and dog-eared edifice than the other palace hotels (Rambagh or Jai Mahal). The superior rooms are comfortable, with cool marble floors and small patches of lawn to the front. Standard rooms are still good, though much less appealing. The suites are cavernous and impersonal. Built in 1729 by Jai Singh, it was also formerly the British Residency, and temporarily the home of Maharaja Man Singh II and the maharani after their residence, the Rambagh Palace, was converted into a luxury hotel.

Narain Niwas Palace Hotel (☎ 2561291; www.hotelnarainniwas.com; Narain Singh Rd; s/d from Rs 2700/3800; 🍷 🍷 🍷) In Kanota Bagh, just south of the city, this genuine heritage hotel has a wonderful ramshackle splendour. There's a lavish dining room with liveried staff, an old-fashioned veranda on which to drink tea, and antiques galore. Settle into the wicker and time seems to stand still – or is it just that the service is a bit tardy. The high-ceilinged rooms are varyingly atmospheric and the bathrooms also vary greatly – so inspect before committing. You will find a large secluded pool and sprawling gardens out back. Rates include breakfast.

Alsisar Haveli (☎ 2368290; www.alsisarhaveli.com; Sansar Chandra Marg; s/d Rs 2750/3500; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Another genuine heritage hotel that has emerged from a gracious 19th-century mansion. Alsisar Haveli is set in beautiful, green gardens, and boasts a lovely swimming pool and a wonderful dining room. Its bedrooms don't disappoint either with elegant Rajput arches and antique furnishings. This is a winning choice, though again a little impersonal, perhaps because it hosts many tour groups.

Mandawa Haveli (☎ 2374130; www.mandawahotels.com; Sansar Chandra Marg; s/d from Rs 2900/3600; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Mandawa Haveli is a lovely heritage hotel, opposite the better known, Alsisar Haveli. Mandawa's management seems a little surprised to see a guest, but it is cheerful enough. The rooms are all spacious and elegantly if

simply furnished. Some boast beautiful double baths set under Rajput arches.

Top End

Jaipur has an impressive selection of luxury hotels, the best of which are the converted palaces of the maharajas and the *havelis* of lesser nobles.

Best Western Om Tower (☎ 2366683; ommljaipur@yahoo.com; Church Rd, off MI Rd; s/d from Rs 4500/5000; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Resembling a piece of mislaid space junk, this tower, though modest by world standards, is a Jaipur landmark. Rooms are modern business bland, comfortable but hardly inspiring, and the bathrooms are space-capsule tiny. At least the views get better the higher you go. The pure-vegetarian revolving restaurant (see p171) has a certain fascination though not necessarily for the food.

Saba Haveli (☎ /fax 2630521; Gangapol; s/d Rs 4500/5500; 🍷 🍷) Near Samode Haveli, in the northeastern part of the town, Saba Haveli is an authentic, friendly and idiosyncratic hotel positioned among a warren of narrow streets. It's another 200-year-old *haveli* that's in the process of being converted into a hotel. The process could take a while. The top floor is pretty much derelict and there were only a handful of renovated rooms in the fairly dilapidated building at the time we visited. In the low season (May to September) you'll get a hefty discount.

Chokhi Dhani (☎ 2225001; www.chokhidhani.com; Tonk Rd; hut/haveli ste Rs 5500/9900; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This is a mock-traditional Rajasthani village, 20km from Jaipur, with wonderful restaurants and entertainment in the evenings (see p172). Accommodation is in traditional-style mud huts with nontraditional interiors. These are well appointed, with a bedroom and sitting room decorated with mirrorwork. There are also eight big rooms in a *haveli*, all swathed in ruched satin. Additional features are the commodious pool and spacious grounds. It's popular with middle-class Indian families.

Mansingh Hotel (☎ 2378771; www.mansinghhotels.com; Sansar Chandra Marg; s/d from Rs 6500/7500; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Located just off Sansar Chandra Marg, the Mansingh is a very central and well-appointed business class hotel. It has comfortable though run-of-the-mill rooms, a coffee-shop beside the pool and rooftop bar and restaurant.

Mansingh Towers (☎ 2378771; s/d from Rs 7000/8000; 🍷 🍷) Next door to Mansingh Hotel is the

slightly swankier Mansingh Towers, which has a huge atrium and spacious rooms. All rooms have spa baths and you can use the pool

Samode Haveli (☎ 2632370; www.samode.com; Gangapol; s/d/ste €143/170/198, ste from €225/248; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Tucked away in the northeast corner of the old city is this charming 200-year-old building, once the town house of the *rawal* (nobleman) of Samode, Jaipur's prime minister. The suites are astonishingly decorative, covered in twinkling mirrorwork, ornate paintings, tiny alcoves and soaring arches. They have large carved beds and most have private terraces. The standard rooms are more ordinary. The pool with its bar is a veritable oasis. The tariff, which includes breakfast, is much reduced from May to September.

Jai Mahal Palace Hotel (☎ 2223636; www.tajhotels.com; Jacob Rd; r from Rs 13,500, ste from Rs 20,000; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Located south of the train station, this impressive hotel is set in 7 hectares of beautifully manicured Mughal gardens, which most of the swish rooms overlook. The 18th-century building was once the residence of Jaipur's prime minister and is now run as a hotel by the Taj Group. Tastefully furnished standard rooms are very comfortable and enhanced by miniature paintings. The suites are conservative and refined, with some exquisite antiques. There's a gorgeous circular pool set in the gardens.

Raj Palace (☎ 2634077-9; www.rajpallace.com; Chomu Haveli, Zorawar Singh Gate, Amber Rd; r US\$350-450, ste from US\$550; 🍷 🍷 🍷) A former royal home, Raj Palace was built by Thakur Mohan Singhji of Chaumoo, then prime minister. The imposing building, just north of town on the Amber Rd, overlooks a splendid courtyard and has a range of individual and atmospheric rooms featuring splendid decoration and luxurious furnishings. There's also disabled access.

Rambagh Palace (☎ 2211919; www.tajhotels.com; Bhawan Singh Marg; s/d from Rs 35,000/36,500, ste from Rs 75,000; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Now a Taj Group hotel, this splendid palace was once the Jaipur pad of Maharaja Man Singh II. Veiled in 19 hectares of gardens, there are fantastic views across the immaculate lawns. More-expensive rooms are naturally the most sumptuous. The maharani (see p158) still lives in separate quarters in the palace grounds. Nonguests can dine in the restaurant or drink tea on the veranda. At least treat yourself to a drink at the Polo Bar (p172).

Raj Vilas (☎ 2680101; www.oberoihotels.com; Goner Rd; r & luxury tents Rs 35,575, villas Rs 100,150; 🍷 🍷)

About 8km from the city centre is Jaipur's most sophisticated and expensive hotel. It has 71 luxurious rooms, yet a boutique feel and attentive, unobtrusive service. Its terracotta domes are set in more than 32 shady orchard- and fountain-filled acres. Immaculate rooms, with sunken baths, are subtly decorated. Each of the three villas has its own pool. Guests ride around in golf buggies. Check the website for special offers.

