

Destination Rajasthan, Delhi & Agra

Here is India at its high-definition, surround-sound best. Prowling tigers, swaying elephants, hot and spicy bazaars, fabulous festivals, stunning saris and twisted turbans; all a pageant of colour and curiosity set against a backdrop of desert sands, secluded jungles, marble palaces and impenetrable stone forts.

This book also celebrates the Golden Triangle – a traveller's trigonometric survey of emblematic India. Starting at the daunting megametropolis of Delhi with its majestic Mughal heritage, it then angles towards Agra, where the world's most famous tomb, the Taj Mahal, defines a city, before heading to Jaipur, the city painted pink with a palace of winds and bustling bazaars, and the gateway to Rajasthan.

Covering an area 342,236 sq km, about the size of Germany, Rajasthan represents 10.4% of the Indian landmass, with much of it embracing the Thar Desert, a vast area of heat, dunes and dust. The chronic drought of recent times has accelerated migration from the parched agricultural lands to the already overburdened cities.

In recent years, Rajasthan's life-giving monsoon has become less and less predictable, and the desperate scarcity of rain has affected people's livelihoods as well as the greater environment. For those who remain on the land, it has become a battle for survival. No wonder then, that there were tears of joy as the waters from the Sardar Sarovar dam, part of the controversial Narmada River Project in neighbouring Gujarat, finally trickled into the deserts around Barmer and Jalore in 2008. Bringing drinking and irrigation water to millions of people affected by drought was a political triumph, but the ultimate financial, social and environmental costs have yet to be counted.

Snapshots of the everyday in Rajasthan capture India at its most evocative: You can catch it in the twirl of a moustache, a veiled glance, or a puff of blue hashish smoke. Witnessing turbaned men bartering camels brings history to life. This is Rajasthan's famous heritage which has bestowed legacies of pride and tradition, magnificent palaces and forts, as well as stunning handicrafts and fine arts developed through patronage of the Maharajas. Rajasthan is India's major drawcard in the lucrative tourist trade – 40% of all visitors to India come to Rajasthan, bringing with them cash, providing jobs, affording its magnificent heritage to be maintained, encouraging the region's splendid arts and provoking cultural exchange.

However, there is another side to the heritage coin: the state's feudal burden slows development, and in many respects – women's rights, health and education – Rajasthan lags behind the other states in the country. The position of women – especially rural women – is a particular cause for concern. In rural areas female education is not valued, largely because of the expense of sending girls to school. But it is also because women have a low status (for more information, see p40). Access to education and health resources in Rajasthan is affected by gender, caste and class far more than elsewhere in the country. It's not all doom and gloom though. The figures for literacy, at around 61% (44.2% for women), have doubled since 1991. Statistics also indicate a decline in poverty and infant mortality.

FAST FACTS

Population Rajasthan:	56.5 million
Population Delhi:	12.8 million
Population Agra:	1.3 million
Population Growth Rate:	2.5%
GDP growth rate:	9%
Inflation:	5.2%
Unemployment:	5.5%
No of camels:	400,000
No of tigers:	16-20 (all in Ranthambhore National Park)
No of maharajas (and rajas):	19

The entire Indian economy, including Rajasthan's tourism, agriculture and business sectors, has undeniably made giant strides in recent years; however, the challenges for today's politicians – redistribution of wealth and environmental conservation – remain unresolved. Rajasthan continues to lose its wildlife and vegetation, and India is expected to become the world's third-largest emitter of carbon by 2015. In a land where juxtaposition of old and new has become a hackneyed slogan, the visitor must still marvel at the scene of elaborate cenotaphs of erstwhile rulers and rich silk-route traders now crowded by state-of-the-art wind turbines helping to address India's burgeoning energy and pollution crisis.

Getting Started

Rajasthan holds India's greatest wealth of places to visit, and is conveniently adjacent to the international gateway of Delhi and the internationally famous destination of Agra. This area of India is very accessible and easy to travel around, with air, bus and train connections that make all sorts of routes feasible. The only problem you may face is deciding how many of Rajasthan's extraordinary sights you can fit into your visit. While puzzling this out, make sure you allow some time to visit out-of-the-way places too, as your experience in a rural hamlet or little-visited village will be a world away from that in the major towns and cities.

Rajasthan suits all budgets – you can travel on a shoestring, emulate the maharajas or go for a middle-path sojourn, and in each case have an astonishing, romantic time, staying in wondrous places that evoke the region's past in varying degrees of luxury.

