

Road to Rajasthan

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Earlier this year, I visited the Indian state of Rajasthan (the name literally means “the land of kings”), and toured the cities of Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Bikaner, Deshnoke, and Pushkar.

Key:

1. A camel driver takes his morning cup of chai. Safaris to the sand dunes in the great Thar Desert are popular with tourists, and a source of income for the local camel drivers. The desert is home to many species of wildlife, including gazelles, hares, eagles, vultures, and peafowls.
2. Two women walk across the square before Jaisalmer Fort to perform their morning worship at the temple before First Fort Gate. The 800-year-old fort is a living city, but ironically the arrival of modern technology may bring more harm than good. While water was once scarce in this desert city, today, the availability of piped water, coupled with the increase in numbers of inhabitants and tourists, has proved more than what the city can cope with. Excessive water in the rock that forms the foundation of the fort has caused damage to its walls. Conservation and restoration of the fort is a continuing effort.



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3. Pilgrims through the streets of Pushkar to bathe at the holy lake at the centre of the town. Bathing in the lake is believed to wash away one's sins, and doing so during the holy week of Karthik Poornima is believed to be even more auspicious. During this period, the streets of this small town are packed with thousands of pilgrims from all over India.
4. Detail on the door of the Salim Singh ki Haveli. Built more than 300 years ago, this was the residence of a prime minister of a princely state, which Jaisalmer was the capital of. It is now one of several old private mansions open to visitors. Every part of this well-preserved building is decorated with intricate wood-, glass- and stonework, but it was also built to defend against attackers – an indication of the politics of the time.
5. A milkman does his morning round in the city of Jodhpur. Cow's milk and its derivatives, ghee, curd, and yogurt, are important components of Indian cuisine. The buildings in the background are painted in the distinctive blue which gives the city its nickname, the Blue City.
6. A textile merchant in Jaisalmer displays his wares to potential customers. Shopping here seems to be a family affair, and browsing and bargaining takes place at a leisurely pace. The Rajasthani woman in her brightly coloured sari has become an icon of the region.
7. These are Jain pilgrims on their way to Mehrangarh, Jodhpur. The Jains believe in non-violence, and wear screens over their mouths to avoid accidentally breathing in insects, and sweep the ground before their feet as they walk to avoid stepping on them.



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8. A family takes shelter from the rain during the Pushkar Camel Fair. The annual event takes place during the holy month of Kartik, and is one of the largest livestock fairs in the world. It has also become a tourist attraction in itself, with an amusement park being set up next to the fairground, and cultural displays and competitions being held in the nearby stadium.

9. A worshipper makes offerings at the Karni Mata Temple in Deshnoke. The temple, built as a tribute to the rat goddess, Karni Mata, is home to thousands of sacred rats. Pilgrims from all over India visit this temple, near the city of Bikaner. It is believed that it is good luck if a rat runs over one's foot.

10. Noblemen compare their swords as they prepare to attend the wedding of the prince of Jodhpur. The wedding of Prince Yuvraj Shivraj and Princess Gayatri of Askot was celebrated with great fanfare. According to the local media, over 300 guests were invited, among them Indian and international stars, politicians, industrialists, and of course, members of the royal and noble families. The marriage would be solemnised in the city of Jaipur, capital of Rajasthan, where the guests would travel to in a specially chartered train.

11. A schoolgirl in Jodhpur spots an inquisitive tourist. **SMA**



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