Other plush options:

Holiday Inn (☎ 2672000; www.holidayinnjaipur.com; s/d from Rs 6000/6500; 🍷 🍷 🍷) 1km north of the city on Amber Rd, this impressive, traditional-style building offers the usual comfortable Holiday Inn standards, and is good value if you ask for a discount. Breakfast is included.

Hotel Clarks Amer (☎ 2550616; www.hotelclarks.com; s/d from Rs 7500/8000; 🍷 🍷 🍷) About 8km south of the city, this 200-room hotel is welcoming, plush and has everything you need for a very comfortable stay. It is also the contact point for homestays through Jaipur Pride (see p164).

Trident Hilton (☎ 2670101; www.trident-hilton.com; Amber Rd; r from Rs 8800; 🍷 🍷 🍷) About 5km north of the city on the road to Amber Rd, the Trident Hilton is a slick and very well-managed international-class hotel. The well-appointed rooms offer balconies with lingering views of the Jal Mahal situated opposite. Disabled access.

WelcomHotel Rajputana Palace Sheraton (☎ 5100100; www.welcomgroup.com; Palace Rd; s/d from Rs 14,000/15,500; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Ritz and comfortable but parts are looking a little tired, and though it is staffed to the hilt it also feels a little impersonal. The exorbitant rack rate is heavily discounted if the hotel isn't full.

EATING

Despite its size, Jaipur doesn't have a huge array of quality restaurants. Apart from hotel restaurants (which are often the best option), there are a few traveller-friendly stalwarts as well as numerous veg and nonveg curry joints. As elsewhere in Rajasthan, many vegetarian restaurants don't serve beer. The locals tend to rock up after 9pm.

Restaurants

MI ROAD

Sankalp (☎ 5115553; MI Rd; dishes Rs 50-90; 🍷 9am-11pm) This popular South Indian chain restaurant serves up simply scrumptious South Indian staples, such as varieties of *dosas* (lentil-flour pancakes) and good-value thalis. It could also win the contest for the most waiters on MI Rd.

Surya Mahal (☎ 2362811; MI Rd; mains Rs 60-120; 🍷 9am-10.30pm) Near Panch Batti is this popular,

good-value option specialising in South Indian vegetarian food; try the delicious *masala dosa*, and the tasty *dhal makhani* (black lentils and red kidney beans).

Handi Restaurant (☎ 2364839; MI Rd; mains Rs 60-180; ☎ noon-3pm & 6.30-11pm) Handi has been satisfying customers for years and has two outlets opposite the main post office. One is the original, tucked at the back of the Maya Mansions, offering scrumptious barbecued dishes and Mughlai cuisine. In the evenings it sets up a smoky kebab stall at the entrance to the restaurant. The pricier AC option is decorated with puppets and mirrors on the mud-covered walls. They share a kitchen and a no-alcohol policy.

Dāsaprakash (☎ 2371313; Kamal Mansions, MI Rd; mains Rs 70-170; ☎ 11am-10.45pm) Part of a competent chain, Dāsaprakash specialises in South Indian cuisine including several versions of *dosa* and *idli* (rice dumpling). Afterwards you can choose from a wonderful selection of over-the-top sundaes, including gems such as the Gold Rush: 'strike it delicious' (fudge, praline chocolate, coffee and a golden vein of butterscotch).

Natraj (☎ 2375804; MI Rd; mains Rs 85-200; ☎ 9am-11pm) Not far from Panch Batti is this classy vegetarian place, which has an extensive menu featuring North Indian, Continental and Chinese cuisine. Diners are blown away by the potato-encased vegetable bomb curry, and there's a good selection of thalis and South Indian food – the *dosa paper masala* is delicious. Slide into a booth or grab some takeaway Indian sweets.

Copper Chimney (☎ 2372275; Maya Mansions, MI Rd; mains Rs 100-220; ☎ noon-3pm & 6.30-11pm) Copper Chimney is casual, almost elegant and definitely welcoming with the requisite waiter army and a fridge of cold beer. 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. Take a seat behind the front window to watch the mayhem of MI Rd or settle further back.

Niro's (☎ 2374493; MI Rd; mains Rs 110-350; ☎ 10am-11pm) Established in 1949, Niro's is a long-standing favourite. Escape the chaos of MI Rd by ducking into its cool, clean, mirror-ceiling sanctum to savour veg and nonveg Indian, Chinese and Continental food. As usual, the Indian menu is the pick. Try the spicy *raj sula*

(barbecued lamb) and *began bharta* (aubergine) to an accompaniment of piped music.

ourpick Reds (☎ 4007710; 5th fl, Mall 21, Bhagwandas Marg; mains Rs 275-360; ☎ Sun-Fri 11am-midnight, Sat 11am-1.30pm) The Pink City's hippest nightspot (see p172) is Reds. Decked out in red-and-black sofas and overlooking the Raj Mandir cinema, Reds is also a smart restaurant, found just around the corner and far above the honking traffic of MI Rd. The Indian and Chinese is accompanied by great views and good service and there are special beer and food deals before 7pm. Speciality of the house is *Shahi Gilawat ka kebab*, a lamb kebab blessed with 36 aromatic and digestive spices that was created for the Nawab of Lucknow. Don't take the stairs – they don't reach the 5th floor – use the lift instead.

OLD CITY

Mohan (144-5 Nehru Bazaar; mains Rs 10-60; ☎ 9am-10pm) The name is in Hindi and it's on the corner of the street, a few steps down from the footpath. It's basic, cheap and grubby, but the curries and snacks are freshly cooked and very popular.

Ganesh Restaurant (☎ 2312380; Nehru Bazaar; mains Rs 35-85; ☎ 9.30am-11pm) Near New Gate is one of Jaipur's best-kept secrets. This pocket-sized outdoor restaurant is in a fantastic location – on the top of the old city wall. The cook is in a pit on one side of the wall, so you can check out your pure vegetarian food being cooked. Not much English is spoken, but if you're looking for a local eatery with fresh tasty food you'll love it. There's an easy-to-miss signpost, but no doubt a stallholder will show you the narrow stairway.

LMB (☎ 2560845; Johari Bazaar; mains Rs 55-170; ☎ 8am-11pm) Laxmi Mishthan Bhandar, LMB to you and me, is a *sattvik* (pure vegetarian) restaurant in the old city that's been going strong since 1954. Though a welcoming AC refuge from frenzied Johari Bazaar, LMB is not the best eatery in town; however, travellers like to chalk up at least one meal in this institution with its singular décor and extensive sweet counter. The menu opens with a warning from Krishna about people who like *tamasic* (putrid and polluted food), which gets you into the *sattvik* mood. Try the Rajasthani thali followed by the signature *kulfi* with dry fruits and saffron.

Palace Café (☎ 2616449; City Palace; mains Rs 200-300; ☎ 9am-10pm) The courtyard café is ideal for a

snack or main meal while exploring the Palace, whereas the AC buffet is usually booked by groups. The menu is predominantly Indian with some Rajasthani specialities and a few Continental options. The courtyard is very atmospheric in the evening when local musicians add to the romance.

