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ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation in Rajasthan ranges from simple whitewashed cells to glorious palaces and forts that have been converted into some of India's most luxurious, atmospheric and extraordinary hotels.

Accommodation listings are usually divided into budget, midrange and top-end categories. Recommendations within these listings are in ascending order of tariff. Roughly, the budget breakdown in this book is from around Rs 75 to Rs 800 (US\$2 to

BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

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US\$20) for a budget room, from around Rs 800 to Rs 4000 (US\$20 to US\$100) for mid-range and from around Rs 4000 (US\$100) upwards for the top end. However, this is a loose guide; many places have rooms covering a variety of categories – their upper-priced rooms are midrange, lower-priced ones are budget. Prices also vary depending on the season, the festival calendar, whether it's a tourist hot spot, and whether you are bedding down in the town or country. Standout options throughout this book are indicated by **our pick**.

Although most prices quoted here are for single and double rooms, many hotels will put an extra bed in a room to make a triple for about an extra 25%.

During the peak tourist season, which falls from mid-November to February, and some festivals, hotel rates can skyrocket and it can be tough even finding a bed – advance reservations are advisable.

Room quality can vary dramatically within properties, particularly budget properties, so try to inspect a few rooms first. For a bathroom low-down see Get to Know Your Bathroom, p352.

Some hotels operate on a 24-hour system (ie your time starts when you check in), while others have fixed checkout times – it pays to ask.

Credit cards are accepted at most top-end hotels and many midrange ones; however, few budget places will take them. Some hotels may request an upfront payment. If you're asked to sign a blank impression of your credit card, refuse to do so. If they insist, fill in an amount less than your estimated expenditure.

In some towns, notably Jodhpur, some hotels 'borrow' the name of a thriving competitor to confuse travellers. To avoid landing up at an inferior copycat, make sure that you know the *exact* name of your preferred hotel, and before paying the driver double-check that you're at the right place, as some cheeky chaps will try to off-load you at hotels where they receive fat commissions. Also see About Touts, p356.

Accommodation Options

BUDGET & MIDRANGE HOTELS

These options range from squalid dives to excellent-value and well-kept guesthouses. Most hotels in these categories come with ceiling fans. Shoestring travellers may like to consider bringing their own sheets and pillowcases, as some of the cheaper places have bed linen that even the most ferocious *dhobi-wallah* (washerwoman) couldn't whiten.

Midrange hotels offer you more comfort than their budget brothers, but they can be a mixed bag: some have dreary, boxlike rooms while others ooze character. Some of these hotels have 'air-cooled' rooms that are one step up from a ceiling fan and one step below air-conditioning. An air-cooler is a large (usually noisy) evaporative device built into a frame within a wall.

Some budget and midrange hotels lock their gates at night and remain unmanned on the outside, so let someone know if you intend coming back late.

CAMPING

There are few camping options in Rajasthan, though a couple of hotels allow you to camp in their grounds, as detailed in the Sleeping sections of regional chapters. Some budget hotels let travellers sleep on their rooftop (usually providing a mattress and some bedding) for a nominal charge.

PAYING GUEST HOUSE SCHEME (HOMESTAYS)

Rajasthan pioneered the Paying Guest House Scheme, so it's well developed in the state. Staying with a local family can be a stimulating change from dealing only with hoteliers. Prices range from budget to upper mid-range – contact the local Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation (RTDC) tourist offices for details (for contact information, see the individual regional chapters). Jaipur also has a reputable private scheme called Jaipur Pride (p164).

RAILWAY RETIRING ROOMS

These are found at train stations, and you can technically only stay here if you possess an ongoing train ticket. The rooms, which can range from substandard to adequate, are handy if you have an early morning train departure, although they can be noisy if it's a busy station. Most are let on a 24-hour basis, and usually offer dormitories (sometimes male only) and private rooms.

PRACTICALITIES

- Electricity is 230V to 240V, 50Hz AC and sockets are the three-round-pin variety. Blackouts are fairly common so bring a torch (flashlight) and the gear to protect delicate electronic equipment.
- Officially India uses the metric system for weights and measures. Terms you're likely to hear are lakhs (one lakh = 100,000) and crores (one crore = 10 million).
- Major English-language dailies include the *Hindustan Times*, *Times of India*, *Indian Express*, *Pioneer*, *Asian Age*, *Hindu*, *Statesman*, *Telegraph* and *Economic Times*. In Delhi there are several listings and general information guides: *Delhi City Guide*, *Delhi Diary*, *Explore Delhi*, *First City* and *Time Out Delhi*. Jaipur also has a couple of listings and tourist guides: *Jaipur Vision* and *Jaipur City Guide*. In Udaipur look out for *Out and About in Udaipur*.
- Read incisive current affairs in *Frontline*, *India Today*, the *Week*, *Sunday* and *Outlook*. For India-related travel articles get *Outlook Traveller*.
- The national (government) TV broadcaster is Doordarshan. More widely watched are satellite and cable TV; channels include BBC World, CNN, Discovery, Star Movies, HBO and MTV. TV (and radio) programme/frequency details appear in most English-language dailies.
- Government-controlled All India Radio (AIR) nationally transmits local and international news. There are also private channels broadcasting news, music, current affairs, talkback and more.