



Rajasthan

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Best Places to Eat

- » Niro's (p117)
- » LMB (p119)
- » Ambrai (p163)
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Best Places to Stay

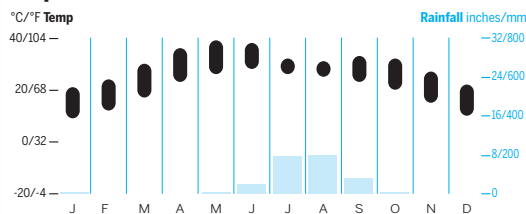
- » Hotel Pearl Palace (p115)
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- » Inn Seventh Heaven (p141)
- » Apani Dhani (p132)

Why Go?

Rajasthan, the Land of Kings, is aptly named. It is indeed a fabulous realm of maharajas and their majestic forts and lavish palaces. While its people-charged cities throb with the crowds and chaos of emerging India, the treasures of the past hold pride of place in mind and spirit. The romantic remnants of a rich and glorious past have earned Rajasthan a place on most travellers' wish lists. Yet there is much more to this iconic region of the subcontinent. It is a land of desert dunes and jungle, camel trains and tigers, glittering jewels, vivid colours and a vibrant culture. There are enough festivals here to fill a calendar and an artist's palette, and the shopping and cuisine are nothing short of spectacular. In short, Rajasthan just about has it all; it is the must-see state of India, brimming with varied, startling and incredible attractions.

When to Go

Jaipur



Oct Ranthambhore National Park reopens for tiger safaris.

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

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

Food

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

DON'T MISS

In Jaipur, the **City Palace** is at the centre of a cluster of 'don't miss' sights, including the fascinating **Jantar Mantar**, **Hawa Mahal** and **Iswari Minar Swarga Sal**. For more vestiges of Maharaja high life check out Udaipur's **City Palace** and **Lake Palace**.

Nature lovers can't miss the birdlife at **Keoladeo Ghana National Park** nor the very real chance of spotting a tiger at **Ranthambhore National Park**.

Rajasthan has a surfeit of spectacular fortresses including the desert citadel of **Jaisalmer Fort** and Jodhpur's imposing **Mehrangarh**. You must also take a day trip out to spectacular **Amber Fort**.

Top State Festivals

- » Desert Festival (Feb, Jaisalmer, p182) A chance for moustache twirlers to compete in the Mr Desert contest.
- » Elephant Festival (Mar, Jaipur, p108) Parades, polo and human-versus-elephant tugs-of-war.
- » Gangaur (Mar/Apr, Jaipur, p108) A statewide festival honouring Shiva and Parvati's love, celebrated with particular fervour in Jaipur.
- » Mewar Festival (Mar/Apr, Udaipur, p160) Udaipur's version of Gangaur, with free cultural events and a colourful procession down to the lake.
- » Teej (Aug, Jaipur, p108, & Bundi, p147) Honours the arrival of the monsoon, and Shiva and Parvati's marriage.
- » Dussehra Mela (Oct, Kota, p151) Commemorates Rama's victory over Ravana (the demon king of Lanka). It's a spectacular time to visit Kota – the huge fair features 22m-tall firecracker-stuffed effigies.
- » Marwar Festival (Oct, Jodhpur, p172, & Osian, p181) Celebrates Rajasthan heroes through music and dance; one day is held in Jodhpur, the other in Osian.
- » Pushkar Camel Fair (Oct/Nov, Pushkar, p142) The Pushkar Camel Fair is the most famous festival in the state; it's a massive congregation of camels, horses and cattle, traders, pilgrims and tourists.

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

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

Fast Facts

- » Population: 68.6 million
- » Area: 342,239 sq km
- » Capital: Jaipur
- » Main languages: Hindi and Rajasthani
- » Sleeping prices: \$ below ₹1000, \$\$ ₹100 to ₹5000, \$\$\$ above ₹5000

Top Tips

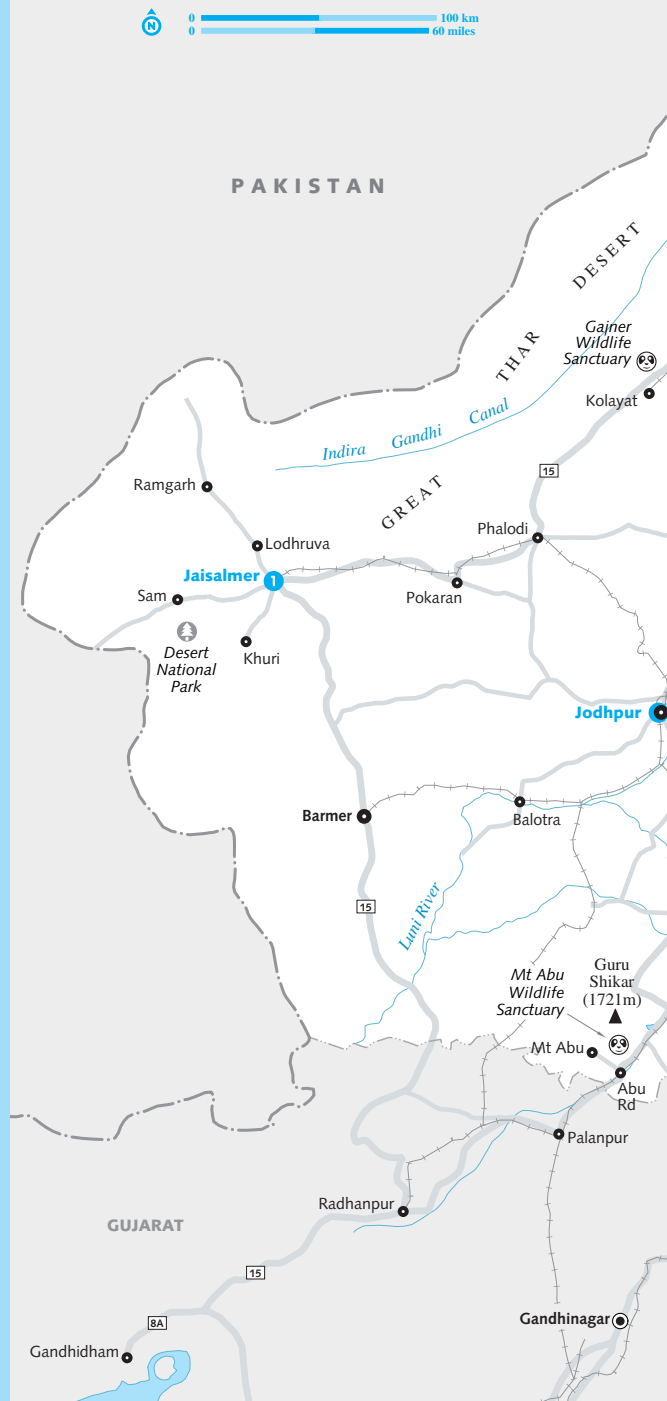
- » Carry small denominations (below ₹50) as drivers often have a lack of change.
- » Call your hotel to confirm the day before you arrive.
- » Book train tickets for longer journeys at least a week ahead

Resources

- » Festivals of India (www.festivalsofindia.in)
- » Incredible India (www.incredibleindia.org)
- » (Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation www.rtdc.in)

Rajasthan Highlights

- 1 Cross the desert on a camel and explore the sandstone fort at **Jaisalmer** (p182)
- 2 Kick back in the pastel-hued pilgrimage town of **Pushkar** (p139)
- 3 Wander through the colourful bazaars of the pink, chaotic capital of **Jaipur** (p108)
- 4 Spot a tiger in the lush jungle and explore a magical cliff-top fortress at **Ranthambhore National Park** (p145)
- 5 Listen to the blue city's secrets from the soaring ramparts of Jodhpur's magnificent fortress, **Mehrangarh** (p173)
- 6 Indulge in the romance of **Udaipur** (p154), with its gorgeous lake vistas and labyrinthine palace
- 7 Explore the forgotten towns and discover the crumbling frescoed *havelis* of **Shekhawati** (p132)





Ganganagar

Sirsa

HARYANA

1

UTTAR
PRADESH

Anupgarh

15

Suratgarh

Hisar

DELHI

24

Rajgarh

Churu

Mandawa

Ramgarh

Fatehpur

Sikar

Ramgarh

Amber

Dausa

Ramgarh

Deoli

Kekri

Deoli

Bundi

Kota

Baroli

Bijolia

Bijapur

Chittorgarh

Banswara

Ratlam

Ujjain

Ratlam

Ujjain

Ratlam

Ujjain

Ratlam

Ujjain

Rewari

Kot Putli

Alwar

Shahpura

Sariska Tiger Park

Bharatpur

Karauli

Dausa

Deeg

Mathura

Fatehpur Sikri

Agra

Keoladeo Ghana National Park

Dholpur

Shivpuri

Shivpuri

Shivpuri

Shivpuri

Shivpuri

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MADHYA
PRADESH

Bhopal

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Chittorgarh

Banswara

Ratlam

Ujjain

Ratlam

Ujjain

Ratlam

Ujjain

Ratlam

Ujjain

Rewari

Kot Putli

Alwar

Shahpura

Sariska Tiger Park

Bharatpur

Karauli

Dausa

Deeg

Mathura

Fatehpur Sikri

Agra

Keoladeo Ghana National Park

Dholpur

Shivpuri

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MADHYA
PRADESH

Bhopal

Shekhawati

Jhunjhunu

Ratargarh

Tal Chhappar Wildlife Sanctuary

Nagaur

Bikaner

Deshnok

Nokha

Mandore

Pushkar

Ajmer

Beawar

Rohet

Pali

Kumbhalgarh

Deogarh

Bhilwara

Rajsamand

Ranakpur

Chittorgarh

Jaisamand Lake

Dungarpur

Banswara

Ratlam

Ujjain

Ratlam

Ujjain

Ratlam

Ujjain

Ratlam

Ujjain

Sambhar Salt Lake

Ranthambhore National Park

Gandhi Sagar

Saraswati River

Yamuna River

29

8

12

11

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8

3

7

2

6

3

History

Rajasthan is home to the Rajputs, warrior clans who claim to originate from the sun, moon and fire, and who have controlled this part of India for more than 1000 years. While they forged marriages of convenience and temporary alliances, pride and independence were always paramount; consequently much of their energy was spent squabbling among themselves. The resultant weakness eventually led to the Rajputs becoming vassals of the Mughal empire.

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

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

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

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

In their absence Rajasthan has made headway, but the state remains poor. The strength of tradition means that women

have a particularly tough time in rural areas. However, literacy stands at 60% in 2008 (males 76%, females 44%), a massive rise from 18% in 1961 and 39% in 1991, although the gender gap remains India's widest, and the literacy rate is still below the national average of around 65%.

EASTERN RAJASTHAN

Jaipur

☑0141 / 3.21 MILLION

Jaipur, Rajasthan's capital, is an enthralling historical city and the gateway to India's most flamboyant state.

The city's colourful, chaotic streets ebb and flow with a heady brew of old and new. Careering buses dodge dawdling camels, leisurely cycle-rickshaws frustrate swarms of motorbikes, and everywhere buzzing autorickshaws watch for easy prey. In the midst of this mayhem, the splendours of Jaipur's majestic past are islands of relative calm evoking a different pace and another world. At the city's heart, the City Palace continues to house the former royal family, the Jantar Mantar, the royal observatory, maintains a heavenly aspect, and the honeycomb Hawa Mahal gazes on the bazaar below. And just out of sight, in the arid hill country surrounding the city, is the fairy-tale grandeur of Amber Fort.

History

Jaipur is named after its founder, the great warrior-astronomer Jai Singh II (1688–1744), who came to power at age 11 after the death of his father, Maharaja Bishan Singh. Jai Singh could trace his lineage back to the Rajput clan of Kachhwahas, who consolidated their power in the 12th century. Their capital was at Amber (pronounced *amer*), about 11km northeast of present-day Jaipur, where they built the impressive Amber Fort (p125).

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. In 1876

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

Sights

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

OLD CITY (PINK CITY)

The Old City is partially encircled by a crenellated wall punctuated at intervals by grand gateways. The major gates are Chandpol (*pol* means 'gate'), Ajmer Gate and Sangneri Gate. Avenues divide the Pink City into neat rectangles, each specialising in certain crafts, as ordained in the *Shilpa-Shastra*. The main bazaars in the Old City include Johari Bazaar, Tripolia Bazaar, Babu Bazaar and Chandpol Bazaar; see the walking tour (p114) or Shopping (p120) for more details of these bazaars.

City Palace

PALACE

(Indian/foreigner incl camera & audio guide ₹75/300, video camera ₹200, Chandra Mahal tour ₹2500; ☉9.30am-5pm) A complex of courtyards, gardens and buildings, the impressive City Palace is right in the centre of the Old City. The outer wall was built by Jai Singh, but within it the palace has been enlarged and adapted over the centuries. Despite the gradual development, the whole is a striking blend of Rajasthani and Mughal architecture.

The price of admission also gets you in to Jaigarh Fort (see p125; a long climb above Amber Fort). This is valid for two days.

Mubarak Mahal

Entering through Virendra Pol, you'll see the Mubarak Mahal (Welcome Palace), built in the late 19th century for Maharaja Madho Singh II as a reception centre for visiting dignitaries. Its multiarched and colonnaded construction was cooked up in an Islamic, Rajput and European stylistic stew by the architect Sir Swinton Jacob. It now forms part of the **Maharaja Sawai Mansingh II Museum**, containing a collection of royal costumes and superb shawls, including Kashmiri *pashmina* (wool shawls). One remarkable exhibit is Sawai Madho Singh I's capacious clothing. It's said he was a cuddly 2m tall, 1.2m wide and 250kg.

Diwan-i-Khas (Sarvatobhadra)

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

Diwan-i-Am

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

The Armoury

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

Pitam Niwas Chowk & Chandra Mahal

Located towards the palace's inner courtyard is Pitam Niwas Chowk. 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.

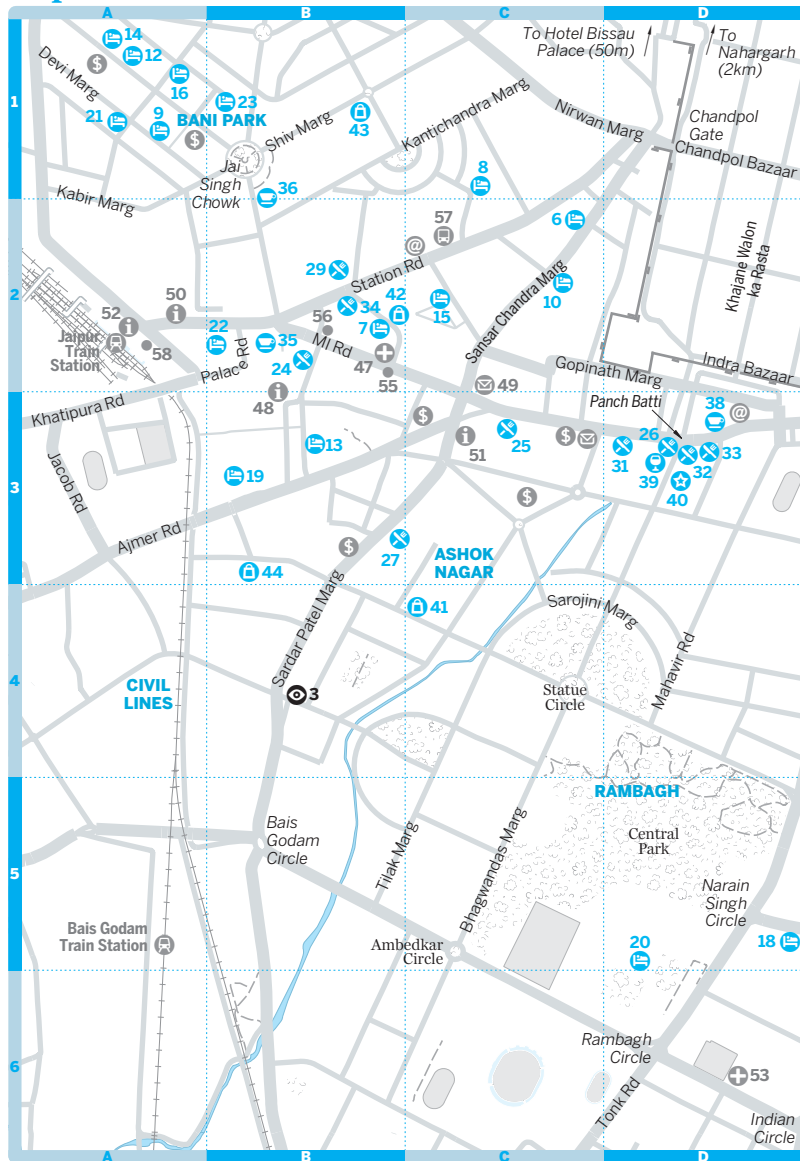
Beyond this *chowk* (square) is the private palace, the Chandra Mahal, which is still the residence of the descendants of the royal family and where you can take a 45-minute guided **tour** (₹2500) of select areas.

Jantar Mantar

HISTORIC SITE

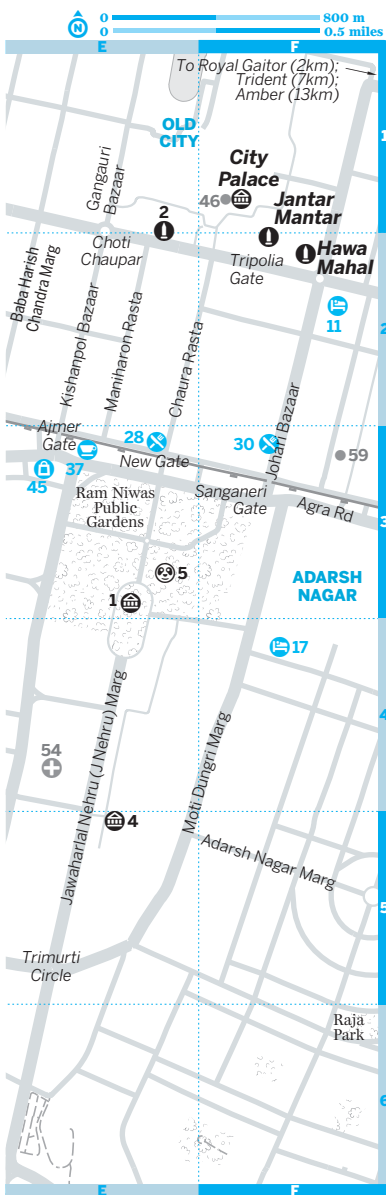
(Indian/foreigner ₹ 20/100 incl audio guide, optional guide Hindi/English ₹200/250; ☉9am-4.30pm) Adjacent to the City Palace is Jantar Mantar, an observatory begun by Jai Singh in 1728 that resembles a collection of bizarre sculptures. The name is derived from the Sanskrit *yanta mantr*, meaning 'instrument of calculation', and in 2010 it was added to India's list of World heritage Sites.

Jai Singh liked astronomy even more than he liked war and town planning. Before constructing the observatory he sent scholars abroad to study foreign constructs. He built



five observatories in total, and this is the largest and best preserved (it was restored in 1901). Others are in Delhi, Varanasi and Ujjain. No traces of the fifth, the Mathura observatory, remain.

Each construction within Jantar Mantar has a specific purpose, for example, measuring the positions of the stars, altitude and azimuth, and calculating eclipses. Paying for the half-hour to one-hour guide is worthwhile if you wish to learn how each fascinating instrument works.



Hawa Mahal

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Palace of the Winds; Indian/foreigner incl camera ₹10/50, audio guide Hindi/English ₹80/110, guide ₹200; ☀9am-5pm) Jaipur's most distinctive landmark, the Hawa Mahal is an extraordinary, fairy-tale, pink-sandstone, delicately

honeycombed hive that rises a dizzying five storeys. Constructed in 1799 by Maharaja Sawai Pratap Singh to enable ladies of the royal household to watch the life and processions of the city. The top offers stunning views over Jantar Mantar and the City Palace one way, and over Siredeori Bazaar the other.

There's also a small **museum** (☀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.

NEW CITY

By the mid-19th century it became obvious that the well-planned city was bulging at the seams. During the reign of Maharaja Ram Singh (1835-80) the seams ruptured and the city burst out beyond its walls. The maharaja commissioned the landscaping of the Ram Niwas Public Gardens, on Jawaharlal Nehru (J Nehru) Rd, and the uproarious splendour of Albert Hall, built in honour of the Prince of Wales' 1876 visit, which now houses the Central Museum.

Central Museum

MUSEUM

(Albert Hall; Indian/foreigner ₹20/150, audio guide Hindi/English ₹80/110; ☀9.30am-5pm) The museum is housed in the spectacularly florid Albert Hall, south of the Old City. It was designed by Sir Swinton Jacob, and combines elements of English and North Indian architecture. The grand old building hosts an eclectic array of tribal dress, clay models of yogis in various positions, dioramas, puppets, sculptures, miniature paintings, carpets, musical instruments and even an Egyptian mummy.



RC Museum of Indology

MUSEUM

(Prachyavidya Path, 24 Gangwaly Park; Indian/foreigner incl guide ₹20/40; ☀8am-6pm) This ramshackle, dusty treasure trove is an extraordinary private collection. It contains folk-art objects and other pieces - there's everything from a manuscript written by Aurangzeb and a 200-year-old mirrorwork swing from Bikaner to a glass bed (for a short queen). The museum is signposted off J Nehru Rd, south of the Central Museum.

Philatelic Bureau & Museum

MUSEUM

(Main Post Office, MI Rd; admission free; ☀10am-5pm Mon-Sat) At the rear of the main post

Jaipur

📍 Top Sights

City Palace	F1
Hawa Mahal.....	F2
Jantar Mantar	F2

👁️ Sights

1 Central Museum	E3
2 Iswari Minar Swarga Sal.....	E1
3 Kerala Ayurveda Kendra.....	B4
Philatelic Bureau & Museum	(see 49)
4 SRC Museum of Indology	E5
5 Zoo.....	E3

🛏️ Sleeping

6 Alsisar Haveli	C2
7 Atithi Guest House	B2
8 Dera Rawatsar	C1
9 Hotel Anuraag Villa.....	A1
10 Hotel Arya Niwas	C2
11 Hotel Kailash.....	F2
12 Hotel Meghniwas	A1
13 Hotel Pearl Palace	B3
14 Jas Vilas.....	A1
Jwala Niketan.....	(see 15)
15 Karni Niwas	C2
16 Madhuban	A1
17 Nana-ki-Haveli	F4
18 Narain Niwas Palace Hotel	D5
19 Pearl Palace Heritage.....	B3
20 Rambagh Palace.....	D5
Retiring Rooms.....	(see 52)
21 Shahpura House.....	A1
22 Sheraton Rajputana Hotel	B2
23 Umaid Bhawan.....	B1

🍴 Eating

24 Baskin Robbins.....	B2
25 Copper Chimney.....	C3
26 Dāsaprakash.....	D3
27 Four Seasons	B3
28 Ganesh Restaurant	E3
Handi Restaurant	(see 25)
29 Hotel Kanji.....	B2
Jal Mahal	(see 32)
Little Italy.....	(see 41)
30 LMB	F3
31 Moti Mahal Delux.....	D3
32 Natraj.....	D3

33 Niro's.....	D3
Peacock Rooftop Restaurant.....	(see 13)
34 Rawat Kachori	B2
Surya Mahal.....	(see 32)

☕ Drinking

35 Cafe Coffee Day	B2
36 Cafe Coffee Day	B1
37 Indian Coffee House.....	E3
38 Lassiwala	D3
Polo Bar.....	(see 20)
39 Reds	D3

🎬 Entertainment

40 Raj Mandir Cinema.....	D3
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🛍️ Shopping

41 Anokhi	C4
Gem Testing Laboratory	(see 28)
42 Jodhpur Tailors.....	B2
43 Kripal Kumbh.....	B1
44 Mojari	B3
45 Rajasthali	E3
Silver Shop.....	(see 13)

Information

46 Foreigners' Regional Registration Office	F1
47 Galundia Clinic.....	B2
48 Government of India Tourist Office	B3
49 Main Post Office.....	C2
50 RTDC Central Reservations Office	A2
51 RTDC Tourist Reception Centre	C3
RTDC Tourist Reception Centre	(see 57)
52 RTDC Tourist Reception Centre.....	A2
53 Santokba Durlabhji Hospital	D6
54 Sawai Mansingh Hospital	E4
Thomas Cook	(see 56)

Transport

55 Jet Airways	B2
56 Kingfisher Airlines	B2
57 Main Bus Station	C2
58 Railway Reservation Office.....	A2
59 Rajasthan Auto Centre	F3

office, this interesting little museum has historical stamps, telegrams and artefacts, including brass belt buckles and badges for Mail Runners and Packers. Even the Mail Peon could wear a badge with pride.

CITY EDGE

Nahargarh

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Tiger Fort; 📍5148044; Indian/foreigner ₹10/30; ☀️10am-5pm) Built in 1734 and extended in 1868, sturdy Nahargarh 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.

Royal Gaitor

HISTORIC SITE

(Gatore ki Chhatryan; Indian/foreigner ₹20/30; ☀9am-5pm) The royal cenotaphs, just outside the city walls, beneath Nahargarh, are an appropriately restful place to visit and feel remarkably undiscovered. The stone monuments are beautifully and intricately carved. Maharajas Pratap Singh, Madho Singh II and Jai Singh II, among others, are honoured here. Jai Singh II has the most impressive marble cenotaph, with a dome supported by 20 carved pillars.

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

Galta & Surya Mandir

HINDU TEMPLE

Perched between the cliff faces of a rocky valley, Galta is a desolate, if evocative, place. It is also known as the **Monkey Temple** and you will find hundreds of monkeys living here – bold and aggressive macaques and more graceful and tolerable langurs. You can purchase peanuts at the gate to feed to them, but be prepared to be mobbed by teeth-barring primates.

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.

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.



Activities

Several hotels will let you use their pool for a daily fee; try the pool at the **Narain Niwas Palace Hotel** (p117; admission ₹150).

Kerala Ayurveda Kendra

AYURVEDA

(☎5106743; www.keralaayurvedakendra.com; F-30 Jamnala Bajaj Marg; ☀8am-noon & 4-8pm) Is Jaipur making your nerves jangle? Get help through Ayurvedic massage and therapy. Massages (male masseur for male clients and female for female clients) cost from ₹500 for 55 minutes. It offers free transport to/from your hotel.



Courses

Sakshi

BLOCK PRINTING

(☎2731862; Laxmi Colony; ☀shop 8.30am-8.30pm, factory 9am-6pm) You can do block-printing courses in nearby Sanganeer village, around 16km south of Jaipur. Costs depend on numbers of students; contact Sakshi for more details.

Kripal Kumbh

BLUE POTTERY

(☎2201127; B1&A Shiv Marg, Bani Park) Free lessons in blue pottery (although it's not possible during the monsoon, from late June to mid-September). Advance bookings are essential.

Dhamma Thali Vipassana Meditation Centre

MEDEITATION

(☎2680220; www.thali.dhamma.org) Located in beautiful surrounds, Dhammathali Vipassana

DON'T MISS

ISWARI MINAR SWARGA SAL

(Heaven-Piercing Minaret; Indian/foreigner ₹5/10, camera ₹10; ☀9am-4.30pm) Piercing the skyline near the City Palace is the unusual Iswari Minar Swarga Sal, just west of 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 spiral to the top of the minaret for excellent views over the Old City. The entrance is around the back of the row of shops fronting Chandpol Bazaar – take the alley 50m west of the minaret along Chandpol Bazaar or go via the Atishpol entrance to the City Palace compound, 150m east of the minaret.

START NEW GATE
FINISH AJMERI GATE
DISTANCE 4.5KM
DURATION THREE TO FIVE HOURS



Walking Tour Pink City

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

Continuing north you'll pass the famous **5 LMB Hotel**, and the **6 Jama Masjid**, with its tall minarets, and the bustling **7 Badi Chaupar**. Be very careful crossing the road here. To the north is **8 Siredeori Bazaar**, also known as Hawa Mahal Bazaar. The name is derived from the spectacular **9 Hawa Mahal**, a short distance to the north. Turning left on **10 Tripolia Bazaar**, you will see a lane leading to the entrance to the Hawa Mahal. A few hundred metres west is the **11 Tripolia Gate**. This is the

main entrance to the **12 Jantar Mantar** and **13 City Palace**, but only the maharaja's family may enter here. The public entrance is via the less-ostentatious Atishpol (Stable Gate), a little further along.

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

Back on Tripolia Bazaar, continue west to cross **16 Choti Chaupar** to **17 Chandpol Bazaar** until you reach a traffic light. Turn left into **18 Khajane Walon ka Rasta**, where you'll find marble and stoneware carvers at work. Continue south until you reach a broad road, just inside the city wall, **19 Indra Bazaar**. Follow the road east towards **20 Ajmer Gate**, the end of this tour.

sana Meditation Centre runs courses (for a donation) in meditation for both beginners and more-advanced students throughout the year.

Maharaja Sawai Mansingh Sangeet Mahavidyalaya

MUSIC & DANCE

(☎2611397; www.sangeetmahavidyalaya.org; Chandni Chowk, City Palace) Lessons in music and dance are available behind Tripolia Gate. Tuition is given in traditional Indian instruments, such as tabla, sitar and flute.

👉 Tours

RTDC

SIGHTSEEING

(☎22020778; tours@rtdc.in; RTDC tourist information bureau, Platform 1, Jaipur train station; ☉8am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Offers half-/full-day tours of Jaipur and its surrounds for ₹150/200. 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. The **Pink City by Night tour** (₹250) departs at 6.30pm, explores several well-known sights, and includes dinner at Nahargarh Fort. Tours depart from Jaipur train station; the company also picks up and takes bookings from the RTDC Hotel Teej, RTDC Hotel Gangaur and the Tourist Information Bureau at the main bus station.

🚗 Sleeping

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

From May to September, most midrange and top-end hotels offer bargain rates, dropping prices by 25% to 50%.

AROUND MI ROAD



Hotel Pearl Palace

HOTEL \$

(☎2373700, 9414236323; www.hotelpearlpalace.com; Hari Kishan Somani Marg, Hathroi Fort; dm

₹175, r ₹350-1200; 🍷🍷🍷) There's quite a range of rooms to choose from – small, large, shared bath, private bath, some balconied, some with AC or fan cooled, and all are spotless. Congenial hosts Mr and Mrs Singh offer all manner of services including free pick-up (8am to 11pm only), moneychanging and travel services. Rightfully popular; advance booking is highly recommended.

Pearl Palace Heritage

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2375242; 9829404055; www.pearlpalaceheritage.com; 54 Gopal Bari, lane 2; r ₹1500-1800; 🍷🍷🍷) The second hotel for the successful Pearl Palace team is a midrange hotel with several special characteristics and great attention to detail. Stone carvings adorn the halls and each room re-creates an individual cultural theme such, as a village hut, a sandstone fort, or a mirror-lined palace boudoir.

Atithi Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2378679; atithijaipur@hotmail.com; 1 Park House Scheme Rd; s ₹650-1100, d ₹750-1200; 🍷🍷🍷) This well-presented guesthouse, set between MI and Station Rds, offers strikingly clean, simple rooms around a quiet courtyard. It's central but peaceful, and the service is friendly and helpful. There's a spotless kitchen and restaurant (guests only), and you can also dine on the very pleasant rooftop terrace.

Hotel Arya Niwas

HOTEL \$\$

(☎4073456; www.aryaniwas.com; Sansar Chandra Marg; s from ₹900, s/d with AC from ₹1800/1150; 🍷🍷🍷) Just off Sansar Chandra Marg, behind a high-rise tower, this is a very popular travellers' haunt, with a travel desk, bookshop and yoga lessons. The spotless rooms vary in layout and size so check out a few. There's an extensive terrace facing a soothing expanse of lawn for relaxing.

Sheraton Rajputana Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎5100100; www.itcwelcomgroup.in; Palace Rd; r incl breakfast from ₹7500; 🍷🍷🍷) Ritzy and comfortable and staffed to the hilt, this grand hotel is a high-walled oasis in an otherwise scruffy part of town near the train station. There is an enormous pool, a select shopping arcade and several plush dining options. The rack rates are heavily discounted if the hotel isn't full, particularly April to September.

Alsisar Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎2368290; www.alsisar.com; Sansar Chandra Marg; s/d from ₹3400/4300; 🍷🍷) Another

genuine heritage hotel that has emerged from a gracious 19th-century mansion. Alisar 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.

Dera Rawatsar

HOTEL \$\$
(☎2200770; www.derarawatsar.com; D194, Vijay Path; r ₹2800-3800, ste ₹4500; 🏠🍽️🚶) Situated off the main drag and close to the bus station, this quiet hotel is managed by three generations of women of a gracious Bikaner noble family. The hotel has a varying range of lovely decorated rooms, sunny courtyards and home-style Indian meals. It is an excellent choice for solo female travellers.

Nana-ki-Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$
(☎2615502; www.nanakihaveli.com; Fateh Tiba, Moti Dungri Marg; r ₹1800-3000; 🏠) 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 and is a good choice for solo female travellers.

Karni Niwas

HOTEL \$
(☎2365433; www.hotelkarniniwas.com; C5 Motilal Atal Marg; s ₹600-1100, d ₹650-1200; 🏠🍽️🚶) Tucked behind Hotel Neelam, this friendly hotel 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. The owner shuns commissions for rickshaw drivers and free pick-up from the train or bus station is available.

Jwala Niketan

GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎25108303; www.jwala-niketan.com; C6 Motilal Atal Marg; s ₹150-650, d ₹200-800; 🏠) This quiet yet centrally located guesthouse (behind the large Hotel Neelam) has a range of good-value, clean but very basic pastel-toned rooms. There is no restaurant, but meals can be delivered to your room from the nearby cheap and multicuisine Mohan Restaurant, or you can sample the family's vegetarian fare.

Krishna Palace

HOTEL \$
(☎2201395; www.krishnapalace.com; E26 Durga Marg, Bani Park; r ₹550-1250; 🏠🍽️🚶) Krishna Palace is an overly managed hotel with some boisterous staff; however, there are some quiet corners and a relaxing lawn to retreat to with a book. It's convenient to the train station (free pick up) and the generally spa-

acious rooms are maintained to an adequate standard.

Hotel Anuraag Villa

HOTEL \$
(☎2201679; www.anuraagvilla.com; D249 Devi Marg; s ₹600-1850, d ₹790-1850; 🏠🍽️🚶) This quiet and comfortable option has no-fuss, spacious rooms (there are three grades) and an extensive lawn where you find some quiet respite from the hassles of sightseeing. It has a recommended restaurant with its kitchen on view, and efficient, helpful staff.

Retiring rooms

RAILWAY RETIRING ROOM \$
(male-only dm ₹70, s without bathroom ₹150, s/d ₹225/450, r with AC ₹750-1000; 🏠) Located upstairs at the train station and very handy if you're catching an early-morning train. Rooms are well worn but surprisingly neat and clean. Make reservations on the inquiries number (☎131).

BANI PARK

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

TOP CHOICE Madhuban

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$
(☎2200033; www.madhuban.net; D237 Behari Marg, Bani Park; s ₹1700-2300, d ₹1900-3600; 🏠🍽️🚶) Madhuban is an elegant, heritage hotel-guesthouse run by the convivial Dicky and his family. 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. Money-changing and travel services are available, as is free pick-up from the bus or train station.

Umaid Bhawan

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$
(☎2206426; www.umaidbhawan.com; Kali Das Marg, via Bank Rd, Bani Park; s ₹1400-2400, d ₹1600-2800, ste ₹4000; 🏠🍽️🚶) This mock-heritage hotel, behind the Collectorate in a quiet cul-de-sac, is extravagantly decorated in traditional style. Rooms are stately, full of marble and carved furniture, and the rooftop restaurant is wonderful. Free pick-up is available from the train or bus station and all taxes and breakfast are included in the tariff.

Shahpura House

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$
(☎2203069; www.shahpurahouse.com; D257 Devi Marg, Bani Park; s/d from ₹3000/3500, ste from

₹4500; 🏠🍷🍷) Elaborately built and decorated in traditional style, this heritage hotel offers immaculate rooms, some with balconies, featuring murals, coloured-glass lamps, flat-screen TVs and even ceilings covered in small mirrors (in the suites). There's an inviting swimming pool and an elegant rooftop terrace that stages cultural shows.

Jas Vilas

HOTEL \$\$

(📍2204638; www.jasvilas.com; C9 Sawai Jai Singh Hwy, Bani Park; s/d ₹3500/3800; 🏠🍷🍷) 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. Three garden-facing rooms are wheelchair accessible. In addition to the relaxing courtyard and lawn, there is a cosy dining room and management will help with all onward travel planning.

Hotel Meghniwas

HOTEL \$\$

(📍4060100; www.meghniwas.com; C9 Sawai Jai Singh Hwy; standard/deluxe r ₹3000/3800, ste ₹4200; 🏠🍷🍷) In a building erected by Brigadier Singh in 1950 and run by his gracious descendants, this very welcoming hotel has comfortable and spotless rooms, with traditional carved-wood furniture and leafy outlooks. The standard rooms are good, but the suite does not measure up to expectations. There's a first-rate restaurant and an inviting pool set in a pleasant lawn area.

OLD CITY

Hotel Bissau Palace

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(📍2304391; www.bissaupalace.com; outside Chandpol; r from ₹3000-6000; 🏠🍷🍷) This is a worthy choice if you want to stay in a palace on a budget. It's actually just outside the city walls, less than 10 minutes' walk from Chandpol (a gateway to the Old City), where there is a very earthy produce market. The hotel has oodles of heritage atmosphere, with lots of antique furnishings and mementos, such as moustached photos and hunting paraphernalia. It feels a bit rundown, however, and could do with a lick of paint.

Samode Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(📍2632370; www.samode.com; Gangapol; s/d incl breakfast from €190/215, ste from €250; 🏠🍷🍷) 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. Rooms have large beds and most have

private terraces. The standard rooms are more ordinary but still manage to charm.

Hotel Kailash

HOTEL \$

(📍2577372; Johari Bazaar; s/d ₹500/575, without bathroom ₹330/360) This hotel, opposite the Jama Masjid, is one of the few budget digs within the Old City. The cheapest rooms are little more than windowless cells and the shared bathrooms can be challenging, but the bigger doubles with attached bath are adequate.

RAMBAGH ENVIRONS

Rambagh Palace

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(📍2211919; www.tajhotels.com; Bhawan Singh Marg; r from ₹27,500; 🏠🍷🍷) This splendid palace was once the Jaipur pad of Maharaja Man Singh II and, until recently, his glamorous wife Gayatri Devi. Veiled in 19 hectares of gardens, there are fantastic views across the immaculate lawns. Nonguests can join in the magnificence by dining in the lavish restaurants or drinking tea on the gracious veranda. At least treat yourself to a drink at the spiffing Polo Bar (p119).

Narain Niwas Palace Hotel

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(📍2561291; www.hotelnarainniwas.com; Narain Singh Rd; s/d incl breakfast from ₹4000/4500, ste from ₹8100; 🏠🍷🍷) 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. The high-ceilinged rooms are varyingly atmospheric and the bathrooms also vary greatly – so inspect before committing. You will find a large secluded pool, heavenly spa and sprawling gardens complete with peacocks out the back.

Eating

AROUND MI ROAD

TOP CHOICE Niro's

INDIAN \$\$

(📍2374493; MI Rd; mains ₹110-350; ☎️10am-11pm) Established in 1949, Niro's is a long-standing favourite on MI Road that continues to shine. Escape the chaos of the street by ducking into its cool, clean, mirror-ceiling sanctum to savour veg and nonveg Indian cuisine. Classic Chinese and Continental food are available but the Indian menu is definitely the pick.

Four Seasons

VEGETARIAN \$\$

(☎2373700; D43A Subhas Marg; mains ₹100-210; ☉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, dosas and a selection of pizzas.

Little Italy

ITALIAN \$\$

(☎4022444; 3rd fl, KK Square, C-11, Prithviraj Marg; mains ₹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 surroundings. The menu is extensive and includes some Mexican items and first-rate Italian desserts.

Moti Mahal Delux

NORTH INDIAN \$\$

(☎4017733; MI Rd; mains ₹140-300; ☉11am-4pm & 7-11pm) The tantalising menu features a vast range of veg and nonveg, including seafood and succulent tandoori dishes. Snuggle into a comfortable booth and enjoy the ambience, spicy food and, last but not least, a delicious *pista kulfi* (pistachio-flavoured sweet similar to ice cream). Beer and wine available.

Peacock Rooftop Restaurant

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(☎2373700; Hotel Pearl Palace, Hari Kishan Somani Marg, Hathroi Fort; mains ₹35-120; ☉7am-11pm) This multilevel rooftop restaurant at the popular Hotel Pearl Palace gets rave reviews for its excellent and inexpensive cuisine (Indian, Chinese and Continental) and relaxed ambience. The mouthwatering 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.