OTHER AREAS

Peacock Rooftop Restaurant (☎ 2373700; Hotel Pearl Palace, Hari Kishan Somani Marg, Hathroi Fort; mains Rs 20-75; ☎ 8am-11pm) This rooftop restaurant at the popular Hotel Pearl Palace gets rave reviews for its excellent and inexpensive cuisine (Indian, Chinese and Continental) and sociable ambience. The mouth-watering food, attentive service, whimsical furnishings and romantic view towards Hathroi Fort make this a first-rate restaurant and the economical prices all the more unbelievable.

Four Seasons (☎ 2373700; D43A Subhas Marg; mains Rs 75-160; ☎ noon-3.30pm & 6.30-11pm) Four Seasons is one of Jaipur's best vegetarian restaurants and being pure vegetarian there's no alcohol. It's 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 and a selection of pizzas. Try a thali or the speciality *rawa masala dosa* (South Indian ground rice and semolina pancake with coconut, onions, carrots and green chillies).

OM (☎ 236683; Church Rd; mains Rs 110-300; ☎ noon-4pm & 7-11pm) Add Om to your list of revolving restaurants. This landmark, rocket-inspired tower boasts a showy, emphatically vegetarian (no alcohol) revolving restaurant at 56m. It spins at a cracking pace and, despite the odd bump and shudder, it's an amazing way to see the city. The menu of Indian, Continental and Chinese features several Rajasthani specialities – try the revolving thali. If you are lucky you will orbit past the centrally located stage featuring live *ghazal* singing.

Little Italy (☎ 4022444; 3rd fl, KK Square, C-11, Prithviraj Marg; mains Rs 165-200; ☎ noon-3.30pm, 6.30-11pm) Easily 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 beige surroundings – not a scalloped archway in sight! The menu is extensive and includes some Mexican items and first-rate Italian desserts. There is a lounge bar attached so you can accompany your vegetarian dining with wine or beer.

Geoffry's Pub (☎ 2360202; Park Plaza Hotel, Prithviraj Marg; mains Rs 180-285; ☎ noon-11.45pm) Settle into a booth of studded leather and panelled wood and select from a pub-inspired and sometimes-curious menu that includes Roast Lamb, Norwegian cheese steak and vodka pizza, as well as Italian, Chinese, Thai and Indian dishes. There's local beer on tap as well as international beers and wines to accompany your meal.

Quick Eats

Rawat Kachori (Station Rd; sweets Rs 10 or per kg Rs 120-300, lassis Rs 25) For great sweets head to this popular place. A delicious milk crown should fill you up for the afternoon.

Jal Mahal (MI Rd; ice creams Rs 12-110) Next door to Surya Mahal is this packed little takeaway ice-cream parlour, with some inventive concoctions.

Manu's Cakes & Bakes (Ashok Marg; mains Rs 30-90) Adjacent to the entrance to Hotel Palms, this small eatery has an ambitious menu including Mexican, Chinese, Indian. But wait; there's also falafel and toasted sandwiches as well as cakes and ice cream. The small roadside eatery is almost pleasant – depends on the heat and the traffic.

Kanji (Station Rd; sweets per kg Rs 130-330) Across the road from Rawat Kachori, Kanji also has a fabulous array of sweets.

DRINKING Cafés

Barista (Mall 21, Bhagwandas Marg; coffees Rs 50-70) This smart, AC coffee bar is part of a chain that sells great espresso coffee and iced concoctions, as well as muffins, snacks and sandwiches. This branch, opposite that huge pink marshmallow – the Raj Mandir cinema, shares its space with a neat little bookshop.

Lassiwala (MI Rd) This famous, much-imitated institution, opposite Niro's, is a simple place that whips up fabulous, creamy lassis at Rs 10/20 for a small/jumbo. Will the real Lassiwala please stand up? It's the one that says 'Since 1944', directly next to the alleyway. Imitators spread to the right as you face it.

Indian Coffee House (MI Rd; coffee Rs 8-15) Set back from the street, down a grubby alley, this coffee house offers a very average cup of coffee in very average surroundings. Aficionados of Indian Coffee Houses will not be disappointed by the ambience. Cheap samosas and *dosas* grace the snack menu.

Bars

Many bars around town tend to be oppressive, all-male affairs; however, most upper-end hotel bars are good for casual drinking. Expect copies of Reds to crop up; these new kids on the block are effortlessly raising the bar.

Polo Bar (Rambagh Palace Hotel, Bhawan Singh Rd; ☎ 11am-1am) A spiffing watering hole adorned with polo memorabilia and arched, scalloped windows framing the neatly clipped lawns. A bottle of beer costs Rs 250 to Rs 300 and cocktails around Rs 450.

Steam (Rambagh Palace Hotel, Bhawan Singh Rd; ☎ 7pm-late Wed-Mon) The Rambagh's lounge bar is a relaxed and stylish haven with a steam engine and a DJ. Sip a cocktail, sample a pizza and lighten your wallet.

Geoffry's Pub (Park Plaza Hotel, Prithviraj Marg; ☎ noon-11.45pm) With coloured glass, dark wood and studded leather this English pub wannabe has local Golden Peacock on tap (Rs 105 a glass) and a good selection of international beer, wine and spirits available. One can also puff on a hookah or sip a cocktail. Meals are also available (see p171).

Reds (☎ 4007710; 5th fl, Mall 21, Bhagwandas Marg; ☎ 11am-midnight Sun-Fri, 11am-1.30pm Sat) Overlooking the Raj Mandir cinema and MI Rd with views to Tiger Fort, slick Reds is a great place to kick back with a drink or take a meal (see p170). Drop into one of the low-slung, red-and-black couches with a beer (bottled or draught), cocktail or mocktail and enjoy the sound system. Things heat up on Saturday and Sunday when the dance floor is cleared and the DJs pump out a mix of Hindipop and techno.

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.

Chokhi Dhani (☎ 2225001; Tonk Rd; adult/child aged 3-9 incl dinner Rs 250/150) Chokhi Dhani means 'special village' and this mock Rajasthani village, 20km south of Jaipur, lives up to its name. As well as the restaurants, where you can enjoy an oily Rajasthani thali, there is a bevy of traditional entertainment. You can wander around and watch traditional tribal dancers setting fire to their hats, children balancing on poles and dancers dressed in lion

costumes lurking in a wood. You can also take elephant or camel rides. Children will adore it. It's hugely popular with middle-class Indian families.

Raj Mandir Cinema (☎ 2379372; Baghwandas Marg; admission Rs 37-91; 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. It's a tourist attraction in its own right and is usually full, despite its immense size. Bookings can be made one hour to seven days in advance (10am to 6pm) at window Nos 7 and 8 – 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 curtain up. Avoid the very cheapest tickets, which are very close to the screen.