Travel in India can be exasperating, challenging and stressful, so choose your companions with care. Women travelling alone will encounter some hassle (see p372 for more information) but this is usually irritating rather than dangerous – it's generally a safe place to travel solo whatever your gender. Travel with children is rewarding here, too. In such a family-centred society, children are fêted everywhere and will be your ticket to feeling welcome wherever you go! That said, it's much harder in the hectic, traffic-congested cities, so you'll need to plan your route carefully to allow lots of respite on the way. For more information, see p354.

For disabled travellers, India is very challenging – crowds, uneven surfaces, lack of adequate facilities, and toilets (often of the squat variety) that test the most able-bodied are all hurdles for any traveller. However, the advantage with travelling here is that you can always find help at hand to assist with lifting, carrying or just about anything. With planning and research there's no reason to rule Rajasthan out because you have a disability. See p369 for more details.

You can choose to get around by train, plane, bus or taxi. Many travellers, particularly those short of time, choose to travel solely by taxi – this allows you complete flexibility, and means you can cover a lot of ground and visit out-of-the-way places with ease. Part of the joy of travel in India, however, can be to take trains – always an experience in itself and a good way of mingling with others. If it suits your needs, trip and budget, the most flexible and rewarding way to get around is a mishmash of methods – taking the occasional train, buses when it suits, and taxis for the more inaccessible places or when you need your own space or are just a bit tired. For more discussion of the pros and cons of different forms of transport, see p376.

WHEN TO GO

Rajasthan is at its best in the balmy winter months (November to March), when the days are warm and sunny (average temperatures across the state are around 25°C), and the nights are cool. However, as this is when most people go, hotel prices are at their highest and you'll also have to plan (and book) ahead if you want to stay in the better-known midrange and top-end hotels, particularly the palaces, *havelis* (traditional, ornately decorated residences) and hunting lodges for which Rajasthan is renowned. In March and in the postmonsoon season from mid-September to the end of November, it's a bit hotter, but still fine to visit, with average maximum temperatures in October of around 35°C and an average minimum of around 20°C. These periods are

See Climate Charts (p354) for more information.

also good as places won't be so busy and rooms at those charismatic hotels will be easier to find.

Another factor you should watch out for is travelling during Indian holiday times. If you want to catch a train during the Diwali holiday (p360), for example, you'll need to book your ticket weeks in advance. Otherwise you can usually book train and plane tickets just a few days in advance to be assured a place.

Rajasthan is a startlingly vibrant state, and some of its most colourful festivals, such as the Desert Festival in Jaisalmer (p301) and the famous Pushkar Camel Fair (p209), take place in winter. In October/November it's Diwali, the festival of lights, when people go crazy with noisy fireworks, and oil lamps line the streets. In late February/early March there's Holi (p360), India's most exuberant festival, when everyone throws coloured water and powder at each other. Rajasthan's own Gangaur Festival (see p148) is celebrated in March/April, as is Udaipur's Mewar Festival (p224). Jaipur's Elephant Festival (see p148) is held in March. For more on festivals, see the boxed text at the beginning of each regional chapter and p358.

Winter is also a good time to visit Rajasthan's best-known wildlife sanctuaries: Keoladeo Ghana National Park (p188), Ranthambhore National Park (p215) and Sariska Tiger Reserve (p198).

If a summer visit is your only option, be aware that it will be horrendously hot. Premonsoon, which extends from April to June, is the hottest season, with temperatures ranging from 32°C to 45°C. There is little relief from the scorching onslaught, particularly in the arid zone to the west and northwest of the Aravalli Hills, where temperatures often climb above 45°C. Mt Abu registers the lowest temperatures at this time (the daytime maximum reaches around 32°C). The monsoon is a welcome arrival in late June in the eastern and southeastern regions of the state, finally falling in mid-July in the desert zones. It is preceded by dust and thunderstorms. Unless the rains are insubstantial, the monsoon is accompanied by a decrease in temperatures, with average maximums dropping to 29°C to 32°C in the south and southeast of Rajasthan, and an average of above 38°C in the northern and northwestern regions. But take comfort in the fact that hotel prices will be at their lowest, you won't have to book ahead anywhere, and plan on taking it easy and doing your sightseeing early or late in the day.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Your passport, visa (p369), tickets and travel insurance (p361)
- Sleeping-bag sheet – good if you're unsure about the hotel linen and essential if you're travelling overnight on a 2nd- or 3rd-class sleeper train
- Packets of wet wipes
- Tampons – available in main tourist centres, but it's worth bringing your own stock
- Sunscreen and sunglasses – the local versions aren't reliable
- A small torch (flashlight) – the sort you wear on your head to keep your hands free is ideal
- A universal sink plug – useful in cheap hotels
- Insect repellent – you can't buy the really good stuff
- A voltage stabiliser – a good idea if you're bringing sensitive electronic equipment
- A water bottle – if you use water-purification tablets or filters (see Drinking Water, p391) you'll avoid adding to Rajasthan's plastic waste problem