Dāsaprakash

SOUTH INDIAN \$\$

(☎2371313; Kamal Mansions, MI Rd; mains ₹90-200; ☉11am-11pm) Part of a renowned chain, Dāsaprakash specialises in South Indian cuisine including thalis and several versions of *dosa* and *idli* (rice cake). Afterwards you can choose from a wonderful selection of cold drinks and over-the-top ice-cream sundaes.

Surya Mahal

SOUTH INDIAN \$\$

(☎2362811; MI Rd; mains ₹90-170; ☉8am-11pm) Near Panch Batti is this popular option spe-

cialising in South Indian vegetarian food; try the delicious *masala dosa*, and the tasty *dhal makhani* (black lentils and red kidney beans). There are also Chinese and Italian dishes, and good ice creams, sundaes and cool drinks.

Handi Restaurant

NORTH INDIAN \$\$

(☎2364839; MI Rd; mains ₹140-300; ☉noon-3.30pm & 6.30-11pm) Handi has been satisfying customers for years. It's opposite the main post office, tucked at the back of the Maya Mansions, offering scrumptious tandoori and barbecued dishes and rich Mughlai curries. In the evenings it sets up a smoky kebab stall at the entrance to the restaurant. Good vegetarian items are also available. No beer.

Natraj

VEGETARIAN \$\$

(☎2375804; MI Rd; mains ₹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. There's a good selection of thalis and South Indian food – the *dosa paper masala* is delicious – as well as Indian sweets.

Copper Chimney

INDIAN \$\$

(☎2372275; Maya Mansions, MI Rd; mains ₹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.

Rawat Kachori

FAST FOOD \$

(Station Rd; kachori ₹40, lassis ₹25) For great Indian sweets (₹10 or ₹120 to ₹300 per kg) and famous *kachori* (potato masala in fried pastry case), head to this exceedingly popular place. A delicious milk crown should fill you up for the afternoon.

Hotel Kanji

SWEETS \$

(Station Rd; sweets per kg ₹120-340) Across the road from Rawat Kachori, Kanji also has a fabulous array of sweets.

Bake Hut

BAKERY \$

(Arvind Marg, off MI Rd; cakes ₹25-100; ☉9am-10pm Mon-Sat) An extremely busy bakery that does a roaring trade in sweet cakes and various breads. It's attached to the back of the Surya Mahal restaurant.

Jal Mahal

(MI Rd; ice creams ₹12-110; ☺10am-midnight) This packed little takeaway ice-cream parlour has some inventive concoctions, from the earthquake to the after ate.

SWEETS \$

Baskin Robbins

(Sanjay Marg; ice creams ₹20-150; ☺noon-11.30pm) Tucked into the edge of the Hotel Gangaur's compound is this pint-sized ice-cream pit stop.

SWEETS \$

OLD CITY

(☺2560845; Johari Bazaar; mains ₹95-190; ☺11.30am-3.30pm & 7-11pm) Laxmi Misthan Bhandar, LMB to you and me, is a *sattvik* (pure vegetarian) restaurant in the Old City that's been going strong since 1954. A welcoming AC refuge from frenzied Johari Bazaar, LMB is also an institution with its singular decor, attentive waiters 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 Rajasthan thali followed by the signature *kulfa*, a fusion of *kulfi* and *falooda* with dry fruits and saffron.

VEGETARIAN \$\$

Ganesh Restaurant

(☺2312380; Nehru Bazaar; mains ₹50-90; ☺9.30am-11pm) This pocket-sized outdoor restaurant is in a fantastic location on the top of the Old City wall near New Gate. The cook is in a pit on one side of the wall, so you can check out your pure vegetarian food being cooked. If you're looking for a local eatery with fresh tasty food, such as *paneer butter masala*, you'll love it. There's an easy-to-miss signpost, but no doubt a stallholder will show you the narrow stairway.

VEGETARIAN \$

**Drinking**

(MI Rd; ☺7.30am till sold out) This famous, much-imitated institution, opposite Niro's, is a simple place that whips up fabulous, creamy lassis at ₹14/28 for a small/jumbo clay cup. Get there early to avoid disappointment! Will the real Lassiwalla please stand up? It's the one that says 'Shop 312' and 'Since 1944', directly next to the alleyway. Imitators spread to the right as you face it.

LASSI

Indian Coffee House

(MI Rd; coffee ₹11-15; ☺8am-9.30pm) Set back from the street, down an alley, this tradition-

CAFE

al coffee house (a venerable co-op owned institution) offers a very pleasant cup of filtered coffee in very relaxed surroundings. Aficionados of Indian Coffee Houses will not be disappointed by the fan-cooled ambience. Inexpensive *samosas*, *pakoras* and *dosas* grace the snack menu.

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. 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.

BAR

Polo Bar

(Rambagh Palace Hotel, Bhawan Singh Rd; ☺noon-midnight) A spiffing watering hole adorned with polo memorabilia and arched, scalloped windows framing the neatly clipped lawns. A bottle of beer costs ₹350 to ₹450 and cocktails around ₹450.

BAR

Café Coffee Day

(Country Inn Hotel, MI Rd; coffee ₹50-90) The franchise that successfully delivers espresso to coffee addicts, as well as the occasional iced concoction and muffin, has several branches in Jaipur. In addition to this one, sniff out the brews at Paris Point on Sawai Jai Singh Hwy (aka Collectorate Rd), and near the exit point at Amber Fort.

CAFE

★ Entertainment

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

Raj Mandir Cinema

(☺2379372; Baghwandas Marg; admission ₹50-110; ☺reservations 10am-6pm, screenings 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm) Just off MI Rd, Raj Mandir is *the* place to go to see a Hindi film in India. This opulent cinema looks like a huge pink cream cake, with a meringue auditorium and a foyer somewhere between a temple and Disneyland. Bookings can be made one hour to seven days in advance at window Nos 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

CINEMA

queue when the current booking office opens 45 minutes before curtain up. Avoid the very cheapest tickets, which are very close to the screen.

Chokhi Dhani

THEME PARK

(☎2225001; Tonk Rd; adult/child aged 3-9 incl dinner ₹350/200) 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. A return taxi from Jaipur, including waiting time, will cost about ₹600.



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.

Most of the larger shops can pack and send your parcels home for you - although it may be slightly cheaper if you do it yourself (see p165) it's generally not worth the hassle.

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

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

Johari Bazaar (☺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. Many unwary visitors get talked into buying things for resale at inflated prices, especially gems. Beware of these get-rich-quick scams.

JAIPUR'S GEMS

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 southeast of the Old City. Here you can see stones being cut and polished in workshops tucked off narrow backstreets.

There is a **gem testing laboratory** (www.gtjaipur.info; ☎10am-5.15pm Mon-Sat) in the Rajasthan Chamber Bhawan on MI Rd. Deposit gems before noon and receive an authenticity certificate on the same day between 4.30pm and 5.15pm. Certification charges start at ₹550 for a single stone.

Kripal Kumbh

HANDICRAFTS

(☎2201127; B18A Shiv Marg, Bani Park; ☎10am-6pm) 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, his family and his students. Ceramics go for anything from ₹30 (for a paperweight) to ₹25,000 (for a large vase).

Rajasthali

HANDICRAFTS

(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.

Mojari

CLOTHING

(Shiv Heera Marg; ☎11am-6pm Mon-Sat) Named after the traditional decorated shoes of Rajasthan, Mojari is a UN-supported project that helps rural leatherworkers, traditionally among the poorest members of society. There is a wide range of footwear available, including embroidered, appliquéd and open-toed shoes, mules and sandals. Mojari also has a small collection of covetable leather and felt bags.



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.

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.



Anokhi

CLOTHING

(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 cafe 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.

Jodhpur Tailors

CLOTHING

(www.jodhpurtailors.com; 9 Ksheer Sagar Hotel, Motilal Atal Rd; ☎9am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) You can have a beautiful pair of jodhpurs (₹2500) made in preparation for your visit to the Blue City. Or you can just go for a made-to-measure suit (₹7000 to ₹15000) or shirt (₹700 to ₹900).

The Silver Shop

JEWELLERY

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



Information

Internet Access

Many places provide internet access, including most hotels and guesthouses. However fast or slow, it'll set you back about ₹25 per hour.

Dhoom Cyber Café (MI Rd; per hr ₹25) Enter through an arch into a quiet courtyard just off the main drag.

Mewar Cyber Café & Communication (Station Rd; per hr ₹25; ☎8am-11pm) Near the main bus station.

Medical Services

Most hotels can arrange a doctor on-site. At **Galundia Clinic** (☎2361040, 9829061040; dagalundia@doctor.com; MI Rd), **Dr Chandra Sen** (☎9829061040) is on 24-hour call.

Good hospitals include:

Santokba Durlabhji Hospital (☎2566251; Bhawan Singh Marg)

Sawai Mansingh Hospital (☎2560291; Sawai Ram Singh Rd)

Money

There are plenty of places to change money, including numerous hotels, and masses of ATMs, most of which accept foreign cards, including **HDFC** (Ashoka Marg & Sawai Jai Singh Hwy), **HSBC** (Sardar Patel Marg), **ICICI** (ground fl, Ganpati Plaza, MI Rd), **IDBI** (Sawai Jai Singh Hwy), **State Bank of India** (Hotel Om Tower) and **Standard Chartered** (Bhagwat Bhavan, MI Rd), which are open 24 hours.

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

Post

DHL Express (☎2361159; www.dhl.co.in; G8 Geeta Enclave, Vinobha Rd; ☎10am-8pm) This reliable international courier also has a small and friendly office (but dealing in cash payments only) beside the Standard Chartered bank on MI Rd. To get to the head office, take the alley beside the small office for about 50m to the Geeta Enclave building. Ensure that you ask to pay customs charges for the destination country upfront.

Main post office (☎2368740; MI Rd; ☎8am-7.45pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5.45pm Sat) A cost-effective and efficient (though you will inevitably

get a little frustrated with the back-and-forth institution. Parcels need to be wrapped according to the rules, so stand back and watch the parcel-packing wallah (10am to 4pm Monday to Saturday) in the foyer, who will pack, stitch and wax seal your parcels for a reasonable fee.

Tourist Information

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

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. The likelihood you'll get an extension on a tourist visa is slight – see p1174 for more details.

Government of India Tourist Office (GITO;

☎2372200; Khasa Kothi Circle; ☎9am-6pm Mon-Fri) Inside the Hotel Khasa Kothi compound (go through the arch and look to the left). Provides brochures on places all over India.

RTDC Tourist Reception Centre

Main branch (☎5155137; www.rajasthan tourism.gov.in; Room 21, former RTDC Tourist Hotel; ☎9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri); airport (☎2722647); Amber Fort (☎2530264); Jaipur train station (☎2200778; Platform 1; ☎24hr); main bus station (☎5064102; Platform 3; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Fri) Has maps and brochures on Jaipur and Rajasthan.

i Getting There & Away

Air

For details of international airlines, see p1175.

Offices of domestic airlines:

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

IndiGo (☎2743500; www.goindigo.in; airport)

Jet Airways (☎5112225; www.jetairways.com; Room 112, Jaipur Tower, MI Rd; ☎9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat)

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 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 (₹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. 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. There is a cluster of private offices along Motilal Atal Rd, near the Polo Victory Cinema.

Car

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 ₹7/8 per kilometre, with a 250km minimum per day and an overnight charge of ₹150 per night.

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS FROM JAIPUR

There are plenty of domestic flights from Jaipur, mostly run by Indian Airlines, Kingfisher Airlines and Jet Airways, who offer similar prices. Other airlines serving Jaipur include IndiGo and SpiceJet. Fares and schedules vary widely and these are just indicative fares at the time of writing.

DESTINATION	FARE (US\$)	DURATION
Ahmedabad	110	1hr
Delhi	55	40min
Jodhpur	100	40min
Kolkata (Calcutta)	145	2hr
Mumbai (Bombay)	70	1½hr
Udaipur	110	1¾hr

BUSES FROM JAIPUR

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY
Agra	195, AC 370	5½	11 daily
Ajmer	110, AC 200	2½	13 daily
Bharatpur	128*	4½	5 daily
Bikaner	190	8	hourly
Bundi	160, AC 220	5	5 daily
Chittorgarh	210, AC 335	7	6 daily
Delhi	325, AC 425-600	5½	at least hourly
Jaisalmer	430	15	daily
Jhunjhunu	140	5	half-hourly
Jodhpur	240, AC 350	7	every 2 hours
Kota	255, AC 370	5	hourly
Mt Abu	AC 531	13	daily
Nawalgarh	95	4	hourly
Pushkar	120	3	daily (direct)
Sawai Madhopur	110	6	2 daily
Udaipur	300, AC 605	10	6 daily

* To take an AC bus to Bharatpur you must pay the full Agra fare on an Agra-bound bus and alight at Bharatpur.

Motorcycle

You can hire, buy or fix a Royal Enfield Bullet (and lesser motorbikes) at **Rajasthan Auto Centre** (☎2568074; www.royalfieldsaleem.com; Sanjay Bazaar, Sanganer Gate), the cleanest little motorcycle workshop in India. To hire a 350cc Bullet costs ₹500 per day (including helmet) within Jaipur. If you take the bike outside Jaipur it costs ₹600 per day.

Train

The efficient **railway reservation office** (☎135; ☎8am-2pm & 2.15-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) is to your left as you enter Jaipur train station. It's open for advance reservations only (more than five hours before departure). Join the queue for 'Freedom Fighters and Foreign Tourists' (counter 769). See the table (p124) for details of routes and fares.

For same-day travel, buy your ticket at the northern end of the train station on **Platform 1, window 10** (☎closed 6-6.30am, 2-2.30pm & 10-10.30pm). The railway inquiries number is ☎131.

Station facilities on Platform 1 include an RTDC tourist information bureau, Tourism Assistance Force (police), a cloakroom for left luggage (₹10 per bag per 24 hours), retiring rooms (p115), restaurants and AC waiting rooms for those with 1st class and 2AC train tickets.

i 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 ₹200/350 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.

Cycle-Rickshaw

You can do your bit for the environment by flagging down a lean-limbed cycle-rickshaw rider. Though it can be uncomfortable watching someone pedalling hard to transport you, this is how they make a living. A short trip costs about ₹30.

Taxi

There are unmetered taxis available which will require negotiating a fare or you can try **Meri-car** (☎4188888; www.mericar.in; flagfall incl 3km ₹50, afterwards per km ₹11, 25% night surcharge 10pm-5am). It's a 24-hour service and taxis can be hired for sightseeing for four-/six-/eight-hour blocks costing ₹550/850/1050.

MAJOR TRAINS FROM JAIPUR

DESTINATION	TRAIN NO & NAME	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	DEPARTURE
Agra	12308 Jodhpur-Howrah Express	160/385/515 (A)	4¾	2.10am
Agra	12966 Udaipur-Gwalior Express	90/305/385/515/840 (B)	4¾	6.10am
Ahmedabad	12958 Ahmedabad SJ Rajdhani Express	890/1215/2055 (C)	9½	12.35am
Ahmedabad	12916 Ahmedabad Ashram Express	280/730/990/1650 (D)	11	8.45pm
Ajmer	12015 Ajmer Shatabdi	270/530 (E)	2	10.40pm (Thu-Tue)
Ajmer	19708 Aravalli Express	120/245/330 (A)	2½	8.30am
Ajmer	12195 Intercity Express	65/222 (F)	2	9.40am
Ajmer	09622 Intercity Express	65/222 (F)	2	2.15pm
Bikaner	12468 Intercity Express	115 (G)	7	3.45pm
Delhi	12016 Shatabdi	535/1015 (D)	5	5.50pm (Thu-Tue)
Delhi	14060 Jaisalmer-Delhi Express	90/155/410/550 (H)	6	5am
Delhi	12413 Jaipur-Delhi Express	100/175/440/590/970 (I)	5	4.30pm
Jaisalmer	14059 Delhi-Jaisalmer Express	145/255/680/930/1555 (I)	13	11.55pm
Jodhpur	12465 Ranthambhore Express	100/180/355/450 (J)	5½	5pm
Jodhpur	14059 Delhi-Jaisalmer Express	90/160/415/565/940 (I)	5½	11.55pm
Sawai Madhoper	12956 Jaipur-Mumbai Express	140/275/355/585 (D)	2	2.10pm
Sawai Madhoper	12466 Intercity Express	65/140/225/275 (J)	2¼	10.55am
Udaipur	12965 Jaipur-Udaipur Express	125/215/435/545/735/1230 (K)	9½	10.25pm

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

Around Jaipur

AMBER

The formidable, magnificent, honey-hued 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 former capital of Jaipur state.

Amber was built by the Kachhwaha Rajputs, who hailed from Gwalior, in present-day Madhya Pradesh, where they reigned for over 800 years. 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.

👁 Sights

Amber Fort

HISTORIC SITE

(Indian/foreigner ₹25/200, guide ₹200, audio guide Hindi/English/various European/various Asian ₹100/150/200/250; ☀8am-6pm, last entry 5.30pm) This magnificent fort is more of a palace, built from pale yellow and pink sandstone and white marble, and divided into four main sections, each with its own courtyard.

You can trudge up to the fort from the road in about 10 minutes (cold drinks are available at the top). A seat in a jeep up to the fort costs ₹200 return. Riding up on an **elephant back** (₹900 per two passengers; ☀8-11am & 3.30-5.30pm) is very popular, however.

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

From Jaleb Chowk, an imposing stairway leads up to the main palace, but first it's worth taking the steps just to the right, which lead to the small **Siladevi Temple** (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.

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

The maharaja's apartments are located around the third courtyard – you enter through the fabulous **Ganesh Pol**, decorated with mosaics and sculptures. The **Jai Mandir** (Hall of Victory) is noted for its inlaid panels and multimirrored ceiling. Carved marble relief panels around the hall are fascinatingly delicate and quirky, depicting cartoon-like insects and sinuous flowers.

Opposite the Jai Mandir is the **Sukh Niwas** (Hall of Pleasure), with an ivory-inlaid sandalwood door and a channel that once carried cooling water right through the

room. From the Jai Mandir you can enjoy fine views from the palace ramparts over picturesque **Maota Lake** below.

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

Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing

MUSEUM

(Anokhi Haveli, Kheri Gate; child/adult ₹15/30, camera/video ₹50/150; ☀10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun, closed 1 May-15 Jul) Just beyond Amber Fort, in Amber town, is this interesting museum that documents the art of hand-block printing and runs hands-on demonstrations.

📍 Getting There & Away

There are frequent (crowded) buses to Amber from near the Hawa Mahal in Jaipur (₹10, 25 minutes). An autorickshaw/taxi will cost at least ₹150/550 for the return trip. RTDC city tours (see p115) include Amber Fort.

JAIGARH

A scrubby green hill – Cheel ka Teela (Mound of Eagles) – rising above Amber, is topped by the imposing fortress of **Jaigarh** (Indian/foreigner ₹25/75, camera or video ₹50, car ₹50, Hindi/English guide ₹150/200; ☀9am-5pm). This massive fort was planned by Jai Singh I, but what you see today dates from the reign of Jai Singh II. Punctuated by whimsically hatted lookout towers, the fort was never captured and is a splendid example of grand 18th-century defences, without the palatial frills that are found in many other Rajput forts. It has water reservoirs, residential areas, a puppet theatre and the world's largest wheeled cannon, **Jaya Vana**.

The fort is a steep uphill walk (about 1km) 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.

SANGANER

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 facto-

ries (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.

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 p113).

i Getting There & Away

Local buses leave from the Ajmeri Gate in Jaipur for Sanganer every few minutes (₹10, one hour). To Bagru, there are daily buses from Sanganer (₹26, 1½ hours).

Bharatpur

☎05644 / POP 263,800

Bharatpur is famous for its Unesco-listed Keoladeo Ghana National Park (p128), a wetland and significant bird sanctuary. Apart from the park, Bharatpur has a few historical vestiges, though it would not be worth making the journey for these alone. The town is dusty, noisy and not particularly visitor friendly.

Keoladeo Ghana National Park lies 3km to the south of Bharatpur's centre.

👁 Sights

Lohagarh

HISTORIC BUILDING

Lohagarh, the early-18th-century Iron Fort, was so named because of its sturdy defences. Today still impressive, though also forlorn and derelict, it occupies the entire small artificial island in the town centre. The main entrance is the **Austdhatu (Eight-Metal Gate)** – apparently the spikes on the gate are made of eight different metals.

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

One of the palaces, centred on a tranquil courtyard, houses a seemingly forgotten **museum** (admission ₹10, free Mon, camera/video ₹10/20, no photography inside museum; ☺10am-4.30pm Sat-Thu). Downstairs is a Jain

sculpture gallery that includes some beautiful 7th- to 10th-century sculpture, and most spectacularly, the palace's original *hammam* (bathhouse), which retains some fine carvings and frescoes.

🛏 Sleeping & Eating

Don't be pressured by touts at Bharatpur train or bus stations. Most hotels can also arrange guides and offer binocular and bike hire. Guests usually eat in the hotel they are staying at and most places offer a *thali* (all-you-can-eat meal) for between ₹80 and ₹180. All of the following options are within easy walking distance of the national park entrance, except for Shagun Guest House.

TOP CHOICE Birder's Inn

HOTEL \$\$

(☎227346; www.birdersinn.com; Bird Sanctuary Rd; s/d incl breakfast from ₹1600/2100; 🍷@☺🚰) The Birder's Inn is rightly the most popular base for exploring the park. The atmospheric stone and thatch-roof restaurant is a great place for a meal and to compare birdwatching stories. The rooms are airy, spacious and nicely decorated with LCD TVs, and are well set back from the road in well-tended gardens.

Hotel Sunbird

HOTEL \$\$

(☎225701; www.hotelsunbird.com; Bird Sanctuary Rd; s/d from ₹1700/2000, cottages ₹2200/2500; 🍷) Another well-run and popular place next door to Birder's Inn. Rooms are clean and comfortable, and there's an appealing garden bar and restaurant with a good range of tasty dishes and cold beer. Packed lunches and guided tours for the park are available.

Kiran Guest House

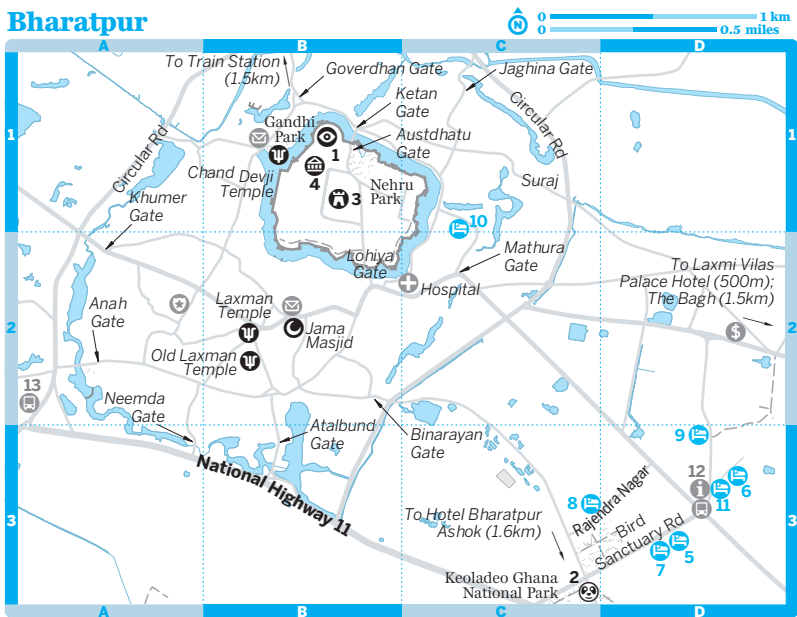
GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎223845; www.kiranguesthouse.com; 364 Rajendra Nagar; r ₹150-300, with AC ₹750; 🍷) Managed by eager-to-please brothers, this guesthouse delivers great value with seven simple, spacious, clean rooms and a pleasant rooftop where you can eat tasty home cooking. It's on a quiet road not far from the park. Nature guiding and free pick up from the Bharatpur train and bus stations are offered.

Hotel Bharatpur Ashok

HOTEL \$\$

(☎222722; www.theashokgroup.com; s/d ₹2700/3000; 🍷@) This lodge, run by the Indian Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), is 1km inside the park and 8km from the Bharatpur train station. It's looking a little faded, and service is typically lax. However, the comfortable, quiet rooms have



balconies with swing seats and there's a bar downstairs. The multicuisine restaurant's handy if you want something to eat while within the park (nonguests are welcome).

Laxmi Vilas Palace Hotel HOTEL \$\$\$
 (☎223523; www.laxmivilas.com; Kakaji-ki-Kothi, Old Agra Rd; s/d/ste ₹4400/4800/6100; 🍷@🍷) This exquisite heritage hotel, about equidistant between the national park and the town centre, was once owned by the younger son of Maharaja Jaswant Singh. Arched ceilings and heavy old furniture make for atmospheric rooms, set around a courtyard.

The Bagh HOTEL \$\$\$
 (☎225415; www.thebagh.com; Old Agra Rd; s/d from ₹6000/7500; 🍷@🍷) A picturesque hotel 2km from town, the Bagh has 23 elegant rooms spread out in separate pavilions nestled in a former royal orchard. All rooms boast cool marble floors, antique furnishings and wonderful bathrooms. The 4-hectare garden is over 200 years old and has masses of birds if you're feeling too lazy to go to the park.

Royal Guest House HOTEL \$
 (☎9414315457; www.royalguesthousebharatpur.com; r ₹250-750; 🍷@) The ultrakeen management, who live on the premises, also do

Bharatpur

Sights

- 1 Jawahar Burj B1
- 2 Keoladeo Ghana National Park Entrance C3
- 3 Lohagarh B1
- 4 Museum B1

Sleeping

- 5 Birder's Inn D3
- 6 Falcon Guest House D3
- 7 Hotel Sunbird D3
- 8 Kiran Guest House C3
- 9 Royal Guest House D3
- 10 Shagun Guest House C1
- 11 Spoonbill Hotel & Restaurant D3

Information

- Royal Forex (see 9)
- 12 Tourist Reception Centre D3

Transport

- 13 Bus Station A2

moneychanging and run an internet cafe here. The rooms are all very clean and fresh, and the rooftop restaurant is cosy. Guests can use a kitchen for self-catering, and have free access to the internet.

Falcon Guest House

(☎223815; falconguesthouse@hotmail.com; HOTEL \$ Gori Shankur Colony; ₹300-1600; 📍📞) The Falcon may well be the pick of a bunch of hotels all in a row and all owned by the same extended family. It is a well-kept, snug place to stay, run by the affable Mrs Rajni Singh. Her husband, Tej, is an ornithologist and he's happy to answer any bird-related questions. Flavoursome home-cooked food is served in the garden restaurant.

Spoonbill Hotel & Restaurant

(☎223571; www.hotelspoonbill.com; HOTEL \$ Gori Shankur Colony; s ₹150-600, d ₹200-700; 📍) The original Spoonbill has a variety of different rooms – all good value and clean, if a bit worn. The hotel has excellent food (mains ₹30 to ₹150), with curd from the family cow and Rajasthan delicacies, such as *churma* (sugar, cheese and dried fruit fried in butter), the royal dish of Rajasthan. There's often a campfire in winter.

Shagun Guest House

(☎9828687488; rajeev shagun@hotmail.com; s/d ₹120/150, without bathroom ₹100) It doesn't get much more basic than this. Down a lane inside Mathura Gate, you will find yourself well off the tourist trail with a little tree-shaded courtyard and friendly locals keen for a chat. The affable owner is knowledgeable about the park and conducts village tours.

Information

Main post office (☎10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) Near Gandhi Park.

Royal Forex (New Civil Lines; ☎6am-10pm; 📞) Moneychanger that has expanded into the hotel and internet cafe business (per hour ₹40).

Tourist Reception Centre (☎222542; ☎9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri) About 700m from the park entrance; sells maps of Bharatpur (₹10).

Getting There & Away**Bus**

There are regular buses to various places, including Agra (₹55, 1½ hours), Fatehpur Sikri (₹30, one hour), Jaipur (₹110, 4½ hours), Deeg (₹25, one hour) and Alwar (₹60, four hours). Buses leave from the main bus station, but also drop off and pick up passengers at the bus stop at the crossroads by the Tourist Reception Centre.

Train

The 19023/4 *Janata Express* leaves New Delhi (sleeper ₹120) at 1.05pm and arrives in

Bharatpur at 5.30pm. It leaves Bharatpur at 8.10am, arriving in the capital at 12.50pm. The 12925/6 *Paschim Express* leaves New Delhi (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹140/315/410/675) at 4.55pm and arrives in Bharatpur at 7.40pm. It leaves Bharatpur at 6.15am, arriving in the capital at 10.55pm.

There are several trains daily to Sawai Madhopur (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹140/325/425/700), including the 12094 *Golden Temple Mail*, which departs at 10.40am and arrives at Sawai Madhopur at 1.05pm and then continues to Kota and Mumbai (Bombay).

To Agra (2nd class/sleeper/AC chair/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹47/140/195/240/310/505), the 12966 *Udaipur-Gwalior Express* departs at 9.05am, arriving at Agra Cantt at 10.15am.

Getting Around

An auto- or cycle-rickshaw from the bus station to the tourist office and most of the hotels should cost around ₹30 (₹35 from the train station).

Keoladeo Ghana National Park

This famous bird sanctuary and **national park** (Indian/foreigner ₹55/400, video ₹400; ☎6am-6pm Apr-Sep, 6.30am-5pm Oct-Mar) has long been recognised as one of the world's most important bird breeding and feeding grounds. In a good monsoon season over one-third of the park can be submerged, hosting over 360 species within its 29 sq km. The marshland patchwork is a wintering area for aquatic birds, including visitors from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, China and Siberia.

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

Visiting the Park

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

Admission entitles you to one entrance per day; if you want to spend the day inside the park, carry plenty of drinking water, as birdwatching is thirsty work.

One narrow road (no motorised vehicles are permitted past checkpoint 2) runs through the park, and countless embank-

ments thread their way between the shallow wetlands.

Only government-authorized cycle-rickshaws (recognisable by the yellow license plate) are allowed beyond checkpoint 2. You don't pay an admission fee for the drivers, but they charge ₹70 per hour. Some are very knowledgeable. However, these cycle-rickshaws can only travel along the park's larger tracks.

An excellent way to see the park is by hiring a bike/mountain bike (₹25/40 per six hours) at the park entrance. Having a bike is a wonderfully quiet way to travel, and allows you to avoid bottlenecks and take in the serenity on your own. You get a map with your entrance ticket.

Alwar

📍0144 / POP 313,300

Alwar is perhaps the oldest of the Rajasthan kingdoms, forming part of the Matsya territories of Viratnagar in 1500 BC. It became known again in the 18th century under Pratap Singh, who pushed back the rulers of Jaipur to the south and the Jats of Bharatpur to the east, and who successfully resisted the Marathas. It was one of the first Rajput states to ally itself with the fledgling British empire, although British interfer-

ence in Alwar's internal affairs meant that this partnership was not always amicable.

It's the nearest town to **Sariska Tiger Reserve**.

👁 Sights

Bala Qila

HISTORIC BUILDING

This imposing fort, with its 5km ramparts, stands 300m above the city, its fortifications hugging the steep incline. Predating the time of Pratap Singh, it's one of the few forts in Rajasthan built before the rise of the Mughals, who used it as a base for attacking Ranthambhore. Now in ruins, unfortunately, the fort houses a radio transmitter station and parts can only be visited with permission from the superintendent of police. However, this is easy to get: just ask at the superintendent's office in the City Palace Complex.

City Palace Complex

HISTORIC BUILDING

Below the fort sprawls the colourful and convoluted City Palace, or Vinay Vilas Mahal, with massive gates and a tank reflecting a symmetrical series of ghats and pavilions.

Hidden within the City Palace is the excellent **Alwar Museum** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/50; ☀️10am-5pm Tue-Sun). Its eclectic exhibits evoke the extravagance of the maharajas' lifestyle: stunning weapons, stuffed Scottish

WORTH A TRIP

SURAJ MAHL'S PALACE, DEEG

Deeg is a small, rarely visited, dusty tumult of a town. At its centre stands an incongruously glorious palace edged by stately formal gardens. **Suraj Mahl's Palace** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☀️9.30am-5.30pm Sat-Thu) is one of India's most beautiful and carefully proportioned palace complexes. Pick up a map and brochure at the entrance and note that photography is not permitted in some of the *bhavans* (buildings).

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

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

Deeg is about 36km north of Bharatpur, and is an easy day trip (and there's nowhere good to stay) from Bharatpur or Alwar by car. All the roads to Deeg are rough and the buses crowded. Frequent buses run to and from Alwar (₹45, 2½ hours) and Bharatpur (₹25, one hour).

pheasants, royal ivory slippers, erotic miniatures, royal vestments, a solid silver table and stone sculptures, such as an 11th-century sculpture of Vishnu.

Cenotaph of Maharaja Bakhtawar Singh

HISTORIC BUILDING

This double-storey edifice, resting on a platform of sandstone, was built in 1815 by Maharaja Vinay Singh in memory of his father. To gain access to the cenotaph, take the steps on the far left when facing the palace. The cenotaph is also known as the Chhatri of Moosi Rani, after one of the mistresses of Bakhtawar Singh who performed *sati* (self-immolation) on his funeral pyre – after this act she was promoted to wifely status.

Sleeping & Eating

As not many tourists stop here, Alwar's hotels are mostly aimed at budget business travellers and are not particularly good value.

Alwar Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2700012; www.alwarhotel.com; 26 Manu Rd; s/d incl breakfast ₹1750/2500, ste ₹2850; 🍷@☎) Set back from the road in a neatly manicured garden, this well-run hotel has spacious, renovated and comfortable rooms. This is easily the best option in town, and staff can be helpful with general information and sightseeing advice. Tours to Sariska and visits to sporting and swimming clubs can be arranged.

Hotel Aravali

HOTEL \$

(☎2332883; www.hotelaravali.co.in; Nehru Rd; s/d from ₹450/500, with AC from ₹850/950; 🍷@☎) This is also one of the town's better choices, but nevertheless is a bit like *Fawlty Towers* without the humour. Its room options stretch to midrange, though rowdy guests can be a problem. If the hotel isn't full request a quiet room. There's a summer-only pool. Turn left out of the train station and it's about 100m down the road.

Prem Pavitra Bhojnalaya

INDIAN \$

(☎2700925; Old Bus Stand; mains ₹40-70; ☎10am-10pm; 🍷) Alwar's renowned restaurant has been going since 1957. It is in the heart of the old town and serves fresh, tasty pure veg food – try the delicious *aloo parathas* (bread stuffed with spicy potato) and *palak paneer* (unfermented cheese cubes in spinach puree). Do finish off with the special *kheer* (creamy rice pudding).

Angeethi

MULTICUISINE \$

(Alwar Hotel, Manu Rd; mains ₹50-100; ☎Tue-Sun; 🍷) Alwar Hotel's restaurant serves first-rate Indian, Continental and Chinese food; the South Indian selection is particularly good. It's slightly gloomy in the restaurant but you can eat in the pleasant gardens.

Getting There & Away

Bus

From Alwar there are numerous buses to Sariska (₹21, 1½ hours, half-hourly 5.15am to 8.30pm), which go on to Jaipur (₹80, four hours). There are also frequent (bumpy) services to Bharatpur (₹50, four hours) for Keoladeo Ghana National Park, and Deeg (₹45, 2½ hours). Buses to Delhi take two different routes (₹95, via Tijara/Ramgarh four/five hours, half-hourly).

Car

A return taxi to Sariska Tiger Reserve (including a stop at Siliserh) will cost you around ₹1150.

Train

The 2015/6 *Shatabdi Express* passes through Alwar. It departs for Ajmer (AC chair/1st class ₹435/830, four hours) at 8.39am and stops at Jaipur (₹320/605) at 10.45am. For Delhi, it departs at 7.30pm (₹335/640, 2½ hours). The 2461 *Mandore Express* to Jodhpur (2AC/3AC ₹793/578, 10½ hours) departs Alwar at 9.45pm.

Sariska Tiger Reserve

☎0144

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

Although Project Tiger has been in charge of the sanctuary since 1979, there has been a dramatic failure in tiger protection. In 2004 there were an estimated 18 tigers in the park; however, this was called into question after an investigation by the WWF. That report prompted the federal government to investigate what has happened to the tigers of Sariska.

Sariska is in any case a fascinating sanctuary. Unlike most national parks, it opens year-round, although the best time to spot wildlife is November to March, and you'll see most wildlife in the evening.

Sights

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

Kankwari Fort

HISTORIC BUILDING

Deep inside the sanctuary, this imposing small jungle fort, 22km away from Sariska, offers amazing views over the plains of the national park, dotted with red mud-brick villages. A four- to five-hour jeep safari (one to five passengers plus guide) to Kankwari Fort from the Forest Reception Office near the reserve entrance costs ₹1600, plus guide fee (₹150).

Bhangarh

HISTORIC SITE

Around 55km from Sariska, beyond the inner park sanctuary and out in open countryside, is this deserted, well-preserved, notoriously haunted city. It was founded in 1631 by Madho Singh, and had 10,000 dwellings, but was suddenly deserted about 300 years ago for reasons that remain mysterious.

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

Tours

Private cars, including taxis, are limited to sealed roads. The best way to visit the park

is by 4WD gypsy (open-topped, takes five passengers), which can explore off the main tracks. Gypsy safaris start at the park entrance and you'll be quoted ₹1050 for three hours, or ₹3200 for a full day. They can take up to five people. Guides are available (₹150 for three hours).

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

Sleeping & Eating

Alwar Bagh

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2885231; www.alwarbagh.com; r & tent ₹2800, ste ₹3500; 🍷🍷) This is a very peaceful option located in the village of Dhawala, between Alwar (14km) and Sariska (19km). It can arrange pick-up and drop-off from Alwar, and can also arrange safaris of Sariska. The bright heritage-style hotel boasts traditional styling, spotless rooms and romantic tents, an organic orchard, a garden restaurant (breakfast/lunch/dinner ₹150/350/350) and a gorgeous swimming pool.

RTDC Hotel Tiger Den

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2841342; s/d incl breakfast & lunch or dinner; ₹1290/1850, with AC ₹2150/2800; 🍷) Hotel Tiger Den is a quasi-Soviet block, backed by a rambling garden. Accommodation and meals are drab, but the rooms have balconies and occupy a pleasant setting close to

SARISKA'S TIGER TALE

Sariska Tiger Reserve has taken centre stage in one of India's most publicised wildlife dramas. It wasn't until 2005 that it was revealed that the tiger population here had been eliminated.

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

Nevertheless, tigers from Ranthambhore National Park were moved by helicopter to Sariska. The first pair were airlifted in 2008. By 2010 five tigers had been transferred; however, in November 2010 the male of the original pair was found dead in suspicious circumstances. Later it was confirmed that it had been poisoned. Authorities pointed the finger at local villagers who are not supportive of the reintroduction. The underlying problem – the inevitable battle between India's poorest and ever-expanding village populace with rare and phenomenally valuable wildlife on their doorstep – remains largely unresolved despite official plans to relocate and reimburse villagers.

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

the reserve entrance. Bring a mosquito net or repellent.

Sariska Tiger Heaven

HOTEL \$\$

(☎224815; www.sariskatigerheaven.com; s/d with full board ₹3500/4000, with AC ₹4000/5000; 🚗) This is an isolated place about 3km west of the bus stop at Thanagazi village and free pick-up is on offer. Rooms are set in stone-and-tile cottages and have big beds and windowed alcoves. Staff can arrange jeeps and guides to the park and pick-up from Jaipur (₹1200).

i Getting There & Away

Sariska is 35km from Alwar, a convenient town from which to approach the reserve. There are frequent (and crowded) buses from Alwar (₹21, one to 1½ hours, at least hourly) and on to Jaipur (₹75). Buses stop in front of the Forest Reception Office.

Shekhawati

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

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

i Getting Around

The Shekhawati region is crisscrossed by narrow, dusty roads and all towns are served by government or private buses and jam-packed shared jeeps. To zip from town to town more speedily and in greater comfort, hire a taxi for the day. The usual rate for a non-AC taxi is ₹5 to ₹7 per kilometre with a minimum charge of 250km per day.

NAWALGARH

☎01594 / POP 60,000

Nawalgarh is a small town almost at the very centre of the region, and thus makes a great base for exploring. It boasts several fine *havelis*, a colourful, mostly pedestrianised bazaar and some excellent accommodation options.

👁 Sights

Dr Ramnath A Poddar Haveli Museum

MUSEUM

(www.poddarhavelimuseum.org; admission ₹100, camera ₹30; ☎8.30am-6.30pm) Built in 1902 on the eastern side of town, this is one of the region's few buildings to have been thoroughly restored. The paintings of this *haveli* are defined in strong colours, as they must have looked when new. On the ground floor are several galleries on Rajasthani culture, including examples of different schools of Rajasthani painting, turbans, tablas and polystyrene forts.