Inox Cinema (☎ 2379372; www.inoxmovies.com; Crystal Palm complex, Bais Godam Circle; admission Rs 70-130) A modern three-screen multiplex with the latest Bollywood blockbusters and Hollywood offerings.

Polo ground (Ambedkar Circle, Bhawan Singh Marg) Maharaja Man Singh II indulged his passion for polo by building an enormous polo ground next to the Rambagh Palace, which is still a polo-match hub today. A ticket to a match also gets you into the lounge, which is adorned with historic photos and memorabilia. The polo season extends over winter, with the most important matches played during January and March – contact the **Rajasthan Polo Club** (☎ 2385380) for ticket details.

During Jaipur's Elephant Festival in March (see Festivals in Jaipur, p148) you can watch elephant polo matches at the Chaughan Stadium in the old city. Contact the Rajasthan Polo Club or **RTDC** (☎ 2202586; MI Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) for details.

SHOPPING

Jaipur is a shopper's paradise. You'll have to bargain hard though – shops have seen too many cash-rich, time-poor tourists. Shops around major tourist centres, such as the City Palace and Hawa Mahal, tend to be pricier. Also commercial buyers come here from all over the world to stock up on the amazing

range of jewellery, gems, artefacts and crafts that come from all over Rajasthan.

For useful tips on bargaining, see The Art of Haggling, p364. At some shops, ie the government emporium and some upmarket stores, prices are (supposedly) fixed.

Most of the larger shops can pack and send your parcels home for you – although it'll be slightly cheaper if you do it yourself (see p150).

Jaipur is famous for precious and semiprecious 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 south-east of the old city. Here you can see stones being cut and polished in workshops tucked off narrow backstreets.

The city is still loosely divided into traditional artisans quarters. The Pink City Walking Tour (p162) 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** (☎ closed part of Sun) 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; but these shops are used to busloads 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. Stay clear of friendly young men on the street trying to steer you to their uncle's/brother's/cousin's shop – commission is the name of their game too. Many unwary visitors get talked into buying things for resale at inflated prices, especially gems. Beware of these get-rich-quick scams.

Arts & Crafts

Kripal Kumbh (☎ 2201127; B18A Shiv Marg, Bani Park; ☎ 9am-5pm) This is a showroom in a private home and a great place to buy Jaipur's famous blue pottery produced by, the late Mr Kripal Singh and his students. The renowned, multi-award-winning potter was an accomplished artist and there are some stunningly beautiful artworks for sale. Ceramics go for anything from Rs 20 (for a paperweight) to Rs 25,000 (for a large vase). You can also learn how to make blue pottery here (see p163). Touts may take you elsewhere, so make sure that you are taken to the right place (near the Jaipur Inn).

Rajasthali (MI Rd; ☎ 11am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) The state-government emporium, opposite Ajmeri Gate, is packed with quality Rajasthani artefacts and crafts, including enamelwork, embroidery, pottery, woodwork, jewellery, colourful puppets, block-printed sheets, cute miniatures, brassware, mirror work and more, but it has an air of torpor that doesn't make shopping much fun. The best reason to visit is to scout out prices, before launching into the bazaar (things can be cheaper at the markets, after haggling, and you'll find more choice).

Juneja Art Gallery (www.artchill.com; 6-7 Laksmi Complex, MI Rd; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat) This gallery, tucked in behind the brash Birdhichand Ghanshyamdas jewellery store has some striking pieces of contemporary art by Rajasthani artists (Rs 500 to Rs 50,000). There are regular shows of contemporary artists changing almost weekly and the new gallery 'Artchill' at Amber Fort should be open by the time you read this. It will feature works for sale as well as a display of masterworks.

Ayurvedic Remedies

Himalaya (MI Rd; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat) For Ayurvedic preparations, try this place located just near Panch Batti, which exports internationally, and has been selling herbal remedies and beauty products for over 70 years. There are even treatments for your pet. The shampoos, moisturisers and beauty products are reasonable buys if you don't have anything more serious to treat.

Musical Instruments

Music N Sports (73 Chaura Rasta; ☎ 10.30am-8pm Mon-Sat) This store sells a range of musical instruments, including sitars, tablas, hand cymbals, bamboo flutes, dancing bells on ankle cuffs

and harmoniums. The helpful staff can recommend music teachers.

Shoes

Mojari (Bhawani Villa, Gulab Path, Chomu House, off Sadar Patel Marg; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Sat) Calling all foot fetishists! This shop sells fabulous footwear for around Rs 500. Named after the traditional decorated shoes of Rajasthan, Mojari is a UN-supported project that helps 3500 rural leatherworkers, traditionally among the poorest members of society. There is a wide range of footwear available, including embroidered, appliquéd and open-toed shoes, mules and sandals. There are also shoes featuring creative stitching, unusual cuts and decoration with bells, beads and sequins. The products meet export-quality standards, but are based on traditional leatherwork skills and design. You may have trouble finding your size. Mojari also has a small collection of covetable leather and felt bags.

Charmica (MI Rd; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat) Opposite Natraj restaurant, this small shop is the place for well-made but pricey *jootis*.

Tailors

New Jodhpur Tailors (9 Ksheer Sagar Hotel, Motilal Atal Rd; ☎ 9am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) You can have a beautiful pair of jodhpurs made in preparation for your visit to the Blue City. Or you can just go for a made-to-measure suit or shirt.

Textiles

Anokhi (www.anokhi.com; 2nd fl, KK Square, C-11, Prithviraj Marg; ☎ 9.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-7pm Sun) Anokhi is a classy, upmarket boutique that's well worth visiting – there's a wonderful little café on the premises and an excellent bookshop in the same building. Anokhi 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. The pieces are produced just outside Jaipur at an unusually ethical factory, built on the grounds of an organic farm. Anokhi provides excellent working conditions, including limited working hours, free health care and transport for its 200 workers, as well as a crèche and educational funding for their children.

Soma (5 Jacob Rd, Civil Lines; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) This is a chic boutique, which sells first-rate textiles, including bright, fresh block prints and lots of unique furnishings, as well as some lovely children's clothes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

It's possible to arrange flights to Europe, the USA and other places, such as Dubai, all via Delhi. For details of international airlines, see p373. It's best to compare ticket prices from travel agencies (see p151), with what the airlines supply directly and through their websites – the latter is where you will usually find the best price.

Offices of domestic airlines:

Indian Airlines (☎ 2743500; www.indian-airlines.nic.in; Nehru Place, Tonk Rd)

Jet Airways (☎ 2360450; www.jetairways.com; 1st fl, Umaid Nagar House, MI Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) Opposite Ganpati Plaza.

Kingfisher Airlines (☎ 4030372; www.flyingfisher.com; Usha Plaza, MI Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun).

