



Rajasthan

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Best for Forts & Palaces

- Jaisalmer (p186)
- Jodhpur (p174)
- Bundi (p149)
- Chittorgarh (p154)
- Udaipur (p158)

Best Off the Beaten Track

- Kumbhalgarh (p168)
- Nawalgarh (p133)
- Osian (p182)
- Chittorgarh (p153)
- Deeg (p130)

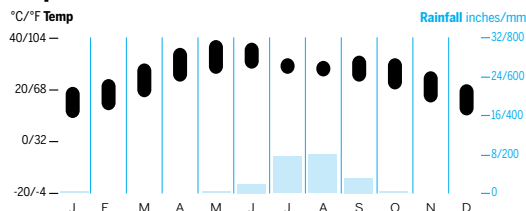
Why Go?

It is said there is more history in Rajasthan than the rest of India put together. Welcome to the Land of the Kings; a fabled realm of maharajas and their majestic forts and lavish palaces. India is littered with splendid ruined bastions, but nowhere will you find fortresses quite as magnificent as those here; rising up imperiously from the desert landscape like fairy-tale mirages of a bygone era.

As enchanting as they are, though, there is more to this most royal of regions than its seemingly timeless architectural wonders. This is also a land of sand dunes and jungle, of camel trains and wild tigers, of glittering jewels, vivid colours and 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 truth, Rajasthan just about has it all; it is the must-see state of this must-see country; brimming with startling, thought-provoking and, ultimately, unforgettable 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 are extremely popular, but there are a few favourites with a regional twist that are worth hunting down. *Kachori* is a round-shaped, masala-dhal-filled, samosa-like package that hits the spot for a 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 top sights, including the fascinating **Jantar Mantar**, **Hawa Mahal** and **Iswari Minar Swarga Sal**. But the stand-out attraction in the Jaipur area is **Amber Fort**. If you are a real fort connoisseur, though, you need to make the long trek west for the best of them all: the spectacular, mirage-like desert fortress that is **Jaisalmer Fort**. Running a close second is Jodhpur's imposing rock-like fortress, **Mehrangarh**, whilst more off-the-beaten-track forts worth hunting down include the remote **Kumbhalgarh** and the utterly enormous **Chittorgarh**. Nature lovers shouldn't miss the birdlife at **Keoladeo Ghana National Park** nor the very real chance of spotting a tiger at **Ranthambhore National Park**, while romantics will soon fall in love with the lake city of **Udaipur**.

Top State Festivals

- ➔ **Desert Festival** (☺ Feb; Jaisalmer, p183) 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; statewide) A festival honouring Shiva and Parvati's love, celebrated with fervour in Jaipur.
- ➔ **Mewar Festival** (☺ Mar/Apr; Udaipur, p157) Udaipur's version of Gangaur, with free cultural events and a colourful procession down to the lake.
- ➔ **Teej** (☺ Aug; Jaipur, p108, & Bundi, p149) Honours the arrival of the monsoon, and Shiva and Parvati's marriage.
- ➔ **Dussehra Mela** (☺ Oct; Kota, p152) 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, p174, & Osian, p182) Celebrates Rajasthani heroes through music and dance; one day is held in Jodhpur, the other in Osian.
- ➔ **Pushkar Camel Fair** (☺ Oct/Nov; Pushkar, p144) 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 ₹500, \$\$ ₹500 to ₹1500, \$\$\$ above ₹1500
- ➔ **Eating prices:** \$ below ₹150, \$\$ ₹150 to ₹300, \$\$\$ above ₹300

Top Tips

- ➔ Carry small denominations (below ₹50) as drivers often lack small change.
- ➔ Use prepaid autorickshaw booths outside large train stations to avoid the tiresome rickshaw hustle.
- ➔ For shorter train journeys, when tickets are sold out, just buy an unreserved 'general ticket' and pile into second class.

Resources

- ➔ **Festivals of India** (www.festivalsindia.in)
- ➔ **Incredible India** (www.incredibleindia.org)
- ➔ **Rajasthan Tourism** (www.rajasthantourism.gov.in)