👉 Tours

Ramesh Jangid at **Apani Dhani** (☎222239; www.apanidhani.com) and his son Rajesh at **Ramesh Jangid's Tourist Pension** (☎224060; www.touristpension.com) are keen to promote sustainable rural tourism, in part by organising village treks, camel-cart safaris and informative guided tours.

🛏 Sleeping & Eating

TOP CHOICE Apani Dhani

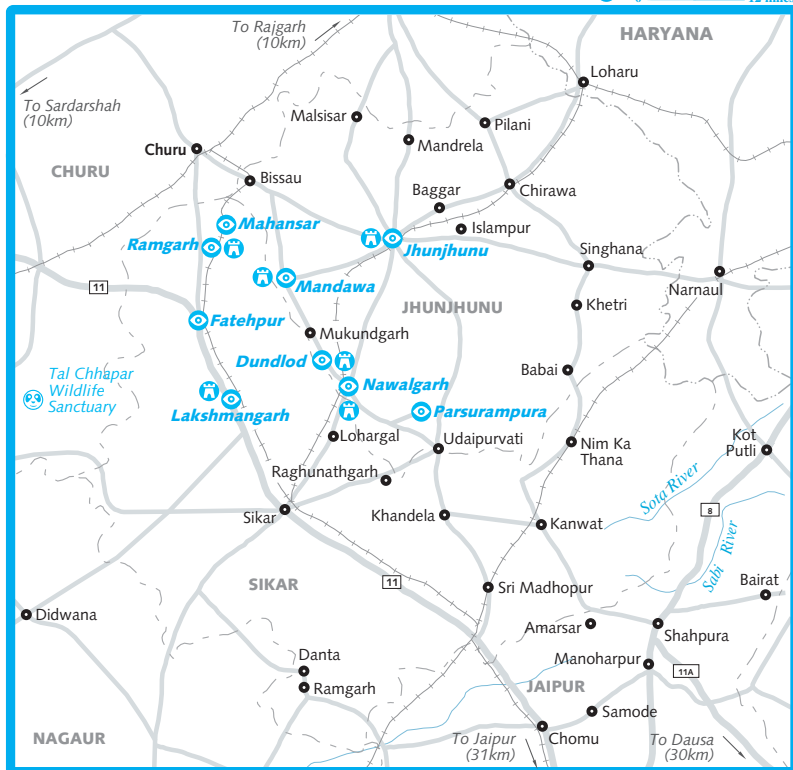
GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎222239; www.apanidhani.com; s/d from ₹995/1350) This award-winning ecotourism venture is a delightful and relaxing place. Rooms are in traditional, cosy mud-hut bungalows, enhanced by thatched roofs and comfortable beds, around a bougainvillea-shaded courtyard. It's on the west side of the Jaipur road. Multilingual Ramesh Jangid runs the show and 5% of the room tariff goes to community projects.

TOP CHOICE Ramesh Jangid's Tourist Pension

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎224060; www.touristpension.com; s/d from ₹400/450) The guesthouse, run by general Rajesh, Ramesh's son, offers homey, clean accommodation in spacious rooms with big beds. Pure veg meals, made with organic ingredients, are available (including a delectable vegetable thali for ₹180). The family also arranges all sorts of tours around Shekhawati.



Shekhawati Guesthouse

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎224658; www.shekhawatiguesthouse.com; s/d ₹400/500, cottages s/d ₹ 700/800, r with AC ₹1000; 🍴📞) This friendly guesthouse is more like a homestay run by a very friendly couple. There are six rooms in the main building plus five atmospheric, thatched-roofed, mud-walled cottages in the garden. The restaurant has received awards for its delicious organic food and we heartily recommend the kheer (rice pudding). It's 4km east of the bus stand (₹60 by taxi). Pick-up from the bus or train station can be arranged, as can cooking lessons.

DS Bungalow

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎9983168916; s ₹350-450, d ₹400-500) Run by a friendly, down-to-earth couple, this simple place with boxy air-cooled rooms is a little out of town on the way to Roop Niwas Palace. The restaurant's home cooking is decent; a full veg/nonveg dinner comes in at ₹250/300.

Getting There & Away Bus

There are RSRTC buses between Nawalgarh and Jaipur (₹85, 3½ hours, every 15 minutes). There's also a daily deluxe bus to Jaipur departing at 8am (₹120, three hours). Buses run to Fatehpur (₹30, hourly) and Mandawa (₹20, every 45 minutes).

JHUNJHUNU

☎01592 / POP 131,000

Shekhawati's most important commercial centre has a different atmosphere from the smaller towns, with lots of traffic, concrete and hustle and bustle as befits the district headquarters.

Sights

Rani Sati Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

(admission free, ☎4am-10pm) In the northeast corner of town is the enormous, multistoried Rani Sati Temple, notorious and hugely popular for commemorating an act of *sati*

SHEKHAWATI'S OUTDOOR GALLERIES

In the 18th and 19th centuries, shrewd Marwari merchants lived frugally and far from home while earning money in India's new commercial centres. They sent the bulk of their vast fortunes back to their families in Shekhawati to construct grand *havelis* (traditional, ornately decorated mansions) to show their neighbours how well they were doing and to compensate their families for their long absences. Merchants competed with one another to build ever more grand edifices – homes, temples, step-wells – which were richly decorated, both inside and out, with painted murals.

The artists responsible for these acres of decoration largely belonged to the caste of *kumhars* (potters) and were both the builders and painters of the *havelis*. Known as *chajeras* (masons), many were commissioned from beyond Shekhawati – particularly from Jaipur, where they had been employed to decorate the new capital's palaces – and others flooded in from further afield to offer their skills. Soon, there was a cross-pollination of ideas and techniques, with local artists learning from the new arrivals.

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

For a full rundown on the history, people, towns and buildings of the area, try tracking down a copy of *The Painted Towns of Shekhawati* by Ilay Cooper, which can be picked up at bookshops in the region or Jaipur. Another good book, available locally, is *Shekhawati: Painted Townships* by Kishore Singh.

(self-immolation) by a merchant's wife in 1595.

Khetri Mahal


HISTORIC BUILDING

(admission ₹20) A series of tiny laneways at the western end of Nehru Bazaar (a short rickshaw drive north of the bus station) leads to the imposing Khetri Mahal, a small palace dating from around 1770 and once one of Shekhawati's most sophisticated and beautiful buildings. Unfortunately, it now has a desolate, forlorn atmosphere, but the architecture remains a superb open-sided collection of intricate arches and columns. There are good views over the town from here, stretching across to the old Muslim quarter, Pirzada Mahalla, and its mosques.

Courses

If you are interested in tuition in traditional Shekhawati painting, contact Laxmi Kant Jangid at the Hotel Jamuna Resort or Hotel Shiv Shekhawati. Laxmi also runs hands-on cookery courses at Hotel Jamuna Resort; these cost around ₹300 per person.

Sleeping & Eating

 **Hotel Jamuna Resort** HOTEL \$\$
(☎512696; www.hoteljamunaresort.com; s/d from ₹1500/2000, d with AC from ₹1200; 🍷🍷🍷) Perched on a hill overlooking town and

operated by Laxmi Kant Jangid (who also runs Hotel Shiv Shekhawati), Hotel Jamuna Resort has all that you need. Rooms in the older wing are either vibrantly painted with murals or decorated with traditional mirror-work, while the rooms in the new wing are modern and airy.

Hotel Shiv Shekhawati

HOTEL \$

(☎232651; www.shivshekhawati.com; Khemi Shakti Rd; s/d from ₹600/800; 🍷🍷) East of the town centre, Shiv Shekhawati is the best budget option with plain but squeaky-clean rooms. It's 600m from the private bus stand in a quiet area on the eastern edge of town. The affable owner, Laxmi Kant Jangid (usually found at Hotel Jamuna Resort), is a wealth of knowledge on the villages of Shekhawati and tours can be organised here.

Information

Tourist Reception Centre (☎232909; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Fri) Out of the town centre at the Churu Bypass Rd, Mandawa Circle. The office has helpful, cheery staff, but all they can provide are a few brochures and a basic map of the town and region.

Getting There & Away

Regular buses run between Jhunjhunu and Jaipur (₹80, four hours). Numerous buses go to Mandawa (₹15, one hour) and Nawalgarh (₹20, one hour).

FATEHPUR

☎01571 / POP 89,000

Established in 1451 as a capital for Muslim nawabs, Fatehpur was their stronghold for centuries before it was taken over by the Shekhawati Rajputs in the 18th century. It's a busy little town, with masses of *havelis*, many in a sad state of disrepair, but with a few notable exceptions.

Haveli Nadine Prince (☎231479; www.cultural-centre.com; adult/child ₹100/50; ☺10am-7pm) has been restored to its former dazzling glory and the admission includes a detailed guided tour. The 1802 building is owned by French artist Nadine Le Prince, who has turned it into an art gallery and cultural centre, and has done much to publicise the plight of Shekhawati

Some other Fatehpur highlights include the nearby **Jagannath Singhania Haveli**; the **Mahavir Prasad Goenka Haveli** (often locked, but with superb paintings); **Geori Shankar Haveli**, with mirrored mosaics on the antechamber ceiling; **Harikrishnan Das Sarogi Haveli**, with a colourful facade and iron lacework; and **Vishnunath Keria Haveli**, which depicts Radha and Krishna in flying gondolas.

🛏 Sleeping & Eating**Haveli Cultural Centre Guest House & Art Cafe**

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$

(☎233024; www.cultural-centre.com; r from ₹800; dishes ₹50-150) This extraordinarily restored *haveli* and cultural centre has opened up its artist residence rooms to travellers with several traditional-style rooms overlooking the central courtyard. Tariff is room only, with breakfast ₹150 and dinner ₹300. To just visit the Art Café you'll have to pay to get into the *haveli*, but this is a good option for a light lunch. It's a cosy place with low tables, serving food such as omelettes, toast and rum-blazed bananas, as well as Indian snacks.

📍 Getting There & Around

At the private bus stand, on the Churu-Sikar road, buses leave for Jhunjhunu (₹25, one hour) and Mandawa (₹20, one hour). From the RSRTC bus stand, which is further south down this road, buses leave for Jaipur (₹80, 3½ hours, every 15 minutes).

MANDAWA

☎01592 / POP 20,717

Mandawa is the preferred base for travellers to Shekhawati. Settled in the 18th century and fortified by the dominant merchant

families, it remains a relatively subdued market town, though the very young, very persistent touts are surprisingly forceful.

Binsidhar Newatia Haveli (now the State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur) has curious paintings on its outer eastern wall – a boy using a telephone, a European woman in a chauffeur-driven car, and the Wright brothers in flight. The **Gulab Rai Ladia Haveli**, southwest of the fort, has some defaced erotic images.

🛏 Sleeping & Eating**Hotel Shekhawati**

HOTEL \$

(☎9314698079; www.hotelshekwati.com; r ₹350-1800; ☺@) Near Mukundgarh Rd, the only real budget choice in town is run by a retired bank manager and his son (who's also a registered tourist guide). Bright, comically bawdy murals painted by artistic former guests give the rooms a splash of colour. Tasty meals are served on the peaceful rooftop, and competitively priced camel, horse and jeep tours can also be arranged.

Hotel Mandawa Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎223088; www.hotelmandawa.com; s/d/ste from 1450/1950/4250; ☺) Close to Sonathia Gate and Subhash Chowk, this hotel is set in a glorious, restored 19th-century *haveli* with rooms surrounding a painted courtyard. The cheapest rooms are small, so it's worth splashing out on a suite, filled with arches, window seats and countless small windows.

Hotel Castle Mandawa

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎223124; www.castlemandawa.com; s/d from ₹4000/4500; ☺@☺) Mandawa's large up-market hotel in the town's converted fort attempts a slightly twee medieval atmosphere but is still a swish and generally comfortable choice. Some rooms are far better appointed than others (the best are the suites in the tower, with four-poster and swing beds), so check a few before you settle in.

📍 Getting There & Away

There are buses to Nawalgarh (₹20, 45 minutes), Fatehpur (₹20, one hour), Bissau (₹18, 1½ hours) and Ramgarh (₹25, 1½ hours).

Ajmer

☎0145 / POP 557,000

Ajmer is a bustling chaotic city around 130km southwest of Jaipur. It surrounds the tranquil lake of Ana Sagar, and is itself ringed by rugged Aravalli hills. Ajmer is



Rajasthan's most important site in terms of Islamic history and heritage. It contains one of India's most important Muslim pilgrimage centres – the shrine of Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti, a venerated Sufi saint who founded the Chishtiya order, the prime Sufi order in India today. As well as some superb examples of early Muslim architecture, Ajmer is also a significant centre for the Jain religion, possessing an amazing golden Jain temple. However, most travellers just use Ajmer as a stepping stone to nearby Pushkar, a supremely sacred town to Hindus and a former hippy hang-out.

🕒 Sights

Ana Sagar

LAKE

This large lake, created in the 12th century by damming the River Luni, is set against the blue-grey hills that are reflected on its oily surface. On its bank are two green parks, the **Subash Bagh** and **Dault Bagh**,

containing a series of marble pavilions erected in 1637 by Shah Jahan.

Dargah of Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti

SUFI SHRINE

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

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

Ajmer

📍 Top Sights

- Dargah of Khwaja Muin-ud-din
Chishti A4

📍 Sights

- 1 Adhai-din-ka-Jhonpra A4
- 2 Akbar's Palace B3
Government Museum (see 2)
- 3 Nasiyan (Red) Temple B2
Taragarh (see 1)

🏠 Sleeping

- 4 Badnor House C1
- 5 Haveli Heritage Inn C3

- 6 Hotel Ajmeru B3

🍴 Eating

- 7 Elite C4
- 8 Honeydew C4
- 9 Madina Hotel C4

Information

- 10 Tourist Reception Centre C1
- 11 Tourist Reception Centre C3

Transport

- 12 Main Bus Stand D1
Reservations Office (see 11)

The first gate is the **Nizam Gate**, built in 1915 up some steps to protect it from the rains. The green and white mosque, **Akbari Masjid**, on the right was constructed by Akbar in 1571 and is now Moiniua Usmania Darul-Uloom, an Arabic and Persian School for religious education. The second gate was built by Shah Jahan, and is often called the Nakkarkhana because it has two large *nakkharas* (drums) fixed above it.

The third gate, **Buland Darwaza**, dates from the 16th century. It's tall – about 28m high – and whitewashed, and leads into the dargah courtyard. Flanking the entrance of the courtyard are the *degs* (large iron cauldrons), one donated by Akbar in 1567, the other by Jehangir in 1631, for offerings for the poor.

The saint's tomb has a marble dome, and the tomb inside is surrounded by a silver platform. Pilgrims believe that the saint's spirit will intercede on their behalf in matters of illness, business or personal problems, so the notes and holy string attached to the railings around are thanks or requests.

Pilgrims and Sufis come from all over the world on the anniversary of the saint's death, The Urs, in the seventh month of the lunar calendar, Jyaistha.

Adhai-din-ka-Jhonpra

HISTORIC SITE

Beyond the dargah, on the town outskirts, are the extraordinary ruins of the Adhai-din-ka-Jhonpra (Two-and-a-Half-Day Building) mosque. According to legend, construction in 1153 took 2½ days. Others say it was named after a festival lasting 2½ days. It was built as a Sanskrit college, but in 1198 Mohammed of Ghori seized Ajmer and con-

verted the building into a mosque by adding a seven-arched wall covered with Islamic calligraphy in front of the pillared hall.

Although in need of restoration, it's an exquisite piece of architecture, with soaring domes, pillars and a beautiful arched screen, largely built from pieces of Jain and Hindu temples.

Taragarh

FORT

(Star Fort; admission free; ☀sunrise to sunset) About 3km and a steep 1½-hour climb beyond the Adhai-din-ka-Jhonpra mosque, the ancient Taragarh commands a superb view over the city (accessible by car). Built by Ajaipal Chauhan, the town's founder, it saw lots of military action during Mughal times and was later used as a British sanatorium.

Nasiyan (Red) Temple

JAIN TEMPLE

(Prithviraj Marg; admission ₹10; ☀8am-4.30pm) This marvellous Jain temple was built in 1865. It's also known as the Golden Temple, due to its amazing display – its double-storey temple hall is filled with a huge golden diorama depicting the Jain concept of the ancient world, with 13 continents and oceans, the intricate golden city of Ayodhya, flying peacock and elephant gondolas, and gilded elephants with many tusks.

Akbar's Palace

MUSEUM

Not far from the main post office, Akbar built this imposing building in 1570 – partly as a pleasure retreat, but mainly to keep an eye on pesky local chiefs. This is just part of the original impressive fortifications. It houses the underwhelming **government museum** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/50; ☀9.45am-5.15pm Tue-Sun), with a small collection of old weapons, miniature paintings, ancient rock

inscriptions and stone sculptures that date back to the 8th century.

Sleeping

Haveli Heritage Inn

HOTEL \$

(☎26221607; www.haveliheritageinn.com; Kutchery Rd; r ₹650-1850; 📍) Set in a 140-year-old *haveli*, this is a welcoming city-centre oasis and arguably Ajmer's best budget choice. The high-ceilinged rooms are spacious, simply decorated, air-cooled and set well back from the busy road. There's a pleasant, grassy courtyard and the hotel is infused with a family atmosphere, complete with home-cooked meals.

Badnor House

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎2627579; www.badnorhouse.com; Civil Lines; d incl breakfast ₹2500, ste ₹2800; 📍) This guesthouse provides an excellent opportunity to stay with a delightful family. The down-to-earth hospitality includes three new heritage-style doubles and an older-style, spacious and comfortable self-contained suite with a private courtyard.

Mansingh Palace

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2425956; www.mansinghotels.com; Circular Rd; s/d from ₹4600/5400, ste ₹9000; 📍📺📶) This modern place, on the shores of Ana Sagar, is rather out of the way, but has attractive and comfortable rooms, some with views and balconies. The hotel has a shady garden, a bar and a good restaurant, the Sheesh Mahal.

Hotel Ajmeru

HOTEL \$

(☎2431103; Khailand Market; s/d from ₹500/600, with AC ₹900/1100; 📍) This hotel with a veg restaurant and small tidy rooms can be found just past the narrow Kotwali Gate off Prithviraj Marg. It's convenient to the train station, Jain Temple and Dargah.

Eating

Honeydew

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(☎2622498; Station Rd; mains ₹90-290; ☀9am-11pm) The Honeydew offers a great selection of veg and nonveg Indian, Chinese and Continental food in a pleasant, clean, relaxed, but overly dim, atmosphere. It has long been one of Ajmer's best, and is the restaurant of choice for Mayo College students' midterm treat. The ice cream, milkshakes and floats will keep you cool.

Madina Hotel

NORTH INDIAN \$

(Station Rd; mains ₹30-100; ☀9am-11pm) Handy if you're waiting for a train (it's opposite the station), this simple, open-

to-the-street eatery cooks up cheap veg and nonveg fare, with specialities such as chicken Mughlai and *rumali roti* (huge paper-thin chapati).

Elite

VEGETARIAN \$

(☎2429544; Station Rd; mains ₹50-105; ☀11am-11pm) Elite has a welcoming ambience attracting families to feast on the town's best value thali (₹66), as well as South Indian and tandoori veg.

Information

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

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

HDFC ATM (Sadar Patel Marg)

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

Satguru's Internet (60-61 Kutchery Rd; per hr ₹20; ☀9am-10pm)

State Bank of India (Civil Lines) Changes travellers cheques and foreign currency and has an ATM.

Tourist Reception Centre train station (☀9am-6pm); RTDC Hotel Khadim (☎2627426; ☀9am-6pm Mon-Fri);

Getting There & Away

Bus

There are frequent RSRTC buses of various grades and comfort leaving from the busy main stand to destinations listed in the following table. Fares quoted are for express and/or AC services either Gold Line or Volvo. The enquiry number is ☎2429398.

In addition, there are numerous private buses to these destinations – many companies have offices on Kutchery Rd.

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)
Agra	232	10
Ahmedabad	311	13
Bharatpur	195	8
Bikaner	155	8
Bundi	110	5
Chittorgarh	115	5
Delhi	265/570 AC	9
Indore	250	12
Jaipur	110/200 AC	2½
Jaisalmer	315	10

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)
Jodhpur	125/300 AC	6
Kishangarh	20	15
Pushkar	10	½
Udaipur	170/200 AC	8

Train

There are no tourist quotas for many Ajmer trains, so book early. Use the services of an agent or go to booth 5 at the train station's **reservations office** (☎8am-2pm & 2.15-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun).

Ajmer is a busy station on the Delhi-Jaipur-Ahmedabad-Mumbai line. The 12016/5 *Shatabdi Express* runs between Ajmer and Delhi (AC chair/1st class ₹645/1200, four hours) via Jaipur (₹300/575). It leaves Delhi at 6.05am and arrives in Ajmer at 12.45pm. Going the other way, the train leaves Ajmer at 3.50pm, arriving in Jaipur at 5.35pm and in Delhi at 10.45pm. There's also the 12957 *Rajdhani Express* to Delhi (3AC/2AC/1AC ₹660/880/1480, seven hours), which leaves Ajmer at 12.40am.

The 19105/6 *Delhi-Ahmedabad Mail* departs from Ajmer at 8.45pm and arrives in Delhi (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹200/525/725/1200) at 5.20am. Heading for Gujarat, the train leaves Ajmer at 7.30am and arrives in Ahmedabad (₹227/608/832/1385) at 6.40pm.

The 12195/6 *Ajmer Agra Fort City Express* leaves at 2.50pm, arriving in Agra Fort (2nd class/AC chair ₹111/393) at 9.30pm via Jaipur (₹65/222, 4.55pm).

The 12992 *Ajmer Udaipur City Express* leaves at 4.15pm, arriving in Udaipur (2nd class/AC chair ₹100/347) at 9.30pm via Chittorgarh (₹75/263, 7.15pm).

Pushkar

☎0145 / POP 14,789

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

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

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

Pushkar is only 11km from Ajmer but separated from it by Nag Pahar, the Snake Mountain.

👁️ Sights

Temples

HINDU TEMPLE

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

Brahma Temple

Most famous is the Brahma Temple, said to be one of the few such temples in the world as a result of a curse by Brahma's consort, Saraswati. The temple is marked by a red spire, and over the entrance gateway is the *hans* (goose symbol) of Brahma. Inside, the floor and walls are engraved with dedications to the dead.

Saraswati Temple

The one-hour trek up to the hilltop Saraswati Temple overlooking the lake is best made before dawn (to beat the heat and capture the best light), though the views are fantastic at any time of day.

Pap Mochani (Gayatri) Temple

The sunrise views over town from the closer Pap Mochani (Gayatri) Temple, reached by a track behind the Marwar bus stand, are also well worth the 30-minute climb.

Ghats

BATHING GHAT

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

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

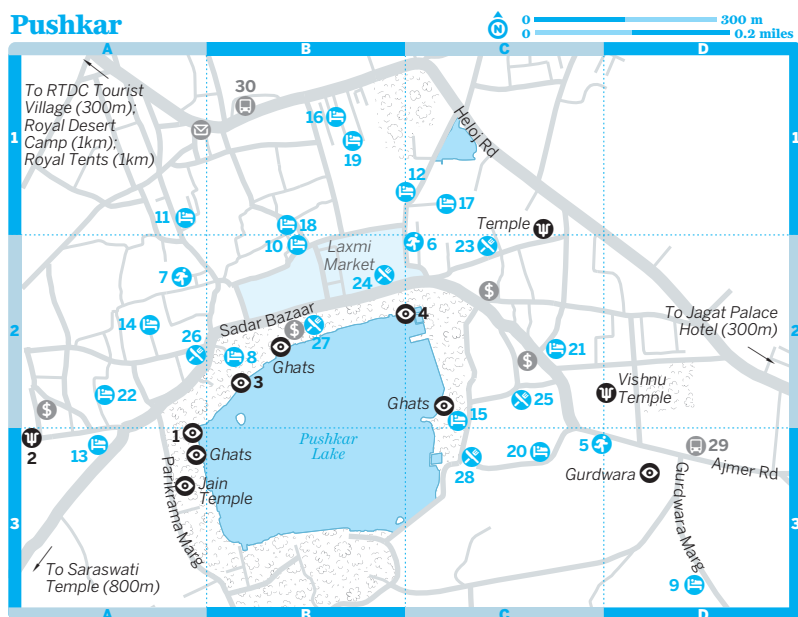
🙏 Activities

The following hotels allow nonguests use of their swimming pools: Jagat Palace Hotel (₹300 per person), Hotel Navaratan Palace (₹100) and Green Park Resort (₹30).

Shannu's Riding School

HORSE RIDING

(☎2772043; <http://shannu.weebly.com>; Panch Kund Marg; ride/lessons per hr ₹350) Long-



time Pushkar resident Marc can organise riding lessons and horse safaris on his graceful Marwari steeds. On top of that you can also stay here, nice and close to the horses.

Dr NS Mathur

REFLEXOLOGY

(☎2622777, 9828103031; Ajmer Rd; ☎10.30am-6.30pm) Provides back, hand and foot reflexology (from ₹250), which will most certainly take your mind off any pains you might have had. The doctor also teaches reiki and his daughter teaches yoga and provides beauty treatments.

Roshi Hiralal Verma

REIKI, YOGA

For reiki, yoga and shiatsu, Roshi is based at the Ambika Guesthouse. Costs depend on the duration and type of session.

🎓 Courses

Saraswati Music School

MUSIC

(☎2773124; Mainon Ka Chowk) Teaches classical *tabla* (drums), flute, singing and *kathak* (classical dance). For music, contact Birju on ☎9828297784, who's been playing for around 20 years, and charges from ₹350 for two hours. He often conducts evening performances (7pm to 8pm), and also sells instruments. For dance, contact Hemant on ☎9829333548.

Cooking Bahar

COOKING

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

Dr NS Mathur

REIKI

(☎2622777, 9828103031; Ajmer Rd; ☎10.30am-6.30pm) Reflexologist Dr NS Mathur is also a teacher of reiki (I/II/III ₹1500/3000/10,000).

👉 Tours

Camel Safaris

Plenty of people in Pushkar offer **camel safaris** (around ₹175 per hour), which are a good way to explore the starkly beautiful landscape – a mixture of desert and the rocky hills – around town. It's best to ask your hotel, a travel agent or other travellers to recommend somebody who organises good trips.

For longer camel treks, Pushkar makes a convenient starting point. Trips start at around ₹700 per day, and head out to Jodhpur (six to seven days) and Jaisalmer (10 to 12 days). See p190 for general details about camel treks. Numerous operators line Panch Kund Marg.

Pushkar

📍 Sights

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

🍳 Activities, Courses & Tours

- Cooking Bahar..... (see 7)
- 5 Dr NS Mathur..... C3
- 6 Roshi Hiralai Verma..... C2
- 7 Saraswati Music School..... A2

🛏 Sleeping

- 8 Bharatpur Palace..... B2
- 9 Green Park Resort..... D3
- 10 Hotel Diamond..... B2
- 11 Hotel Everest..... A1
- 12 Hotel Kanhaia Haveli..... C1
- 13 Hotel Navratan Palace..... A3
- 14 Hotel Paramount Palace..... A2
- 15 Hotel Pushkar Palace..... C2
- 16 Hotel White House..... B1
- 17 Inn Seventh Heaven..... C1
- 18 Mayur Guesthouse..... B1

- 19 Milkman Guesthouse..... B1
- Pushkar Inn's Hotel..... (see 28)
- 20 RTDC Hotel Sarovar..... C3
- 21 Shri Shyam Krishna
Guesthouse..... C2
- 22 Sun-n-Moon..... A2

🍽 Eating

- 23 Baba Restaurant..... C2
- 24 Honey & Spice..... B2
- 25 Om Shiva..... C2
- 26 Out of the Blue..... A2
- 27 Raju Terrace Garden
Restaurant..... B2
- Sixth Sense..... (see 17)
- 28 Sunset Cafe..... C3

Information

- Tourist Reception Centre..... (see 20)

Transport

- 29 Ajmer Bus Stand..... D3
- 30 Marwar Bus Stand..... B1

🛏 Sleeping

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

TOP CHOICE Inn Seventh Heaven BOULIQUE HOTEL \$\$

(☎5105455; www.inn-seventh-heaven.com; Chhiti Basti; r ₹550-2400; 🍷🍷) You enter this lovingly converted *haveli* through heavy wooden doors into an incense-perfumed courtyard, centred with a marble fountain. There are just 12 individually decorated rooms on three levels, with traditionally crafted furniture and comfortable beds. On the roof you'll find the excellent Sixth Sense restaurant as well as sofas and swing chairs for relaxing with a book.

Hotel Pushkar Palace HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2773001; www.hotelpushkarpalace.com; s/d from ₹4225/5150, ste ₹10,850; 🍷🍷) Once belonging to the maharaja of Kishangarh, this top-end hotel boasts a romantic lakeside setting. Rooms have carved wooden furniture and beds, and the suites look directly onto

the lake. There's also a pleasant outdoor dining area overlooking the lake.

Jagat Palace Hotel HOTEL \$\$

(☎2772953; www.hotelpushkarpalace.com; Ajmer Rd; s/d ₹3575/4225; 🍷🍷) This is a lovely heritage-style hotel in new but traditional-style buildings resembling a palace. It's in a quiet spot on the town's outskirts and offers romantic bedrooms with carved wooden furniture and lovely bathrooms. There are tempting packages including meals and low-season discounts.

Hotel Everest HOTEL \$

(☎2773417; www.pushkarhoteleverest.com; r ₹200-600, with AC ₹850; 🍷🍷) This welcoming budget hotel is secreted in the quiet laneways north of Sadar Bazaar and is convenient to the bazaar and the mela ground. The rooms are variable in size, colourful and spotless, and the beds are comfortable. The roof is a pleasant retreat for meals or relaxation.

Hotel Shannu's Ranch Inn BOULIQUE HOTEL \$

(☎2772043; http://shannus.weebly.com; Panch Kund Marg; r ₹600, ste ₹1200) Especially for horse lovers but not exclusively so, this relaxed, family-run hotel is just a short walk from the lake. There is a large garden compound featuring

PUSHKAR CAMEL FAIR

Come the month of Kartika, the eighth lunar month of the Hindu calendar and one of the holiest, Thar camel drivers spruce up their ships of the desert and start the long walk to Pushkar in time for Kartik Purnima (Full Moon). Each year around 200,000 people converge here, bringing with them some 50,000 camels, horses and cattle. The place becomes an extraordinary swirl of colour, sound and movement, thronged with musicians, mystics, tourists, traders, animals, devotees and camera crews.

Trading begins a week before the official fair (a good time to arrive to see the serious business), but by the time the RTDC *mela* (fair) starts, business takes a back seat and the bizarre sidelines (snake charmers, children balancing on poles etc) jostle onto centre stage. Even the cultural program is bizarre: moustache contests, turban-tying contests, or seeing how many people can balance on a camel.

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

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

It usually takes place in October or November and because dates can change the following are indicative only: 2 to 10 November 2011, 20 to 28 November 2012, 9 to 17 November 2013 and 1 to 8 November 2014.

the family home, separate guest accommodation and, of course, the stables housing Marc's beloved Marwari horses. The large suites easily accommodate a family of five.

Hotel Kanhaia Haveli

HOTEL \$

(☎2772146; <http://pushkarhotelkanhaia.com>; Chotti Basti; r ₹200-1200, s/d without bathroom ₹150/200; 🍷🍷) With a vast range of rooms from cheap budget digs to AC suites you are sure to find a room and price that suits. As you spend more dosh the rooms get bigger and lighter with more windows and even balconies.

Bharatpur Palace

HOTEL \$

(☎2772320; bharatpurpalace_pushkar@yahoo.co.in; r ₹200-800; 🍷) This rambling old building occupies one of the best spots in Pushkar, on the upper levels adjacent to Ghandi Ghat. It features aesthetic blue-washed simplicity: bare as bones rooms with unsurpassed views of the holy lake. There's a variety of rooms with or without bathrooms, running hot water and AC. Room 1 is the most romantic place to wake up: it's surrounded on three sides by the lake.

Sun-n-Moon

HOTEL \$

(☎2772883; r ₹400) With a neohippy vibe, the Sun-n-Moon has a lovely, serene courtyard

surrounding a bodhi tree and a small shrine. It's a very quiet and relaxing place to stay in inexpensive, simple but clean rooms with excellent food.

Shri Shyam Krishna Guesthouse

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2772461; skguesthouse@yahoo.com; Sadar Bazaar; s/d ₹300/500, without bathroom ₹200/300) Housed in a lovely old blue-washed building with lawns and gardens, this guesthouse has ashram austerity and genuine friendly management. Some of the cheaper rooms are cell-like, though all share the simple, authentic ambience.

Hotel Navaratan Palace

HOTEL \$

(☎2772145; www.pushkarnavaratanpalace.co.in; s/d from ₹300/400, with AC from ₹600/700; 🍷🍷) Located close to the Brahma Temple, this hotel has a lovely enclosed garden with a fabulous pool (₹100 for nonguests), children's playground and pet tortoises. The rooms are clean, small and crammed with carved wood-en furniture.

Pushkar Inn's Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2772010; hotelpushkarinns@yahoo.com; Pushkar Lake; s/d ₹650/700, r with AC ₹1200; 🍷) A charming little hotel comprising a row of clean and bright rooms, backed by a garden

and orchard, which catch the breeze from the lake, and that is mostly good, though some wafts are less than holy. The best rooms have lake views.

Hotel New Park

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2772464; www.newparkpushkar.com; Panch Kund Marg; s/d ₹1050/1200; 🍷@🍷) This quiet hotel is blissfully rural, located among fields of red roses, but still an easy walk to/from the lake. Smart, modern rooms with TVs and balconies overlook an inviting pool, gardens and a backdrop of hills.

Green Park Resort

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2773532; www.greenparkpushkar.com; Gurdwara Marg; s/d ₹800/1200; 🍷🍷) This welcoming place has 18 spiffy rooms all with marble floors, comfy beds and satellite TV. The swimming pool is big and inviting (₹30 for nonguests) and there's a relaxing rooftop restaurant. It's only a 10-minute stroll to town along a shady country lane.

Hotel Paramount Palace

HOTEL \$

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

Milkman Guesthouse

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2773452; vinodmilkman@hotmail.com; Mali Mohalla; r ₹200-700, without bathroom ₹100; 🍷@🍷) Milkman is a cosy guesthouse in a backstreet location with a relaxing rooftop retreat featuring the Ooh-la-la Café and a lawn with high-altitude tortoises. The widely varying rooms are all brightly decorated with paintings and though some of the cheaper rooms are small and doorways are low, the bright colours, cleanliness and friendly family atmosphere keep this place cheerful.

Hotel White House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2772147; www.pushkarwhitehouse.com; r ₹250-650, with AC ₹650-1350; 🍷@) This place is indeed white with spotless rooms, though some rooms are decidedly on the small side and the stairwells are narrow and steep. There is good traveller fare and fine views from the plant-filled rooftop restaurant. Yoga is offered.

Mayur Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2772302; www.mayurguesthouse.com; Holi ka Chowk; r ₹200-700, s without bathroom ₹100)

A pleasant blue-washed place, with neat, unspectacular rooms around a tiny leafy courtyard. Upstairs rooms have balconies and there's a cheerful welcome and more views from the rooftop.

Hotel Diamond

HOTEL \$

(☎9829206787; Holi ka Chowk; r ₹300, s without bathroom ₹150-200) In a quiet part of town, Diamond has tiny cell-like rooms around a small tranquil courtyard. The better rooms with attached bathrooms are upstairs.

TOURIST VILLAGE

During the camel fair, the RTDC and many private operators set up a sea of tents near the fairground. You're advised to book ahead. These all have private bathroom.

RTDC Tourist Village

LUXURY TENTS \$\$

(☎2772074; s/d huts from ₹4500/5000, s/d tents from ₹6000/6500; 🍷) This option has various permanent huts and semipermanent tents that are usually booked out by tour groups well in advance. Rates include all meals.

Royal Tents

LUXURY TENTS \$\$\$

(www.jodhpurheritage.com; tents s/d ₹14,500/16,500; 🍷) Owned by the former royal family of Jodhpur, these are probably the most luxurious tents you'll ever come across, with comfy beds, verandahs and deck chairs, and running hot and cold water. Note that meals cost extra.

Royal Desert Camp

LUXURY TENTS \$\$\$

(☎2772001; www.hotelpushkarpalace.com; tents s/d ₹10,000/11,500; 🍷) Further away from the fairground than Royal Tents, but another super luxurious option run by owners of Jagat Palace Hotel and Hotel Pushkar Palace. Again, note that meals are extra.

Eating

Pushkar has plenty of atmospheric eateries with lake views and menus reflecting backpacker tastes and preferences. Strict vegetarianism, forbidding even eggs, limits the range of ingredients, but the cooks usually make up for this with imagination and by using fresh ingredients.

Sixth Sense

MULTICUISINE \$

(Inn Seventh Heaven, Chotti Basti; mains ₹50-180; ☺8.30am-4pm & 6-10pm) This chilled rooftop restaurant is a great place to head even if you didn't score a room in its popular hotel. Indian seasonal vegetables and rice, vegetable sizzlers, pasta and pizzas are all excellent. As

are the filter coffee and fresh juice blends. Its ambience is immediately relaxing and the pulley apparatus that delivers the delicious food from the ground-floor kitchen is enthralling. Save room for the desserts, such as the excellent homemade tarts.

Little Italy

ITALIAN \$

(Panchkund Marg; mains ₹80-200; ☺10am-11pm) This superb garden restaurant has excellent thin-crust, wood-fired pizzas and imported pasta with tasty sauces. As well as homemade pesto and gnocchi, there are some Indian and Israeli dishes and fresh ground Kerala coffee.

Sunset Café

MULTICUISINE \$

(mains ₹75-200; ☺7.30am-midnight) Right on the eastern ghats, this cafe has sublime lake views. It offers the usual traveller menu, including curries, pizza and pasta, plus there's a German bakery serving OK cakes. The lakeshore setting is perfect at sunset and gathers a crowd.

Out of the Blue

MULTICUISINE \$

(mains ₹50-180; ☺8am-11pm) Distinctly a deeper shade of blue in this sky-blue town, Out of the Blue is a new addition to the horde of lakeview restaurants. The menu ranges from noodles and *momos* (Tibetan dumplings) to pizza, pasta and pancakes. A nice touch is the espresso coffee, which can also be enjoyed at street level.

Honey & Spice

MULTICUISINE \$

(Laxmi Market off Sadar Bazaar; mains ₹75-120; ☺7am-7pm) Run by a friendly man who is a mine of information, this tiny breakfast and lunch place has delicious South Indian coffee and home-made banana cake. Soups and hearty vegetable stews served with brown rice are thoroughly healthy.

Raju Terrace Garden Restaurant

MULTICUISINE \$

(Sadar Bazaar; mains ₹40-90; ☺10am-10pm) This relaxed rooftop restaurant serves lots of dishes for the homesick (for example, shepherd's pie, pizza and baked potatoes) and other tame Indian food. It's on a pleasant terrace that's filled with pot plants and fairy lights and has great views of the lake. Note the service can be super slow.

Om Shiva

MULTICUISINE \$

(☺5105045; mains ₹70-150; ☺7.30am-late) This traveller stalwart continues to satisfy with its ₹80 buffet. Wood-fired pizzas and espresso coffee are new additions to the try-anything menu.

Baba Restaurant

MULTICUISINE \$

(☺2772858; mains ₹60-120; ☺8am-10pm)

Tucked away, east of Sadar Bazaar, and open to the street, Baba has good pizzas and Israeli food and a chilled atmosphere.

Shopping

Pushkar's Sadar Bazaar is lined with enchanting little shops and is a good place for picking up gifts. Many of the vibrant textiles come from the Barmer district south of Jaipur. There's plenty of silver and beaded jewellery catering to foreign tastes, and some old tribal pieces, too. Coloured glass lamps are another appealing buy (you can ponder trying to get them home intact), as are embroidered and mirrored wall hangings. The range of Indian-music CDs makes this market an excellent place for sampling local tunes.

Information

Post office (off Heloj Rd, ☺9.30am-5pm) Near the Marwar bus stand.

Punjab National Bank ATM (Sadar Bazaar; ☺9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat) ATM inside branch accepts Cirrus and MasterCard but not Visa cards. There's a second ATM near the SBBJ ATM (north of the Brahma temple).

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

Thomas Cook (Sadar Bazaar; ☺9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Changes cash and travellers cheques and also does train and flight ticketing.

Tourist Reception Centre (☺2772040; ☺10am-5pm) In the grounds of RTDC Hotel Sarovar; staff will give out a free map.