Bus

Rajasthan State Road Transport Corporation (RSRTC aka Rajasthan Roadways) buses all

BUSES FROM JAIPUR

Destination	Fare (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Frequency
Agra	124, AC 297	5½	at least hourly
Ajmer	71, AC 110	2½	10 daily
Bharatpur	102	4½	hourly
Bikaner	100, AC 141	8	hourly
Bundi	120, AC 178	5	5 daily
Chittorgarh	168, AC 272	7	every 2 hours
Delhi	270, AC 370-460	5½	at least hourly
Jaisalmer	341	15	1 daily
Jhunjhunu	105	5	half-hourly
Jodhpur	190, AC 282	7	every 2 hours
Kota	141, AC 210	5	hourly
Mt Abu	248, AC 432	13	1 daily
Nawalgarh	72	4	hourly
Pushkar	90	3	1 daily (direct)
Sawai Madhopur	91	6	4 daily
Udaipur	235, AC 358	10	hourly

leave from the **main bus station** (Station Rd), picking up passengers at Narain Singh Circle (you can also buy tickets here). There is a left-luggage office at the main bus station (Rs 10 per bag for 24 hours), as well as a prepaid autorickshaw stand.

Deluxe or private buses are far preferable to RSRTC Blue Line or Star Line or local buses, which stop in small villages and are usually crowded bone-rattlers with questionable safety records. Deluxe buses all leave from Platform 3, tucked away in the right-hand corner of the bus station, and seats may be booked in advance from the **reservation office** (☎ 5116032), which is within the main bus station.

For long journeys, the RSRTC Volvo and Gold Line buses are easily the most comfortable and safe AC services. Even the cheaper RSRTC Silver Line services get good reviews. The RSRTC Gray Line is a sleeper service, where you can lie down – theoretically ensuring better sleep than a chair service. Private companies also provide sleeper buses over long distances and are also usually cheaper. Private buses are generally not as reliable, however, when it comes to schedules and safe drivers. There is a cluster of private offices along Motilal Atal Rd, near the Polo Victory Cinema.

There are regular buses that travel to many destinations, including those that are outlined in the table (above). Numerous private agencies also operate direct services to these cities.

Car

There are no car-hire operators offering self-drive cars in Rajasthan. You'll have to hire a car in Delhi if you're mad enough to try this.

You can arrange car and driver hire directly with the driver at the taxi stand at the train station. Usually the drivers need only a day's notice for a long trip. A much easier way to do this is to utilise the services provided by your hotel. Most hotels will be able to contact drivers (with cars) that are known to the hotel. These drivers value the work they obtain through the hotels and that provides you with greater security and service standards. A reasonable price is non-AC/AC Rs 5/6 per kilometre, with a 250km minimum per day and an overnight charge of Rs 100 per night. See p379 for more information. Rates with the RTDC are from Rs 4.75/6 per kilometre (Rs 125/150 overnight charge) for a non-AC/AC car, with the usual 250km minimum per day.

Train

The efficient **railway reservation office** (☎ 135; ☎ 8am-2pm & 2.15-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) is to your right as you exit Jaipur train station. It's open for advance reservations only. Join the queue for 'Freedom Fighters and Foreign Tourists' (counter 769). See the table (p176) for details of routes and fares.

For same-day travel, buy your ticket at the train station on platform 1, window 9. The railway inquiries number is ☎ 131.

There's a prepaid autorickshaw stand at the road entrance to the train station, as well as

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS FROM JAIPUR

There are plenty of domestic flights from Jaipur, mostly run by Indian Airlines and Jet Airways, who offer similar prices. Other airlines serving Jaipur include Deccan-Kingfisher, IndiGo, Go Air, SpiceJet, and JetLite who offer competitively priced flights: see p376 for more details.

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration	Frequency
Ahmedabad	170	1hr	2 weekly
Delhi	75	40min	3 daily
Jodhpur	130	40min	daily
Kolkata (Calcutta)	300	2hr	1 daily
Mumbai (Bombay)	200	1½hr	5 daily
Udaipur	90	1¾hr	1 daily

MAJOR TRAINS FROM JAIPUR

Destination	Train No & name	Fare (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Departure
Agra	2308 Howrah Jodhpur Exp	157/385/520 (A)	4¾	2am
Ahmedabad	2958 Ahmedabad SJ Rajdhani Exp	890/1215/2055 (B)	9¼	12.45am (Wed-Mon)
	2916 Ahmedabad Ashram Exp	281/735/1013/1721 (C)	11	8.55pm
Ajmer	2015 Shatabdi	270/530 (D)	2	10.50pm (Thu-Tue)
Bikaner	4737 Bikaner Exp	178/654/1117 (E)	8½	10.10pm
	2468 Intercity Exp	119 (F)	7	3.50pm
Delhi	2016 Shatabdi	535/990 (D)	5	5.45pm
	2957 Rajdhani	530/715/1210 (B)	5½	2.30am
	2413 Jaipur-Delhi Exp	177/441/600/1018 (C)	5	4.35pm
Jaisalmer	4059 Delhi-Jaisalmer Exp	150/256/690/962 (G)	13	11.50pm
Jodhpur	2465 Intercity Exp	105/180/359/450 (H)	5½	5.40pm
	2461 Mandore Exp	180/450/612/1040 (C)	5½	2.35am
Sikar	0711 Jaipur-S. Ganganagar Passenger	80 (I)	3	8.40am
Sawai Madhopur	2956 Jaipur-Mumbai Exp	141/276/366/609 (C)	2	2.10pm
Udaipur	2965 Jaipur-Udaipur Exp	252/655/901/1524 (C)	9½	10.25pm

Fares: A – sleeper/2AC/3AC, B – 3AC/2AC/1AC, C – sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC, D – AC chair car/executive chair car, E – sleeper/2AC/1AC, F – 2nd class, G – sleeper/2nd class/3AC/2AC, H – 2nd class/sleeper/AC chair car/3AC, I – sleeper.

a tourist information office and a cloakroom for left luggage on platform 1.

GETTING AROUND**To/From the Airport**

There are no bus services from the airport, which is 12km southeast of the city. An autorickshaw/taxi costs at least Rs 150/250 for the 15km journey into the city centre, or there's a prepaid taxi booth inside the terminal.

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. In other cases you should be prepared to bargain hard.

If you want to hire an autorickshaw for local sightseeing, it should cost about Rs 200/400 for a half/full day (including a visit to Amber but not Nahargarh); be prepared to bargain. This price is per rickshaw, not per person, and don't let drivers tell you otherwise. Make sure you fix a price before setting off to avoid a scene later. A slower, but cheaper, and more environmentally friendly option is to hire a cycle-rickshaw. Though it can be uncomfortable watching someone

pedalling hard to transport you, this is how they make a living.

Taxi

There are unmetered taxis available which will require negotiating a fare or there is the recommended **Pinkcity Radio Taxi** (☎ 5115100; flagfall Rs 20, per km Rs 8, 25% night surcharge 10pm-6am). It's a 24-hour service and taxis can be hired for a four-hour block and used for sightseeing.

AROUND JAIPUR

Jaipur's environs take in some fascinating ancient sites and interesting towns and villages that make great day trips. A comprehensive network of local buses and the ease of finding a taxi or autorickshaw makes getting to these regions simple. It's also possible to join a tour run by the RTDC that includes a commentary on the various places visited. See p164 for more details.