COSTS & MONEY

Prices vary depending on the season and how busy a place is. In the low season, or even on an off day during the high season, you can get big discounts just by asking. Costs will escalate during festivals or other special events. Costs in the larger cities (such as Jaipur, Delhi and Agra) and popular tourist destinations (such as Jaisalmer and Udaipur) are often higher, though accommodation can be cheap at these places because of all the competition.

Costs also vary depending on whether you are travelling solo or in a group. It's more economical travelling with one or more people, as you can save money by sharing hotel rooms, taxis, rickshaws and car hire.

Whatever budget you have, you'll get so much more for your money than in most other countries – Rajasthan is amazing value.

That said, during the high season, prices for top-end hotels can vie with similar places elsewhere in the world. If you stay in luxurious converted forts and palaces, fly between the main cities of Rajasthan, and buy exquisite arts and crafts, you can sail through enormous amounts of cash. It's easy to blow US\$200 a night in a swanky palace hotel without even poking your nose out the door.

If you stay in dormitories or the cheapest hotels, travel on public buses, and subsist on dhal and rice, you could see Rajasthan on about US\$20 a day.

If you're looking for something between these extremes, you could spend around US\$40 to US\$60 a day staying in good budget and midrange hotels, eating in good restaurants and taking trains and autorickshaws rather than uncomfortable buses.

Admission Fees

Most tourist sites have an admission fee, and many levy a fee for the use of cameras and videos (they haven't yet adapted for digital cameras that can take videos). Many sites charge a substantially lower admission fee for Indian residents than they do for foreigners. In case you're wondering, if you're of Indian descent (but not an Indian resident), the foreigners' rate officially applies, although you may escape detection or even be knowingly offered the lower local rate.

Admission to the Taj Mahal now costs Rs 750 for foreigners, but most other places are nowhere near as expensive, averaging around Rs 250 for major sites.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Since its inception in 1973, Lonely Planet has encouraged readers to tread lightly, travel responsibly and enjoy the magic that independent travel affords. International travel is growing at a jaw-dropping rate, and we still firmly believe in the benefits it can bring – but, as always, we encourage you to consider the impact your visit will have on both the global environment and the local economies, cultures and ecosystems. For a range of ways to travel responsibly see Responsible Travel (p82).

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Robyn Davidson's *Desert Places* is a remarkable account of the author's journey by camel with the Rabari (a nomadic tribal group) on their annual migration through the Thar Desert. It offers compelling insight into the plight of the nomads, as well as recounting the reflections of a solo female traveller in Rajasthan.

HOW MUCH?

Internet access per hr
Rs 20-60

Rajasthani puppet
Rs 100-500

Kurta pyjamas Rs 300

Camel safari per day
Rs 650

Henna painting per hand
Rs 80

TOP PICKS



PUT YOURSELF IN THE PICTURE

Take the effort to seek out some of the region's most spectacular, picturesque and evocative experiences and take home a lifetime of memories.

- The monument to love – the Taj Mahal (p133)
- Sunrise overlooking Pushkar from Saraswati Temple (p209)
- The mighty Mehrangarh (p304), Rajasthan's most imposing fort
- Tiger spotting in Ranthambhore National Park (p215)
- The sand-castle fort of Jaisalmer (p320)
- Bird-watching in Keoladeo Ghana National Park (p188)

ROMANTIC ROOMS & PALATIAL DIGS

Whether it's an old fort with metre-wide walls, an opulent palace, or a luxury tent in the wide outdoors, you'll sleep like royalty in our top hotel picks.