Dangers & Annoyances

Priests – some genuine, some not – will approach you near the ghats and offer to do a *pooja* (prayer) for which you'll receive a 'Pushkar passport' (a red ribbon around your wrist). Others proffer flowers (to avoid trouble, don't take any flowers you are offered). Some of these priests genuinely live off the donations of others and this is a tradition that goes back centuries. Others can be pushy and aggressive. Walk away if you feel bullied and agree on a price before taking a ribbon or flowers.

During the camel fair, Pushkar is besieged by pickpockets working the crowded bazaars. You can avoid the razor gang by not using thin-walled daypacks and by carrying your daypack in front of you. Fortunately, there is very little motorised traffic in the main bazaar, making it a pleasur-

able place to explore at leisure – though watch out for stray motorbikes.

i Getting There & Away

Frequent buses to/from Ajmer (₹8, 30 minutes) stop on the road heading eastwards out of town; other buses leave from the Marwar bus stand to the north.

Local travel agencies sell tickets for private buses – you should shop around. These buses generally leave from Ajmer, but the agencies should provide you with free connecting transport. Those that leave from Pushkar usually stop for an hour or more in Ajmer anyway. Be warned that some buses (particularly those via Jodhpur) don't go all the way; in spite of promises, they'll involve a change of bus and an extra fare. Some destinations and fares from Pushkar:

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)
Ajmer	express/local 8/7	½
Bundi	117	6
Delhi	ordinary/sleeper 200/300	10½
Jaipur	120	4
Jaisalmer	ordinary/sleeper 240/340	10½
Jodhpur	120	5

The post office will book train tickets for services out of Ajmer for about ₹15 commission. For around ₹50 private agencies do the same, including transfer to Ajmer.

i Getting Around

There are no autorickshaws, but it's a breeze to get around on foot. Another good option is to hire a bicycle (₹30 per day) or a motorbike (₹200 to ₹250 per day, helmet ₹30 per day). Try **Shree Ganpati Motorbike Hire** (☎2772830; Brahma Rd), whose bikes have an all-Rajasthan tourist permit. A *wallah* can carry your luggage on a *thela* (hand-drawn cart) to/from the bus stand for around ₹30.

Ranthambhore National Park

☎07462

This famous national park, open from October to June, is the best place to spot wild tigers in Rajasthan. Comprising 1334 sq km of wild jungle scrub hemmed in by rocky ridges, at its centre is the amazing 10th-century Ranthambore Fort. Scattered around

the fort are ancient temples and mosques, hunting pavilions, crocodile-filled lakes and vine-covered *chhatris*. The park was a maharajas' hunting ground until 1970 – a curious 15 years after it had become a sanctuary.

Project Tiger has been in charge of the tiger population since 1979, but the project's difficulties were thrown into sharp relief when government officials were implicated in poaching in 2005. Getting an accurate figure on the number of tigers comes down to who you believe – the park probably has around 32 tigers, after the relocation of five tigers to Sariska Tiger Reserve (see p131).

Seeing a tiger is partly a matter of luck; you should plan on two or three safaris to improve your chances. But remember there's plenty of other wildlife to see including more than 300 species of birds.

It's 10km from the town of Sawai Madhopur to the first gate and another 3km to the main gate and Ranthambore Fort. Accommodation is stretched out along the road from the town to the park. The train station is in the heart of Sawai Madhopur, just south of the main bazaar.

i Sights

Safaris take place in the early morning and late afternoon. The mornings can be very chilly in the open vehicles, so bring some warm clothes. The best option is to travel by jeep gypsy. You still have a good chance of seeing a tiger from the canter, though sometimes other passengers can be rowdy.

Safaris (Indian/foreigner per person in gypsy ₹500/890, in canter ₹425/812; video camera ₹400) take three hours. In October canters and gypsies leave at 6.30am and 2.30pm; from November to January they leave at 7am and 2pm; from February to March they leave at 6.30am and 2.30pm; from April to May they leave at 6am and 3pm; and from May to June they leave at 6am and 3.30pm.

Be aware that the rules for booking safaris (and prices) are prone to change. Seats in gypsies and canters can be reserved on the official website (www.rajasthanwildlife.in). If you book online you will need to pay the balance at the Forest Office on the day of the safari or risk being cancelled. Cancelled seats are subsequently made available for direct booking. A single gypsy and five canters are also kept for direct booking at the **Forest Office** (Ranthambhore Rd; ☎5.30am-7am & noon-2pm). Demand often outstrips supply during holiday seasons. Direct bookings on

the day of the safari are best done through your hotel, which will send someone down to the Forest Office to obtain your ticket and naturally this will incur a small fee. This is the easiest way to do it, even though there is a dedicated window for foreigners at the Forest Office. If you do decide to do it yourself, be prepared for plenty of jostling and confusion.

Sleeping



Khem Villas

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎252099; www.khemvillas.com; Ranthambhore Rd; s/d incl all meals & taxes ₹8000/9500, tents ₹10,600/14,000, cottages ₹14,000/17,000; ☎) This splendid option has been created by the Singh Rathore family – the patriarch Fateh Singh Rathore is lauded as the driving force behind the conservation of the tiger at Ranthambhore. His son Goverdhan, and his daughter-in-law Usha, run this impressive ecolodge set in 22 acres of organic farmland and re-afforested land. The accommodation ranges from rooms in the colonial-style bungalow to luxury tents to sumptuous stone cottages.

Hotel Tiger Safari Resort

HOTEL \$\$

(☎221137; www.tigersafariresort.com; d incl breakfast ₹1280-1600; ☎@☎) This is one of the best options for those on a budget, with the helpful management adept at organising safaris, wake-up calls and early breakfasts before the morning safari. They can also organise pick-up and drop-off from the train station and sightseeing trips to the fort. The spacious doubles and so-called 'cottages' (larger rooms with bigger bathrooms) face a well-kept garden and small pool.

Hotel Ranthambhore Regency

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎221176; www.ranthambhor.com; r ₹5500, s/d incl meals from US\$135/165; ☎@☎) This is a very professional place that caters to tour groups but can still provide a good service to independent travellers. It has immaculate, well-appointed rooms (think marble floors, flat-screen TVs etc), which would rate as suites in most hotels.

Hotel Aditya Resort

HOTEL \$

(☎9414728468; www.adityaresort.com; r ₹400, without bathroom ₹250, with AC ₹750; ☎) This friendly place represents good value for money. There are just six simple, unadorned rooms and a cute rooftop restaurant. The keen young staff will help organise safari bookings.

Hotel Ankur Resort

HOTEL \$\$

(☎220792; www.hotelankurresort.com; r incl breakfast ₹1500, cottages ₹2000; ☎@☎) Ankur Resort is another hotel that is good at organising safaris, wake-up calls and early breakfasts for tiger spotters. Standard rooms are clean and comfortable with TVs, if fairly unadorned. The cottages boast better beds and a settee overlooking the surrounding gardens with its inviting pool.

RTDC Castle Jhoomar Baori

HOTEL \$\$

(☎220495; www.rtdc.in; s/d incl breakfast ₹3300/4300, ste ₹6000; ☎) This is a stunningly set hilltop former royal hunting lodge, about 7km from the train station (you can spot it from the train). The multichamber rooms are loaded with character, although they're a bit shabby in true RTDC style. Open-rooftop areas add appeal.

RTDC Vinayak Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(☎221333; www.rtdc.in; s/d ₹1900/2800, tents ₹1700/2600, with AC ₹2600/3500; ☎) This RTDC complex is close to the park entrance and, although institutional in atmosphere, has bright and spacious rooms generally better than typical RTDC rooms. The tents on concrete bases are less appealing. There's a nice lawn area and a campfire is lit in the winter.



Shopping

Dastkar Craft Centre

HANDICRAFTS

(Ranthambhore Rd; ☎10am-8pm) This workshop and outlet located beyond the park entrance, near Khem Villas, is well worth a visit. The organisation helps to empower low-caste village women, who gain regular income through selling their textile and embroidery work. Many attractive handicrafts are on sale, including saris, scarves, bags and bedspreads. There is another outlet about 3km from the train station. Beware of imitators.



Information

Bank of Baroda ATM (Bazariya Market) Located 200m northwest of the train station.

Post office (Sawai Madhoper) Located 400m northeast of the train station.

Project Tiger office (☎223402; Ranthambhore Rd) The office is 500m from the train station. Don't expect much in the way of information.

State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur (SBBJ) The place to change cash or travellers cheques,

also with an ATM. There's another ATM east of the entrance in the train station building and one on Hamir Circle near the start of Ranthambhore Rd.

Tiger Track (📞222790; Ranthambhore Rd; per hr ₹60; ☀️7am-10.30pm) Near Ankur Resort Hotel. Offers internet access and a good range of books.

Tourist Reception Centre (📞220808; Train station; ☀️9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri) This friendly office has a good, although not to scale, map of Sawai Madhopur and the park.

i Getting There & Away

Bus

Firstly, trains are preferable on all routes. Buses to Jaipur (₹110, six hours, four daily) via Tonk (₹44), and to Kota (₹86, five hours) via Bundi (₹74, 3½ hours) leave from the Bundi bus stand near the petrol station close to the overpass. Travelling to Bharatpur by bus invariably involves a change in Dausa (on the Jaipur-Bharatpur road). Buses to Jaipur (₹85, six hours) via Dausa (₹65, five hours) leave from the roundabout near the main post office.

Train

At Sawai Madhopur train station there's a computerised **reservation office** (☎️8am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun).

The 12956 *Jaipur-Mumbai Express* departs Jaipur at 2.10pm, arriving at Sawai Madhopur (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹140/275/355/585) at 4pm. Going the other way (No 12955) it departs Sawai Madhopur at 10.45am arriving at Jaipur at 12.50pm. The 12466 *Intercity Express* leaves Jaipur at 10.55am, arriving at Sawai Madhopur (2nd class/sleeper/AC chair/3AC ₹65/140/225/275) at 1.15pm. Going the other way, the 12465 *Ranthambhore Express* departs Sawai Madhopur at 2.40pm and reaches Jaipur at 4.40pm.

The 12903 *Golden Temple Mail* leaves Sawai Madhopur at 12.30pm, stopping at Bharatpur (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹140/322/424/699) at 3pm and continuing to arrive at Delhi (₹187/469/628/1051) at 6.30pm. From Delhi (No 12904), it leaves at 7.40am, stopping at Bharatpur at 10.40am and arriving at 1pm. It then departs at 1.05pm and arrives at Kota (₹140/265/323/526) at 2.25pm. Another convenient train to Kota is the 19037/8 *Avadh Express*. It leaves Sawai Madhopur at 9.10am and arrives in Kota (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹120/235/293) on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at 10.50am. Going the other way, it departs from Sawai Madhopur at 4.20pm, arriving in Agra (₹130/335/454) at 9.50pm on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

i Getting Around

Bicycle hire is available in the main bazaar (around ₹30 per day). Autorickshaws are available at the train station; the journey to Ranthambhore Rd will cost around ₹40.

SOUTHERN RAJASTHAN

Bundi

📞0747 / POP 88,312

A captivating town with narrow lanes of Brahmin-blue houses, lakes, hills, bazaars and a temple at every turn, Bundi is dominated by a fantastical palace of faded-parchment cupolas and loggias rising from the hillside above the town. Though popular with travellers, Bundi attracts nothing like the tourist crowds of cities like Jaipur or Udaipur, nor are its streets choked with noisy, polluting vehicles or dense throngs of people. Few places in Rajasthan retain so much of the magical atmosphere of centuries past.

A group of Chauhan nobles from Ajmer, pushed south in the 12th century by Mohammed of Ghori, wrested the Bundi area from the Mina and Bhil tribes and made Bundi the capital of their kingdom, known as Hadoti.

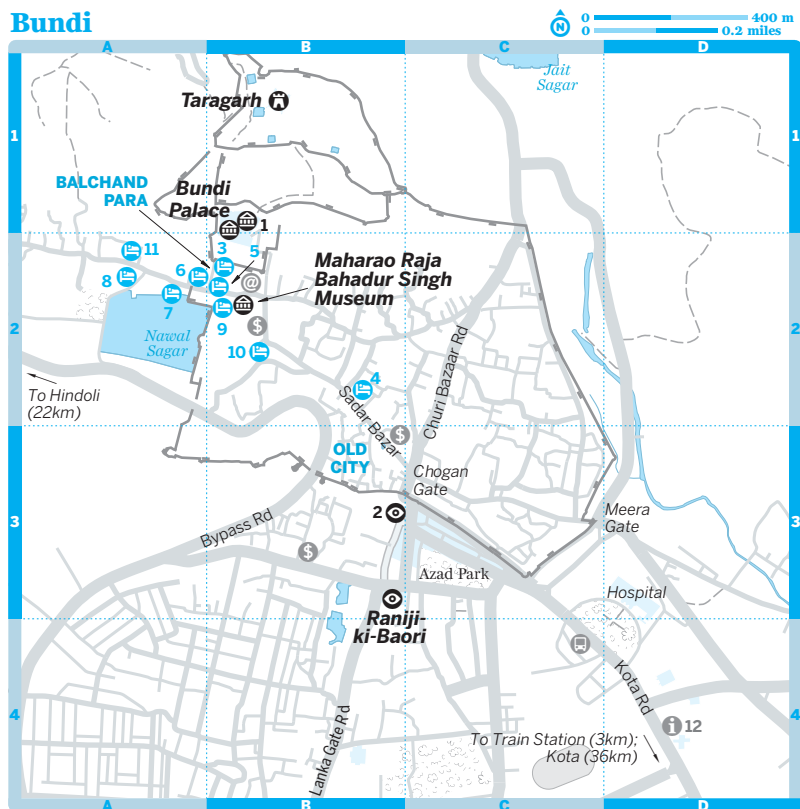
i Sights

Bundi Palace

PALACE

(Garh Palace; Indian/foreigner ₹10/100, camera/video ₹50/100; ☀️8am-5pm) This extraordinary, partly decaying edifice – described by Kipling as ‘the work of goblins rather than of men’ – almost seems to grow out of the rock of the hillside it stands on. Though large sections are still closed up and left to the bats, the rooms that are open hold a series of fabulous, fading turquoise-and-gold murals that are the palace's chief treasure. The palace was constructed in the reign of Rao Raja Ratan Ji Heruled (Ratan Singh; 1607-31) and added to by his successors.

If you are going up to Taragarh as well as the palace, get tickets for both at the palace entrance. Once inside the palace's Hathi Pol (Elephant Gate), climb the stairs to the Ratan Daulat or Diwan-e-Aam, a hall of public audience with a white marble coronation throne. You then pass into the Chhatra Mahal, added by Rao Raja Chhatra Shabji in 1644, with some fine but rather weathered



murals. Stairs lead up to the Phool Mahal (1607), whose murals include an immense royal procession, and then the Badal Mahal (Cloud Palace; also 1607), with Bundi's very best murals, including a wonderful Chinese-inspired ceiling, divided into petal shapes and decorated with peacocks and Krishnas.

FREE Chitrasala

PALACE

(Ummad Mahal; ☀️dawn-dusk) To reach this small 18th-century palace built by Rao Ummad Singh, exit through Bundi Palace's Elephant Gate and walk round the corner uphill. Above the palace's garden courtyard are several rooms covered in beautiful paintings. There are some great Krishna images, including a detail of him sitting up a tree playing the flute after stealing the clothes of the *gopis* (milkmaids). The back room to the right is the Sheesh Mahal, badly damaged but still featuring some beautiful inlaid

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

Taragarh

FORT

(Star Fort; Indian/foreigner ₹10/100, camera/video ₹50/100; ☀️8am-5pm) The ramshackle, partly overgrown 1354 Taragarh fort, on the hilltop above the palace, is great to ramble around – but take a stick to battle the overgrown vegetation, help the knees on the steep climb and provide confidence when surrounded by testosterone-charged macaques.

Maharao Raja Bahadur Singh Museum

MUSEUM

(admission ₹50, camera ₹50; ☀️9am-1pm & 2-5pm) This museum is housed in the Moti Mahal, where the current royal descendants live. It is an extraordinary celebration of the lives of the more recent royal members. The first hall is stuffed with stuffed wildlife, chiefly tigers shot by Indian, British and American luminaries.

Bundi

📍 Top Sights

Bundi Palace	B1
Maharao Raja Bahadur Singh Museum	B2
Raniji-ki-Baori	B3
Taragarh	B1

📍 Sights

1 Chitralsala	B1
2 Nagar Sagar Kund	B3

🛏 Sleeping

3 Bundi Vilas	B2
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4 Hadee Rani Guest House.....	B2
5 Haveli Braj Bhushanjee.....	B2
6 Haveli Katkoun	A2
7 Haveli Uma Megh	A2
8 Hotel Bundi Haveli.....	A2
9 Kasera Heritage View	B2
10 RN Haveli	B2
11 Shivam Tourist Guesthouse.....	A2

Information

12 Tourist Office.....	D4
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Baoris

NOTABLE BUILDINGS

Bundi has around 60 beautiful *baoris* (step-wells), some right in the town centre. The majesty of many of them is unfortunately diminished by their lack of water today – a result of declining groundwater levels – and by the rubbish that collects in them which no one bothers to clean up. The most impressive, **Raniji-ki-Baori** (Queen's Step-Well), is 46m deep and decorated with sinuous carvings, including the avatars of Lord Vishnu. The **Nagar Sagar Kund** is a pair of matching step-wells just outside the old city's Chogan Gate.

Old City

AREA

It's great to explore the ancient winding streets, gateways and bazaars of the old city, as well as the more touristic Balchand Para area below the palace. Bundi has more than 200 temples, and the market area just outside the Chogan Gate, around Nagar Sagar Kund, is the most vibrant area of town.



Festivals

A visit in August or September might reward you with a glimpse of the cheerful festival of **Kajli Teej**, celebrating the arrival of the monsoon and a good chance to see local artists perform, while October or November sees **Bundi Utsav**, a cultural festival complete with music, dance, fireworks, a turban-tying competition and more, blaze through Bundi's quiet streets.



Sleeping & Eating

Most accommodation clusters in the Balchand Para area beneath the palace. Guesthouses and hotels provide the main eating options and many of them happily serve nonguests as well as guests. Most places

will pick you up from the train station or bus stand if you call ahead. Bundi was once a dry town, so it's not a place for evening revelry; however, a cold beer can usually be arranged.



Haveli Braj Bhushanjee

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎2442322; www.kiplingsbundi.com; r ₹500-4500; 🍷🍷) This rambling, authentic, 200-year-old *haveli* is run by the very helpful and knowledgeable Braj Bhushanjee family, descendants of the former prime ministers of Bundi. It's an enchanting place with original stone interiors (plenty of low doorways), splendid rooftop views, beautiful, well-preserved murals, and all sorts of other historic and valuable artefacts. The terrific range of accommodation includes some lovely, recently modernised rooms that are still in traditional style.

Hotel Bundi Haveli

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$

(☎2447861; http://hotelbundihaveli.com; r ₹1000-2500, ste ₹4000; 🍷) The exquisitely renovated Bundi Haveli certainly leads the pack in terms of up-to-date style and sophistication. Yes, it is very comfortable and relaxed and there's a lovely rooftop dining area boasting palace views and an extensive, mainly Indian menu (mains ₹90 to ₹250).

Haveli Katkoun

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2444311; http://havelikatkoun.free.fr; s from ₹350, d ₹500-1800; 🍷) Just outside the town's west gate, Katkoun is a totally revamped *haveli*. It boasts large, spotless rooms with superb views of the lake or palace and has a good courtyard restaurant (mains ₹65 to ₹200).

Kasera Heritage View

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎2444679; www.kaseraheritageview.com; s/d ₹800/1000, AC from ₹1500/1800; ☹) Another revamped *haveli*, Kasera has an incongruously modern lobby but offers a range of slightly more authentic rooms. The welcome is friendly, it's all cheerfully decorated, the rooftop restaurant has great views, and discounts of 40% to 50% are frequently offered.

RN Haveli

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2443278, 9784486854; rnhavelibundi@yahoo.co.in; Rawle ka Chowk; r ₹300-400, without bath-room ₹150-200, AC ₹1000-1200; ☹) This is an old, rambling house with a grassy garden, recently decorated rooms and delectable, home-cooked, vegetarian meals (mains ₹60 to ₹80). Run by a dynamic mother-and-two-daughters team, it's a place where solo female travellers will feel comfortable at once.

Hadee Rani Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2442903; hadeerani@g@yahoo.com; Sadar Bazar; s ₹150-700, d ₹200-800) A friendly, enthusiastic family runs this three-centuries-old *haveli* with rooms of varied sizes up and down its staircases. It has a very good multi-cuisine restaurant (mains ₹50 to ₹200, thali ₹100 or ₹180).

Bundi Vilas

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎5120694; www.bundivilas.com; r incl breakfast ₹2500-3000; ☹@) This 300-year-old *haveli* has been tastefully renovated with Jaialmer sandstone, earth-toned walls and deft interior design. Rooms are medium sized, except for two larger ones next to the restaurant.

Shivam Tourist Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2447892, 9214911113; www.shivam-bundi.co.in; r ₹250-800; ☹) Rooms are good and clean if a trifle Spartan. The energetic, talkative hosts offer good veg meals on the rooftop, plus classes in cooking, henna design and Hindi.

Haveli Uma Megh

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2442191; haveliumamegh@yahoo.com; r ₹200-600) Has plenty of dilapidated charm, with wall paintings, alcoves and a lakeside garden for candlelit dinners (mains ₹40 to ₹60, thali ₹80 to ₹200). The pricier rooms are spacious.

i Information

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

Front Page Cyber Cafe (Balchand Para; per hr ₹40; ☎8am-10pm) One of the less expensive places to check your email, and it has decent connections.

Tourist office (☎2443697; Kota Rd;

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

i Getting There & Away**Bus**

Bus journeys to and from Bundi are bone-rattlers, although the recently made four-lane Hwy 76, which you hit about halfway to Chittorgarh, has improved journeys in that direction. 'Express' government buses from the bus stand run to Kota (₹24, one hour, every 15 minutes), Chittorgarh (₹100, four hours, two evening buses), Udaipur (₹175, six hours, two evening buses), Ajmer (₹111, four hours, half-hourly), Jaipur (₹120, five hours, half-hourly), Sawai Madhopur (₹60, 4½ hours, four daily), Jodhpur (₹160, 10 hours, three daily), Delhi (₹270, 11 hours, three daily) and Indore (₹175, 12 hours, 8am and 11am). For Pushkar, change buses at Ajmer.

Private sleeper buses with similar seat prices to government buses launch around 10pm for Chittorgarh, Udaipur, Ajmer and Delhi (one each), but they are for thrill-seekers and sadomasochists only.

Train

The station is 4km south of the old city; trains are fewer but smoother and sometimes quicker than buses. The 12963 *Mewar Express* departs at 2.04am for Chittorgarh (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹150/288/371/608, 2¾ hours) and Udaipur (₹167/399/527/874, 5¼ hours). In the other direction the 12964 *Mewar Express* leaves at 10.50pm for Delhi's Nizamuddin station (₹242/609/817/1375, 7¾ hours), stopping at Kota, Sawai Madhopur and Bharatpur en route. Two other trains go to Chittorgarh: the 59812 *Haldighati Passenger* at 7.20am (sleeper ₹90, 3¼ hours), and the 29020 *Dehradun Express* at 9.38am (sleeper/2AC/1AC ₹130/341/558, 3¼ hours). Eastbound, the 59811 *Haldighati Passenger* at 5.50pm heads to Sawai Madhopur (sleeper ₹90, 5½ hours) and Agra (₹119, 12 hours); the 29019 *Nimach-Kota Express* at 5.21pm heads to Kota, Sawai Madhopur (sleeper/2AC/1AC ₹130/362/593, four hours), Bharatpur and Delhi Nizamuddin (₹202/787/1325, 12 hours).

i Getting Around

Bicycles are an ideal way to get around this area. They are available at many guesthouses for around ₹30 or ₹40 per day. You can also hire motorbikes for ₹200 to ₹300 per day.

An autorickshaw to the train station costs ₹50 to ₹70 by day and ₹100 to ₹120 by night.

You can rent taxis for ₹700 to ₹1200 per day through your accommodation.

Kota

☎0744 / POP 695,899

Kota is an industrial and commercial town on Rajasthan's only permanent river, the Chambal, mainly worth visiting for its spectacular palace within the walled old city south of the centre. Originally part of the Bundi principedom, Kota separated in 1624 and subsequently became a larger and more powerful city and state than Bundi. Kishore Sagar lake marks the approximate centre of town.

👁 Sights & Activities

City Palace & Fort

PALACE, FORT

The fort and the palace within it make up one of the largest such complexes in Rajasthan. This was the royal residence and centre of power, housing the Kota principedom's treasury, courts, arsenal, armed forces and state offices. Some of its buildings are now used as schools. The **City Palace** (Indian/foreigner ₹10/100, camera/video ₹50/100; ☎10am-4.30pm Sat-Thu), entered through a gateway topped by rampant elephants, contains the excellent **Rao Madho Singh Museum**, where you'll find all the stuff necessary for a respectable Raj existence – silver furniture, an old-fashioned ice-cream maker and ingenious, beautiful weapons. The oldest part of the palace dates from 1624. Downstairs is an elegant *darbar* (royal audience) hall with beautiful mirror work, while the elegant, small-scale apartments upstairs dance with exquisite, beautifully preserved paintings, particularly the hunting scenes for which Kota is renowned.

Boat Trips

BOATING

The Chambal River upstream of Kota is part of the Darrah National Park and once you escape the city it's beautiful, with lush vegetation and craggy cliffs on either side. It's an opportunity to spot birds, gharials (those thin-snouted, fish-eating crocodiles), muggers (those keep-your-limbs-inside-the-boat crocodiles) and possibly sloth bears. A 20-minute jaunt costs ₹40 per person; longer trips for up to six people are ₹1000 an hour. Boats start from **Chambal Gardens** (Indian/foreigner ₹2/5), 1.5km south of the fort on the river's east bank, and normally operate from 10.30am to sunset.

🌟 Festivals & Events

If you happen to hit Kota in October or November, check whether your visit coincides with the city's huge **Dussehra Mela**, during which massive effigies are built then spectacularly set aflame.

🛏 Sleeping & Eating

All the hotels listed here, except Palkiya Haveli, are in the northern half of town between Kishore Sagar and the train station.

TOP CHOICE Palkiya Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2387497; www.alsisar.com; palkiyahaveli@yahoo.com; Mokha Para; s/d ₹1800/2300, ste ₹2600; ☎) This is an exquisite *haveli* that has been in the same family for 200 years. Set in a deliciously peaceful corner of the old city about 800m east of the City Palace, it's a lovely, relaxing place to stay, with welcoming hosts, a high-walled garden and a courtyard with a graceful neem tree. There are impressive murals and appealing heritage rooms, and the food is top notch.

Brijraj Bhawan Palace Hotel

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2450529; brijraj@dil.in; off Collectorate Circle, Civil Lines; s/d ₹2500/3550, ste ₹3700/4600; ☎) High above the Chambal River, this charismatic hotel was built to house the British Residency and is still home to the head of the Kota royal house. The enormous, classically presented rooms, admittedly not refurbished very recently, open onto lofty verandas and terraces overlooking the river. The intimate dining room (for guests only) is, unlike those in most palaces, homey rather than grand.

Hotel Navrang

HOTEL \$

(☎2323294; Collectorate Circle, Civil Lines; s/d ₹450/550, with AC ₹750/950; ☎) The Navrang's rooms are worn but good-sized and comfortable and arranged around a modern internal courtyard. The attached vegetarian **New South Indian Restaurant** (mains ₹50-90; ☎9am-11pm) is OK, if slow.

📍 Information

Tourist Reception Centre (☎2327695; RTDC Hotel Chambal; ☎9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) About 250m north of Kishore Sagar.

📍 Getting There & Away

Bus

The central bus stand is just east of the Bundi Rd river bridge, 1km north of Kishore Sagar.

'Express' government buses head to Ajmer (₹133, six hours, half-hourly), Bundi (₹24, one hour, every 15 minutes), Chittorgarh (₹120, four hours, five daily), Jaipur (₹149, six hours, half-hourly), Jodhpur (₹225, 10 hours, six daily), Udaipur (₹195, seven hours, nine daily) and Delhi (₹224, 12 hours, eight daily). There's an AC deluxe bus to Jaipur (₹255, five hours) at 2.30pm, and a Volvo AC bus to Jaipur (₹370, five hours) and Delhi (₹900, 11 hours) at 11pm.

Train

Kota is on the main Mumbai–Delhi train route via Sawai Madhopur, so there are plenty of trains to choose from.

i Getting Around

Minibuses link the train station and central bus stand (₹6). An autorickshaw should cost ₹30 for this journey; there's a prepay place at the station.

Chittorgarh (Chittor)

01472 / POP 96.028

Chittorgarh, the fort (*garh*) at Chittor, is the greatest in Rajasthan, and is well worth re-shuffling an itinerary to explore. It rises from the plains like a huge rock island, nearly 6km long and surrounded on all sides by 150m-plus cliffs. Wandering around the plateau on top is like being on an island in the sky, or a gigantic boat, dotted with a collection of sublimely beautiful stone buildings. Chittorgarh's history epitomises Rajput romanticism, chivalry and tragedy, and it holds a special place in the hearts of many Rajputs. Three times Chittorgarh was under attack from a more powerful enemy; each time, its people chose death before dishonour, performing *jauhar*. The men donned saffron martyrs' robes and

rode out from the fort to certain death, while the women and children immolated themselves on huge funeral pyres.

The first of Chittor's three great disasters occurred in 1303 when the Delhi sultan Alau-din Khilji besieged the fort – according to legend, in order to capture the beautiful Padmini, the wife of the Mewar king Ratan Singh. When defeat was inevitable, the men rode out to die and the Rajput noblewomen, including Padmini, committed *jauhar*. Mewar recaptured the fort in 1326 and under Rana Kumbha (1433-68), a poet and musician as well as a military leader, Chittorgarh reached its cultural peak and Mewar attained its territorial zenith.

A siege by Bahadur Shah, the sultan of Gujarat, in 1535, precipitated the second great *jauhar*, in which, it's thought, 13,000 Rajput women and 32,000 Rajput warriors died. The final sacking of Chittor came just 33 years later, in 1568, when the Mughal emperor Akbar took the fort. Once again, the odds were overwhelming, and again the women performed *jauhar*, while 8000 orange-robed warriors rode out to certain death. On this occasion, Rana Udai Singh II fled to Udaipur, where he established a new capital for Mewar. In 1616, Jehangir returned Chittor to the Rajputs. There was no attempt at resettlement, though it was restored in 1905.

i Sights



Chittorgarh Fort

FORT

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☀️sunrise-sunset) A zig-zag ascent of more than 1km leads through six outer gateways to the main gate on the

MAJOR TRAINS FROM KOTA

DESTINATION	TRAIN NUMBER & NAME	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	DEPARTURE
Chittorgarh	29020 Dehradun Express	130/395/650 (A)	3¼	9am
Delhi (Nizamuddin)	12964 Mewar Express	230/576/770/1294 (B)	6½	11.55pm
Jaipur	12955 Mumbai-Jaipur Express	163/390/512/852 (B)	4	8.52am
Mumbai	12904 Golden Temple Mail	349/913/1237/2078 (B)	15	2.35pm
Sawai Madhopur	12059 Shatabdi	87/240 (C)	1¼	6am
Udaipur	12963 Mewar Express	179/433/573/955 (B)	6	1.25am

Fares: A – sleeper/2AC/1AC, B – sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC, C – 2nd class/AC chair.

western side, the **Ram Pole** (the former back entrance). Inside Ram Pole is a village of perhaps 4000 people that occupies a small northwestern part of the fort. (Turn right here for the ticket office.) The rest of the plateau is deserted except for the wonderful palaces, towers and temples that remain from its heyday, with the addition of a few more recent temples. A loop road runs around the plateau, which has a deer park at the southern end.

There is a **Sound & Light Show** (Indian/foreigner ₹75/200; 🌅sunset) at the Rana Kumbha Palace. The commentary is in English on days when the Palace on Wheels and Royal Rajasthan on Wheels tourist trains hit Chittor (Tuesday and Friday at research time).

Rana Kumbha Palace

Past the ticket office, you arrive almost immediately at this ruined palace group, which takes its name from the 15th-century ruler who renovated and added to earlier palaces on this site. The complex includes elephant and horse stables and a Shiva temple. Across from the palace is the **Sringar Chowri Temple**, a Jain temple built by Rana Kumbha's treasurer in 1448 and adorned with attractive, intricate carvings of elephants, musicians and deities.

Meera & Kumbha Shyam Temples

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

Tower of Victory

The glorious Tower of Victory (Jaya Stambha), symbol of Chittorgarh, was erected by Rana Kumbha in the 1440s, probably to commemorate a victory over Mahmud Khilji of Malwa. Dedicated to Vishnu, it rises 37m in nine exquisitely carved storeys, and you can climb the 157 narrow stairs (the interior is also carved) to the 8th floor, from where there's a good view of the area.

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



EXPLORING THE FORT

A typical vehicular exploration of the fort takes two to three hours. Guides charging around ₹350 for up to four hours are available for either walking or autorickshaw tours, usually at the ticket office. Make sure you get a government guide (they carry a guide licence).

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

Gaumukh Reservoir

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

Padmini's Palace

Continuing south, you reach the **Kalika Mata Temple**, an 8th-century sun temple damaged during the first sack of Chittorgarh and then converted to a temple for the goddess Kali in the 14th century. Padmini's Palace stands about 250m further south, beside a small lake with a central pavilion. Legend relates that, as Padmini sat in this pavilion, Ala-ud-din Khilji saw her reflection in mirrors from the palace, and this glimpse convinced him to destroy Chittorgarh in order to possess her.

Surajpol & Tower of Fame

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

Sleeping & Eating

The modern town of Chittor below the fort's west side is an ordinary place, and its accommodation options are ordinary too. The best places to stay in the area are two heritage hotels in villages to the east.

Alternatively you can visit Chittorgarh as a long day-trip from Udaipur or as a half-day stopover between Udaipur and Bundi.

Castle Bijaipur

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎276351; www.castlebijaipur.com; r incl breakfast from ₹2500; 🍷🍷) This is a fantastically set 16th-century palace apparently plucked from the whimsy of Udaipur and dropped into a rural retreat 41km by road east of Chittorgarh. It's a great place to settle down with a good book, compose a fairy-tale fantasy or just laze around. Rooms are romantic and luxurious, and there is a pleasant garden courtyard and an airy restaurant serving Rajasthani food. Reservations should be made through the website or Chittorgarh's Hotel Pratap Palace. The owners can arrange transfer from Chittor as well as horse and jeep safaris, birdwatching, cooking classes, massage and yoga.

Bassi Fort Palace

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎225321; www.bassifortpalace.com; s/d incl breakfast ₹2000/2200) A glorious 450-year-old mead of a place in Bassi village, 25km north-east of Chittorgarh. It's a peaceful spot with 18 lovely rooms sporting attractive murals and antique furnishings including bedside lamps made from chain-mail helmets. Buses to Bassi (₹13, 30 minutes) leave Chittorgarh's central bus stand about every half-hour.

Hotel Pratap Palace

HOTEL \$\$

(☎240099; www.hotelpratappalacechittaurgarh.com; r ₹800-1000, AC s ₹1250-2500, d ₹1550-3000; 🍷🍷) This is Chittor's best and friendliest option, with a wide range of rooms, a convenient location and travel-savvy staff. The more expensive rooms have window seats and leafy outlooks, and even a big mural (Room 209).

Hotel Nandan Palace

HOTEL \$\$

(☎243314; hotel.nandanpalace2@gmail.com; Station Rd; s/d from ₹1900/2200; 🍷🍷) New in 2010, this is a step up from other options near the train station, a business hotel with good-sized rooms in shades of orange and apricot, a lift and an Indian restaurant (mains ₹60 to ₹100). Discounts are often available.

Hotel Amber Plaza

HOTEL \$

(☎248862; 32 Kidwai Nagar; r without/with AC ₹500/900; 🍷) Down a quietish street near the bus stand, this has quite comfy, medium-sized rooms with bright decorations (eg large posters of Versailles) and a restaurant.

Information

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

Mahavir Cyber Cafe (Collectorate Circle; per hr ₹25; ☺8am-10pm)

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

Getting There & Away

Bus

'Express' services from the bus stand head to Delhi (₹354, 14 hours, two daily), Ajmer (₹120, four hours, frequent), Jaipur (₹180 to ₹192, seven hours, 19 daily), Udaipur (₹72, 2½ hours, half-hourly), Bundi (₹100, four hours, 10am) and Kota (₹120, four hours, eight daily), among other places. There are also a few 'deluxe' services to Jaipur (₹225).

Train

At least six daily trains head to Udaipur, including the 12963 *Mewar Express* at 7.20am (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹150/280/344/561, 2¼ hours) and the 12992 *Ajmer-Udaipur Express* at 7.35pm (2nd class/AC chair ₹70/223, two hours). For Bundi there are four daily trains, including the 12964 *Mewar Express* at 8.50pm (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹150/288/371/608, two hours) and the 29019 *Nimach-Kota Express* at 2.55pm (sleeper/2AC/1AC ₹130/341/558, 2½ hours).

The 12966 *Udaipur-Gwalior Super Express* leaves Chittorgarh at 12.35am and arrives in Jaipur (2nd class/sleeper/AC chair/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹112/191/376/467/619/1036) at 6am. There are also six or more trains daily to Ajmer.

Getting Around

It's about 6km from the train station to the fort (4km from the bus stand), and a further 9km to make a full loop around the fort (7km if you don't go south of Padmini's Palace). Autorickshaws charge around ₹200 from the bus or train station to go around the fort and come back (including waiting time). You'll have to haggle, and make sure it's clear that you're going to visit the sights and have time to look around.

Udaipur

☎0294 / POP 389,317

Beside shimmering Lake Pichola, with the ochre and purple ridges of the wooded Aravalli Hills stretching away in every direction, Udaipur has a romantic setting unmatched in Rajasthan and arguably in all India. Fan-

tastical palaces, temples, *havelis* and countless narrow, crooked, colourful streets add the human counterpoint to the city's natural charms. It's tag of 'the most romantic spot on the continent of India' was first applied in 1829 by Colonel James Tod, the East India Company's first Political Agent in the region. Today the romance is wearing ever so slightly thin as Udaipur strains to exploit it for tourist rupees. In the parts of the city nearest the lake, almost every building is a hotel, shop, restaurant, travel agent – or all four rolled into one – and noisy, dirty traffic clogs some of the streets that were made for people and donkeys.

Take a step back from the hustle, however, and Udaipur still has its magic, not just in its marvellous palaces and monuments but in its matchless setting, the tranquillity of boat rides on the lake, the bustle of its ancient bazaars, the quaint old-world feel of its better hotels, its tempting shops, and lovely countryside to explore on wheels, feet or horseback.

Udaipur was founded in 1568 by Maharana Udai Singh II following the final sacking of Chittorgarh by the Mughal emperor Akbar. This new capital of Mewar had a much less vulnerable location than Chittorgarh. Mewar still had to contend with repeated invasions by the Mughals and, later, the Marathas, until British intervention in the early 19th century. This resulted in a treaty that protected Udaipur from invaders while allowing Mewar's rulers to remain effectively all powerful in internal affairs. The ex-royal family remains influential and in recent decades has been the driving force behind the rise of Udaipur as a tourist destination.

Sights

Lake Pichola

LAKE

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

The lake is allegedly home to a handful of crocodiles, believed to reside near uninhabited sections of the shore (making it

an unappealing option for swimming and wading).

Boat rides (adult/child 30min ₹200/100, 1hr ₹300/150, sunset ₹500/250; ☀️10am-5pm) leave roughly hourly from Rameshwar Ghat in the City Palace gardens. Note that you also have to pay ₹25 to enter the City Palace complex. The one-hour trips (including sunset trips) make a stop at Jagmandir Island.

Jagniwas Island

The world-famous Lake Palace hotel island of Jagniwas is about 15,000 sq metres in size, entirely covered by the opulent palace built by Maharana Jagat Singh II in 1754. Once the royal summer palace, it was greatly extended and converted into the **Lake Palace hotel** in the 1960s by Maharana Bhagwat Singh, and is now in the hands of the Indian-owned Taj hotel group. One of the world's top luxury hotels, with gleaming courtyards, lotus ponds and a pool shaded by a mango tree, it has been largely responsible for putting Udaipur on the international tourist map. You may also remember it from that classic Bond movie, *Octopussy*, along with the Shiv Niwas Palace and the Monsoon Palace. The Taj Lake Palace doesn't welcome casual visitors: the only time nonguests might be able to experience its magic is during the quietest seasons (eg May and June) when the hotel sometimes accepts outside reservations for lunch or dinner.