AMBER

The formidable, magnificent, pink fort-palace of Amber (pronounced Amer), an ethereal example of Rajput architecture, rises from a rocky mountainside about 11km

northeast of Jaipur. Amber was the ancient capital of Jaipur state.

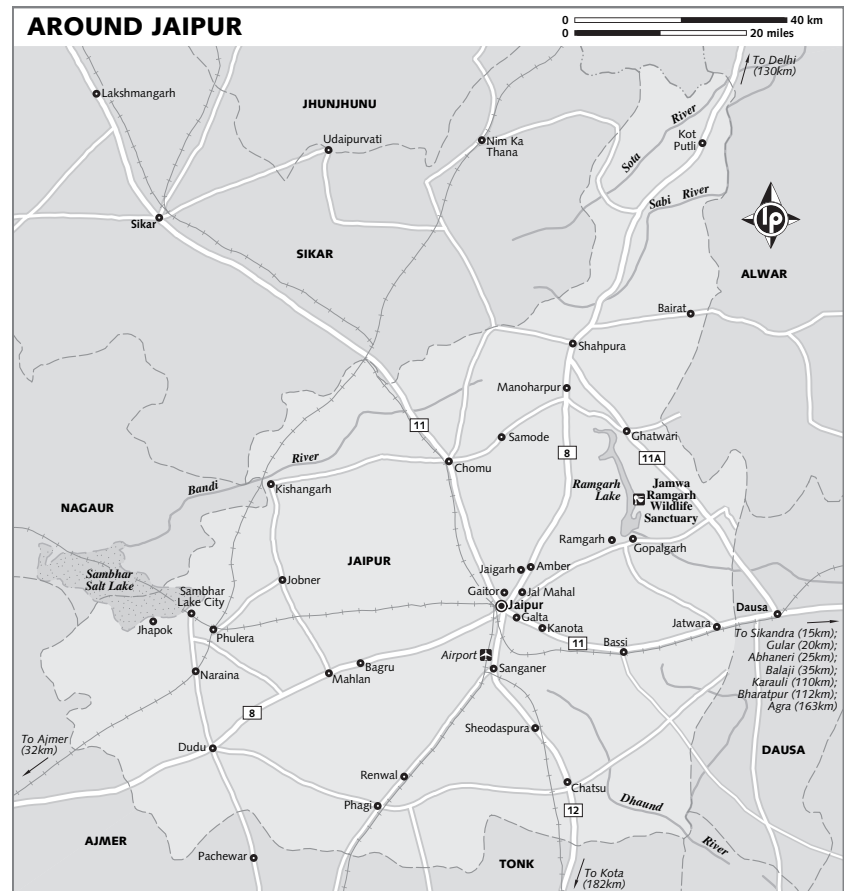
En route to Amber you can squeeze in visits to Royal Gaitor (p160), the Jal Mahal (p160) and the cenotaphs of the maharanis of Jaipur.

Amber was built by the Kachhwaha Rajputs, who originally hailed from Gwalior, in present-day Madhya Pradesh, where they reigned for over 800 years. They were adept at diplomacy through marriage, and it was a marital alliance between a Kachhwaha prince Taj Karan and a Rajput princess that resulted in the granting of the region of Dausa to the prince by the princess' father.

Taj Karan's descendants eyed the hilltop that Amber Fort was later built on, recognis-

ing its virtue as a potential military stronghold. The site was eventually prised from its original inhabitants, the Susawat Minas, and the Minas were granted guardianship of the Kachhwahas' treasury in perpetuity.

The Kachhwahas, despite being devout Hindus belonging to the Kshatriya (warrior) caste, realised the convenience of aligning themselves with the powerful Mughal empire. They paid homage at the Mughal court, cemented the relationship with marital alliances and defended the Mughals in their various skirmishes. For this they were handsomely rewarded. With war booty they financed construction of the fort-palace at Amber, 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 the move to Jaipur on the plains below.

Just beyond Amber Fort is the **Anokhi Museum of Handprinting** (Anokhi Haveli, Kheri Gate; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Tue-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun) which documents the art of hand-block printing and runs hands-on demonstrations. Of course there's a café and gift shop.

Sights

AMBER FORT

This magnificent **fort** (Indian/foreigner Rs 20/100, video camera Rs 200, guide Rs 200, audio guide Hindi/English/various European/various Asian Rs 100/150/200/250; ☎ 8am-7pm Aug-Mar, 7am-7pm Apr-Jul, last entry 5.30pm) is more of a palace, built from pale red sandstone and white marble, and divided into four main sections, each with its own courtyard. Entry is 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. Hiring a guide or grabbing an audio guide is recommended as there are few signs.

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 down to the small **Siladevi Temple** (photography prohibited; ☎ 6am-noon & 4-8pm). Every day from the 16th century until 1980 (when the government banned the practice) a goat was sacrificed here. It's a beautiful temple, entered through gorgeous silver doors featuring repoussé (raised relief) work. Before the image (an incarnation of Kali) lie two silver lions. According to tradition, Maharaja Man Singh prayed to the goddess for victory in a battle with the ruler of Bengal. The goddess came to the maharaja in a dream advising that if he won the battle he should retrieve her image, which was lying at the bottom of the sea. After vanquishing his foes, the maharaja recovered the statue and installed it in the temple as Sila Devi (*sila* means 'slab' – the image is carved from one piece of stone). Above the lintel of the temple is the usual image of Ganesh, this one carved from a single piece of coral.

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. Here the maharaja held audience and received the petitions of his subjects.

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. Patterns made with coloured foil and paint are covered in glass. At night this would have been candlelit and the convex mirrors would have glittered brightly like stars. Regrettably, much of the decoration was allowed to deteriorate during the 1970s and 1980s, but restoration of varying quality proceeds. 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 running through the room. It once carried water and acted as an ingenious air-cooling system. Not a single drop of water was wasted, with the overflow passing through conduits to the gardens. From the Jai Mandir you can enjoy fine views from the palace ramparts over picturesque **Maota Lake** below. The lake, at the foot of the hillside, reflects the fort's terraces and ramparts, but it dries up in the winter months. Around July and August, when the lake is full, boats can be hired for around Rs 50 per person for 15 minutes.

The **zenana** are around the fourth courtyard. The rooms were cleverly 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.

At Amber Fort there's also an **RTDC restaurant** (mains Rs 60-100), off the Jaleb Chowk, which has a pleasant garden, veg and nonveg thalis, as well as a Rajasthali government emporium.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent buses to Amber from near the Hawa Mahal in Jaipur (Rs 8, 25 minutes). An autorickshaw/taxi will cost at least Rs 150/450 for the return trip. RTDC city tours (see p164) include Amber Fort.

A good option is to hire a taxi from the stand near Jaipur train station – a round trip

THE AMBER ELEPHANTS & HELP IN SUFFERING

If an elephant has its own way, it will live in a hot, wet place, preferably close to a nice deep pool for bathing. Unfortunately, Rajasthan doesn't come up with the goods and the elephants that trundle tourists up the steep cobbled road to Amber Fort suffer greatly from the hot, dry days and freezing nights of their adopted desert state.