- Lake Palace Hotel (p253) – opulence with movie-set credentials and a perfect location
- Khem Villas (p218) – luxurious tents and bungalows in jungle environs owned and run by dedicated conservationists
- Rambagh Palace (p169) – lavish lawns and serene surroundings seem to slow down time
- Umaid Bhawan Palace (p310) – sheer luxury in this swan song of maharaja indulgence
- Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel (p253) – sumptuous suites and a gorgeous marble pool

GOING GREEN

Though there are many claiming to be on the green wagon, Rajasthan is not an overly green destination. Nonetheless, there are some commendable efforts blending sustainable tourism with environmental awareness.

- Apani Dhani (p281) – an award-winning accommodation option that uses organic farm alternative energy, including solar cookers and water heaters, compost toilets and biogas
- Barefoot College (p207) – supports rural outreach programmes in Rajasthan with an emphasis on empowering women and conserving the natural environment and traditional knowledge
- Sanganer's paper manufacturers (p180) – use recycled fabric rather than wood pulp
- Anokhi (p174) – a modern textile outlet, with branches blossoming all over India, that has helped revive traditional dyeing and hand-block printing

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Rajasthan is alive with festivals year-round and the following are our top 10 picks (for more on the wealth of festivals and events in Rajasthan, see p358).

- Jaisalmer Desert Festival (p301) in January and February in Jaisalmer
- Holi (p224) in February and March in Udaipur
- Gangaur (p148) in March and April in Jaipur
- Teej (p148) in July and August in Jaipur
- Dussehra (p224) in October and November in Kota
- Pushkar Camel Fair (p209) in October and November in Pushkar
- Kolayat Fair (p301) in November in Bikaner

Rajasthan Stories, Rudyard Kipling's tales about the state, make for an old-fashioned ripping yarn; the three slim volumes are available in bookshops in Jaipur (p150).

City of Djinnns, by William Dalrymple, is a fascinating book about Delhi – its history intertwined with the author's personal struggles to get to grips with the city. It also records a visit to the Sufi shrine at Ajmer during pilgrimage time.

In Rajasthan, by Royina Grenal, is part of Lonely Planet's travel literature series and gives a different slant on solo female travel – from a local (if privileged middle-class) perspective.

Lost in Transmission, by Jonathan Harley, is an engaging and entertaining account of a foreign correspondent finding his way in the subcontinent. It is interestingly linked to another book, *Holy Cow*, by Sarah MacDonald. This is a lightweight, amusing book about the author's life in Delhi (thanks to new husband, Jonathan Harley), travels around India, and her cursory investigations of different religions – her conclusions feel a bit glib, but it's very entertaining on the way.

Scoop-wallah, by Justine Hardy, follows the author's work on the *Indian Express* in Delhi. It's a tantalising glimpse into the world of Indian journalism that journeys through the author's frustrations and her canny observations of contemporary Delhi.

No Full Stops in India, by BBC correspondent Mark Tully, is a fascinating read that details his travels around India and puts forward some interpretations of contemporary Indian society.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The website of the state tourism authority, **Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation** (RTDC; www.rajasthantourism.gov.in), offers some useful information on what's happening in Rajasthan.

There are zillions of websites on India and Rajasthan, but you'll find that many are nothing more than glossy, inaccurate public-relations puff. For reliable information scan trusted newspapers and current-affairs sites:

Hindu (www.thehindu.com) The website of this quality broadsheet.

Hindustan Times (www.hindustantimes.com) Another reasonable broadsheet with a reasonable website.

India Today (www.india-today.com) A popular magazine on India's current affairs.

Indian Express (www.indianexpress.com) Useful coverage on this popular broadsheet's site.

Times of India (www.timesofindia.com) National coverage with a tabloid feel, and a curious selection of international news.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

This traditional circuit linking the big-ticket attractions of Delhi, Agra and Jaipur is ideal for travellers short on time. You will cover just over 700km and though the road and rail connections are excellent, book your bus or train seats early on this popular trail.

THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

One route is so well loved it even has a name: the Golden Triangle – the classic Delhi–Agra–Jaipur trip, which can be squeezed into a week.

Spend a day or two in **Delhi** (p88) finding your feet and seeing the big-draw sights, such as the magnificent Mughal **Red Fort** (p96) and **Jama Masjid** (p98), India's largest mosque. Then catch a convenient train to **Agra** (p130) to spend a day being awed by the world's most extravagant monument to love, the **Taj Mahal** (p133) and exploring the mighty **Agra Fort** (p135). Only an hour away is **Fatehpur Sikri** (p142), a beautiful Mughal city dating from the apogee of Mughal power, which is amazingly well preserved and deserves another day.