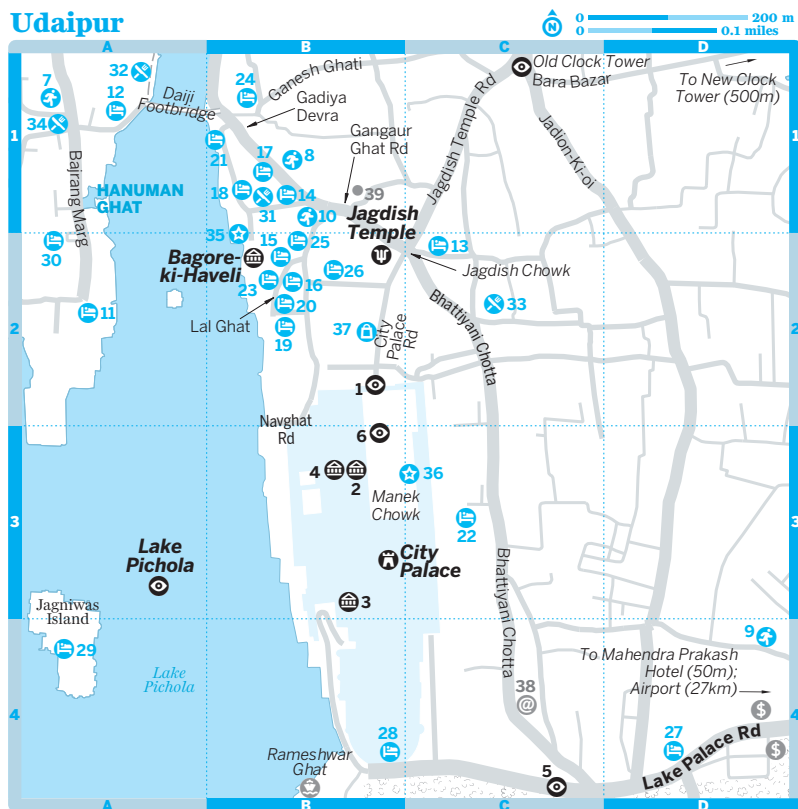
Jagmandir Island

The palace on Jagmandir Island, about 800m south of Jagniwas, was built by Maharana Karan Singh in 1620, added to by his successor Maharana Jagat Singh, and then changed very little until the last few years when it was partly converted into another (small) hotel. When lit up at night it has more romantic sparkle to it than the Lake Palace. With its entrance flanked by a row of enormous stone elephants, the island has an ornate 17th-century tower, the Gol Mahal, carved from bluestone and containing a small exhibit on Jagmandir's history, plus a garden and lovely views across the lake. As well as the seven hotel rooms, the island has a restaurant, bar and spa, which are open to visitors.

TOP CHOICE City Palace

PALACE

(www.eternalmewar.in; adult/child ₹25/15, not charged if visiting City Palace Museum; ☀️7am-11pm) Surmounted by balconies, towers and cupolas towering over the lake, the



imposing City Palace is Rajasthan's largest palace, with a facade 244m long and 30.4m high. Construction was begun by Maharana Udai Singh II, the city's founder, and it later became a conglomeration of structures built and extended by various maharanas, though it still manages to retain a surprising uniformity of design.

You can enter the complex at the **Badi Pol** (Great Gate; 1615) at the palace's north end, or at the **Sheetla Mata Gate** on Lake Palace Rd. Tickets for the City Palace Museum are sold at both entrances. At Badi Pol you can rent an audio guide in English, French, German or Spanish for ₹250, or hire a human guide for ₹150 for up to five people.

Inside the Badi Pol, eight **arches** on the left commemorate the eight times maharanas were weighed here and their weight in gold or silver distributed to the lucky locals. You then pass through the three-arched **Tripolia Gate** (1711) into a large courtyard,

Manek Chowk. Spot the large tiger-catching cage, which worked rather like an oversized mousetrap, and the smaller one for leopards.

City Palace Museum

(adult/child ₹50/30, camera or video ₹200; ☀9.30am-5.30pm, last entry 4.30pm) The main part of the palace is open as the City Palace Museum, with rooms extravagantly decorated with mirrors, tiles and paintings and housing a large, varied collection of artefacts. It's entered from **Ganesh Chowk**, which you reach from Manek Chowk.

The City Palace Museum begins with the **Rai Angan** (Royal Courtyard), the very spot where Udai Singh met the sage who told him to build a city here. Rooms along one side contain historical paintings including several of the Battle of Haldighati (1576), in which Mewar forces under Maharana Pratap, one of the great Rajput heroes, gallantly fought the army of Mughal emperor Akbar to a stalemate. As you move through

Udaipur

📍 Top Sights

Bagore-ki-Haveli	B2
City Palace	B3
Jagdish Temple	B2
Lake Pichola	A3

📍 Sights

1 Badi Pol	B2
2 City Palace Museum	B3
3 Crystal Gallery	B3
Durbar Hall	(see 3)
4 Government Museum	B3
5 Sheetla Mata Gate	C4
6 Tripolia Gate	B3

📍 Activities, Courses & Tours

Ashoka Arts	(see 14)
Ayurvedic Body Care	(see 25)
Hotel Krishna Niwas	(see 15)
7 Prajapati Musical Instruments	A1
8 Prem Musical Instruments	B1
9 Princess Trails	D4
Queen Cafe	(see 34)
10 Shashi Cooking Classes	B1
Spice Box	(see 25)

📍 Sleeping

11 Amet Haveli	A2
12 Dream Heaven	A1
13 Hotel Baba Palace	C2
14 Hotel Gangaur Palace	B1
15 Hotel Krishna Niwas	B2
16 Hotel Lake Ghat Palace	B2
17 Hotel Minerwa	B1
18 Hotel Pichola Haveli	B1
19 Jagat Niwas Palace Hotel	B2
20 Jaiwana Haveli	B2
21 Jheel Palace Guest House	B1
Kankarwa Haveli	(see 19)
22 Kumbha Palace	C3

23 Lalghat Guest House	B2
Mewar Haveli	(see 15)
24 Nukkad Guest House	B1
25 Poonam Haveli	B2
26 Pratap Bhawan Paying Guest House	B2
27 Rangniwas Palace Hotel	D4
28 Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel	B4
29 Taj Lake Palace	A4
30 Udai Kothi	A2

🍴 Eating

Ambrai	(see 11)
31 Cafe Edelweiss	B1
Cafe Namaste	(see 14)
Gallery Restaurant	(see 3)
Jagat Niwas Palace Hotel	(see 19)
32 Jasmin	A1
33 Lotus Cafe	C2
Paantya Restaurant	(see 28)
34 Queen Cafe	A1
Taj Lake Palace	(see 29)

🍷 Drinking

Panera Bar	(see 28)
Sunset Terrace	(see 3)

🎬 Entertainment

35 Dharohar	B2
36 Mewar Sound & Light Show	C3

🛍 Shopping

37 Rajasthali	B2
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📄 Information

38 BA Photo N Bookstore	C4
Lake City	(see 20)

🚗 Transport

39 Heera Cycle Store	B1
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the palace, highlight spots include the **Baadi Mahal** (1699) where a pretty central garden gives fine views over the city. **Kis-han (Krishna) Vilas** has a remarkable collection of miniatures from the time of Maharana Bhim Singh (1778–1828). The story goes that Bhim Singh's daughter Krishna Kumari drank a fatal cup of poison here to solve the dilemma of rival princely suitors from Jaipur and Jodhpur who were both threatening to invade Mewar if she didn't marry them. The **Surya Choupad** boasts a huge, ornamental sun – the symbol of the

sun-descended Mewar dynasty – and opens into **Mor Chowk** (Peacock Courtyard) with its lovely mosaics of peacocks, the favourite Rajasthani bird. The south end of the museum comprises the **Zenana Mahal**, the royal ladies' quarters built in the 17th century. It now contains a long picture gallery with lots of royal hunting scenes. The Zenana Mahal's central courtyard, **Laxmi Chowk**, contains a beautiful white pavilion and a stable of howdahs, palanquins and other people carriers.

Crystal Gallery & Durbar Hall

(adult/child incl audio guide & drink ₹500/300; ☉9am-7pm) The Crystal Gallery houses rare crystal that Maharana Sajjan Singh ordered from F&C Osler & Co in England in 1877. The maharana died before it arrived, and all the items stayed forgotten and packed up in boxes for 110 years. The extraordinary, extravagant collection includes crystal chairs, sofas, tables and even beds. Below, and included on the same admission ticket – along with tea or a soft drink in the Gallery Restaurant – is the grand Durbar Hall, one of India's vastest and most lavish royal reception halls, with some of the country's hugest chandeliers. Tickets are available at the city palace gates or the Crystal Gallery entrance.

Government Museum

(admission free; ☉10am-5pm Tue-Sun) Entered from Ganesh Chowk, this has a splendid collection of jewel-like miniature paintings of the Mewar school and a turban that belonged to Shah Jahan, creator of the Taj Mahal. Stranger exhibits include a stuffed monkey holding a lamp.

Jagdish Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

(☉5.30am-2pm & 4-10pm) Entered by a steep, elephant-flanked flight of steps 150m north of the City Palace's Badi Pol entrance, this busy Indo-Aryan temple was built by Maharana Jagat Singh in 1651. The wonderfully carved main structure enshrines a black stone image of Vishnu as Jagannath, Lord of the Universe; there's a brass image of the Garuda (Vishnu's man-bird vehicle) in a shrine facing the main structure.

Bagore-ki-Haveli

NOTABLE BUILDING

(admission ₹30; ☉10am-5pm) This gracious 18th-century *haveli*, set on the water's edge in the Gangaur Ghat area, was built by a Mewar prime minister and has been carefully restored. There are 138 rooms set around courtyards, some arranged to evoke the period during which the house was inhabited, and others housing cultural displays, including – intriguingly enough – the world's biggest turban. The *haveli* also houses an interesting art gallery, featuring contemporary and folk art, and an eclectic selection of world-famous monuments lovingly carved out of polystyrene.

Sajjan Garh (Monsoon Palace)

PALACE

Perched on top of a distant mountain like a fairy-tale castle, this melancholy, neglected late 19th-century palace was constructed by

Maharana Sajjan Singh. Originally an astronomical centre, it became a monsoon palace and hunting lodge. Now government owned, it's in a sadly dilapidated state but visitors stream up here for the marvellous views, particularly at sunset. It's 5km west of the old city as the crow flies, about 9km by the winding road. At the foot of the hill you enter the 5-sq-km **Sajjan Garh Wildlife Sanctuary** (Indian/foreigner ₹10/80, car ₹60, camera/video free/₹200). A good way to visit is with the daily sunset excursion in **taxi No RJ-27-TA 2108** (☎9784400120; per person ₹200), a minivan, which leaves Udaipur's Gangaur Ghat at 5pm daily; the charge does not include the sanctuary fees. Autorickshaws charge ₹200 including waiting time for a round trip to the sanctuary gate, which they are not allowed to pass. Taxis ferry people the final 4km up to the palace for ₹100 per person.

Vintage & Classic Car Collection

MUSEUM

(Garden Hotel, Garden Rd; admission ₹150, incl lunch or dinner ₹250; ☉9am-9pm) The maharanas' car collection makes a fascinating diversion, for what it tells about their elite lifestyle and for the vintage vehicles themselves. Housed in the former state garage are 22 splendid vehicles, including a seven-seat 1938 Cadillac complete with purdah system, the beautiful 1934 Rolls-Royce Phantom used in *Octopussy* and the Cadillac convertible that whisked Queen Elizabeth II to the airport in 1961. If you enjoy a vegetarian thali, the combined museum-and-meal ticket is a very good option (lunch 11.30am to 3pm, dinner 7.30pm to 10pm).

Saheliyon-ki-Bari

GARDEN

(Garden of the Maids of Honour; admission ₹5; ☉8am-7pm) In the north of the city, the Saheliyon-ki-Bari was built by Sangram Singh II in 1710. This small, quaint ornamental garden was laid out for the enjoyment of 48 women attendants who came as part of a princess' dowry and has beautiful, well-maintained fountains (water shortages permitting), kiosks, marble elephants and a delightful lotus pool.

Activities

Horse Riding

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

ANIMAL AID UNLIMITED

This spacious **animal refuge** (☎9950531639, 9829596637; www.animalaidunlimited.com) treats around 250 street animals a day (mainly dogs, donkeys and cows) and answers more than 3000 emergency rescue calls a year. The refuge welcomes volunteers and visitors: make contact in advance to fix a time between 9am and 5pm any day. It's in Badi village, 7km northwest of Udaipur: a round trip by autorickshaw, including waiting time, costs around ₹250. Call Animal Aid Unlimited if you see an injured or ill street animal in Udaipur.

Krishna Ranch

HORSE RIDING

(☎9828059505; www.krishnaranch.com) In beautiful countryside near Badi village; experienced owner-guide Dinesh Jain leads most trips himself.

Princess Trails

HORSE RIDING

(☎3096909, 9829042012; www.princessstrails.com; city office Boheda Haveli, Kalaji Goraji) A recommended Indian-German operation offering extended horse safaris and half-day nature rides.

Massage

Ayurvedic Body Care

AYURVEDA

(☎2413816; www.ayurvedicbodycare.com; 39 Lal Ghat; ☎10.30am-9pm) A small and popular old-city operation offering ayurvedic massage at reasonable prices, including a 15-minute head or back massage (₹250) and a 45-minute full-body massage (₹750). It also has ayurvedic products such as oils, moisturisers, shampoos and soaps for sale.

Walking

Exploring the surrounding countryside and villages on foot is a fantastic way to see rural and tribal life while taking in some beautiful scenery.

Mountain Ridge

WALKING

(☎3291478, 9602192902; www.mountainridge.in; Sisarma; half-day trek per person ₹650) This British-run homestay 6km west of town has pioneered country walking around Udaipur. The trips, with local tribal guides, include morning pick-up in Udaipur, lunch and a ride back to town afterwards.

Courses

Cooking

Spice Box

COOKING

(☎2424713; www.spicebox.co.in; 38 Lal Ghat; 2-3hr class ₹750) Shakti Singh from this spice, tea, oils and incense shop offered Udaipur's orig-

inal cooking classes and they are still recommended. Recipes are all vegetarian but the curries are good with meat too.

Queen Cafe

COOKING

(☎2430875; 14 Bajrang Marg; 2/4hr class ₹900/1400) The four-hour introductory class with Meenu, composer of many of this little eatery's delicious dishes, encompasses a grand 14 veg items.

Shashi Cooking Classes

COOKING

(☎9929303511; www.shashicookingclasses.blogspot.com; Sunrise Restaurant, 18 Gangaur Ghat Rd; 4hr class ₹500) Readers rave about Shashi's high-spirited classes (maximum four students), teaching many fundamental Indian dishes.

Music

Prem Musical Instruments

MUSIC

(☎2430599; 28 Gadiya Devra; per hr ₹200) Rajesh Prajapati (Bablu) is a successful local musician who gives sitar, tabla and flute lessons. He also sells and repairs those instruments and can arrange performances.

Painting

Hotel Krishna Niwas

PAINTING

(☎2420163; www.hotelkrishnaniwas.com; 35 Lal Ghat; 2hr class ₹600) Jairaj Soni is a renowned artist who teaches miniature and classical painting.

Ashoka Arts

PAINTING

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

Tours

City tours (per person excl admission charges ₹140) run by the Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation (RTDC) leave at 8.30am from the RTDC Hotel Kajri by Shastri Circle (400m northeast of Delhi Gate), and take in the main sights in 4½ hours.

Contact the Tourist Reception Centre for more information.

Festivals & Events

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

Sleeping

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

Directly across the water from Lal Ghat, Hanuman Ghat has a slightly more local vibe and often better views, though you're certainly not out of the touristic zone.

Discounts are often available outside the peak tourist seasons.

To bypass rapacious rickshaw drivers looking for commissions from hotels, use the prepaid autorickshaw stands outside the train and bus stations (if they are operating). If you're heading for the Lal Ghat area to find accommodation, you can avoid discussions about individual lodgings by taking a rickshaw to the nearby Jagdish Temple, which should cost ₹30.

LAL GHAT AREA

Jagat Niwas Palace Hotel HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$
(☎2420133; www.jagatniwaspalace.com; 23-25 Lal Ghat; r ₹1750-3950, ste ₹6350; 🍷@🍷) This leading midrange hotel set in two converted lakeside *havelis* takes the location cake. The lake-view rooms are charming, with carved wooden furniture, cushioned window seats and pretty prints. Non-lake-facing rooms are almost as comfortable and attractive, and considerably cheaper. The building is full of character with lots of attractive sitting areas, terraces and courtyards, and it makes the most of its position with a picture-perfect rooftop restaurant.

Jaiwana Haveli HOTEL \$\$
(☎2411103; www.jaiwanahaveli.com; 14 Lal Ghat; s/d ₹1890/1990; 🍷@🍷) Professionally run by two helpful, efficient brothers, this smart

midrange option has spotless, unfussy rooms with good beds, some decorated with attractive block-printed fabrics. Book corner room 11, 21 or 31 for views.

Poonam Haveli HOTEL \$\$
(☎2410303; www.hotelpoonamhaveli.com; 39 Lal Ghat; r ₹800-1600, ste ₹2000; 🍷@🍷) A fairly modern place decked out in traditional style, friendly Poonam has 16 spacious, spotlessly clean rooms with big beds and spare but tasteful decor, plus pleasant sitting areas. None of the rooms enjoy lake views, but the rooftop restaurant does, and boasts 'real Italian' pizzas among the usual Indian and traveller fare.

Nukkad Guest House GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎2411403; nukkad_raju@yahoo.com; 56 Ganesh Ghati; r ₹300-500, s/d without bathroom ₹100/200; @) Always busy with travellers, Nukkad has a relaxed atmosphere and a sociable, breezy, upstairs restaurant with very good Indian and international dishes (mains ₹60 to ₹85). Your hosts Raju and Kala are most helpful and you can join afternoon cooking classes and morning yoga sessions without stepping outside the door. Rooms are simple, fan-cooled, very clean and good value; there's plenty of hot water and many rooms have cushioned window seats.

Mewar Haveli HOTEL \$\$
(☎2521140; www.mewarhaveli.com; 34-35 Lal Ghat; r ₹990-1620; 🍷@🍷) Mewar is a good mid-ranger with excellent staff who oversee sun-filled rooms with good beds. It has a nice, clean, fresh feel, with bright fabrics and wall paintings. All rooms are AC and most have lake views.

Pratap Bhawan Paying Guest House GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎2560566; 12 Lal Ghat; r ₹500-800) A curving marble staircase leads up from the wide lobby to large, sparkling-clean rooms with good, big bathrooms and in many cases cushioned window seats. Recently taken over by friendly new management, this place will probably get even better.

Hotel Minerwa HOTEL \$
(☎2523471; www.hotelminerwaudaipur.com; 5/13 Gadiya Devra; r ₹300-700, with AC ₹900; 🍷@🍷) A good-value, new-on-the-scene budget bet with clean rooms that is proving pretty popular. Rooms improve in size, decor and views as you go up the price scale: a few have lake glimpses. The pleasant, well-priced, two-level roof restaurant has a floor-cushion zone.

Hotel Baba Palace

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2427126; www.hotelbabapalace.com; Jagdish Chowk; s ₹950, d ₹1400-2800; 🍷🍷) This slick hotel has spotless, fresh rooms with decent beds behind solid doors, and offers free train station or airport pick-ups. It's eye to eye with Jagdish Temple so many of them have interesting views; all rooms have AC and TVs. On top there's the first-rate Mayur Rooftop Cafe.

Hotel Lake Ghat Palace

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2521636; http://lakeghatpalace.com; 23/165 Lal Ghat; s ₹600-800, d ₹500-1900; 🍷🍷) Some of the smart, biggish rooms at this travellers' hot spot have views, others have balconies, and all are decorated with stained glass. The rooms are set around a small atrium, about six storeys high and hung with plants; there are splendid views from the roof and a good multicuisine restaurant (mains ₹60 to ₹120).

Jheel Palace Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎2421352; www.jheelguesthouse.com; 56 Gangaur Ghat; r ₹1800-2800; 🍷) Right on the lake edge (when the lake is full), Jheel Palace has three nice rooms with little balconies and four-poster beds, and three more ordinary ones. All are AC. Staff are accommodating and hands-off, and there's a good Brahmin pure veg rooftop restaurant (no beer).

Hotel Krishna Niwas

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2420163; www.hotelkrishnaniwas.com; 35 Lal Ghat; d ₹1350-1650; 🍷🍷) Run by an artist family, Krishna Niwas has smart, clean, all AC rooms; those with views are smaller, and some come with balconies. There are splendid views from the rooftop, and a decent restaurant. Or you can eat your own cooking after taking a lesson here.

Lalghat Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2525301; lalghat@hotmail.com; 33 Lal Ghat; dm ₹100, r ₹400-1500; 🍷@) This mellow guesthouse by the lake was one of the first to open in Udaipur, and it's still a sound choice, with an amazing variety of older and newer rooms. Most rooms have lake views and those in the older part of the building generally have more character. There's a small kitchen for self-caterers.

Kankarwa Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎2411457; www.kankarwahaveli.com; 26 Lal Ghat; s ₹1100-1650, d ₹1250-2200; 🍷🍷🍷) This is one of Udaipur's few hotels that are genuine old *havelis*. It's right by the lake, and the white-washed rooms, set around a courtyard, have a lovely simplicity with splashes of colour.

The pricier ones look right onto Lake Pichola; the cheapest lack AC.

Hotel Gangaur Palace

HERITAGE HOTEL \$

(☎2422303; www.ashokahaveli.com; Gadiya Devra; s ₹400-2000, d ₹500-2500; 🍷) This elaborate, faded *haveli* is set around a stone-pillared courtyard, with a wide assortment of rooms on several floors. It's gradually moving up-market and rooms range from windowless with flaking paint to bright and recently decorated with lake views. The hotel also boasts an in-house palm reader, an art school, the good Cafe Namaste and a rooftop restaurant.

Hotel Pichola Haveli

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2413653; info@picholahaveli.com; 64 Gangaur Ghat; s/d ₹1200/1500; 🍷@🍷) A sound choice with medium-sized heritage-style rooms, friendly and helpful management, and a quiet location. Lake Pichola, across the street, is visible from some rooms and the pleasant rooftop restaurant.

HANUMAN GHAT AREA**Amet Haveli**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎2431085; www.amethaveliudaipur.com; s/d/ste ₹4000/5000/6000; 🍷@🍷🍷) This 350-year-old heritage building on the lake shore has delightful rooms with cushioned window seats and coloured glass with little shutters. They're set around a pretty little courtyard and pond. Splurge on one with a balcony or giant bathtub. One of Udaipur's most romantic restaurants, Ambrai, is part of the hotel.

Dream Heaven

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2431038; www.dreamheaven.co.in; Hanuman Ghat; r ₹150-600; 🍷) A deservedly popular place to come to a halt, with spick-and-span rooms featuring wall hangings and paintings. Bathrooms are smallish, though some rooms have a decent balcony and/or views. The food at the rooftop restaurant (dishes ₹40 to ₹90), which overlooks the lake and shows Udaipur at its best, is fresh, tasty and highly recommended – the perfect place to chill out on a pile of cushions.

Udai Kothi

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2432810; www.udaikothi.com; Hanuman Ghat; r ₹4000-10,000; 🍷@🍷🍷) A bit like a five-storey wedding cake, Udai Kothi is a glittery, modern building with lots of traditional touches – cupolas, interesting art and fabrics, window seats in some rooms, marble bathrooms and carved-wood doors in others, and thoughtful

touches such as bowls of floating flowers. The apex is the roof terrace, where you can dine well and swim in Udaipur's *only* rooftop pool (nonguests ₹300).

LAKE PALACE ROAD AREA

TOP CHOICE Mahendra Prakash Hotel HOTEL \$\$
(☎24219811; www.hotelmahendraprakash.com; r ₹1400-3000; 🍷🍷🍷) Spacious gardens, spick-and-span rooms well furnished in traditional style, a cheery atmosphere and friendly staff are the name of the game at the very well-run Mahendra Prakash. There's a fabulous pool (nonguests ₹100), a decent restaurant and a lawn with tortoises. Rooms at the top have private balconies and City Palace views.

Kumbha Palace GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎2422702, 9828059505; www.hotelkumbha.com; 104 Bhattiyani Chotta; r ₹300-450, with AC ₹900; 🍷🍷) This excellent place run by a Dutch-Indian couple is tucked up a quiet lane off busy Bhattiyani Chotta and is backed by a lovely lush lawn. The 10 rooms are simple but comfortable (just one has AC), and the restaurant knows how to satisfy homesick travellers. The owners also run Krishna Ranch, where excellent horse riding and cottage accommodation are on offer.

Rangniwas Palace Hotel HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$
(☎2523890; www.rangniwas.com; Lake Palace Rd; s ₹880-2200, d ₹990-2500, ste s/d ₹3000/3500; 🍷🍷🍷) This 19th-century palace boasts plenty of heritage character and a peaceful central garden with a small pool. The quaint rooms in the older section are the most appealing, while the suites – full of carved wooden furniture and terraces with swing seats – are divine.

CITY PALACE

Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎2528016; www.hrhhotels.com; City Palace Complex; r ₹12,000, ste ₹24,000-80,000; 🍷🍷🍷) This hotel, in the former palace guest quarters, has opulent common areas like its pool courtyard, bar and lovely lawn garden with a 30m-long royal procession mural. Some of the suites are truly palatial, filled with fountains and silver, but the standard rooms are not great value. Go for a suite, or just go for a drink, meal, massage, or swim in the gorgeous marble pool (nonguests ₹300; ☀9am-6pm). Rates drop dramatically from April to September.

OTHER AREAS

TOP CHOICE Taj Lake Palace HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎2428800; www.tajhotels.com; r ₹37,500-43,500, ste from ₹150,000; 🍷🍷🍷) The icon of Udaipur, this romantic white-marble palace seemingly floating on the lake is extraordinary, with open-air courtyards, lotus ponds and a small, mango-tree-shaded pool. Rooms are hung with breezy silks and filled with carved furniture. Service is superb. Access is by boat from the hotel's own jetty in the City Palace gardens. Rates can vary a lot with season and demand; check the website.

TOP CHOICE Udaivilas HOTEL \$\$\$
(☎2433300; www.oberoihotels.com; r ₹35,000-40,500, ste ₹180,000-250,000; 🍷🍷🍷) In lovely grounds running down to the north-west shore of Lake Pichola, 2km west of the old city by road, Udaivilas' butter-sculpture domes are breathtaking. It's a beautifully designed, luxurious but personal hotel that doesn't spare the glitz or gold leaf, and the suites and many rooms even come equipped with private or semiprivate pools. The hotel houses three fine restaurants and a plush spa.

Mountain Ridge HOMESTAY \$\$
(☎3291478, 9602192902; www.mountainridge.in; Sisarma; r incl breakfast & dinner ₹1950-3950; 🍷) This country homestay run by a resident Briton makes a great alternative to the city noise and hustle, and a good base for exploring the Udaipur countryside. It's a lovely stone-built house with five spacious rooms and great views, perched on a hilltop near Sisarma village, 6km from the city centre. Guided hikes and birdwatching, yoga, yummy food and free cooking lessons are all available here. An autorickshaw/taxi from town costs around ₹100/300.

🍴 Eating

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

LAL GHAT AREA

Jagat Niwas Palace Hotel INDIAN \$\$
(☎2420133; 23-25 Lal Ghat; mains ₹120-300; ☀6.30am-10.30am, noon-3.30pm & 7-10pm) A wonderful, classy, rooftop restaurant with superb lake views, delicious Indian cuisine

and good service. Choose from an extensive selection of rich curries (tempered for Western tastes) – mutton, chicken, fish, veg – as well as the tandoori classics. There's a tempting cocktail menu and the beer is icy. It's wise to book ahead for dinner.

Lotus Cafe

MULTICUISINE \$

(15 Bhattiyani Chotta; dishes ₹50-120; ☎9am-10.30pm) This funky little restaurant plucks out fabulous chicken dishes (predominantly Indian), plus salads, baked potatoes and plenty of vegetarian fare. It's ideal for meeting and greeting other travellers, with a mezzanine to loll about on and cool background sounds.

Cafe Edelweiss

CAFE \$

(73 Gangaur Ghat Rd; snacks ₹30-80; ☎7am-7pm) The Savage Garden restaurant folks run this itsy piece of Europe that appeals to homesick and discerning travellers with superb baked goods and good coffee. If sticky cinnamon rolls, squidgy blueberry chocolate cake, spinach-and-mushroom quiche or apple strudel don't appeal, give it a miss.

Cafe Namaste

CAFE \$

(Gadiya Devra; cakes, pies, breakfast dishes ₹20-80; ☎7.30am-9.30pm) A European-themed street-side cafe at the Gangaur Palace Hotel that delivers the goods with scrumptious muffins, apple pies, cinnamon rolls, brownies etc. And to wash it down there is coffee from a shiny silver espresso machine (₹40 to ₹70) taking pride of place. The noisy street is a minus.

HANUMAN GHAT AREA



Ambrai

NORTH INDIAN \$\$

(☎2431085; Amet Haveli hotel; mains ₹145-325; ☎12.30-3pm & 7.30-10.30pm) The cuisine at this scenic restaurant – at lake-shore level, looking across to Lake Palace Hotel, Lal Ghat and the City Palace – does justice to its fabulous position. Highly atmospheric at night, Ambrai feels like a French park, with its wrought-iron furniture, dusty ground and large shady trees, and there's a terrific bar to complement the dining.

Jasmin

MULTICUISINE \$

(mains ₹50-80) Very tasty vegetarian dishes are cooked up here in a lovely, quiet, open-air spot looking out on the quaint Daiji foot-bridge. There are plenty of Indian options, and some original variations on the usual multicuisine theme including Korean and

Israeli dishes. The ambience is super-relaxed and service friendly.

Queen Cafe

INDIAN \$

(14 Bajrang Marg; mains ₹60-75; ☎8am-10pm) This homey little eatery with just a couple of tables serves up fabulous home-style Indian vegetarian dishes. Try the pumpkin curry with mint and coconut, and the Kashmir pulao with fruit, vegies and coconut. Don't pass on the chocolate desserts either!

CITY PALACE

Note that you have to pay ₹25 to enter the City Palace complex if you're not staying in one of its hotels.

Paantya Restaurant

MULTICUISINE \$\$\$

(☎2528016; Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel; mains ₹500-1400) Most captivating in the evening, this semiformal restaurant in the ritzy Shiv Niwas Palace has indoor seating, but if the weather's warm enough it's best out in the open-air courtyard by the pool. Indian classical music is performed nightly, and the food is great. For local flavour try the very tasty *laal maas dhungar*, a Rajasthani spiced and smoked mutton dish.

Gallery Restaurant

CONTINENTAL \$\$\$

(Durbar Hall; Durbar tea ₹325; ☎9am-6pm) Alongside the splendiferous Durbar Hall, this elegant little restaurant has beguiling views across Lake Pichola. It does snacks and a Continental lunch, but the time to come is between 3pm and 5pm when you can indulge in afternoon tea with cakes and the all-important scones, jam and cream.

OTHER AREAS

1559 AD

MULTICUISINE \$\$\$

(☎2433559; PP Singhal Marg; mains ₹200-650; ☎11am-11pm) Waiters in embroidered-silk waistcoats serve up lovely Indian, Thai and Continental dishes in elegant surroundings at this secluded restaurant near the south-eastern side of Fateh Sagar Lake. There are garden tables as well as several different rooms with just a few candlelit tables in each, and Indian classical music in the evenings. Includes a coffee shop with the best coffee we tasted in Udaipur.

Savage Garden

MEDITERRANEAN \$\$

(☎2425440; 22 Inside Chandpol; mains ₹190-320; ☎11am-11pm) Savage Garden has a winning line in soups and chicken and homemade pasta dishes with assorted sauces, though portions aren't huge. There are some Middle

Eastern influences too. The setting is atmospheric, in a 250-year-old *haveli* with indigo walls and bowls of flowers, and tables in alcoves or a pleasant courtyard.

Natraj Hotel

GUJARATI \$

(New Bapu Bazaar; thali ₹70; ☎10.30am-3.30pm & 6.15-10.30pm) Famous throughout town for its delicious all-you-can-eat vegetarian Gujarati thalis, this place has been filled to the brim for two decades with devout locals, who arrive to chow down on its huge portions of cheap, fresh food. It's tucked away in a backstreet 1.5km northeast of the City Palace, but definitely worth the hunt.



Drinking

Most guesthouses have a roof terrace serving up cold Kingfishers with views over the lazy waters of Lake Pichola, but for a real treat try the top-end hotels. Note that you have to pay ₹25 to enter the City Palace complex if you're not staying in one of its hotels.

Panera Bar

BAR

(Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel; Kingfisher or Indian whisky ₹250-275; ☎11.30am-10pm) Sink into plush sofas surrounded by huge mirrors, royal portraits and beautiful paintwork, or sit out by the pool, and be served like a maharaja.

Sunset Terrace

BAR

(Fateh Prakash Palace Hotel; ☎7am-10.30pm) On a terrace overlooking Lake Pichola, this is perfect for a sunset gin and tonic. It's also a restaurant, with live music performed every night.



Entertainment

Dharohar

DANCE

(☎2523858; Bagore-ki-Haveli, Gangaur Ghat; admission ₹60, camera ₹50; ☎7pm) The beautiful Bagore-ki-Haveli hosts the best (and most convenient) opportunity to see Rajasthani folk dancing, with nightly shows of colourful, energetic Mewari, Bhil and western Rajasthani dances, by talented performers.

Mewar Sound & Light Show

SOUND & LIGHT SHOW

(Manek Chowk, City Palace; lower/upper seating English show ₹150/400, Hindi show ₹100/200; ☎7pm Sep-Feb, 7.30pm Mar-Apr, 8pm May-Aug) Fifteen centuries of intriguing Mewar history are squeezed into one atmospheric hour of commentary and light switching – in English from September to April, in Hindi other months.



Shopping

Tourist-oriented shops – selling miniature paintings, wood carvings, silver and other jewellery, bangles, traditional shoes, spices, leather-bound handmade-paper notebooks, ornate knives, camel-bone boxes and a large variety of textiles – line the streets radiating from Jagdish Chowk. There are more on Bajrang Marg near Hanuman Ghat. Udaipur is known for its local crafts, particularly its miniature paintings in the Rajput-Mughal style, but finding an authentic artist takes a collector's eye.

Be prepared to bargain hard in these areas, as most places will probably quote you a ridiculous opening price: as a rule of thumb, aim to pay around 50% of the initial asking price.

The local market area extends east from the old clock tower at the north end of Jagdish Temple Rd, and buzzes loudest in the evening. Foodstuffs are mainly found around the new clock tower at the east end of the bazaar area.

Numerous shops clustered around Lal Ghat purvey and exchange guidebooks, non-fiction and fiction about Rajasthan and India, in English and other languages.

Rajasthali

HANDICRAFTS

Chetak Circle (26 Chetak Circle; ☎10.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat); old city (City Palace Rd; ☎10am-6.30pm) This government fixed-price emporium is worth dropping into to gauge handicraft prices. The branch at Chetak Circle, 1km north of the old clock tower, has a pretty representative range of Rajasthan crafts.



Information

Emergency

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

Internet Access

You can surf the internet at plenty of places, particularly around Lal Ghat, for ₹30 per hour. Many places double as travel agencies, bookshops, art shops etc.

BA Photo N Book Store (69 Durga Sadan; ☎10am-11pm)

Lake City (Lal Ghat; ☎9am-11pm)

Medical Services

GBH American Hospital (☎3056000; www.gbhamericanhospital.com; 101 Kothi Bagh, Bhatt Ji Ki Bari, Meera Girls College Rd) Modern, reader-recommended private hospital with

24-hour emergency service, about 2km north-east of the old city.

Money

There are lots of ATMs, including Axis Bank and State Bank ATMs on City Palace Rd near Jagdish Temple; HDFC, ICICI and State Bank ATMs near the bus stand; and two ATMs outside the train station. Places to change currency and travellers cheques include the following:

Sai Tours & Travels (168 City Palace Rd; ☎8am-9pm)

Thomas Cook (Lake Palace Rd; ☎9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat)

Post

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

Post office (City Palace Rd; ☎9.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Beside the City Palace's Badi Pol ticket office, 1.5km northeast of the City Palace.

Tourist Information

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

Getting There & Away

Air

Air India (☎2410999; www.airindia.com; 222/16 Mumal Towers, Saheli Rd) Flies to Mumbai daily and to Delhi via Jodhpur also daily.

Jet Airways (☎2561105; www.jetairways.com; Blue Circle Business Centre, Madhuban) Flies

direct to Delhi daily, and Mumbai once or twice daily.

Kingfisher Airlines (☎1800 2093030; www.flyingfisher.com; 4/73 Chetak Circle) has daily flights to Delhi, Mumbai and Jaipur, with the Jaipur flight continuing to Jodhpur from about October to March.

Bus

Frequent **Rajasthan State Road Transport Corporation** (RSRTC) buses travel from the main bus stand near the Udaipol gate to other Rajasthani cities, as well as Delhi, Agra and Ahmedabad. If you use these buses, take an express or one of the infrequent deluxe services as the ordinary buses take an incredibly long time and can be very uncomfortable. The best RSRTC buses are the air-conditioned Volvo services, which run once a day on just a few routes.

Private buses, mostly leaving from Station Rd a little south of the main bus stand, operate to destinations including Kota (seat/sleeper ₹150/200, seven hours), Bundi (₹160/220, seven hours), Jaipur (₹180/280, seven to eight hours), Jodhpur (₹180/250, five to eight hours), Agra (₹300/400, 13 hours), Delhi (₹450/800, 12 hours), Ahmedabad (₹160/260, five hours), Mumbai (₹400/600, 15 hours) and Mt Abu (seat ₹150, four hours). AC buses costing around 50% more are available to Jaipur, Delhi, Ahmedabad and Mumbai; Mumbai even has some Volvo AC services (seat/sleeper around ₹1200/1500). You can get tickets from plenty of travel agencies, hotels and guesthouses, though you may find commission charges are lower at the ticket offices near the departure area.

Taxi

Most hotels, guesthouses and travel agencies can organise you a car and driver to just about anywhere you want. A typical round-trip day

RSRTC BUSES FROM UDAIPUR

DESTINATION	FARE (EXPRESS/DE-LUXE/VOLVO, ₹)	APPROXIMATE DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY
Agra	415/456/-	14	2 daily
Ahmedabad	157/170/390	5	hourly, 4am-11pm
Ajmer	161/201/-	7	every 30 minutes
Bundi	160/-/-	6	4 daily, 4.30-9.30am
Chittorgarh	70/81/-	2½	every 30 minutes, 5.30am-11.30pm
Delhi	406/456/1207	15	4
Jaipur	235/285/685	9	hourly
Jodhpur	145/160/400	6-8	10 daily
Kota	170/204/-	7	every 30 minutes, 5am-9.30am
Mt Abu	127/-/-	4	about every 30 minutes, 5am-4pm

outing in a non-AC car costs around ₹800 to Eklingji and Nagda, ₹1400 to Chittorgarh, and ₹1400 to Ranakpur and Kumbhalgarh. One-way trips to Mt Abu, Ahmedabad, Bundi via Chittorgarh, or Jodhpur via Kumbhalgarh and Ranakpur are around ₹2500 (this includes a charge for the driver's trip back to Udaipur).

Train

The computerised main **ticket office** (☎8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) at the station has a window for foreign tourists and other special categories of passenger.

The 12964 *Mewar Express* departs Udaipur at 6.15pm and arrives in Delhi's Nizamuddin station (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹315/816/1102/1846) at 6.30am, via Chittorgarh, Bundi, Kota, Sawai Madhopur and Bharatpur.

The 12966 *Udaipur-Gwalior Super Express* departs Udaipur at 10.20pm and arrives in Gwalior (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹324/844/1142/1915) at 12.45pm, via Chittorgarh, Ajmer, Jaipur (₹224/559/747/1255, 7½ hours) and Bharatpur.

The 12991 *Udaipur-Ajmer Express* departs at 6.15am and arrives in Ajmer (2nd class/AC chair ₹109/362) at 11.40am, via Chittorgarh (₹70/223, two hours).

The 19943 *Udaipur-Ahmedabad Express* departs at 7.25pm and reaches Dungarpur (sleeper/2AC ₹130/314) at 10.56pm and Ahmedabad (₹162/554) at 4.25am.

Getting Around

To/From the Airport

The airport is 25km east of town, about 900m south of Hwy 76 to Chittorgarh. A prepaid taxi to the Lal Ghat area costs ₹400.

Autorickshaw

These are unmetered, so you should agree on a fare before setting off – the normal fare anywhere in town is around ₹30.

Bicycle & Motorcycle

A cheap and environmentally friendly way to buzz around is by bike; many guesthouses can arrange bikes to rent, costing around ₹50 per day. Scooters and motorbikes, meanwhile, are great for exploring the surrounding countryside.