There are around 100 elephants working in rotation at Amber. Every day they have to walk to the fort from their compound, the Mahavaton-ka-Mohalla in Jaipur's old city – a distance of 11km each way. During the hot season temperatures at Amber can reach 45°C, and the elephants suffer from sunburn and cracked feet from walking on the hot bitumen roads. Elephants need to drink around 250L of water a day, most of which they drink while bathing. The Amber elephants used to do this at the lake below the palace – until the water level dropped. They also suffer from foot rot, abscesses and blindness caused by vitamin deficiencies.

Many of the mahouts (elephant keepers) are deeply concerned about the health and welfare of their elephants, but unfortunately some resort to metal prods (the *ankush*), which sometimes draw blood, to keep their elephants in line. Often this is linked to the poor conditions of the mahouts themselves – low wages mean that there's a high turnover of new recruits, and the important relationship between elephant and mahout never has a chance to develop.

If you're concerned about the elephants working the tourist trade at Amber, you can write a letter of support or make a donation to **Help in Suffering** (HIS; ☎ 2760803; www.his-india.org.au; Maharani Farm, Durgapura; ☎ 9am-5pm) which has a small office at the elephant mounting area below the fort. This organisation is lobbying the government to speed up its plans to build an elephant compound with bathing facilities close to Amber Fort, and to address the need for enforceable regulations to protect the animals, as well as better training and pay for the mahouts.

In addition to treating the elephants working at Amber, HIS also runs a rabies- and population-control programme for Jaipur's dogs, operates mobile clinics to rural areas, and rescues animals in trouble. It's possible to visit the Durgapura shelter, around 10km south of Jaipur, off the road to Sangaran, where happy dogs wander the grounds, and birds and animals of all descriptions convalesce. If you find an animal that is in need of some help, you can call HIS. Qualified vets can also volunteer here – see p370 for further details.

covering Amber Fort, Jaigarh and Nahargarh will cost around Rs 500, including waiting time (maximum five people). Try to arrive at Nahargarh in time for a sunset beer overlooking the city.

You can climb up to the fort from the road in about 10 minutes (cold drinks are available at the top). A seat in a jeep up to the fort costs Rs 200 return. Riding up on elephants is popular at Rs 550 per elephant carrying two passengers up – elephants return empty. In the mornings when most of the tour buses arrive, the queue for elephants is very long and you must be prepared to wait in the full blaze of the sun. Help in Suffering (see the boxed text, p179) is lobbying the government to speed up plans to build better facilities for these elephants.

JAIGARH

A scrubby green hill – Cheel ka Teela (Mound of Eagles) – rising above Amber, is topped by the imposing fortress of **Jaigarh** (Indian/foreigner Rs

25/75, camera or video Rs 50, admission free with City Palace ticket, car Rs 50, guide Rs 100; ☎ 9am-5pm). This massive fort was planned by Jai Singh I, but what you see today dates from the reign of Jai Singh II. It was only opened to the public in mid-1983 and thus has remained very much intact. 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.

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

debatable how many times this great device was used.

Sophisticated rainwater harvesting systems are in place at this fort. Complicated drainage channels, which fed three large tanks, are scattered throughout the fort. The largest has a capacity for 22.8 million litres of water. The fort served as the treasury of the Kachhwahas, and for a long time people were convinced that at least part of the royal treasure was still secreted in this large water tank. The Indian government even searched it to check, but found nothing. These tanks used to provide water for all the soldiers, residents and livestock that lived in the fort.

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

The fort is a steep uphill walk (about 1km) from Amber 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. Vehicles can drive up to the fort though your taxi driver will expect an extra 'hill fee' of Rs 150. There are cool drinks and snacks for sale inside the fort.

SANGANER & BAGRU

The large village of Sanganer is 16km south of Jaipur, and has a **ruined palace**, a group of **Jain temples** with fine carvings (to which entry is restricted) and two ruined **tripolias** (triple gateways). The main reason to visit, however, 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.

Best of all in Sanganer is walking down to the riverbank to see the brightly coloured fabrics drying in the sun. Though more and more of Sanganer's cloth is screen-printed, the time-honoured block printers of Sanganer are famous for their small floral prints, and the cloth produced here was traditionally used by the royal court. Traditional papermakers were also brought to the court at Amber in the 16th century, but moved to Sanganer in

the late 18th century due to water shortages. Later Gandhi's support helped develop the industry here.

Salim's Paper (☎ 2730222; www.handmadepaper.com; Gramodyog Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) is the largest handmade paper factory in India and claims to be one of the biggest in the world. It's well set up for visitors: you can take a free tour to see the paper production process. Significantly, the paper is not made from trees, but from scrap pieces of fabric, and often decorated with petals or glitter. You'll recognise lots of styles and designs, as the paper is exported all over the world. The 300 employees produce 40,000 sheets a day. There's also a beautiful range of free-tree paper products for sale in the showroom – great (and light) gifts for friends back home.

Another huge handmade paper manufacturer is **AL Paper House** (☎ 2731706; www.alpaperhouse.com; ☎ 9am-5pm), near the tempo stand. This factory is also open to visitors.

For block-printed fabrics and blue pottery, there are a number of shops, including **Sakshi** (☎ 2731862; Laxmi Colony; ☎ shop 8.30am-8.30pm, factory 9am-6pm). You can see the block-printing workshop here, and even try your hand at block printing. It also runs courses in block printing and blue pottery (see p163). There's a tremendous range of blue pottery and block-printed fabrics for sale.

About 20km west of Sanganer is the little village of **Bagru**, also known for its block printing, particularly of colourful designs featuring circular motifs. You won't see as much here as in Sanganer, but it's more off the beaten track. The fabric is dyed with natural colours here and the printers' quarter – full of small family businesses – is a hive of activity.

Getting There & Away

Buses leave from the Ajmeri Gate in Jaipur for Sanganer every few minutes (Rs 8, one hour). To Bagru, there are daily buses from Sanganer (Rs 20, 1½ hours).

SAMODE

☎ 01423

The small village of Samode is spectacularly set among rugged hills, about 40km north of Jaipur. The only real reason to visit is if you can stay at the **Samode Palace** (admission Rs 100). If you want to be precise, it's not a palace, as it was owned by a nobleman rather than a ruler, but it's certainly palatial enough to get

away with the title. Like the Samode Haveli in Jaipur, this building was owned by the *rawal* (nobleman) of Samode, and today it's also run by his descendants.

Mainly dating from the 19th century, it's a fantastical building nestling between the Aravalli hills and built on three levels, each with its own courtyard. The highlight is the exquisite Diwan-i-Khas, which is covered with original paintings and mirrorwork.

Above the palace is the overgrown Samode Fort – ask around and you'll find someone to let you in – where there are great views from the ramparts. This is also good walking country, with paths heading off into the countryside. Beneath the palace is a small village, where locals sell block-printed cloth and glass bangles.