If you have time, take a rural respite at **Keoladeo Ghana National Park** (p188), one of the world's foremost bird reserves. Though suffering from lack of water, it is a relaxing, beautiful and intriguing place to visit. Having chilled, you can train it to **Jaipur** (p147) for a couple of days in and around Rajasthan's hectic, dusky-pink capital, seeing the **City Palace** (p154) and **Amber Fort** (p178), and stocking up on blue pottery, Rajasthani puppets and other shopping delights before heading back to Delhi.



MAHARAJA CIRCUIT

With a fortnight to spare, you can forget triangles and go all out for a multifaceted loop taking in Rajasthan's most spectacular cities, all erstwhile capitals of former princely states.

Again, start from **Delhi** (p88) and make your way to **Jaipur** (p147), possibly via **Agra** (p130) and the **Taj Mahal** (p133).

From Jaipur, take a long trip to the sacred lake of **Pushkar** (p206) and then on to the romantic lake-town of **Udaipur** (p240), visiting the fine **City Palace** (p244) and the impressive **Jagdish Temple** (p247) as well as doing some shopping and relaxing on rooftops while peering at the lake. From Udaipur head to the extraordinary, bustling, blue city of **Jodhpur** (p301), but not before taking time to stop at the milk-white Jain temple complex of **Ranakpur** (p261) and the isolated, dramatic fortifications of **Kumbalgarh** (p259), one of Rajasthan's most remote and impressive forts. As they are fairly close together you can visit them comfortably en route to Jodhpur in a day. In Jodhpur itself, visit the spectacular **Mehrangarh** (p304), a fort that glowers over the city like a storybook fortress.

Next take an overnight train to the Golden City, **Jaisalmer** (p320), a giant sand castle in the desert, with its beautiful Jain temples and exquisite merchants' *havelis* (traditional, ornately decorated mansions). Take a short camel safari through bewitching desertscapes if you get a chance, and break your journey back to Delhi with a stop in the desert city of **Bikaner** (p338), home to the impregnable **Junagarh Fort** (p339).

Taking in the famous palaces and forts of royal Rajasthan, this 2000km loop explores the length and breadth of the romantic desert state. Though certainly feasible in a couple of weeks, you'll be tempted to linger and lap up the luxury.



TAILORED TRIPS

UNDISCOVERED GEMS

Many out-of-the-way places in Rajasthan don't see that many tourists – amazing when you consider how many visitors the state receives, and wonderful when you want to escape from the major tourist haunts and see an entirely different side of the state.

Our top picks include the Shekhawati region with its colourful *havelis* and rural pace. The town of Mandawa aside, the area has escaped much tourism, and seeking out the amazing murals in its small towns is like a treasure hunt. Some towns worth discovering are **Nawalgarh** (p277), **Fatehpur** (p291), **Dundlod** (p282) and **Mahansar** (p289). Other lesser-known places include **Kolayat** (p348), a remote town around a holy lake near Bikaner; **Osiyan** (p317), an ancient desert town filled with Jain temples; some of the sights around Sariska, such as the ghost town of **Bhangarh** (p199); **Dungarpur** (p263), a royal town with an eccentric empty palace and serene lake; **Jhalawar** (p233), near a magnificent fortress and the ancient City of Temple Bells; and **Karauli** (p219), which has a beautiful, worn palace.

Other wonderful escapes are the countryside around **Udaipur** (p240), with its undulating hills and tiny villages, trekking in the hills around **Mt Abu** (p264) or **Kumbalgarh** (p259), and the barren landscape surrounding **Pushkar** (p206).



ARTS & CRAFTS

Rajasthan's desolate, muted landscape seemingly galvanises its inhabitants to produce some of India's most vivid paintings, textiles and jewellery.

Shekhawati's small towns are packed with brilliantly painted *havelis*; in **Nawalgarh** (p280) you can attend craft workshops, and you can take painting lessons at **Jhunjhunu** (p287).

Jaipur (p147) is the artistic nerve centre, with some wonderful shops and opportunities to see artisans, particularly jewellers, at work. Nearby is **Sanganer** (p180), where you can visit workshops specialising in paper making and block printing, and take block-printing or pottery **lessons** (p163). Also nearby is the woodcarving centre of **Bassi** (p235). **Kishangarh** (p205) is renowned for its production of miniature paintings.

Around **Jodhpur** (p301), villagers produce woollen *dhurries* (rugs).