Heera Cycle Store (☎7.30am-9pm), just off Gangaur Ghat Rd, hires out bicycles/mountain bikes/mopeds/scooters/motorbikes/Bullets for ₹50/100/200/350/350/450 per day (with a deposit of US\$50/100/200/300/400/500); you must show your passport and driving licence.

Around Udaipur

KUMBHALGARH

☎02954

About 80km north of Udaipur, **Kumbhalgarh** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☎9am-6pm) is a fantastic, remote fort, fulfilling romantic expectations and vividly summoning up the chivalrous, warlike Rajput era. One of the many forts built by Rana Kumbha (r 1433-68), under whom Mewar reached its greatest extents, the isolated fort is perched 1100m above sea level, with endless views melting into the blue distance. The journey to the fort, along twisting roads through the Aravalli Hills, is a highlight in itself.

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

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

The large and rugged Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary can be visited from Kumbhalgarh and most accommodation here can organise jeep, horse or walking trips in the sanctuary.

Sleeping & Eating

Aodhi

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎242341; www.eternalmewar.in; r ₹6000, ste ₹7000, meals ₹400-1000; ☎@☎) Just under 2km from the fort is this luxurious and blissfully tranquil hotel with an inviting pool, rambling gardens and winter campfires. The spacious rooms, in stone buildings, all boast their own palm-thatched terraces, balconies or pavilions, assorted wildlife, and botanical art and photos. Non-guests can dine in the restaurant, where good standard Indian fare is the pick of the options on offer, or have a drink in the cosy Chowpal Bar. Room rates plummet from April to September.

Kumbhal Castle

(☎242171; www.thekumbhalcastle.com; Fort Rd; s/d ₹2000/2400, super deluxe ₹2500/2900, meals ₹250-500; 🍷🍷) The modern Kumbhal Castle, 2km from the fort, has plain but pleasant white rooms featuring curly iron beds, bright bedspreads and window seats, shared balconies and good views.

Karni Palace Hotel

(☎242033; www.karnipalace.com; Bus Stand Rd, Kelwara; s/d ₹500/750, with AC ₹800/1200, ste ₹1500/2000; 🍷) In the town of Kelwara, 7km south of Kumbhalgarh, this hotel backs onto lovely cornfields. Rooms are clean and adequately comfortable, with bathtubs in the bathrooms and balconies overlooking the main street, and there's a rooftop restaurant.

Getting There & Away

Buses leave Udaipur bus stand at 5.15am, 8.15am and 2.30pm for Kelwara (₹50, three hours), 7km south of the fort, from where you can continue by autorickshaw or jeep. Hiring a taxi from Udaipur means you can visit both Ranakpur and Kumbhalgarh in a day; the round trip costs around ₹1400 (or ₹1600 with AC).

RANAKPUR

(☎02934

At the foot of a remote, steep, wooded escarpment of the Aravalli Hills, **Ranakpur** (camera/video ₹50/150; 🕒Jains 6am-7pm, non-Jains noon-5pm) is one of India's biggest and most important Jain temple complexes. It's 75km north-west of Udaipur, and 12km west of Kumbhalgarh as the crow flies (but 50km by road, via Saira). The main temple, the **Chaumukha Mandir** (Four-Faced Temple), is dedicated to Adinath, the first Jain *tirthankar* (depicted in the many Buddha-like images in the temple), and was built in the 15th century in milk-white marble. An incredible feat of Jain devotion, this is a complicated series of 29 halls, 80 domes and 1444 individually engraved pillars.

HOTEL \$\$

The interior is covered in knotted, lovingly wrought carving, and has a calming sense of space and harmony. Shoes, cigarettes and leather articles must be left at the entrance; menstruating women are asked not to enter.

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

Sleeping & Eating**Shivika Lake Hotel**

(☎285078; www.shivikalakehotel.com; r ₹600-1600, tent ₹1200; 🍷🍷🍷) Two kilometres north of the temple, Shivika is a welcoming, rustic, family-run hotel that provides free pick-ups and drops at the bus stop near the temple. You can stay in small, cosy rooms amid leafy gardens, or safari-style tents. Two tents have prime positions beside beautiful Nalwanja Lake.

HOTEL \$\$

Aranyawas

(☎02956-293029; www.aranyawas.com; r incl breakfast ₹3500; 🍷🍷🍷) In beautifully secluded, tree-shaded grounds just off Hwy 32, 12km south of the temple, Aranyawas has 28 attractive rooms in stone-built cottages. They are not fancy but neat and tasteful, with pine furnishings and, in most cases, balconies overlooking a small river and hills. There's a large pool surrounded by broad, stone-paved terraces, and the inside-and-outside restaurant (mains ₹150 to ₹250) is a lovely place to stop for an Indian meal.

HOTEL \$\$\$

Ranakpur Hill Resort

(☎286411; www.ranakpurhillresort.com; Ranakpur Rd; s ₹2000-3500, d ₹2500-4000, s/d tent ₹2000/2500; 🍷🍷🍷) A well-run hotel with a nice pool in grassy gardens, around which

HOTEL \$\$\$

WORTH A TRIP**KUMBHALGARH WILDLIFE SANCTUARY**

Ranakpur is a great base for exploring the hilly, densely forested **Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary** (Indian/foreigner ₹20/160, jeep or car ₹130, camera/video free/₹400, guide per day ₹200; 🕒dawn-dusk), which extends over some 600 sq km to the northeast and southwest. It's known for its leopards and wolves, although the chances of spotting antelopes, gazelles, deer and possible sloth bears are higher, especially from March to June. You will certainly see some of the sanctuary's 200-plus bird species. Some of the best safaris and treks are offered (to guests and nonguests) by Shivika Lake Hotel: options include three-hour jeep safaris (per person ₹650), a three-hour forest and lake walk (₹300), a one-way trek to Kumbhalgarh (about five hours; ₹650) and a two-night camping trip, with one jeep safari included, for ₹3500 (all prices are per person, with a two-person minimum).

are attractive, all-AC rooms sporting marble floors, stained glass and floral wall paintings. It's 3.5km north of the temple along Hwy 32.

Maharani Bagh Orchard Retreat HOTEL \$\$\$ (☎285105; www.jodhanaheritage.com; s/d ₹4500/5500; 🍷@🍷) Maharani Bagh (Queen's Garden) is set in lush grounds with its own 1.5km walking trail. Accommodation is in colourful, spacious cottages with verandahs and there's a beautiful pool. It's down a short lane from Hwy 32, 4km north of the temple.

i Getting There & Away

Buses to Ranakpur leave roughly hourly from the bus stand in Udaipur (₹70, three hours), and 10 times daily from the central bus stand in Jodhpur (₹109, four to five hours). The stop in Ranakpur is outside the temple: you should either ask to be dropped at your accommodation or arrange for a pick-up on arrival. Buses from Ranakpur to both Udaipur and Jodhpur leave every one to two hours; the best services are the expresses, at around 7am, 2pm, 4pm and 6pm to both destinations.

Mt Abu

☎02974 / POP 22,045 / ELEV 1200M

Rajasthan's only hill station sits among green forests on the state's highest mountain at the southwestern end of the Aravalli Range and close to the Gujarat border.

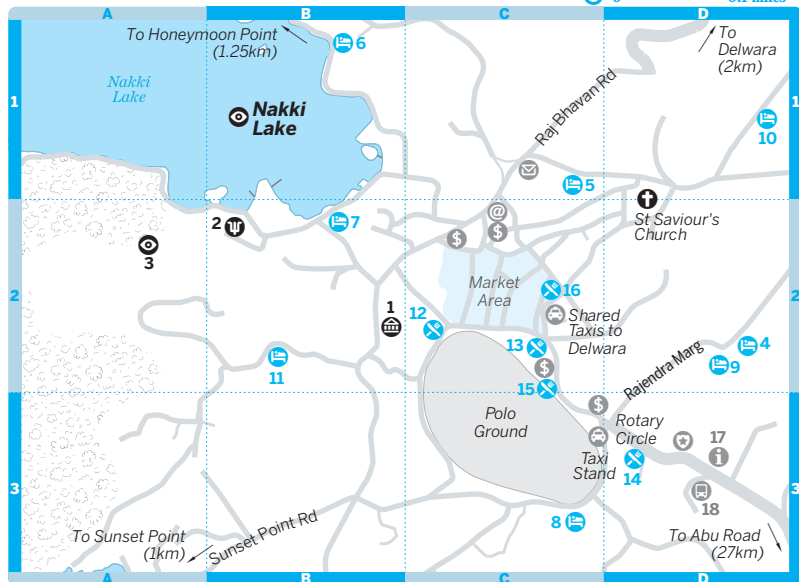
Quite unlike anywhere else in Rajasthan, Mt Abu provides Rajasthanis, Gujaratis and a steady flow of foreign tourists with respite from scorching temperatures and arid beige terrain elsewhere. It's a particular hit with honeymooners, middle-class families from Gujarat and others from that alcohol-dry state in search of a beverage more potent than lassi.

Mt Abu town sits towards the southwest end of the plateau-like upper part of the mountain, which stretches about 19km from end to end and 6km from east to west. The town is surrounded by the flora- and fauna-rich, 289-sq-km Mt Abu Wildlife Sanctuary, which extends over most of the mountain from an altitude of 300m upwards.

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

Try to avoid arriving in Diwali (October or November) or the following two weeks, when prices soar and the place is packed. Mt Abu also gets pretty busy from mid-May to mid-June, before the monsoon. This is when the Summer Festival hits town, with music, fireworks and boat races. In the cooler months, you will find everyone wrapped up in shawls and hats; pack something woolly

Mt Abu



to avoid winter chills in poorly heated hotel rooms.

Sights & Activities

Nakki Lake

LAKE

Scenic Nakki Lake, the town's focus, is one of its biggest attractions. It's so named because, according to legend, it was scooped out by a god using his *nakh* (nails). Some Hindus thus consider it a holy lake. It's a pleasant stroll around the perimeter – the lake is surrounded by hills, parks and strange rock formations. The best known, **Toad Rock**, looks just like a toad about to hop into the lake. The 14th-century **Raghunath Temple** (☀️dawn-dusk) stands near the lake's south shore.

Sunset Point

VIEWPOINT

Sunset Point is a popular and lovely place to watch the brilliant setting sun, though distinctly unromantic unless being thrust red roses, bags of peanuts or Polaroid cameras gets you into a loving mood. Hordes stroll out here every evening to catch the end of the day, the food stalls and all the usual jolly hill-station entertainment.

Brahma Kumaris Peace Hall & Museum

MEDITATION, MUSEUM

The white-clad people you'll see around town are either armed forces or members of the **Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University** (www.bkwsu.com, www.brahmakumaris.com), a worldwide organisation whose headquarters are here in Mt Abu. Brahma Kumaris teaches that all religions lead to God

and are equally valid, and that the principles of each should be studied. Its aim is the establishment of universal peace through 'the impartation of spiritual knowledge and training of easy raja yoga meditation'. Tens of thousands of followers come to Mt Abu each year for intense meditation or outreach training courses.

For many the teachings are intensely powerful; there are over 800 branches in 130 countries. For others, it gives off a New Age-sec vibe. You can find out more for yourself by paying a visit to the university's **Universal Peace Hall** (Om Shanti Bhawan; ☀️8am-6pm), just north of Nakki Lake, where free 30-minute tours are available, including an introduction to the Brahma Kumaris philosophy.

The organisation also runs the small **World Renewal Spiritual Museum** (admission free; ☀️8am-8pm) in the town centre, the entrance of which is labelled 'Gateway to Paradise'. The museum outlines Brahma Kumaris' teachings through kitschy dioramas and maxims like 'Man was never a beast nor will he ever become a beast, but he has now become worse than a beast'.

Tours

The RSRTC runs full-day (₹83) and half-day (₹45) bus tours of Mt Abu's main sights, leaving from the bus stand at 9.30am and 1pm respectively (times may vary). Admission and camera fees and the ₹20 guide fee are extra. Make reservations at the **enquiries counter** (☎️235434) at the main bus stand.

Mt Abu

Top Sights

Nakki Lake..... B1

Sights

- 1 World Renewal Spiritual Museum..... B2
- 2 Raghunath Temple..... B2
- 3 Toad Rock..... A2

Activities, Courses & Tours

Mt Abu Treks..... (see 6)

Sleeping

- 4 Connaught House..... D2
- 5 Honey Dew Paying Guest House..... C1
- 6 Hotel Lake Palace..... B1
- 7 Hotel Panghat..... B2
- 8 Hotel Saraswati..... C3

9 Kishangarh House..... D2

10 Mushkil Aasan..... D1

11 Shri Ganesh Hotel..... B2

Eating

12 Arbuda..... C2

13 Chacha Cafe..... C2

14 Kanak Dining Hall..... D3

15 Sankalp..... C2

16 Sher-e-Punjab Hotel..... C2

Information

17 Tourist Reception Centre..... D3

Transport

18 Main Bus Stand..... D3

Railway Reservation Centre..... (see 17)

Sleeping

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

Connaught House HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$
(☎238560; www.jodhanaheritage.com; Rajendra Marg; s/d incl breakfast ₹4000/5000; 🏠🍷) Connaught House is a charmingly stuck-in-time colonial bungalow that looks like an English cottage, with lots of sepia photographs, dark wood, angled ceilings and a gorgeous shady garden. The five rooms in the original 'cottage' have most character – and big colonial-era baths. The other five sit in a newer building with good views from their own verandahs.

Shri Ganesh Hotel HOTEL \$
(☎237292; lalit_ganesh@yahoo.co.in; dm ₹150-200, without bathroom ₹100, s ₹300, d ₹400-1200;

🍷) Deservedly the most popular budget spot, Shri Ganesh is well set up for travelers, with an inexpensive cafe, a small internet room and plenty of helpful travel information. Rooms are well used but kept clean. Some have squat toilets and limited hours for hot water; clothes washing is not allowed. Daily forest walks and cooking lessons are on offer.

Hotel Lake Palace HOTEL \$\$
(☎237154; http://savshantihotels.com; r ₹2000-2800; 🏠🍷) Spacious and friendly, Lake Palace has an excellent location, with small lawns overlooking the lake. Rooms are simple, uncluttered, bright and clean. All have AC and some have semiprivate lake-view terrace areas. There are rooftop and garden multicuisine restaurants too.

Kishangarh House HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$
(☎238092; www.royalkishangarh.com; Rajendra Marg; s/d cottage room ₹2500/3000, deluxe ₹4000/4500; 🏠) The former summer residence of the maharaja of Kishangarh has been successfully converted into a heritage hotel. The deluxe rooms in the main building are big, with extravagantly high ceilings.

DON'T MISS

DELWARA TEMPLES

These remarkable Jain temples (donations welcome; 🕒Jains 6am-6pm, non-Jains noon-6pm) are Mt Abu's most remarkable attraction and feature some of India's finest temple decoration. They predate the town of Mt Abu by many centuries and were built when this site was just a remote mountain fastness. It's said that the artisans were paid according to the amount of dust they collected, encouraging them to carve ever more intricately. Whatever their inducement, there are two temples here in which the marble work is dizzyingly intense.

The older of the two is the **Vimal Vasahi**, on which work began in 1031 and which was financed by a Gujarati chief minister named Vimal. Dedicated to the first *tirthankar*, Adinath, it took 1500 masons and 1200 labourers 14 years to build, and allegedly cost ₹185.3 million. Outside the entrance is the **House of Elephants**, featuring a procession of stone elephants marching to the temple, some of which were damaged long ago by marauding Mughals. Inside, a forest of beautifully carved pillars surrounds the central shrine, which holds an image of Adinath himself.

The **Luna Vasahi Temple** is dedicated to Neminath, the 22nd *tirthankar*, and was built in 1230 by the brothers Tejpal and Vastupal for a mere ₹125.3 million. Like Vimal, the brothers were both Gujarati government ministers. The marble carving here took 2500 workers 15 years to create, and its most notable feature is its intricacy and delicacy, which is so fine that, in places, the marble becomes almost transparent. It's difficult to believe that this huge lace-like filigree started life as a solid block of marble.

As at other Jain temples, leather articles (belts as well as shoes) have to be left at the entrance, and menstruating women are asked not to enter. No photography is permitted.

Delwara is about 2.5km north of Mt Abu town centre: you can walk there in less than an hour, or hop aboard a shared taxi (₹5 per person) from up the street opposite Chacha Cafe. A taxi all to yourself should be ₹50, or ₹150 round trip with one hour's waiting.

TREKKING AROUND MT ABU

Getting off the well-worn tourist trail and out into the forests and hills of Mt Abu is a revelation. This is a world of isolated shrines and lakes, weird rock formations, fantastic panoramas, nomadic villagers, orchids, wild fruits, plants used in ayurvedic medicine, sloth bears (which are fairly common), langurs, 150 bird species and even the occasional leopard.

Mt Abu-born Mahendra Dan ('Charles') of **Mt Abu Treks** (☎9414154854; www.mount-abu-treks.blogspot.com; Hotel Lake Palace) is a passionate and knowledgeable nature lover who leads excellent tailor-made treks ranging from three or four hours close to Mt Abu (₹300 per person) to overnight treks to nomad villages beyond Guru Shikhar (up to ₹1500 per person including meals). There's a two-person minimum, and on some routes wildlife sanctuary entrance fees (Indian/foreigner ₹20/160) and/or transport costs (minimum ₹250 for a car drop and pick-up) have to be paid too.

The cottage rooms at the back are smaller but cosier. There is a delightful sun-filled drawing room and the lovely terraced gardens are devotedly tended.

Honey Dew Paying Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎238429; off Raj Bhavan Rd; ₹1500) Honey Dew sits at the top of the central area, near the post office. Its five rooms, around a courtyard-like area, are unostentatious but comfy, clean, well kept and good sized – and decorated with a touch of modern art for a change.

Mushkil Aasan

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎235150; ₹1000-1500) A lovely guesthouse nestled in a tranquil vale in the north of town, with nine homey decorated rooms and a small garden above a stream. Home-style Gujarati meals are available, and check-out is a civilised 24 hours.

Hotel Saraswati

HOTEL \$

(☎238887; ₹590-1000; 📶📶) Saraswati is a reasonably appealing place in a peaceful setting behind the polo ground. Rooms are big enough and in varied states of repair: see a few of the 36 on offer before you decide. Hot water is only available from 7am to 11am. The restaurant serves good Gujarati thalis (₹80).

Hotel Panghat

HOTEL \$

(☎238886; ₹450-500) The rooms are plain and worn, with squat toilets and unheated showers, but the lake is across the street and some rooms overlook it. There's a good rooftop with a swing, and management is friendly and obliging.

Eating

Most holidaymakers here are Gujarati – hence the profusion of sweet veg thali restaurants.

Sankalp

SOUTH INDIAN \$

(Hotel Maharaja; mains ₹50-120; ☎9am-11pm) A branch of a quality Gujarat-based chain serving up excellent South Indian vegetarian fare. Unusual fillings like pineapple or spinach-cheese-garlic are available for its renowned dosas and *uttapams* (savoury South Indian rice pancake), which come with multiple sauces and condiments. Order *masala papad* (wafer with spicy topping) for a tasty starter.

Kanak Dining Hall

INDIAN \$

(Gujarati/Punjabi thali ₹90/100; ☎11.30am-3pm & 7-10.30pm) The excellent all-you-can-eat thalis are contenders for Mt Abu's best meals; there's seating indoors in the busy dining hall or outside under a canopy. It's conveniently near the bus stand for the lunch break during the all-day RSRTC tour.

Chacha Cafe

MULTICUISINE \$

(dishes ₹60-120; 📶) A very neat, bright eatery with red-check table cloths and welcome AC. The presentable fare ranges over dosas, pizzas, vegetarian burgers, cashew curry and biryanis.

Sher-e-Punjab Hotel

PUNJABI \$

(mains ₹60-160) This place in the market area has bargain Punjabi food. Plenty of regular veg and nonveg curries that won't stretch the budget.

Arbuda

INDIAN \$

(Arbuda Circle; mains ₹65-90) This big restaurant is set on a sweeping open terrace filled with chrome chairs. It's popular for

its Gujarati, Punjabi and South Indian food.

i Information

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

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

Yani-Ya Cyber Zone (Raj Bhavan Rd; internet per hr ₹30; ☎9am-10pm) There are also a couple of cybercafes down in the market area below here.

i Getting There & Away

Access to Mt Abu is by a dramatic 28km road that winds its way up thickly forested hillsides from the town of Abu Road on Hwy 14, about 140km west of Udaipur. The nearest train station is at Abu Road. Some buses from other cities go all the way up to Mt Abu; others only go as far as Abu Road. Buses (₹22, one hour) run between Abu Road and Mt Abu bus stands roughly hourly in each direction from about 6am to 7pm. A taxi from Abu Road to Mt Abu is ₹300 by day or ₹400 by night: make it clear you want to be taken to your hotel and not just Mt Abu bus stand.

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

Bus

Public buses from the main bus stand go to Udaipur (₹137, 4½ hours, four daily), Jodhpur (₹150, six hours, one daily), Jaisalmer (₹220, 10 hours, one daily), Jaipur (₹480, 11 hours, one AC bus daily) and Ahmedabad (₹130, seven hours, nine daily). Private bus companies, serving similar destinations at usually slightly higher prices, have ticket offices on the street near the bus stand.

i MT ABU PRECAUTIONS

Unless you are in a group, it is very unwise to visit Sunset Point or Honeymoon Point any time other than sunset when lots of people will be around. It is also unwise to walk off the streets alone – for example along some of the paths shown on Tourist Reception Centre maps. Muggings and at least one murder have happened in recent years to people who ignored these precautions.

Train

Abu Road station is on the line between Delhi and Mumbai via Ahmedabad. An autorickshaw from Abu Road train station to Abu Road bus stand costs ₹10. Mt Abu has a **railway reservation centre** (☎8am-2pm), above the tourist office, with quotas on most of the express trains.

Around Mt Abu

GURU SHIKHAR

At the northeast end of the Mt Abu plateau, 17km by the winding road from the town, rises 1722m-high Guru Shikhar, Rajasthan's highest point. A road goes almost all the way to the summit and the **Atri Rishi Temple**, complete with a priest and fantastic, huge views. A popular spot, it's a highlight of the RSRTC tour; if you decide to go it alone, a jeep will cost ₹500 return.

WESTERN RAJASTHAN

Jodhpur

☎0291 / POP 846,400

Mighty Mehrangarh, the muscular fort that towers over the Blue City of Jodhpur, is a magnificent spectacle and an architectural masterpiece. Around Mehrangarh's feet, the old city, a jumble of Brahmin-blue cubes, stretches out to the 10km-long, 16th-century city wall. The 'Blue City' really is blue! Inside is a tangle of winding, glittering, medieval streets, which never seem to lead where you expect them to, scented by incense, roses and sewers, with shops and bazaars selling everything from trumpets and temple decorations to snuff and saris. Traditionally, blue signified the home of a Brahmin, but non-Brahmins have got in on the act, too. As well as glowing with a mysterious light, the blue tint is thought to repel insects.

Modern Jodhpur stretches well beyond the city walls, but it's the immediacy and buzz of the old Blue City and the larger-than-life fort that capture travellers' imaginations. This crowded, hectic zone is also Jodhpur's main tourist shopping and eating area, and it often seems you can't speak to anyone without them trying to sell you something. Areas of the old city further west, such as Navchokiya, are just as atmospheric, with far less hustling.

MAJOR TRAINS FROM ABU ROAD

DESTINATION	TRAIN NUMBER & NAME	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	DEPARTURE
Ahmedabad	19224 <i>Jammu Tawi-Ahmedabad Express</i>	130/312/415 (B)	4½	11.10am
Bhuj	14311 <i>Ala Hazrat Express</i>	245/644/876 (B)	13	1.35am Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun
	14321 <i>Bareilly-Bhuj Express</i>	197/511/694 (B)	9	1.35am Mon, Tue, Thu
Jaipur	19707 <i>Aravalli Express</i>	204/529/717 (B)	9	10.02am
Jodhpur	19223 <i>Ahmedabad-Jammu Tawi Express</i>	153/386/519	4¾	3.22pm

Fares: B – sleeper/3AC/2AC.

History

Driven from their homeland of Kannauj, east of Agra, by Afghans serving Mohammed of Ghori, the Rathore Rajputs fled west around AD 1200 to the region around Pali, 70km southeast of Jodhpur. They prospered to such a degree that in 1381 they managed to oust the Pratiharas of Mandore, 9km north of present-day Jodhpur. In 1459 the Rathore leader Rao Jodha chose a nearby rocky ridge as the site for a new fortress of staggering proportions, Mehrangarh, around which grew Jodha's city: Jodhpur.

Jodhpur lay on the vital trade route between Delhi and Gujarat. The Rathore kingdom grew on the profits of opium, sandalwood, dates and copper, and controlled a large area which became cheerily known as Marwar (the Land of Death) due to its harsh topography and climate. It stretched as far west as what's now the India-Pakistan border area, and bordered with Mewar (Udaipur) in the south, Jaisalmer in the northwest, Bikaner in the north and Jaipur and Ajmer in the east.

Sights & Activities

TOP CHOICE **Mehrangarh** FORT
 (www.mehrangarh.org; museum admission adult/senior & student incl camera & audio guide ₹300/250, video ₹200; ☀9am-5.30pm) Rising perpendicular and impregnable from a rocky hill that itself stands 120m above Jodhpur's skyline, Mehrangarh is one of the most magnificent forts in India. The battlements are 6m to 36m high and as the building materials were chiselled from the

rock on which the fort stands, the structure merges with its base. Still run by the Jodhpur royal family, Mehrangarh is chock-full of history and legend.

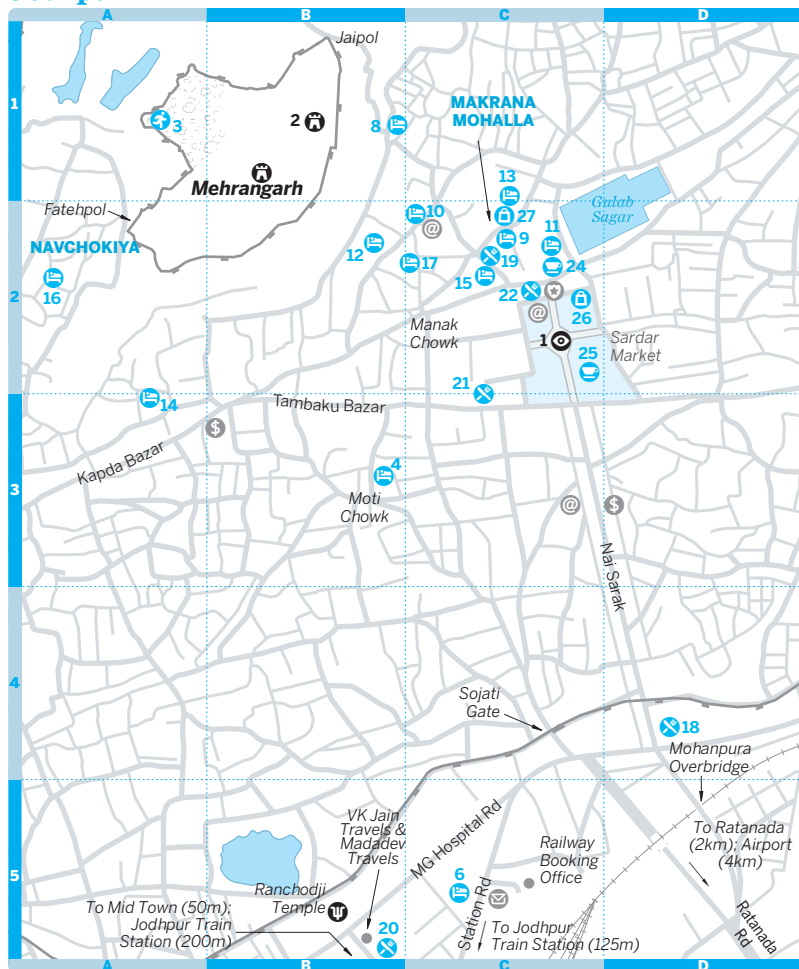
Mehrangarh's main entrance, at the northeast gate, Jaipol, is a 300m walk up from Hill View Guest House in the old city. Or you can take a winding 5km autorickshaw ride (around ₹80). The audio tour, included with the museum ticket, is in multiple languages and requires a deposit of passport, credit/debit card or ₹2000.

The **Jaipol** was built by Maharaja Man Singh in 1808 following his defeat of invading forces from Jaipur. Past the ticket office, the 16th-century **Dodh Kangra Pol** was an external gate before the Jaipol was built, and still bears the scars of 1808 cannonball hits. Through here, the main route heads up to the left, through the 16th-century **Imritiapol** and then the **Loha Pol**, the fort's original entrance, with iron spikes to deter enemy elephants. Just inside the gate are two sets of small handprints, the *sati* (self-immolation) marks of royal widows who threw themselves on their maharajas' funeral pyres – the last to do so were widows of Maharaja Man Singh in 1843.

Past Loha Pol you'll find a cafe and the Surajpol gate, which gives access to the museum. Once you've visited the museum, continue up to the panoramic **ramparts**, which are lined with impressive antique artillery.

Museum

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



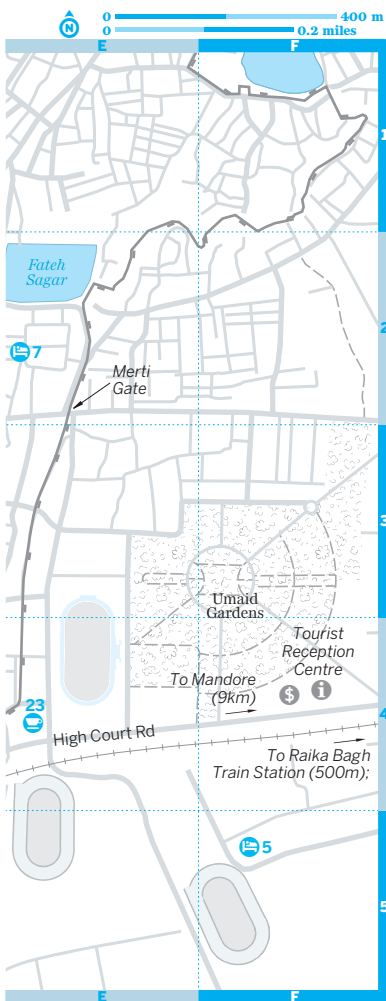
ture, so finely carved that it often looks more like sandalwood than sandstone.

The galleries around **Shringar Chowk** (Anointment Courtyard) display India's best collection of elephant howdahs and Jodhpur's royal palanquin collection.

One of the two galleries off **Daulat Khana Chowk** displays textiles, paintings, manuscripts, headgear and the curved sword of the Mughal emperor Akbar; the other gallery is the armoury. Upstairs are a **gallery of miniature paintings** from the sophisticated Marwar school and the beautiful 18th-century **Phul Mahal** (Flower Palace), whose

19th-century wall paintings depict the 36 moods of classical ragas as well as royal portraits; the artist took 10 years to create them using a curious concoction of gold leaf, glue and cow's urine.

Takhat Vilas was the bedchamber of Maharaja Takhat Singh (r 1843–73), who had just 30 maharanis and numerous concubines. Its beautiful ceiling is covered with Christmas baubles. You then enter the extensive zenana, whose lovely latticed windows (from which the women could watch the goings-on in the courtyards) are said to feature over 250 different de-



signs. Here you'll find the **Cradle Gallery**, exhibiting the elaborate cradles of infant princes, and the 17th-century **Moti Mahal** (Pearl Palace), which was the palace's main durbar hall for official meetings and receptions, with gorgeously colourful stained glass.

Flying Fox

(www.flyingfox.asia; 1/6 zips ₹330/1330; ☎9am-4pm) This two-hour circuit of six zip lines flies back and forth over walls, bastions and lakes on the north side of Mehrangarh. Safety standards are good and 'awesome' is the verdict of most who dare.

Jaswant Thada

(Indian/foreigner ₹15/30, camera/video ₹25/50; ☎9am-5pm) This milky white marble memorial to Maharaja Jaswant Singh II, sitting above a small lake 1km northeast of Mehrangarh, is an array of whimsical domes. It's a welcome, peaceful spot after the hubbub of the city, and the views across to the fort and over the city are superb. Built in 1899, the cenotaph has some beautiful *jalis* (carved marble lattice screens) and is hung with portraits of Rathore rulers going back to the 13th century.

Clock Tower & Markets

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

Umaid Bhawan Palace

Take a rickshaw or taxi to this hill-top palace, 3km southeast of the old city, sometimes called the Chittar Palace because local Chittar sandstone was used to build it. Building began in 1929 and the 365-room edifice was designed by the British architect Henry Lanchester for Maharaja Umaid Singh. It took over 3000 workers 15 years to complete, at a cost of around ₹11 million. The building is mortarless, and incorporates 100 wagon loads of Makrana marble and Burmese teak in the interior. Apparently the construction of this over-the-top palace began as a royal job-creation program during a time of severe drought.

The current royal incumbent, Gaj Singh II (known as Bapji), still lives in part of the building. Most of the rest has been turned into a suitably grand hotel.

Most interesting in the **museum** (Indian/foreigner ₹15/50; ☎9am-5pm) are the photos showing the elegant art deco design of the palace interior. Look out for some of the maharaja's highly polished classic cars displayed on the lawn in front of the museum.

Tours

Most guesthouses and hotels can lay on city tours by autorickshaw (half-day/day around ₹350/700) or taxi (around ₹500/1000). If you prefer to organise your own taxi, there's a stand outside the main train station.

Jodhpur

📍 Top Sights

Mehrangarh B1

📍 Sights

- 1 Clock Tower C2
2 Museum B1

👤 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 3 Flying Fox A1

🛏 Sleeping

- 4 Blue House B3
5 Durag Niwas Guest House F5
6 Govind Hotel C5
Haveli Inn Pal (see 11)
7 Heritage Kuchaman Haveli E2
8 Hill View Guest House B1
9 Hotel Haveli C2
10 Krishna Prakash Heritage
Haveli C2
11 Pal Haveli C2
12 Pushp Paying Guest House B2
13 Raas C1
14 Shahi Guest House A3
15 Shivam Paying Guest House C2

16 Singhvi's Haveli A2

17 Yogi's Guest House C2

🍴 Eating

- 18 Priya Restaurant D4
Indique (see 11)
19 Jhankar Choti Haveli C2
Jharokha (see 9)
20 Kalinga Restaurant B5
21 Nirvana C2
22 Omelette Shop C2

☕ Drinking

- 23 Cafe Coffee Day E4
24 Cafe Sheesh Mahal C2
Govind Hotel (see 6)
25 Shri Mishrilal Hotel C2

🛍 Shopping

- Krishna Art & Crafts (see 21)
26 Krishna Book Depot C2
27 Sambhali Boutique C2

Information

Net Hut (see 15)

Further afield, tours to Bishnoi and craft-making villages south of Jodhpur are popular (see p181).

🌟 Festivals & Events

In September or October Jodhpur hosts the colourful **Marwar Festival**, which includes polo and a camel tattoo.

🛏 Sleeping

The old city has something like 100 guesthouses, most of which scramble for your custom within half a kilometre of Sardar Market and its landmark clock tower. Many midrange and top-end options are found outside the old city, especially in the Ratana-da area (about 2km south), and on Circuit House Rd (1km southeast).

If a rickshaw driver is clamouring to take you to a particular guesthouse or hotel, it's probably because he is aiming to receive a commission from them. There's a growing anti-commission movement among hoteliers here, but some still pay your rickshaw or taxi driver an absurd 50% of what you pay for your room. Don't believe drivers, or strangers on the street, who tell you the place you want has closed, is full, is under repair, is far from the centre etc.

Many lodgings can organise a pick-up from the train station or bus stops, even at night, if you call ahead. Otherwise, for most places in the old city, you can avoid nonsense by getting dropped at the clock tower and walking from there.

OLD CITY



Singhvi's Haveli

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2624293; www.singhvihaveli.com; Ramdevji-kachowk, Navchokiya; r ₹300-1800; 📍📞) This red-sandstone, family-run, 500-odd-year-old *haveli* is an understated gem. It's in Navchokiya, one of the most atmospheric yet least touristy parts of the old city, beneath the western end of Mehrangarh (which you can enter by the Fatehpol gate). Run by a friendly Jain family, Singhvi's has 13 individual rooms, ranging from the simple to the magnificent Maharani Suite with 10 windows and a fort view. The relaxing and romantic vegetarian restaurant is decorated with sari curtains and floor cushions.

Krishna Prakash Heritage Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎2633448; www.kpheritage.net; Nayabas, Killikhana; s/d standard ₹850/1050, deluxe incl breakfast

₹1550/1750, ste incl breakfast ₹2450-3500; 🏠🏠) This multilevel heritage hotel right under the fort walls is a good-value and peaceful choice. It has prettily painted furniture and murals and rooms are well proportioned; the deluxe ones are a bit more spruced up, generally a bit bigger, and set on the upper floors, so airier. There's an undercover swimming pool and a relaxing terrace restaurant.

Pal Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(📍3293328; www.palhaveli.com; Gulab Sagar; r incl breakfast ₹2500-4000; 🏠🏠) This stunning *haveli*, the best and most attractive in the old city, was built by the Thakur of Pal in 1847. There are 21 charming, spacious rooms, mostly large and elaborately decorated in traditional heritage style, surrounding a cool central courtyard. The family still lives here and can show you its small museum. Three restaurants serve excellent food and the rooftop Indique boasts unbeatable views.

Raas

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(📍2636455; www.raasjodhpur.com; Tunvarji-kajhara, Makrana Mohalla; incl breakfast r ₹15,000-18,000, ste ₹26,000; 🏠🏠🏠) Developed from a 19th-century city mansion, Jodhpur's first contemporary-style boutique hotel is a splendid retreat of clean, uncluttered style, hidden behind a big castle-like gateway. If you fancy a change from the heritage aesthetic that prevails in Rajasthan's top-end hotels, Raas' clean, uncluttered style and subtle lighting are just the ticket. The red-stone-and-terrazzo rooms are not massive, but they come with plenty of luxury touches and have balconies with great Mehrangarh views.

Haveli Inn Pal

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(📍2612519; www.haveliinnpal.com; Gulab Sagar; r incl breakfast ₹2050-2550; 🏠🏠) The smaller, 12-room sibling of Pal Haveli. It's accessed through the same grand entrance, but is located around to the right in one wing of the grand *haveli*. It's a simpler heritage experience, with comfortable rooms and lake or fort views from the more expensive ones. Discounts are often available for single occupancy.

Hill View Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

((📍2441763; r ₹150-400) Perched just below the fort walls, this is run by a friendly, enthusiastic, no-hassle, Muslim family, who'll make you feel right at home. Rooms are basic, clean and simple, all with bathrooms, and the ter-

race has a great view over the city. Good, home-cooked veg and nonveg food is on offer.

Blue House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(📍2621396; bluehouse36@hotmail.com; Dabgaron-ki-Gali, Moti Chowk; r ₹250-1800; 🏠🏠) Certainly blue, this rambling old house run by a friendly Jain family is a reliable bet. It has a big range of individually decorated rooms and some very steep stairs. The two top-floor rooms (₹900 each) are good value.

Shahi Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$

(📍2623802; www.shahiguesthouse.net; Gandhi St, City Police; r ₹900-2200; 🏠🏠) Shahi is an interesting guesthouse developed from a 350-year-old *zenana*. There's lots of cool stone, and narrow walkways surrounding a petite courtyard. The six rooms are individual and cosy, and the family is charming. There is a delightful rooftop restaurant with views.

Hotel Haveli

HOTEL \$\$

(📍2614615; www.hotelhaveli.net; Makrana Mohalla; r ₹500-2200; 🏠🏠🏠) This 250-year-old building inside the walled city is a popular, efficient and friendly place. Rooms vary greatly and are individually decorated with colour themes and paintings; many have semibalconies and fort views. The rooftop vegetarian restaurant, Jharokha, has excellent views and nightly entertainment.

Yogi's Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(📍2643436; www.yogiguesthouse.com; Naya Bass, Manak Chowk; r ₹350-1200; 🏠🏠) Yogi's is a classic travellers' hangout that's moving up-market, with many refurbished rooms but also still plenty of budget options. Set in a 500-year-old *haveli* near the base of the fort walls, it's a friendly place painted blue and other bright colours. The rooms are smart and clean; some have AC and/or views.

Shivam Paying Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(📍2610688; shivamgh@hotmail.com; Makrana Mohalla; r ₹200-700, without bathroom ₹150; 🏠) Near the clock tower, this quiet, hassle-free option run by a helpful family has cosy rooms, steep staircases and a lovely little rooftop restaurant.

Pushp Paying Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(📍2648494; sanukash2003@yahoo.co.in; Pipli-ki-Gali, Naya Bass, Manak Chowk; r ₹200-600; 🏠🏠🏠) A small guesthouse with five clean, colourful rooms with windows. There's an up-close view of Mehrangarh from its rooftop restaurant.