Sleeping & Eating

Samode Bagh (☎ 40235; www.samode.com; s/d €100/110; ☎ ☎) Also part of the Samode group, this luxurious tented accommodation (featuring private modern bathrooms) is a wonderful retreat. It's set in 8 peaceful hectares of land, surrounded by formal gardens and near a 150-year-old pavilion. Samode Bagh is 4km from Samode Palace. You can book through Samode Haveli in Jaipur.

Samode Palace (☎ /fax 240014/23; www.samode.com; s/d €143/170, ste €198-225; ☎ ☎ ☎) Largely extended in the 19th century, this magnificent palace is a gloriously grand hotel decorated in no-holds-barred Rajput splendour, with a great courtyard swimming pool plus an infinity pool. The suites are particularly atmospheric and the room tariff includes breakfast. The palace admission fee for nonguests is deducted if you have a meal (Rs 250 to Rs 450) here. You can book through Samode Haveli in Jaipur. There are discounts from May to September and you should check the website for special offers.

Getting There & Away

There are a few direct buses to Samode from the main bus station in Jaipur (Rs 30, 1½ hours), or you can hire a taxi for around Rs 900 return.

RAMGARH

☎ 01426

This green oasis, about 35km northeast of Jaipur, has a pretty, though much shrunken lake, the **Jamwa Ramgarh Wildlife Sanctuary**. In

1982, when the lake was much fuller, some water-sports fixtures of the Asian Games took place here. The area around here has been scarred by mines – all are now closed as the area is protected. Panthers, hyenas, antelopes and wild boars once roamed the area, as the trophy-laden walls of Ramgarh Lodge testify, but loss of habitat, lack of water and hunting have, understandably, driven the wildlife to more welcoming areas. The scenery, with lush palms, huge banyans, remote villages, and small temples set into craggy rock, make it worth a visit to explore and walk in the area. There's a picturesque **polo ground** (in Jaipur for fixtures ☎ 0141-2374791) and the **Jamwa Maa Di Mandir**, an ancient Durga temple.

RTDC Jheel Tourist Village (☎ 52170; s/d Rs 300/400), further away from the lake, is very peaceful and offers accommodation in small round huts, which are a bit run down with peeling paint, but fine. The gardens are well kept with colonially trim lawns, and the views across to the remains of the lake are lovely. An extra bed costs Rs 100. There's a small dining area with veg thalis for Rs 55. Boating on Ramgarh Lake can be arranged when the water is high enough (Rs 125 per person per hour). They can also arrange jeep and camel safaris through the park.

Ramgarh Lodge (☎ 2552217; www.tajhotels.com; d with breakfast & dinner Rs 3700-4700, ste Rs 6700; ☎ ☎ ☎), a one-time royal hunting lodge overlooking Ramgarh Lake, is spectacular, but it's one of those places with zillions of busy staff and immensely slow, offhand service, even when there are only a couple of guests. Inside the lodge are masses of glass-eyed stuffed beasts, the saddest of which is a bear holding a tray. Billiards, squash and tennis are available, as well as boating when the lake's water level is high enough. The pool (check it's full) has a great setting, and the most expensive rooms have fabulous views. Jeep safaris to the park cost Rs 1000 per jeep for one hour (maximum six people).

Buses travel between Jaipur (from the main bus station) and Ramgarh (Rs 13, one hour).

ABHANERI

About 95km from Jaipur on Agra Rd, this remote village surrounded by rolling wheat fields is the unlikely location for one of Rajasthan's most awe-inspiring step-wells, the **Chand Baori** (admission free; ☎ sunrise-sunset).

With around 11 visible levels of zigzagging steps, this 10th-century water tank is an incredible, geometric sight, 20m deep. Flanking the *baori* is a small, crumbling **palace**, where the royals used to picnic and bathe in private rooms (water was brought up by oxen) – it's now inhabited by pigeons and bats. Next door is the **Harshat Mata Temple**, also dating from the 10th century, which was damaged by Muslim invaders, but retains some beautiful deep-relief sculptures in warm-orange sandstone. Both are thought to have been built by King Chand, ruler of Abhaneri and a Rajput from the Chahamana dynasty.

From Jaipur, catch a bus to Sikandra (1½ hours), from where you can hire a jeep for the 10km trip to Abhaneri (Rs 250 return, including a 30-minute stop). Alternatively, take a bus to Gular, from where it's a 5km walk to Abhaneri. If you have your own transport, this is a worthwhile stop between Jaipur and Bharatpur or Agra.

BALAJI

The extraordinary Hindu **exorcism temple** of Balaji, about 102km from Jaipur, is about 3km off the Jaipur to Agra road. People bring their loved ones who are suffering from possession here to have bad spirits exorcised through prayer and rituals. Most exorcisms take place on Tuesday and Saturday. At these times the street outside feels like it's hosting a Hindu rave, and the only people who can get inside the temple are the holy men and the victims – services are relayed to the crowds outside on crackly video screens. The possessed scream, shout, dance and shake their heads. It's an extraordinary experience.

If you wait until the service has finished, you will be able to look inside the temple. You may want to cover your head with a scarf as a mark of respect. No photography is permitted inside. The often-disturbing scenes at this temple may upset some. Believers say you shouldn't take items you buy from around the temple with you – they could bring you bad luck. The number of stands lining the way to the temple indicates that not everyone heeds these solemn warnings.

From the main bus station in Jaipur there are numerous buses to Balaji (local/express Rs 32/50, 2½/two hours).

SAMBHAR SALT LAKE

The country's largest salt lake, around 60km west of Jaipur, Sambhar Salt Lake's vast 230-sq-km wetland expanse once attracted flamingos, cranes, pelicans and many other waterfowl. According to myth, Sambhar is believed to have been given to local people by the goddess Shakambari some 2500 years ago. Her shrine, **Mata Pahari**, juts into the lake west of Jhapok. The people are certainly making good use of it – around 80 sq km of the lake is used for salt farming. On the eastern end, the lake is divided by a 5km-long stone dam. East of the dam are salt-evaporation ponds where salt has been farmed for the past 1000 years.

Also east of the dam is a railway line, built by the British (before Independence) which provides access from Sambhar Lake City to the saltworks. Water from the vast western section is pumped through gates to the other side when it is saline enough for salt extraction.

Sambhar was designated as a Ramsar site (recognised wetland of international importance) in 1990, because the wetland is a key wintering area for birds that migrate from northern Asia, some from as far as Siberia. Its privileged status, however, has not done it much good in recent years.

Usually the water depth fluctuates from a few centimetres during the dry season to about 3m postmonsoon. The specialised algae and bacteria growing in the lake provide striking water colours and support the lake ecology that, in turn, sustains the migrating waterfowl. Poor monsoons, however, have affected this environment, and the lake has almost completely dried up in places. Check locally about the current situation before heading out here, unless you have a particular interest in salt.

The best way to reach Sambhar from Jaipur is via train to Phulera Junction (Rs 25 in 2nd class, one hour and 10 minutes, two daily), 9km from the lake. From the station you can hire a jeep or rickshaw.

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