Udaipur (p240) is another major centre for the arts – a splendid place to buy miniatures, textiles, woodcarving and jewellery, take lessons in painting and see traditional dance. Outside the city is **Shilpgram** (p247), which displays, demonstrates and sells traditional handiwork.

In the west, **Barmer** (p337) is another place to see block printers at work, and in **Bikaner** (p338) you can see artisans producing *usta* (gold-painted camel leather) work.



RAJASTHAN'S WILD SIDE

You can wildlife-spot till you drop in Rajasthan's beautiful sanctuaries, commune with tamer creatures at regional festivals or ride them out on safari.

World Heritage site **Keoladeo Ghana National Park** (p188) is one of the world's foremost bird sanctuaries. Rambling **Ranthambhore National Park** (p215) is one of the best places in India to spot tigers. Though there are no tigers at **Sariska Tiger Reserve** (p198), it is another scenic sanctuary protecting leopards, hyenas, blue bulls and lots of birdlife.

Catch up with all the latest trends in camel fashion at the epic **Pushkar Camel Fair** (p209) or the more business-oriented version at **Nagaur** (see Festivals in Western Rajasthan, p301) in January/February. To get an even closer look at Rajasthan's ships of the desert, take a camel safari from **Jaisalmer** (p330), **Khuri** (p336), **Osiyan** (p317), **Pushkar** (p210) or **Bikaner** (p343).

Going horse riding around **Udaipur** (p248) is a wonderful way to take in the countryside as well as some rural life. Between Udaipur and Jodhpur, **Kumbalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary** (p259) offers some fantastic scenery and is famous for its wolves.

Finally, do not miss **Khichan**, located between Jaisalmer and Nagaur, where you can see the spectacular sight of over 7000 demoiselle cranes descending to feed on grain spread around for them by villagers (see The Demoiselle Cranes of Khichan p318).



FORT COLLECTING

Water may be a problem, but one thing Rajasthan's not short of is forts. You'll definitely want to bag as many of these architectural wonders on your trip as you can.

Delhi (p88) is a good place to start on your fort-finding mission, with the city-centre Mughal **Red Fort** (p96). To the east, in Agra, is its red-sandstone cousin, **Agra Fort** (p135), which contains exquisite Mughal buildings. For something straight out of the *Jungle Book*, visit **Ranthambhore Fort** (p216), perched on a craggy mountain in Ranthambhore National Park, surrounded by jungle. At Sariska Tiger Reserve is **Kankwari Fort** (p198) – a fortified pip-squeak compared to many others, but one that offers superb views. **Taragarh** (p225) at Bundi is overgrown, crumbling and a fantastic place for a ramble. Plateau-top **Chittorgarh** (p236) is Rajasthan's most legendary fort, containing palaces, temples and a mass of myths. Even more spectacular is **Kumbalgarh** (p259), a noble, remote edifice between Udaipur and Jodhpur. Near Jhalawar is little-visited **Gagron Fort** (p235), which towers over the confluence of two rivers.

Most dramatic of all is **Mehrangarh** (p304) in Jodhpur, rising from a rock face like an epic movie set. Also striking is **Jaisalmer** (p324), the golden sandstone fort that resembles a sand castle and is alive with inhabitants, while Bikaner's **Junagarh** (p339) claims the region's most spectacular interiors.



On the Road



LINDSAY BROWN *Coordinating Author*

As a Lonely Planet author your path is not always your own. Publishers, editors, cartographers, previous authors, readers, even centuries-old trade routes have a habit of, if not mapping out your destiny, then dictating your itinerary. Still, chance and serendipity, the predictable unpredictability of India and perhaps even karma are daily companions providing distracting detours and temptations to lead you astray. Following the hastily emailed directions of a reader, I weave through the narrow lanes of sky-blue old Jodhpur and come face to face with Shiva.



AMELIA THOMAS It's 7am, New Year's Day, New Delhi, and new baby (on the way in two-months' time) is kicking hungrily for breakfast. Connaught Place is – possibly for the first time ever – silent and deserted. Except for a few post-party revellers and a doorman shivering in the chilly air, we're the only ones wandering its once grand colonnaded walkways. We savour the scent of wood fires and watch hawks soaring over the central park, then duck into a South Indian cubbyhole restaurant. Delhi, one of my favourite cities, has never seemed so serene – and *dosas* (lentil-flour pancakes) have rarely tasted so good.

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