Heritage Kuchaman**Haveli**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎2547787; www.kuchamanhaveli.com; inside Merti Gate; r ₹1550-2950, ste ₹3750; ④@☎)

This recently renovated 19th-century *haveli* is a rare midrange option in the old city. It's a well-proportioned building, but the rooms are rather dull.

TRAIN STATION AREA**Govind Hotel**

HOTEL \$

(☎2622758; www.govind-hotel.com; Station Rd; r ₹350-900; ④@☎) Well set up for travellers, with helpful management, an internet cafe and a location convenient to the Jodhpur train station. All rooms are clean and tiled, with fairly smart bathrooms. There's a rooftop restaurant and coffee shop with excellent espresso and cakes.

SOUTH OF THE OLD CITY**Devi Bhawan**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎2511067; www.devibhawan.com; Ratanada; r ₹1800-2300; ④@☎) A charming hotel surrounding a verdant oasis shaded by majestic neem trees. As well as being the most peaceful place in Jodhpur it is also excellent value. There's a superb pool and a good **restaurant** (veg/nonveg thali ₹175/200; ☎7-10am & 8-10pm). Rooms are spacious, clean, comfortable and decorated with colourful textiles and traditional furnishings.

Ratan Vilas

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎2613011; www.ratanvilas.com; Loco Shed Rd, Ratanada; r ₹2000-2950; ④@☎) Built in 1920, this beauty from a bygone era is quintessential colonial India, with manicured lawns, spacious, spotless and solidly tasteful rooms, and exceptional staff who prepare wonderful meals.

Durag Niwas Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2512385; www.durag-niwas.com; 1st Old Public Park Lane, Raika Bagh; rooftop per person ₹100, r ₹350-1000; ④) A friendly place set away from the hustle of the old city. Good home-cooked veg and nonveg dishes are available, and there's a cushion-floored, sari-curtained area on the roof for relaxing. Management offers cultural tours and the opportunity to do volunteer work with the Sambhali Trust.

Newtons Manor

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎2670986; www.newtonsmenor.com; 86 Jawahar Colony, Ratanada; r ₹1395-1595; ④) This family home has eight elegant guest rooms fussily decorated with lots of antique furniture.

It offers excellent home cooking, though pride of place goes to the good-sized billiard table. There's an eternally ungrateful tiger in the sitting room.

Ajit Bhawan

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2513333; www.ajitbhawan.com; Circuit House Rd; r ₹10,000-17,000; ④@☎) Behind the gracious main heritage building, built in 1927 for Maharajadhiraj Ajit Singh (younger brother of Maharaja Umair Singh), the accommodation is a series of comfortable thatched stone cottages with traditional furnishings. There's a sensational swimming pool and a fine-dining restaurant with live Rajasthani folk music in the evenings.

Vivanta Hari Mahal

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2439700; www.vivantabytaj.com; 5 Residency Rd; r ₹14,500-16,500, ste ₹27,500; ④@☎) Run by the Taj Group, this is a luxurious modern hotel with traditional Rajasthani flourishes, 2km south of the train station. It has very spacious common areas, including a bar, a big, inviting courtyard swimming pool and some lovely artwork. Decent discounts are often available for online bookings.

Umair Bhawan Palace

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2510101; www.tajhotels.com; Umair Bhawan Rd; r ₹26,500-43,500, ste ₹41,000-150,000; ④@☎) This massive art deco palace, still the royal residence, is constructed from honey sandstone and white marble and is located 3km southeast of the old city. It's so immense it feels rather like a parliament building or a university (ie not all that cosy). It has luxurious rooms of course and numerous sporting facilities, including a magnificent indoor swimming pool.

**Eating**

It's often convenient to eat in your guesthouse or hotel restaurant (which is usually on the roof, with a fort view), but there are also a number of places well worth going out to.

**Indique**

INDIAN \$\$

(☎3293328; Pal Haveli, Gulab Sagar; mains ₹200-275) This candle-lit rooftop restaurant at the Pal Haveli hotel is the perfect place for a romantic dinner. Even murky Gulab Sagar glistens at night and the views to the fort, clock tower and Umair Bhawan are superb. The food covers traditional tandoori, biryanis and North Indian curries, and you won't be disappointed by the old favourites –

butter chicken and rogan josh. On your way up, drop into the delightful 18 Century Bar, with saddle stools and enough heritage paraphernalia to have you ordering pink gins.

Nirvana

INDIAN \$\$

(1st fl, Tija Mata ka Mandir, Tambaku Bazar; mains ₹90-130, regular/special thali ₹160/250) Sharing premises with a Rama temple, 300m from the clock tower, Nirvana has both an indoor cafe covered in 150-year-old wall paintings of the Ramayana story, and a rooftop eating area with panoramic views. The Indian vegetarian food is among the most delicious you'll find in Rajasthan, and the thalis are wonderful. The special thali is truly enormous and easily enough for two. Continental as well as Indian breakfasts are served in the cafe.

Jharokha

MULTICUISINE \$

(Hotel Haveli, Makrana Mohalla; mains ₹60-90) The rooftop terraces of the Hotel Haveli host one of the best vegetarian restaurants in Jodhpur. As well as the excellent food and views there's nightly entertainment in the form of traditional music and dance. The dishes include Rajasthani specialities and traditional North Indian favourites, plus pizza, pasta and pancakes for the homesick.

Jhankar Choti Haveli

MULTICUISINE \$

(Makrana Mohalla; mains ₹70-110; 📶) Stone walls, big cane chairs, prettily painted woodwork and whirring fans set the scene at this semi-open-air travellers' favourite. It serves up good Indian vegetarian dishes plus pizzas, burgers and baked cheese dishes.

On the Rocks

INDIAN \$\$

(📍5102701; Circuit House Rd; mains ₹115-325; ☺12.30-3.30pm & 7.30-11pm) This leafy garden restaurant, 2km southeast of the old city, is very popular with locals and tour groups. It has tasty Indian cuisine, including lots of barbecue options and rich and creamy curries, plus a small playground and a cave-like bar (open 11am to 11pm) with a dance floor (for couples only).

Omelette Shop

CAFE \$

(Sardar Market; dishes ₹15-25) Located beside the northern gate of Sardar Market, this spot goes through 1000 to 1500 eggs a day. The egg man has been doing his thing here for over 30 years. Three tasty, spicy boiled eggs cost ₹15, and a two-egg masala and cheese omelette with four pieces of bread is ₹25.

Kalinga Restaurant

MULTICUISINE \$

(off Station Rd; mains ₹105-270) This restaurant near Jodhpur train station is smart and popular. It's in a dimly lit setting and has AC, a well-stocked bar, and tasty veg and non-veg North Indian tandooris and curries. Try the *lal maans*, a mouthwatering Rajasthani mutton curry.

Mid Town

INDIAN \$

(off Station Rd; mains ₹70-120, thali ₹110-150; ☺7am-11pm) This clean, AC restaurant does great veg food, including some Rajasthani specialities, and some particular to Jodhpur, such as *chakki-ka-sagh* (wheat dumpling cooked in rich gravy), *bajara-ki-roti pachkuta* (*bajara* wheat roti with local dry vegetables) and *kabuli* (vegetables with rice, milk, bread and fruit).

Priya Restaurant

INDIAN \$

(181-182 Nai Sarak; mains ₹50-73) If you can handle the traffic fumes, this street-facing place has a certain cheerful clamour, and serves up reliable North and South Indian cuisine. The thalis (₹89) are good and there are sweets, too.



Drinking

Shri Mishrial Hotel

CAFE

(Sardar Market; lassi ₹20; ☺8am-10pm) Just inside the southern gate of Sardar Market, this place is nothing fancy but whips up the most superb creamy *makhania* lassis. These are the best in town, probably in all of Rajasthan, possibly in all of India.

Coffee drinkers will enjoy the precious beans and espresso machines at the deliciously air-conditioned **Cafe Sheesh Mahal** (Pal Haveli; ☺10am-9pm); the rooftop coffee shop at the **Govind Hotel** (Station Rd); and, for those who need their dose of double-shot espresso, a branch of **Café Coffee Day** (Ansal Plaza, High Court Rd; ☺10am-11pm).



Shopping

Plenty of Rajasthani handicrafts are available, with shops selling textiles and other wares clustered around Sardar Market and along Nai Sarak (you'll need to bargain hard).

Jodhpur is famous for antiques, with a concentration of showrooms along Palace Rd, 2km southeast of the centre. These warehouse-sized shops are fascinating to wander around, but they're well known to Western antique dealers, so you'll be hard-pressed to

find any bargains. Also remember that the trade in antique architectural fixtures may be contributing to the desecration of India's cultural heritage (beautiful old *havelis* are often ripped apart for their doors and window frames). Restrictions apply to the export of Indian items over 100 years old. However, most of these showrooms deal in antique reproductions, and can make a piece of antique-style furniture and ship it home for you. The best bets for quality replica antiques are **Ajay Art Emporium** (Palace Rd) **Rani Handicrafts** (www.ranihandicrafts.com; Palace Rd), and **Rajasthan Arts & Crafts House** (www.rachindia.com; Palace Rd). These shops also have more portable and often less expensive items than furniture, such as textiles, carvings and silverware.

MV Spices

FOOD & DRINK

(www.mvspices.com) Nai Sarak (107 Nai Sarak; ☎9.30am-10pm); Sardar Market (209B Vegetable Market; ☎10am-9pm) The clock tower area has several tourist-oriented spice shops. This one has genuine spices and good service.



Sambhali Boutique CLOTHING, ACCESSORIES (Makrana Mohalla; ☎10.30am-8pm) This small but interesting shop sells goods made by women who have learned craft skills with the Sambhali Trust.

Krishna Art & Crafts

HANDICRAFTS

(1st fl, Tija Mata ka Mandir, Tambaku Bazar) A good place to gain knowledge of traditional garments. It also has a large range of carpets and shawls.

Krishna Book Depot

BOOKSTORE

(Sardar Market; ☎10.30am-7.30pm) Stocks an impressive range of secondhand and new books, including Lonely Planet titles.



Information

There are ATMs all over the city, including State Bank ATMs at Jodhpur train station, on Nai Sarak, next to the Tourist Reception Centre (High Court Rd) and near Shahi Guest House. There's also an ICICI Bank ATM on Nai Sarak.

Main post office (Station Rd; ☎9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, stamp sales only 10am-3pm Sun)

Net Hut (Makrana Mohalla; internet per hr ₹30; ☎9.30am-11pm)

Om Forex (Sardar Market; internet per hr ₹30; ☎9am-10pm) Also exchanges currency and travellers cheques.

Police (Sardar Market; ☎24hr) Small police post inside the market's north gate.

State Bank of India (off High Court Rd; ☎10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Changes currencies and travellers cheques; east of Umaid Gardens.

Tourist Reception Centre (☎2545083; High Court Rd; ☎9am-6pm Mon-Fri) Offers a free map and willingly answers questions.

Getting There & Away

Air

Jet Airways (☎5102222; www.jetairways.com; Residency Rd) and **Indian Airlines** (☎2510758; www.indian-airlines.nic.in; Circuit House Rd) both fly daily to Delhi and Mumbai, with Indian Airlines' Mumbai flights stopping at Udaipur on the way.

Bus

Destinations served from the RSRTC **Central Bus Stand** (Raika Bagh) include Ajmer (non-AC/AC ₹133/217, 4½ hours, half-hourly), Bikaner (₹145, 5½ hours, hourly), Delhi (₹379, 13 hours, four daily), Jaipur (express/deluxe/AC ₹197/239/346, seven hours, half-hourly), Jaisalmer (₹155, 5½ hours, 11 daily), Pushkar (₹125, five hours, five daily), Mt Abu (₹172, 5½ hours, three daily) and Udaipur (₹157, six to eight hours, 10 daily). Comfortable Volvo AC buses head off to Ajmer (₹300) and Jaipur (₹500) at 1am, and to Jaipur and Delhi (₹1100) at 4pm.

Numerous private bus companies, including Mahadev Travels, Jain Travels and VK Jain Travels, have offices on the street leading from Jodhpur train station to the Ranchodji Temple. They serve destinations such as Jaisalmer (₹150), Udaipur (₹160), Bikaner (₹140), Jaipur (₹180), Ajmer (₹120), Mt Abu (₹200) and Ahmedabad (₹260). Hotels and guesthouses will get you tickets for about ₹30 commission. Private buses leave from various locations around 2km southwest of Jodhpur train station, including Bombay Motors Circle, Kalpatru Cinema and Residency Rd – about ₹60 by autorickshaw from the clock tower.

Taxi

You can organise taxis for intercity trips, or longer, through most accommodation places, or deal direct with drivers. There's a taxi stand outside Jodhpur train station. A reasonable price is ₹6 per kilometre (for a non-AC car), with a minimum of 250km per day. The driver will charge at least ₹100 for overnight stops and will charge for his return journey.

Train

The computerised **booking office** (Station Rd; ☎8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1.45pm Sun)

is 300m northeast of Jodhpur train station. There's a tourist quota (Window 786).

Most trains from the east stop at the Raika Bagh station before heading on to the main station, which is handy if you're heading for a hotel on the eastern side of town.

To Jaisalmer, the 14059 *Delhi–Jaisalmer Express* departs at 6.10am, arriving in Jaisalmer (2nd class/sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹100/165/419/566/944) at 11.45am. The 14810 *Jodhpur–Jaisalmer Express* departs every night at 11pm, arriving at 5am.

To Delhi, the 12462 *Mandore Express* leaves Jodhpur at 7.30pm, reaching Jaipur (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹188/458/608/1015) at 12.40am, and Delhi (₹282/723/975/1627) at 6.25am. The 12466 *Intercity Express* departs at 5.55am, reaching Jaipur (2nd class/sleeper/AC chair/3AC ₹110/188/369/458) at 10.45am, and Sawai Madhopur (₹133/227/453/567) at 1.15pm. There are several daily trains to Bikaner, including the 14708 *Ranakpur Express* departing at 10.45am and arriving in Bikaner (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹156/395/531) at 4.40pm.

For Karachi (Pakistan), the 14889 *Thar Express*, alias the *Jodhpur–Munabao Link Express*, leaves Bhagat Ki Kothi station, 4km south of the main station, at 1am on Saturday only, reaching Munabao on the India–Pakistan border at 7am. There you undergo lengthy border procedures before continuing to Karachi (assuming you have a Pakistan visa) in a Pakistani train, arriving about 2am on Sunday. Accommodation is 2nd class and sleeper only, with a total sleeper fare of around ₹400 from Jodhpur to Karachi. In the other direction the Pakistani train leaves Karachi at about 11pm on Friday, and Indian train 14890 leaves Munabao at 7pm on Saturday, reaching Jodhpur at 11.50pm. Schedules can be erratic, so check in Jodhpur for departure times and stations.

i Getting Around

To/From the Airport

The airport is 5km south of the city centre, about ₹200/100 by taxi/autorickshaw.

Autorickshaw

Autorickshaws between the clock tower area and the train stations or central bus stand should be about ₹35.

Around Jodhpur

The mainly arid countryside around Jodhpur is dotted with surprising lakes, isolated forts and palaces, and intriguing villages. It's home to a clutch of fine heritage hotels where you can enjoy the slower pace of rural life.

MANDORE

Situated 7km north of the centre of Jodhpur, Mandore was the capital of Marwar prior to the founding of Jodhpur. Only a few traces of the ancient seat of power remain, but the lush **Mandore Gardens** (☀9am–5.30pm), with their monuments and museum, make an appealing and relaxing excursion from Jodhpur (it's thronged with local tourists at weekends). Buses to Mandore (₹8) run about every five minutes from Jodhpur. You can catch them at a stop just east of the Tourist Reception Centre on High Court Rd.

OSIAN

This ancient Thar Desert town, 65km north of Jodhpur, was an important trading centre between the 8th and 12th centuries. It was dominated by the Jains, whose wealth left a legacy of exquisitely sculptured, well-preserved temples. The **Mahavira Temple** (Indian/foreigner free/₹10, camera/video ₹50/100; ☀6am–8.30pm) surrounds an image of the 24th *tirthankar* (great teacher), formed from sand and milk. **Sachiya Mata Temple** (☀6am–7.15pm) is an impressive walled complex where both Hindus and Jains worship.

Prakash Bhanu Sharma, a personable Brahmin priest, has an echoing **guesthouse** (☎02922-274331, 9414440479; s/d without bathroom ₹250/300), geared towards pilgrims, opposite the Mahavira Temple.



Gemar Singh (☎9460585154; www.hacra.org), a native of Bhikamkor village northwest of Osian, arranges camel safaris, homestays, camping, desert walks and jeep trips in the deserts around Osian and their Rajput and Bishnoi villages. His trips receive rave reviews. The cost is around ₹1000 per person per day (minimum two people), including bus transfer from Jodhpur.

RSRTC buses run about hourly to/from Jodhpur (local/express ₹33/36, 1½ hours) and Phalodi (local/express ₹44/49, two hours). Trains between Jodhpur and Jaisalmer (three daily each way) also stop here. A return taxi from Jodhpur costs about ₹900.

SOUTHERN VILLAGES

A number of traditional villages are strung along and off the Pali road southeast of Jodhpur. Most hotels and guesthouses in Jodhpur offer tours to these villages. It's a well-worn trail and a lot depends on how good your guide is: a typical four-hour, 90km tour to the Bishnoi villages of Khejadali and Guda (east of the main road) and

the non-Bishnoi craft-making villages of Salawas (west of the road) and Kakani (on the road) costs ₹500 or ₹600 per person (minimum two people). A recommended Jodhpur-based operator is **Bishnoi Village Safari** (☎9829126398; www.bishnoivillagesafari.com), run by Deepak Dhanraj.

Many visitors are surprised by the density, and fearlessness, of wildlife such as black-buck, bluebills (nilgai), chinkara gazelles and desert fox around the Bishnoi villages. The Bishnoi are a Hindu sect who hold all animal life sacred. The 1730 sacrifice of 363 villagers to protect khejri trees is commemorated in September at **Khejadali** village, where there is a memorial to the victims fronted by a small grove of khejri trees.

ROHET

Rohet Garh (☎02936-268231; www.rohetgarh.com; s/d ₹4000/5000, ste ₹7500; 📍📞📧), in Rohet village, 40km south of Jodhpur on the Pali road, is one of the area's most appealing heritage hotels. This 350-year-old, lovingly tended manor has masses of character and a tranquil atmosphere, which obviously helped Bruce Chatwin when he wrote *The Songlines* here, and William Dalrymple when he began *City of Djinn*s in the same room, No 15. Rohet Garh has a gorgeous colonnaded pool, charming green gardens, great food and lovely, individual rooms. It also possesses a stable of fine Marwari horses and organises rides from two-hour evening rides (₹1500) to six-day back-country treks, sleeping in luxury tents.

Mihir Garh (☎9829023453; www.mihirgarh.com; ste incl full board & village safari ₹24,000; 📍📞📧), the latest pride and joy of the family who own Rohet Garh, rises out of the plains 17km to the west of its sibling like a fantasy desert castle. Opened in 2009, this is the ultimate Rajasthan chill-out spot. It has just nine huge, all-different suites, equipped with contemporary amenities (including plunge pool or Jacuzzi) and beautiful Rajasthan artefacts. Three specialist chefs (Continental, Indian and desserts) cater to your personal culinary preferences, and you can relax in the infinity pool or the spa.

One of the strangest temples in all India stands 8km south of Rohet beside the Pali road, near Chotila village. The deity at **Om Bana Temple** is a garland-decked Enfield Bullet motorcycle, known as Bullet Baba. The story goes that local villager Om Bana died at this spot in the 1980s when his motorbike skidded into a tree. The bike was

taken to the local police station, but then mysteriously twice made its own way back to the tree, and travellers along the road started seeing visions of Om Bana – inevitably leading to the machine's deification.

Buses to Rohet (₹29, one to 1½ hours) leave Jodhpur's Central Bus Stand about every 15 minutes. A taxi is around ₹800.

Jaisalmer

☎02992 / POP 58,286

The fort of Jaisalmer is a breathtaking sight: a massive sandcastle rising from the sandy plains like a mirage from a bygone era. No place better evokes exotic camel-train trade routes and desert mystery. Ninety-nine bastions encircle the fort's still-inhabited twisting lanes. Inside are shops swaddled in bright embroideries, a royal palace and numerous businesses looking for your tourist rupee. Despite the commercialism it's hard not to be enchanted by this desert citadel. Beneath the ramparts the narrow streets of the old city conceal magnificent *havelis*, all carved from the same golden-honey sandstone as the fort – hence Jaisalmer's designation as the Golden City.

A city that has come back almost from the dead in the past half-century, Jaisalmer may be remote but it's certainly not forgotten – indeed it's one of Rajasthan's biggest tourist destinations, and few people come here without climbing onto a camel in the surrounding Thar Desert. Competition to get *your* bum into a camel saddle can be fierce, with some operators adopting unpleasant hard-sell tactics (see the boxed text, p190, for more on camel safaris).

Jaisalmer celebrates its desert culture in January or February each year with the action-packed **Desert Festival**, featuring camel races, camel polo, folk music, snake charmers, turban-tying contests and the famous Mr Desert competition. Many events take place at the Sam sand dunes.

History

Jaisalmer was founded way back in 1156 by a leader of the Bhati Rajput clan named Jaisal. The BhatIs, who trace their lineage back to Krishna, ruled right through to Independence in 1947.

The city's early centuries were tempestuous, partly because its rulers relied on looting for want of other income, but by the 16th century Jaisalmer was prospering from its strategic position on the camel-train routes

between India and Central Asia. It eventually established cordial relations with the Mughal empire. Maharawal Sabal Singh, in the mid-17th century, expanded the Jaisalmer principedom to its greatest extents by annexing areas that now fall within the administrative districts of Bikaner and Jodhpur.

Under British rule the rise of sea trade (especially through Mumbai) and railways saw Jaisalmer's importance and population decline. Partition in 1947, with the cutting of trade routes to Pakistan, seemingly sealed the city's fate. But the 1965 and 1971 wars between India and Pakistan gave Jaisalmer new strategic importance, and since the 1960s the Indira Gandhi Canal to the north has brought revitalising water to the desert.

Today tourism and the area's many military installations are the pillars of the city's economy.

Sights

Jaisalmer Fort

FORT

Founded in 1156 by the Rajput ruler Jaisal and reinforced by subsequent rulers, Jaisalmer Fort was the focus of a number of battles between the Bhatias, the Mughals of Delhi and the Rathores of Jodhpur. You enter the fort from its east side and pass through four massive gates on the zigzagging route to the upper part. The fourth gate opens into a large square, Dasher Chowk, where Jaisalmer Fort's uniqueness becomes apparent: this is a living fort, with about 3000 people residing within its walls. It's honeycombed with narrow, winding lanes which are lined with houses and temples – along with a large number of handicraft shops, guesthouses, restaurants and massage/beauty parlours. Watch your bags and pockets as you wander around the fort – there have been some incidents of theft.

Fort Palace

(Indian/foreigner incl audio guide & camera ₹30/250; video ₹50/150; ☀8am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-6pm Nov-Mar) Towering over the fort's main square, and partly built on top of the Hawa Pol (the fourth fort gate), is the former rulers' elegant seven-storey palace. The 1½-hour audio-guide tour, available in six languages, is worthwhile but you must deposit ₹2000 or your passport/driver's licence/credit card. Highlights include the mirrored and painted Rang Mahal (the bedroom of the 18th-century ruler Mulraj II), a gallery of finely wrought 15th-century sculptures



ARRIVAL IN JAISALMER

Touts work the buses heading to Jaisalmer from Jodhpur, hoping to steer travellers to guesthouses or hotels in Jaisalmer where they will get a commission. On arrival in Jaisalmer, most buses are surrounded by a swarm of touts baying for your attention. If an autorickshaw driver has a sign with the name of the accommodation you want, by all means take the free ride offered (after checking that it is free). Otherwise, don't believe anyone who offers to take you 'anywhere you like' for just a few rupees, and do take with a fistful of salt any claims that the hotel you want is 'full', 'closed' or 'no good any more'.

Also be very wary of offers of rooms for ₹100 or similar absurd rates. Places offering such prices are almost certainly in the camel-safari hard-sell game and their objective is to get you out of the room and on to a camel as fast as possible. If you don't take up their safari offers, the room price may suddenly increase or you might be told there isn't a room available any more.

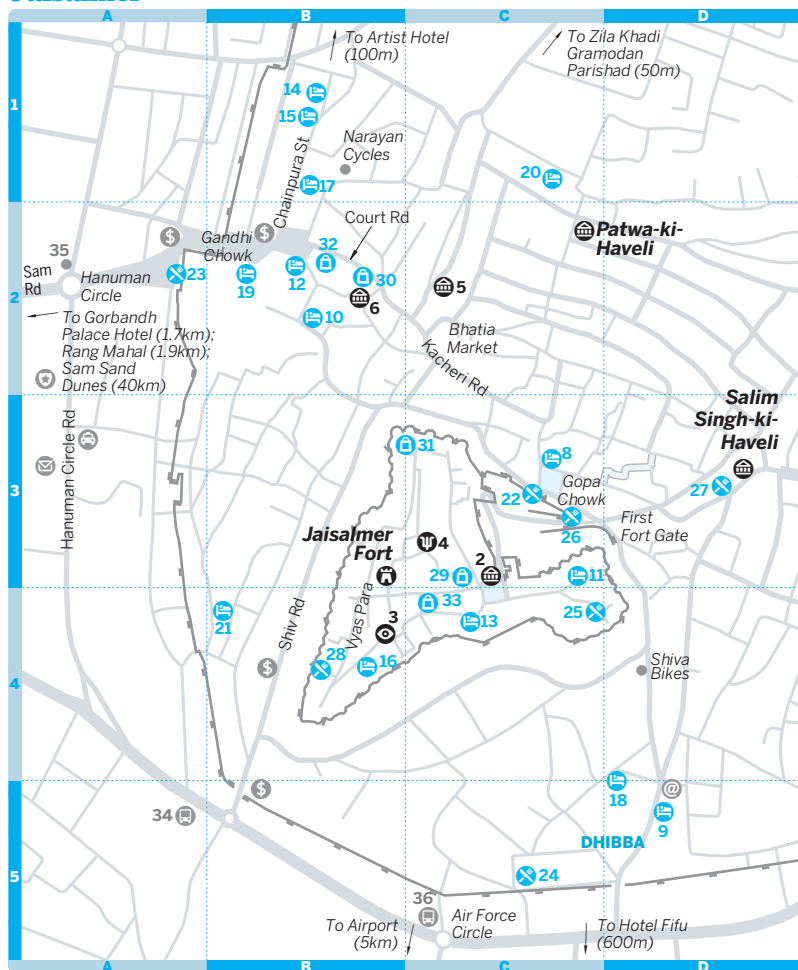
Touts are less prevalent on the trains, but the same clamour for your custom ensues outside the station once you have arrived.

donated to the rulers by the builders of the fort's temples, and the spectacular 360-degree views from the rooftop. One room contains an intriguing display of stamps from the former Rajput states.

Jain Temples

(admission ₹30, camera/video/mobile phone ₹70/120/30; ☀7am-1pm) Within the fort walls is a mazelike, interconnecting treasure trove of seven beautiful yellow-sandstone Jain temples, dating from the 15th and 16th centuries. The intricate carving rivals that of the marble Jain temples in Ranakpur and Mt Abu, and has an extraordinary quality because of the soft, warm stone. Shoes and all leather items must be removed before entering the temples.

Chandraprabhu is the first temple you come to inside. Dedicated to the eighth *tirthankar*, whose symbol is the moon, it was built in 1509 and features fine sculpture in the *mandapa*, whose intensely sculpted pillars form a series of *toranas*. To the right of Chandraprabhu is the tranquil **Rikhabdev**

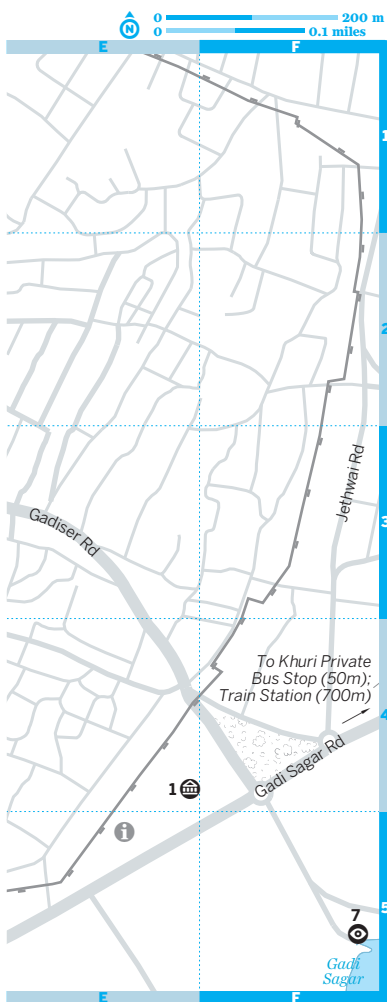


temple, with fine sculptures around the walls, protected by glass cabinets, and pillars beautifully sculpted with *apsaras* and gods. Behind Chandraprabhu is **Parasnath**, which you enter through a beautifully carved *torana* culminating in an image of the Jain *tirthankar* at its apex. A door to the south leads to small **Shitalnath**, dedicated to the 10th *tirthankar*, whose image is composed of eight precious metals. A door in the north wall leads to the enchanting, dim chamber of **Sambhavanth** – in the front courtyard, Jain priests grind sandalwood in mortars for devotional use. Steps lead down to the **Gyan**

Bhandar, a fascinating, tiny, underground library founded in 1500, which houses priceless ancient illustrated manuscripts. The remaining two temples, **Shantinath** and **Kunthunath**, were both built in 1536 and feature plenty of sensual carving.

Laxminarayan Temple

The Hindu Laxminarayan Temple, in the centre of the fort, is simpler than the Jain temples and has a brightly decorated dome. Devotees offer grain, which is distributed before the temple. The inner sanctum has a repoussé silver architrave around its en-



trance, and a heavily garlanded image enshrined within.

Havelis

Inside the fort but outside it, too (especially in the streets to the north), Jaisalmer is replete with the fairy-tale architecture of *havelis* – gorgeously carved stone doorways, *jali* (carved lattice) screens, balconies and turrets.

Patwa-ki-Haveli

HISTORIC BUILDING

The biggest fish in the *haveli* pond is Patwa-ki-Haveli, which towers over a narrow lane, its intricate stonework like honey-coloured

lace. It is divided into five sections and was built between 1800 and 1860 by five Jain brothers who made their fortunes in brocade and jewellery. It's most impressive from the outside, though the first of the five sections is open as the privately owned **Kothari's Patwa-ki-Haveli Museum** (Indian/foreigner ₹50/120, camera/video ₹40/70; ☉8.30am-7pm), which richly evokes 19th-century life.

Salim Singh-ki-Haveli

HISTORIC BUILDING

(admission incl guide ₹20, camera/video ₹20/50; ☉8am-7pm May-Sep, 8am-6pm Oct-Apr) This 18th-century *haveli* has an amazing, distinctive shape. The top storey spreads out into a mass of carving, with graceful arched balconies surmounted by pale blue cupolas. Salim Singh was a notorious 19th-century prime minister of Jaisalmer whose ill treatment of the area's Paliwal Brahmin community led them to abandon their 84 villages and move elsewhere.

Nathmal-ki-Haveli

HISTORIC BUILDING

(admission ₹20; ☉8am-7pm) This late-19th-century *haveli* also used to be a prime minister's house and is still partly inhabited. It has an extraordinary exterior, dripping with carvings and the 1st floor has some beautiful paintings using 1.5kg of gold. A doorway is surrounded by 19th-century British postcards and there's a picture of Queen Victoria. The left and right wings were the work of two brothers, whose competitive spirits apparently produced this virtuoso work – the two sides are similar, but not identical.

Museums

Desert Cultural Centre & Museum

MUSEUM

(Indian/foreigner ₹20/50, camera/video ₹20/50; ☉9am-8pm) Next to the Tourist Reception Centre, this interesting little museum has material in English and Hindi on the history of Rajasthan's different princely states, and exhibits on traditional Rajasthani culture. Features include Rajasthani music (with video), textiles and a *phad* scroll painting. It also hosts nightly half-hour **puppet shows** (Indian/foreigner ₹30/50, camera/video ₹20/50; ☉6.30pm, 7.30pm) with English commentary.

Thar Heritage Museum

MUSEUM

(off Court Rd; admission ₹40) This privately run museum near Gandhi Chowk also has an intriguing assortment of Jaisalmer area artefacts. It's brought alive by the guided tour you'll probably get from its founder, local historian and folklorist LN Khatri. Opening

Jaisalmer

📍 Top Sights

Jaisalmer Fort.....	B3
Patwa-ki-Haveli.....	C2
Salim Singh-ki-Haveli.....	D3

📍 Sights

1 Desert Cultural Centre & Museum.....	E4
2 Fort Palace Museum.....	C3
3 Jain Temples.....	B4
4 Laxminarayan Temple.....	C3
5 Nathmal-ki-Haveli.....	C2
6 Thar Heritage Museum.....	B2
7 Tilon-ki-Pol.....	F5

🛏 Sleeping

8 Hotel Fort View.....	C3
9 Hotel Gorakh Haveli.....	D5
10 Hotel Jaisal Palace.....	B2
11 Hotel Killa Bhawan.....	C3
12 Hotel Nachana Haveli.....	B2
13 Hotel Paradise.....	C4
14 Hotel Pleasant Haveli.....	B1
15 Hotel Renuka.....	B1
16 Hotel Siddhartha.....	B4
17 Hotel Swastika.....	B1
18 Hotel The Royale Jaisalmer.....	D5

19 Mandir Palace Hotel.....	B2
20 Residency Centre Point.....	C1
21 Shahi Palace.....	B4

🍴 Eating

22 Bhang Shop.....	C3
23 Chandan Shree Restaurant.....	A2
24 Desert Boy's Dhani.....	C5
25 Free Tibet.....	C4
26 Jaisal Italy.....	C3
27 Natraj Restaurant.....	D3
Saffron.....	(see 12)
28 Sun Set Palace.....	B4
The Trio.....	(see 19)

🛍 Shopping

29 Bellissima.....	C3
30 Desert Handicrafts Emporium.....	B2
31 Hari Om Jewellers.....	C3
32 Jaisalmer Handloom.....	B2
33 Light of the East.....	C4

🚗 Transport

34 Bus Stand.....	A5
35 Hanuman Travels.....	A2
36 Private Bus Stand.....	C5
Swagat Travels.....	(see 35)

hours are variable, but if it's closed, you should find Mr Khatri at his shop, Desert Handicrafts Emporium, nearby on Court Rd.

Other Attractions

Gadi Sagar

LAKE

This stately 14th-century tank, southeast of the city walls, was Jaisalmer's vital water supply until 1965, and because of its importance it is surrounded by many small temples and shrines. It's a waterfowl favourite in winter, but can almost dry up before the monsoon. The lake's large catfish population swarms in a writhing mass to the shore whenever someone is tossing breadcrumbs. **Boat hire** (☀8am-9pm) costs ₹50 to ₹100 for 30 minutes.

The attractive **Tilon-ki-Pol** gateway that straddles the road down to the tank is said to have been built by a famous prostitute. When she offered to pay to have it constructed, the maharawal refused permission on the grounds that he would have to pass under it to go down to the tank, which would be beneath his dignity. While he was away, she built the gate anyway, adding a Krishna

temple on top so the king could not tear it down.

👉 Tours

The Tourist Reception Centre runs sunset tours to the Sam sand dunes (₹200 per person, minimum four people). Add ₹100 if you'd like a short camel ride too. Another tour visits Amar Sagar, Lodhruva and Bada Bagh for ₹500 per car.

🛏 Sleeping

Staying in the fort is the most atmospheric and romantic choice, but you should be aware of the pressure tourism is exerting on the fort's infrastructure (see the boxed text, p187). There is a wide choice of good places to stay outside the fort. Rates at many places fluctuate with the seasons: if there's a festival on, rooms are expensive and scarce, but at slow times most places offer big discounts. You'll get massive discounts between April and August, because Jaisalmer is hellishly hot then.

OUTSIDE THE FORT**Desert Moon**

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎)250116, 9414149350; www.desertmoonguesthouse.com; Achalvansi Colony; s ₹700-800, d ₹800-1000; (☎) On the northwest edge of town, 1km from Gandhi Chowk, Desert Moon is in a peaceful location beneath the Vyas Chhatari sunset point. The guesthouse is run by a friendly Indian-Kiwi couple who offer free pick-up from the train and bus stations. The 11 rooms are cool, clean and comfortable, and the rooftop vegetarian restaurant has fort and *chhatri* views.

Hotel Pleasant Haveli

HOTEL \$\$

(☎)253253; www.pleasanthaveli.com; Chainpura St; r ₹1200-2000, ste ₹2000-3250; (☎) Recently renovated, this welcoming place has lots of lovely carved stone, a beautiful rooftop and just a handful of spacious, attractive, colour-themed rooms, all with bathroom and AC.

Residency Centre Point

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎)/fax 252883; residency_guesthouse@yahoo.com; Kumbhara Para; r ₹450) Near the Patwa-ki-Haveli, this friendly, family-run guesthouse has five clean, spacious doubles in a lovely 250-year-old building. Rooms vary in size – budget by price but midrange in quality. The rooftop restaurant has superb fort views and offers home-cooked food.

Hotel Fifu

HOTEL \$\$

(☎)254317; www.fifutavel.com; Bera Rd; r incl breakfast ₹2650; (☎) Down a dusty lane on the south edge of town, this hotel is a little out of the way, though the beautiful, colour-themed sandstone rooms afford a very peaceful and pleasant stay. The rooftop has tremendous views and a great vegetarian restaurant.

Hotel Nachana Haveli

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎)252110; www.nachanahaveli.com; Gandhi Chowk; s/d ₹2500/3000; (☎) This 280-year-old royal *haveli*, set around three courtyards – one with a tinkling fountain – is a fascinating hotel. The raw sandstone rooms have arched stone ceilings and the ambience of a medieval castle. They are sumptuously and romantically decorated, though some lack much natural light.

Hotel Gorakh Haveli

HOTEL \$\$

(☎)9982657525; www.hotelgorakhhaveli.com; Dhibba; s/d ₹1000/1500, with AC ₹1500/2500; (☎) A pleasantly low-key spot south of the fort, Gorakh Haveli is a modern place built with traditional sandstone and some attractive carving. Rooms are comfy and spacious, staff are amiable, and there's a reasonable multicuisine rooftop restaurant.

Hotel Renuka

HOTEL \$

(☎)252757; hotelrenuka@rediffmail.com; Chainpura St; r ₹200-750; (☎) Spread over three floors, Renuka has squeaky clean rooms – the best have balconies, bathrooms and AC. It's been warmly accommodating guests since 1988, so management knows its stuff. The roof terrace has great fort views and a good restaurant.

**Artist Hotel**

HOTEL \$

(☎)252082; www.artisthotel.info; Artist Colony; s ₹150-250, d ₹250-500, tr with AC ₹1000; (☎) This friendly, Austrian-and-Indian-run establishment helps support – and maintain the artistic traditions of – formerly nomadic musicians and storytellers who are now settled in the same area of town. There are great fort views from the roof, where frequent musical

A CASTLE BUILT ON SAND

A decade ago the whole structure of Jaisalmer Fort was in danger of being undermined by water leakage from its antique drainage system. The main problem: material progress, in the form of piped water for the fort's inhabitants – something undreamt of when the fort was built. Three of the ancient bastions had collapsed and parts of the fort palace were leaning at an alarming rate.

Since then, British-based **Jaisalmer in Jeopardy** (www.jaisalmer-in-jeopardy.org) and several Indian organisations, including the **Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage** (INTACH; www.intach.org), have raised funds and carried out much-needed conservation works to save the fort. Most important has been the renewal of the fort's drainage system and repaving of the streets, as well as repair works inside the fort palace.

While the fort is no longer in imminent danger of subsiding, it remains a delicate structure. Thoughtless, often illegal, building work remains a threat to parts of its structure. Visitors should be aware of the fort's fragile nature and conserve resources, especially water, as much as possible.

events take place, and a very good range of European and Indian dishes (mains ₹85 to ₹220) is served. Rooms vary, but are clean and comfortable, with small bathrooms.

Shahi Palace

HOTEL \$

(☎255920; www.shahipalacehotel.com; off Shiv Rd; r ₹550-2050; 🍷🍷) A modern building in traditional style with some lovely carved sandstone. Shai Palace has attractive rooms, though a limited number have natural light. The cheaper rooms are mostly in two annexes along the street, **Star Haveli** and **Oasis Haveli**. The rooftop restaurant (mains ₹80 to ₹200) is excellent.

Mandir Palace Hotel

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎252788; www.mandirpalace.com; Gandhi Chowk; s/d ₹4500/5000, ste ₹8000-10,000; 🍷🍷🍷) Jaisalmer's erstwhile royal family still lives in this sprawling 18th-century palace just inside the town walls. Some rooms are full of character, but the newer ones have less character, and staff can be distant.

Hotel Fort View

HOTEL \$

(☎252214; Gopa Chowk; r ₹150-400) A friendly stalwart of the budget scene, close to the fort gate. The cheapest rooms are small and in the back, but clean. Rooms 21 and 31 have fort views. There's a popular 21-facing multicuisine restaurant (mains ₹50 to ₹80).

Hotel The Royale Jaisalmer

HOTEL \$\$

(☎252601; www.royalejaisalmer.com; Dhibba; r ₹1850-2500; 🍷🍷🍷) A good choice for its spacious, colourful, traditionally decorated rooms, multicuisine rooftop restaurant and neat pool in the rear courtyard.

Hotel Swastika

HOTEL \$

(☎252483; swastikahotel@yahoo.com; Chainpura St; dm ₹100, s/d/tr ₹200/300/400, r with AC ₹600; 🍷) In this well-run place the only thing you'll be hassled about is to relax. Rooms are plain, quiet, clean and good value.

Hotel Jaisal Palace

HOTEL \$

(☎252717; www.hoteljaisalpalace.com; near Gandhi Chowk; s ₹600-1050, d ₹750-1250; 🍷) This is a well-run, good-value hotel, though the rooms tend to be smallish and characterless.

IN THE FORT

Hotel Killa Bhawan

BOULIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎251204; www.killabhawan.com; 445 Kotri Para; r incl breakfast ₹3850-9400; 🍷) A cute mini-labyrinth of a place combining three old houses set right on the fort walls. French-owned and designed, it has vividly coloured rooms,

attractive little sitting areas and all sorts of intriguing arts and crafts.

Hotel Paradise

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎252674; www.paradiseonfort.com; r ₹300-2000, with AC from ₹1050; 🍷🍷) Right above the fort's southern walls, Paradise has great terraces for lounging, eating and drinking, and nice clean rooms, many with views.

Hotel Siddhartha

HOTEL \$

(☎253614; r ₹500-700) Just past the Jain temples, little Siddhartha has well-kept, stone-walled rooms; some with street or panoramic views and some have no views.

OUTSIDE TOWN

Fort Rajwada

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎253233; www.fortrajwada.com; Jodhpur-Barmar Link Rd; s/d ₹5400/7000, ste from ₹12,500; 🍷🍷🍷) Two kilometres east of town, off the Pokaran road, this large, modern but traditional-style place was built according to the ancient Indian design principles of *vaastu*, which is similar to feng shui. An opera designer created the interior, so it's suitably dramatic. Rooms are well equipped, though not huge, and there's a nice pool.

Gorbandh Palace Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎253801; www.hrhhotels.com; Sam Rd; r ₹6000; 🍷🍷🍷) Two kilometres west of Hanuman Circle, this grandiose modern hotel with large if unimaginative gardens is a good bet for families. It's constructed with traditional design elements from local sandstone. There's a superb pool (nonguests ₹200), a classy spa and a good bookshop. Rooms aren't huge, though some have balconies or terraces.

Eating

As well as the many hotel-rooftop eateries, there's a good number of other places to enjoy a tasty meal, often with a view.

Desert Boy's Dhani

INDIAN \$

(Dhibba; mains ₹70-90; ☀8am-10pm) This is a walled-garden restaurant where tables are spread around a large, stone-paved courtyard with a big tree. Rajasthani music and dance is performed from 8pm to 10pm nightly, and it's a very pleasant place to eat excellent, good-value Rajasthani and other Indian veg dishes.

Jaisal Italy

ITALIAN \$\$

(First Fort Gate; mains ₹120-170) Though it's run by the same family as the Bhang Shop, you won't have to worry about bhong pizzas. Instead you'll find superb all-veg bruschetta,

antipasti, pasta, pizza, salad and desserts, plus Spanish omelettes, served in an exotically decorated indoor restaurant (cosy in winter, deliciously air-conditioned in summer) or on a delightful terrace atop the lower fort walls, with cinematic views.

Sun Set Palace MULTICUISINE \$
(Fort; mains ₹60-120) This restaurant has cushions and low tables on an airy terrace on (as the name implies) the fort's west side. Pretty good vegetarian Indian dishes are prepared, as well as Chinese and Italian options.

Natraj Restaurant MULTICUISINE \$\$
(mains ₹110-270) This is an excellent place to eat, and the rooftop has a satisfying view of the upper part of the Salim Singh-ki-Haveli next door. The veg and nonveg food, including tandoori and curries, as well as Chinese and Continental dishes, is consistently excellent, as is the service.

Saffron MULTICUISINE \$\$
(Gandhi Chowk; mains ₹70-180) On the spacious roof terrace of Hotel Nachana Haveli, the veg and nonveg food here is excellent and it's a particularly atmospheric place in the evening. The Indian food is hard to beat, though the Italian comes a close second.

Free Tibet MULTICUISINE \$\$
(Fort; mains ₹70-140; ☺8am-9pm) It's multi-multicuisine here, with everything from French baguettes to moussaka, but the speciality is Tibetan, including good noodle soups and *momos* (dumplings). It's near the fort's southeast corner, with good views from window tables.

The Trio MULTICUISINE \$\$
(☎252733; Gandhi Chowk; mains ₹100-190) Under a tented roof atop the wall of the Mandir Palace, this long-running Indian, Chinese and Continental restaurant offers reliably good veg and nonveg dishes. The thalis and tandoori items are excellent, and the restaurant has a lot more atmosphere than most places in town. Traditional musicians play in the evening and there's a great fort view.

Chandan Shree Restaurant INDIAN \$
(near Hanuman Circle; mains ₹50-90, thalis ₹60-140) An always busy dining hall churning out a huge range of tasty, spicy South Indian, Gujarati, Rajasthani, Punjabi and Bengali dishes.

Bhang Shop CAFE \$
(Gopa Chowk; medium/strong lassi ₹50/60) Outside the First Fort Gate, this 'shop' (not the

most attractive establishment in town) offers lassis of different strengths as well as bhang cookies, cakes and sweets; camel-safari packs are a speciality. Note that bhang doesn't agree with everyone (see p1167).

Shopping

Jaisalmer is famous for stunning embroidery, bedspreads, mirror-work wall hangings, oil lamps, stonework and antiques. Watch out when buying silver items: the metal is sometimes adulterated with bronze.

Hari Om Jewellers HANDICRAFTS
(Chougan Para, Fort; ☺10am-8.30pm) This family of silversmiths makes beautiful, delicate silver rings and bracelets featuring world landmarks and Hindu gods. Asking prices for rings start at ₹1800 (at a rate of ₹300 per day's work).

Jaisalmer Handloom HANDICRAFTS
(Court Rd; www.jaisalmerhandloom.com; ☺9am-8pm) Has a big array of bedspreads, tapestries, clothing (ready made and custom-made, including silk) and other textiles, made by its own workers and others, and doesn't belabour you with too much of a hard sell.

Light of the East SOUVENIRS
(Tewata Para, Fort; ☺8am-9pm) An enthralling little shop selling crystals and rare mineral specimens.

Desert Handicrafts Emporium HANDICRAFTS
(Court Rd; ☺9am-8pm) With some unusual jewellery, paintings and all sorts of textiles, this is one of the most original of numerous craft shops around town.

Bellissima HANDICRAFTS
(Fort; ☺8am-9pm) This small shop near the Fort's main square sells beautiful patchworks, embroidery, paintings, bags, rugs, cushion covers and all types of Rajasthani art. Proceeds assist women.

Information

Internet Access

There are several internet cafes in the fort, but not so many outside it. Typical cost is ₹40 per hour.

SOCH it (Dhibba; internet per hr ₹40; ☺7.30am-10pm)

Money

ATMs include State Bank and SBBJ near Hanuman Circle, SBBJ and ICICI Bank on Shiv Rd, and State Bank outside the train station.



JAISALMER CAMEL SAFARIS

Trekking around by camel is the most evocative and fun way to sample Thar Desert life. Don't expect dune seas, however – the Thar is mostly arid scrubland sprinkled with villages and wind turbines, with occasional dune areas popping out here and there. You will often come across fields of millet, and children herding flocks of sheep or goats whose neck-bells tinkle in the desert silence – a welcome change after the sound of belching camels.

Most trips now include jeep rides to get you to less frequented areas. An alternative to Jaisalmer is to base yourself in Khuri, 48km southwest, where some good safaris are available and you're already in the desert when you start.

Before You Go

Competition between safari organisers is cut-throat and standards vary. Most hotels and guesthouses are very happy to organise a camel safari for you. While many provide a good service, some may cut corners and take you for the kind of ride you didn't have in mind. A few low-budget hotels in particular exert considerable pressure on guests to take 'their' safari. Others specifically claim 'no safari hassle'.

You can also organise a safari directly with one of the several reputable specialist agencies in Jaisalmer. Since these agencies depend exclusively on safari business it's particularly in their interest to satisfy their clients. It's a good idea to talk to other travellers and ask two or three operators what they're offering.

A one-night safari, leaving Jaisalmer in the afternoon and returning next morning, with a night on some dunes, is a minimum to get a feel for the experience: you'll probably get 1½ to two hours riding each day. You can trek for several days or weeks if you wish. The longer you ride, the more you'll gain understanding of the desert's villages, oases, wildlife and people.

The best known dunes, at Sam (40km west of Jaisalmer) and Khuri, are always crowded in the evening and are more of a carnival than a back-to-nature experience. 'Nontouristy' and 'off the beaten track' trips take you to other areas, usually southwest from Jaisalmer to the area between Sam and Khuri, or beyond Khuri.

With jeep transfers included, typical rates are between ₹550 and ₹750 per person per day. This should include three meals a day, plus as much mineral water and as many blankets as you need, and often thin mattresses. Check that there will be one camel for each rider. You can pay for greater levels of comfort (eg tents, better food), but always get it all down in writing.

You shouldn't have to pay for a full day if you're returning after breakfast on the last day. One-night safaris starting in the afternoon and ending the following morning are normally charged as about 1½ days.

Thomas Cook (Gandhi Chowk; ☎9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) A reliable moneychanger, changing travellers cheques and cash, and providing credit- and debit-card advances.

Post

Main post office (Hanuman Circle Rd; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Tourist Information

Tourist Reception Centre (☎252406; Gadi Sagar Rd; ☎9.30am-6pm) This friendly office has a free (if rather old) town map and various brochures. Staff will helpfully answer all sorts of questions.

i Getting There & Away

Air

The airport, 5km south of town, opens and closes intermittently due to border tensions with Pakistan. In early 2011 it was closed. The most recent flights were operated by **Kingfisher Airlines** (www.flyingfisher.com) to Jodhpur.

Bus

RSRTC buses leave from a stand just off Shiv Rd on the south side of town. There are buses to Jodhpur (ordinary/express ₹125/155, 5½ hours, 15 daily), Bikaner (₹130/162, seven hours, four daily) and Jaipur (semi-deluxe ₹375, 12 hours, 5.30pm).

Private buses mostly leave from a yard near Desert Boy's Dhani, south of the fort. You can

What to Take

Women should consider wearing a sports bra, as a trotting camel is a bumpy ride. A wide-brimmed hat (or Lawrence of Arabia turban), long trousers, long-sleeved shirt, insect repellent, toilet paper, torch, sunscreen, water bottle (with a strap), and some cash (for a tip to the camel men, if nothing else) are also recommended. It can get cold at night, so if you have a sleeping bag bring it along, even if you're told that lots of blankets will be supplied. During summer, rain is not unheard of, so come prepared.

Which Safari?

» **Ganesh Travels** (☎250138; ganeshtravel45@hotmail.com; Fort) Run by camel owners from the villages and has a good basic rate of ₹550 per day. Most shorter trips are in the Bersiala area, 50km to 60km southwest of Jaisalmer.

» **Sahara Travels** (☎252609; sahara_travels@yahoo.com; Gopa Chowk) Its office is just outside the First Fort Gate. This agency gets good reviews and is run by the proudly bearded and moustachioed LN Bissa, alias Mr Desert. Trips may circle the area around Sam, or head out beyond Khuri. The normal daily rate is ₹700.

» **Trotters** (☎9414469292; www.trotterscamelsafarijaisalmer.com; Gopa Chowk) Trotters has a daily rate of ₹750 but provides very reliable service. Its one-night, off-the-beaten-track option costs between ₹900 and ₹1500 depending on your departure and return times.

There are several other options, including hotel-organised safaris. Note that recommendations here should not be a substitute for doing your own research. Whichever agency you go for, insist that all rubbish is carried back to Jaisalmer.

In the Desert

Camping out at night, huddling around a tiny fire beneath the stars and listening to the camel drivers' songs, is magical.

There's always a long lunch stop during the hottest part of the day. At resting points the camels are unsaddled and hobbled; they'll often have a roll in the sand before limping away to browse on nearby shrubs, while the camel drivers brew chai or prepare food.

Take care of your possessions, particularly on the return journey. Any complaints you do have should be reported, either to the **Superintendent of Police** (☎252233), the Tourist Reception Centre, or the intermittently staffed Tourist Assistance Force posts inside the First Fort Gate and on the Gadi Sagar access road.

The camel drivers will expect a tip or gift at the end of the trip; don't neglect to give them one.

book through your accommodation (which adds ₹30 to the fare) or direct with the bus company ticket offices, most of which are at Hanuman Circle, including Swagat Travels, which has buses to Jodhpur (seat/sleeper ₹150/250, 16 daily), Bikaner (₹150/250, three daily), Ahmedabad (₹350/450, 12 hours, 5.30pm) and Udaipur (₹350/450, 12 hours, 3.30pm), and Hanuman Travels, with services to Jaipur (₹280/380, 4.30pm) and Bhuj (₹400/800, 15 hours, 2.30pm). These prices are for direct buses; some agencies may also sell tickets requiring a change of bus at Jodhpur, and some travellers have found themselves in Jodhpur with a useless onward ticket, so do clarify what you're getting.

Taxi

One-way taxis should cost about ₹1800 to Jodhpur, ₹2500 to Bikaner or ₹4500 to Udaipur. There is a stand on Hanuman Circle Rd.

Train

The **train station** (☺ticket office 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1.45pm Sun) is on the eastern edge of town, just off the Jodhpur road.

Two daily express trains leave for Jodhpur. The 14809 *Jaisalmer-Jodhpur Express* (sleeper/3AC ₹165/419) departs at 11.15pm, reaching Jodhpur at 5.20am. The 14060 *Jaisalmer-Delhi Express* leaves at 4.30pm, reaching Jodhpur (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹165/419/566) at 9.50pm, and continues to Jaipur (₹262/693/945,

10½ hours from Jaisalmer) and Delhi (₹331/888/1215, 18½ hours).

Trains 14703 and 14701 leave Jaisalmer at 10.40am and 10.45pm respectively for Bikaner (sleeper ₹168, 5½ hours).

i Getting Around

Autorickshaw

Official rates (first kilometre ₹11, each subsequent kilometre ₹6, minute of waiting ₹0.20) are posted at some autorickshaw stands. That adds up to about ₹25 from the train station to Gandhi Chowk, for example, but you may have to bargain hard to get this price.

Bicycle

A good way to get around town is by bicycle. There are a number of hire places, including **Narayan Cycles** (near Gandhi Chowk; per hr/day ₹10/40).

Car & Motorcycle

It's possible to hire taxis or jeeps from the stand on Hanuman Circle Rd. To Khuri, the Sam sand dunes or Lodhrva, expect to pay ₹500 return including a wait of about an hour or so. A full day of sightseeing around Jaisalmer is around ₹1000.

Shiva Bikes (Dhibba; scooter/motorbike per day ₹300/400) is a licensed hire place with adequate motorbikes and scooters for exploring town and nearby sights (helmets and area maps included).

Around Jaisalmer

SAMSAND DUNES

The silky **Sam sand dunes** (admission vehicle/camel ₹50/80), 41km west of Jaisalmer along a good sealed road (maintained by the Indian army), are one of the most popular excursions from the city. The band of dunes is about 2km long and is undeniably one of the most picturesque in the region. Some camel safaris camp here, but many more people just roll in for sunset, to be chased across the sands by dressed-up dancing children and tenacious camel owners offering short rides. Plenty more people stay overnight in one of the couple of dozen tent resorts near the dunes. All in all the place acquires something of a carnival atmosphere from late afternoon till the next morning, making it somewhere to avoid if you're after a solitary desert sunset experience.

If you're organising your own camel ride on the spot, expect to pay ₹200 to ₹300 for

a one-hour sunset ride, but beware of tricks from camel men such as demanding more money en route.

KHURI

☎03014

The village of Khuri, 48km southwest of Jaisalmer, has quite extensive dune areas attracting their share of sunset visitors, and a lot of mostly smallish 'resorts' offering the same sort of overnight packages as Sam. It also has a number of low-key guesthouses where you can stay in tranquillity in a traditional-style hut with clay-and-dung walls and thatched roof, and venture out on interesting camel trips in the relatively remote and empty surrounding area. Khuri is within the **Desert National Park** which stretches over 3162 sq km southwest of Jaisalmer to protect part of the Thar ecosystem, including wildlife such as the desert fox, desert cat, chinkara gazelle, nilgai or bluebull (a large antelope), and some unusual bird life including the endangered great Indian bustard.

Sleeping & Eating

Badal House

HOSTEL \$

(☎9660535389; per person incl full board r or hut ₹300) Here you can stay in a family compound in the centre of the village with a few spotlessly clean, mud-walled, thatch-roofed huts and equally spotless rooms (one with its own squat toilet), and enjoy good home cooking. Former camel driver Badal Singh is a charming, gentle man who charges ₹500 for a camel safari with a night on the dunes. He doesn't pay commission so don't let touts warn you away.

Angaur Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎7742547711, 9929296900; hameersingh@yahoo.com; huts per person from ₹500, tent per person ₹1000) One of the closest lodgings to the main dunes (on the south side of the village), this has yet another circle of snug huts. Prices are for packages including a camel ride, dinner with traditional dance entertainment and breakfast. Wildlife jeep tours (per person per day ₹500) as well as overnight camel safaris in the less touristy area east of Khuri are on offer.

Arjun Family

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎274132; arjunguesthouse@yahoo.co.in; per person incl full board huts/r ₹150/200) A couple of doors from Badal House, this is another friendly family offering very clean lodgings, home-cooked meals and inexpensive safaris. Rooms have attached bathroom, huts don't

i Getting There & Away

Private buses to Khuri (₹30, one hour) leave from the Barmer road corner in the southeast of Jaisalmer at about 10.30am, 11.30am, 3.30pm and 5pm. You may be approached by camel-safari touts en route.

Bikaner

📞0151 / POP 529,007

Bikaner is a vibrant, dust-swirling desert town with a fabulous fort and an energising outpost feel. It's less dominated by tourism than many other Rajasthan cities, though it has plenty of hotels and a busy camel-safari scene, which is attracting more and more travellers looking to avoid the Jaisalmer hustle. Bikaner's atmospheric walled old city sits in what's now the southwest of the city, with the main train station (Bikaner Junction) and Junagarh fort to its northeast, in what's more or less the centre of town.

Few people come to Bikaner without taking a trip out to the notorious Karni Mata Temple at Deshnok, 30km south, where pilgrims worship thousands of holy rats.

Around the full moon in January or very late December, Bikaner celebrates its three-day **Camel Festival**, with one day of events at the Karni Singh Stadium and two days out at Ladera, 45km northeast of the city.

History

The city was founded in 1488 by Rao Bika, a son of Rao Jodha, Jodhpur's founder, though the two Rathore ruling houses later had a serious falling out over who had the right to keep the family heirlooms. It grew fast as a staging post on the great caravan trade routes from the late 16th century onwards, and flourished under a friendly relationship with the Mughals, but declined as they did in the 18th century. By the 19th century the area was markedly backward, but managed to turn its fortunes around by hiring out camels to the British during the Afghan War. In 1886 it was the first desert princely state to install electricity.

Sights

Junagarh

FORT

(Indian/foreigner ₹30/200, video ₹100, audio guide incl camera ₹250; ☀️10am-5.30pm, last entry 4.30pm) This most impressive fort was constructed between 1589 and 1593 by Raja Rai Singh, ruler of Bikaner and a general in the army of the Mughal Emperor Akbar. You en-

ter through the Karan Prole gate on the east side and pass through three more gates before the ticket office for the palace-museum.

The admission price includes a group tour in Hindi and/or English with an official guide. The audio guide (requiring an identity document as a deposit), available in English, French, German and Hindi, is very informative and allows you to visit at a more leisurely pace.

The beautifully decorated **Karan Mahal** was the palace's Diwan-i-Am (Hall of Public Audience), built in the 17th and 18th centuries. **Anup Mahal Chowk** has lovely carved *jarokhas* (balcony-windows) and *jali* screens, and was commissioned in the late 17th century by Maharaja Anup Mahal. Rooms off here include the sumptuous **Anup Mahal**, a hall of private audience with walls lacquered in red and gold, and the **Badal Mahal** (Cloud Palace), whose walls are beautifully painted with blue cloud motifs and red and gold lightning.

The **Gaj Mandir**, the suite of Maharaja Gaj Singh (r 1745-87) and his two top wives, is a fantastic symphony of gold paint, colourful murals, sandalwood, ivory, mirrors, niches and stained glass. From here you head up to the palace roof to enjoy the views and then down eventually to the superb **Ganga Durbar Hall** of 1896, with its pink stone walls covered in fascinating relief carvings. You then move into **Maharaja Ganga Singh's office** and finally the **Vikram Vilas Durbar Hall**, where pride of place goes to a WWI De Havilland DH-9 biplane bomber.

Old City

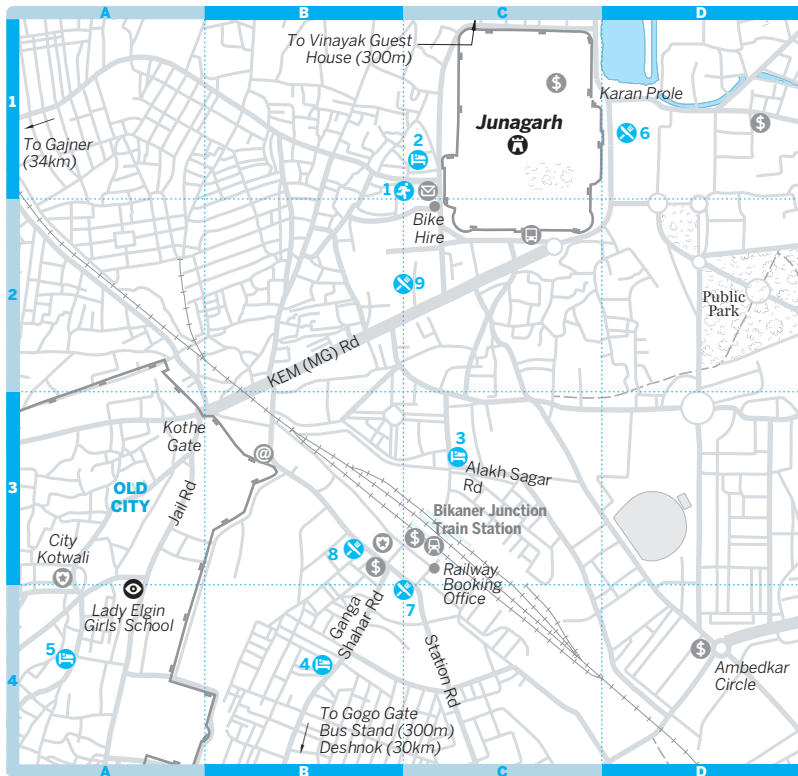
AREA

The old city still has a medieval feel despite the motorbikes and autorickshaws. This labyrinth of narrow, winding streets conceals a number of fine old *havelis*, and a couple of notable Jain temples (**Bhandasar Temple** and **Sandeshwar Temple**), and makes for an interesting wander, on which we guarantee you will get lost at least once. The main entrance from the city centre is the triple-arched Kothe Gate, surrounded by a bustling commercial area.

Sri Sadul Museum

MUSEUM

(Indian/foreigner ₹25/50, camera/video free/₹150; ☀️10am-5.30pm) In the grounds of the royal Lallgarh Palace (now a hotel), about 2km northeast of Junagarh, this well-presented museum celebrates the history of Bikaner's Rathore royal family. You can see Maharaja Sadul Singh's 1940s railway carriage,



Maharaja Karni Singh's golf clubs and hair-brush, a nice collection of Bikaner school miniatures, and lots of shooting photos right down to the medals of contemporary Princess Rajyashree Kumari, who excelled in target shooting rather than wildlife shooting.

Sleeping

Hotels and guesthouses are scattered all round town. If you're arriving by train in the early morning, check whether you'll have to pay extra for occupying the room before noon.

Bhanwar Niwas

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2529323; www.bhanwarniwas.com; Rampuria St, Old City; s ₹4000-5000, d ₹5000-6000, ste ₹14,000; 🍷🍷) This superb hotel has been developed out of the beautiful Rampuria Haveli – a gem in the old city, 300m southwest of the City Kotwali police station. It has 26 all-different, spacious and delightfully deco-

rated rooms, featuring stencil-painted wallpaper, marble or mosaic floors and antique furnishings. Comfortable common rooms drip with antiques and are arranged around a large internal courtyard, which doubles as a venue for cultural events.

Hotel Desert Winds

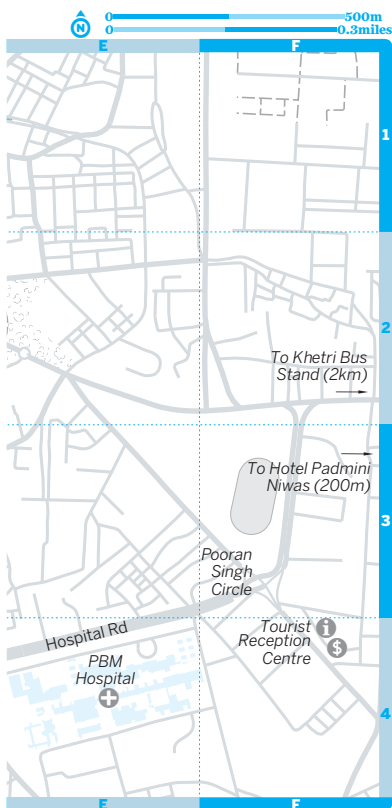
HOTEL \$\$

(☎2542202; www.hoteldesertwinds.in; s ₹900-1100, d ₹1100-1300; 🍷🍷) This lovely hotel with spotless, spacious rooms and a friendly, relaxed atmosphere is 1km northeast of the fort. It's owned by a retired deputy director of Rajasthan Tourism and his family, who can give you plenty of info about the city.

Bhairon Vilas

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎2544751, 9928312283; <http://hotelbhaironvilas.tripod.com>; s ₹1000-1800, d ₹1300-2100; 🍷🍷) This hotel on the west side of Junagarh is run by a former Bikaner prime minister's great-grandson. Rooms are mostly large and are eclectically decorated with antiques,



gold-threaded curtains and old family photographs (some of the wiring and fittings seem to be of the same vintage). Three-hour city tours with government-authorised guides (₹200) and a range of camel and jeep safaris are on offer.

Laxmi Niwas Palace HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2202777; www.laxminiwaspalace.com; s ₹7700-9900, d ₹8800-11,000, ste ₹18,000-25,000; 🍷🍷🍷) Located 2km north of the city centre, this pink-sandstone hotel is part of the royal palace, dating from 1902. It has opulent interiors with lovely stone carving. Rooms are mostly large, elegant and evocative, and the bar and billiards room are overlooked by skins, heads and photos of deceased wildlife.

Hotel Jaswant Bhawan HOTEL \$\$

(☎2548848; www.hoteljaswantbhawan.com; s/d ₹600/800, with AC ₹1000/1200; 🍷🍷) This is a pleasant, quiet, welcoming place run by

Bikaner

📍 Top Sights

Junagarh C1

🎪 Activities, Courses & Tours

AFEV (see 9)

1 Desert Tours C1

🏠 Sleeping

2 Bhairon Vilas C1

3 Hotel Jaswant Bhawan C3

4 Hotel Marudhar Heritage B4

5 Shanti House A4

🍴 Eating

Amber Restaurant (see 8)

6 Gallops D1

7 Heeralal's C4

8 Laxmi Hotel B3

9 Pause Café C2

Information

Cyber Station (see 1)

descendants of Bikaner prime ministers. The AC rooms are spacious, plain and airy, though some of the external paintwork needs attention. It's a two-minute walk from the main train station (via the station's 'foot over bridge'); self-catering is also possible.

Vijay Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2231244, 9829217331; www.camelman.com; Jaipur Rd; s ₹300-1000, d ₹400-1200; a) About 4km east of the centre, this is a home away from home with 10 spacious, light-filled rooms and a friendly family. Owner Vijay is a camel expert and a recommended safari operator. This is an ideal base for taking a safari, with good home-cooked meals (₹125 to ₹200), which you can eat inside or in the garden. As well as camel trips, they offer free pick-up and drop-off from the train and bus stations, and jeep outings to Deshnok and other sights around Bikaner.

Hotel Padmini Niwas

HOTEL \$

(☎2522794; padmini_hotel@rediffmail.com; 148 Sadul Ganj; r without/with AC ₹850/1050; 🍷🍷🍷) A fabulous place to unwind away from the rush of the city. Padmini Niwas has clean, carpeted rooms and a chilled-out, helpful owner. The lawn area is a revelation, boasting one of the town's few outdoor pools.

Hotel Marudhar Heritage

HOTEL \$

(☎2522524; hmheritage2000@hotmail.com; Ganga Shahar Rd; s ₹400-1200, d ₹500-1500; 🍷🍷)



BIKANER SAFARIS

Bikaner is an excellent alternative to the Jaisalmer camel safari scene and increasingly popular with travellers. There are fewer people running safaris here, so the hassle factor is quite low. Camel trips tend to focus on desert villages and the interesting wildlife.

Three days and two nights is a common camel-safari duration, but half-day, one-day and short overnight trips are all possible. If you're after a serious camel trek, go for a cross-country trip to Kichan (about six days), famous for its concentration of large, graceful demoiselle cranes from September to March, or Jaisalmer (two weeks).

Typical prices are around ₹1000 to ₹1200 per person per day including overnight camping, with tents, mattresses, blankets, meals, mineral water, one camel per person, a camel cart to carry the gear (and sometimes tired riders), and a guide in addition to the camel men. Many trips start at Raisar, about 8km east of Bikaner, or Deshnok, 30km south.

The two most popular operators, both reliable and long established, are the **Camel Man** (☎2231244, 9829217331; www.camelman.com; Vijay Guest House, Jaipur Rd), run by Vijay Singh Rathore, and **Vino Desert Safari** (☎2270445, 9414139245; www.vinodesertsafari.com; VINO Paying Guest House, Ganga Shahar), run by Vinod Bhojak. The French-run NGO **AFEV** (☎9829867323; www.afevinde.com; Pause Café, KEM Rd) offers desert horse-cart and bike trips as well as camel safaris. **Vinayak Desert Safari** (☎2202634; www.vinayakdesertsafari.com; Vinayak Guest House) does appealing jeep safaris (per person per day ₹1500) focusing on desert animals and birds.

This is a friendly, well-run and good-value option a short walk from the main train station. There are plain and comfortable rooms with TV and phone to suit most budgets. You may wish to avoid the carpeted rooms which are a bit musty. Checkout is 24 hours after you check in.

Vinayak Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎2202634; vinayakguesthouse@gmail.com; r ₹150-800, s without bathroom ₹100; 🍷🍷) This place offers six varied and clean rooms in a quiet family house with a little sandy garden. On offer are a free pick-up service, good home-cooked food, cooking lessons, bicycles (per day ₹25), and camel safaris and wildlife trips with Vinayak Desert Safari. It's just 400m north of Junagarh fort.

Vino Paying Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎2270445, 9414139245; www.vinodesertsafari.com; Ganga Shahar; s ₹150-200, d ₹250-350; 🍷🍷) This guesthouse is in a family home 3km south of the main train station. It's a cosy choice and is the base of one of Bikaner's best camel-safari operations. It's excellent value, and the family is enthusiastic, helpful and welcoming. They also serve up good home-cooked food and offer free cooking classes. It's opposite Gopeshwar Temple; they'll pick you up for free from the main train station.

Shanti House

GUESTHOUSE \$
(☎2543306; inoldcity@yahoo.com; New Well, near City Kotwali; r ₹250-400; 🍷) This is a tiny old-

city *haveli* with a narrow staircase and just four bargain rooms with squat toilets, bucket hot water and some nice wall paintings. The bustle of old Bikaner is at your doorstep. The helpful owner, Gouri, is a knowledgeable guide who can walk you around the old city (per person per hour ₹30). Free cooking classes and station pickups (a good idea as it's not the easiest place to find – call the day before if possible) are offered.

Hotel Harasar Haveli

HOTEL \$\$
(☎2209891; www.harasar.com; near Karni Singh Stadium; r ₹500-2000) Most rickshaw-wallahs will want to bring you to this hotel, 1km northeast of Junagarh fort, which is notorious for its commission-paying tactics. So it's a good place to meet other travellers. The 38 plain rooms cover a big range in price, size and cleanliness. There's a decent rooftop restaurant.

Eating

Gallops

MULTICUISINE \$\$
(mains ₹200-400; ☎10.30am-10pm) This modern-ish cafe-restaurant close to the Junagarh entrance is known as 'Glops' to rickshaw-wallahs. There are snacks such as pizzas, pakoras and sandwiches, and a good range of Indian and Chinese veg and non-veg dishes. You can sit outside or curl up in an armchair in the air-conditioned interior with a cold beer, espresso coffee or fuming hookah.

Pause Café

(KEM Rd; dishes ₹30-70; ☺10am-10pm; ☺) A travellers' hang-out with a nice garden setting and internet (per hour ₹20, wi-fi per hour ₹10), French-run Pause serves up soups, chips, cheese toast, salads, rice and dhal, a daily vegetarian dish, banana lassi and real coffee. It's run by the NGO AFEV (p41) and is also the contact point for AFEV's 'equitable-tourism' camel safaris.

Heeralal's

(Station Rd; mains ₹50-110; ☺noon-10.30pm) This bright and hugely popular 1st-floor restaurant serves up pretty good veg and nonveg Indian dishes, plus a few Chinese and pizzas (but unfortunately no beer), amid large banks of plastic flowers.

Palace Garden Restaurant

(Hotel Laxmi Niwas; mains ₹110-240; ☺7.30-10pm) This excellent garden restaurant at one of Bikaner's best hotels is a lovely place to eat – at least until the nights become too chilly. The fare spans South Indian, veg and nonveg North Indian, and Chinese, and if you're lucky there will be live music.

Bhanwar Niwas

(☎2529323; Rampuria St, Old City; set lunch/dinner ₹350/375; ☺lunch & dinner) A splendid place to eat, this beautiful hotel welcomes nonguests to its veg dining hall (reservations are essential). You can have a drink before dinner in the courtyard.

Laxmi Hotel

(Station Rd; mains ₹40-80, thali ₹60-100) A simple place, Laxmi is open to the street and dishes up tasty, fresh vegetarian thalis. You can see the roti being flipped in front of you.

Amber Restaurant

(Station Rd; mains ₹75-115, thali ₹51-105; ☺8am-10.30pm) It has a staid, no-nonsense look, but Amber is well regarded and popular for veg fare. To one side is an Indian sweets counter, to the other an ice-cream parlour.

**Information**

You'll find a State Bank ATM outside the main train station, and Bank of Baroda ATMs opposite the station and next to the Tourist Reception Centre. There are several cybercafes on Ganga Shahar Rd.

Cyber Station (internet per hr ₹20; ☺6.30am-11pm)

Lake Palace Trade & Travels (Junagarh; ☺9am-6pm Mon-Sat) Just inside the fort

entrance; changes currency and travellers cheques.

Main post office (☺9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Near Bhairon Vilas hotel.

Modi Cyber Cafe (Station Rd; internet per hr ₹20; ☺9.30am-9.30pm) Under a Vadilal (ice cream) sign.

Tourist Reception Centre (☎2226701; ☺9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri) This very helpful and friendly office (near Pooan Singh Circle) can answer most tourism-related questions and provide transport schedules and a map-brochure.

Getting There & Away**Bus**

The RSRTC's Central Bus Stand is 1.5km north-east of Junagarh fort. If your bus is coming from the south, you can ask the driver to let you out closer to the city centre. RSRTC buses depart for Jodhpur (₹143, 5½ hours, half-hourly), Jaipur (₹191, seven hours, hourly 5am to 6pm) via Fatehpur and Sikar, Udaipur (₹289, 13 hours, 4.30pm), Delhi (₹287, 11 hours, three daily) via Mandawa (₹117, five hours), Jhunjhunu (₹130, five hours, two daily) and Ajmer (₹156, seven hours, seven daily).

Private buses and their ticket offices mostly congregate along the southern wall of the fort. Destinations include Jaisalmer (seat/sleeper ₹140/200, seven hours, 5.30am, 3pm and 10pm), Jodhpur (₹150/200, six daily), Jaipur (₹150/200, 11 daily), Delhi (₹250/300, 7.30pm, 8pm and 8.30pm), Ajmer (₹150/200, 10pm and 11pm) and Pushkar (₹150/180, seven hours, 9pm, 10pm and 11pm). Private buses to Fatehpur, Nawalgarh and Mandawa leave about every half-hour, 10am to 7pm, from a stop on the Jaipur road known as the Khetri bus stand. A private bus to Amritsar (seat/sleeper ₹300/350, 15 hours, 5.45pm) leaves from Ambedkar Circle.

Train

The main train station is Bikaner Junction, with a **computerised reservations office** (☺8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) in a separate building just east of the main station building. A couple of other useful services go from Lalgarh Junction station in the north of the city.

To Jaipur, the 09733 *Hanumangarh-Kota Special* leaves at 10.17pm (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹188/487/659, seven hours) and the 12467 *Intercity Express* leaves at 5.30am (2nd class ₹123, 6¼ hours), both from Bikaner Junction. For Jodhpur the 14707 *Ranakpur Express* departs Bikaner Junction at 9.30am (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹156/395/531, five hours). The 15610 *Avadh-Assam Express* leaves Lalgarh Junction at 7.45pm for Delhi (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹262/693/945, 11½ hours). To Jaisalmer (sleeper ₹168, six hours), the

14702 Bikaner–Jaisalmer Express leaves Bikaner Junction at 11.35pm, and the 14704 Lalgarh–Jaisalmer Express leaves Lalgarh Junction at 7.20am.

i Getting Around

An autorickshaw from the train station to Junagarh fort should cost ₹30, but you'll probably be asked for more.

Bikaner Motorbikes & Bicycle Hire (www.bikanermotorbikesbicyclehirerentalcenter.com; ☎9am–7pm), by the roundabout 600m northeast of Junagarh fort, rents out 18-gear mountain bikes for ₹300 per day, ordinary gearless bikes for ₹50, 125cc and 150cc motorbikes for ₹400 and 180cc motorbikes for ₹600. Motorbikes come with a clean helmet! It also offers interesting guided day and half-day desert rides by bike or motorbike.

Around Bikaner

NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE ON CAMELS

The **National Research Centre on Camels** (☎0151-2230183; Indian/foreigner ₹10/20, camera ₹20, rides ₹20; ☎2–6pm) is 8km southeast of central Bikaner, beside the Jodhpur–Jaipur Bypass. While here you can visit baby camels, go for a short ride and look around the small museum. There are about 400 camels, of three different breeds. The British Army had a camel corps drawn from Bikaner during WWI. Guides are available for ₹50-plus.

The on-site Camel Milk Parlour doesn't look much but can whip up a lassi for ₹5. The round trip, including a half-hour wait at the camel farm, is around ₹150 for an autorickshaw or ₹300 for a taxi.

DESHNOK

TOP CHOICE Karni Mata Temple (camera/video ₹20/50; ☎4am–10pm) at the village of Deshnok, 30km south of Bikaner, is extraordinary even by Indian standards. Most travellers coming to Bikaner make a beeline here. According to legend, Karni Mata, a 14th-century incarnation of Durga, asked Yama, the god of death, to restore life to her drowned son, Lakhan. When Yama refused, Karni Mata decreed that all members of her family would be reincarnated as *kabas* (rats), and that these *kabas* would return as members of her family. The mass of holy rodents running around the temple is not for the squeamish. It's considered auspicious to have one run across your feet – and sighting one of the few white *kabas* at the temple also augurs well for your spiritual progress.

Buses to Deshnok (₹20, 40 minutes) leave the main and Gogo Gate bus stands in Bikaner every 20 minutes. There are also several trains from Bikaner Junction station.

A return taxi/autorickshaw from Bikaner with a one-hour wait costs ₹500/280.

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