



# Udaipur & Southern Rajasthan

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## Why Go?

Udaipur is one of India's most magical cities, a bastion of Rajasthani tradition, with its creamy-white palaces beside a shimmering lake, rambling old *havelis* (traditional mansions) and romantic luxury hotels that pull in honeymooners and more than a few wedding parties. Elsewhere in southern Rajasthan you'll clamber around mighty forts full of heroic and tragic legends, visit exquisitely carved Hindu and Jain temples, wander through medieval streets and markets in tangled old town centres, and, if your budget allows it, indulge in the luxuries of quaint palace-hotels. You can shop endlessly for a vast range of colourful artisanry, and get right off the beaten track exploring a host of wildlife sanctuaries from the wild, forested hills of Kumbhalgarh to the grasslands of Sorsan. And if the heat gets too much, skip away to the cooler heights of Mt Abu, Rajasthan's only hill station.

## Best Places to Eat

- » Ambrai (p210)
- » Paantya Restaurant (p210)
- » 1559 AD (p210)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Haveli Braj Bhushanjee (p183)
- » Taj Lake Palace (p209)
- » Udaivilas (p209)

## When to Go

The best time to come to the south, like everywhere else in Rajasthan, is the winter months, November to March, for the main reason that the temperatures are temperate then. Indeed it can get cold in December and January. The winter months also see the bulk of the region's outstanding festivals, and are the best time for visiting the area's wildlife sanctuaries. The monsoon period, July to September, doesn't scorch like May and June, but its heat is steamy.

## FESTIVALS IN SOUTHERN RAJASTHAN

There's a flurry of colourful festivals in the south, while statewide and nationwide festivals (see p24) are also celebrated with plenty of enthusiasm.

» **Baneshwar Fair** (Baneshwar, Jan/Feb) This large event, honouring both Lord Shiva and Vishnu (worshipped as Mavji) is celebrated by thousands of Bhil tribal people, the fair site lying at the confluence of the Mahi and Som Rivers. Festivities include acrobatic and cultural programmes, and a silver image of Mavji is paraded through the village on horseback and doused in the river.

» **Holi** (Udaipur; Feb/Mar) Udaipur is the place to be for this joyful festival, which marks the beginning of spring. The Udaipur royal family hosts an elaborate function at the City Palace, with an evening horse procession, a band, and local nobility in traditional attire. After performing an ancient religious ceremony, the royal family lights a huge sacred fire, Holika Dahan, signifying the triumph of good over evil.

» **Gangaur** (Mt Abu; Mar/Apr) Gangaur, celebrated across Rajasthan, has some interesting adaptations in this region. Essentially a festival for women, it's dedicated to the goddess Gauri (Parvati). The Garasia tribes of the Mt Abu region celebrate for an entire month, with an image of Gauri carried aloft from village to village. In Bundi, Kota and Jhalawar, unmarried girls collect poppies from the fields and make them into wreaths for the goddess; in Nathdwara the Gangaur procession lasts for seven days, the goddess dressed differently each day.

» **Mewar Festival** (Udaipur; Mar/Apr) Udaipur's colourful take on Gangaur, this festival also celebrates spring. People in traditional costumes sing and dance in a lively procession to Gangaur Ghat on Lake Pichola. There are also free cultural programmes.

» **Summer Festival** (Mt Abu; May/Jun) Mt Abu registers the coolest temperatures in the state at this scorching time of the year; the festival includes classical and traditional folk-music programmes, as well as boat races on Nakki Lake and fireworks.

» **Kajli Teej** (Bundi; Aug/Sep) The traditional Rajasthani festival of Kajli Teej, marking the onset of the monsoon, is celebrated somewhat differently in Bundi where it's observed on the third day of the month of Bhadra. The celebrations are a good chance to see local artists perform.

» **Bundi Utsav** (Bundi; Oct/Nov) This cultural festival showcases the colourful traditions of the region with a procession, classical raga performances, magic and fireworks.

» **Dussehra** (Kota; Oct/Nov) Kota is the place to be for this festival, when enormous effigies, some around 20m high, are filled with crackers and set alight. The festival – an India-wide celebration – celebrates the story of Rama's victory over Ravana.

» **Ghans Bheru Festival** (Bharodia, Oct/Nov) Held on the day after Diwali in the village of Bharodia, about 10km northwest of Bundi, this colourful festival, almost unknown to tourists, honours the Hindu god Ghans Bheru. Thousands of villagers converge on Bharodia to celebrate a prosperous harvest.

» **Chandrabhaga Fair** (Jhalrapatan, Oct/Nov) This huge cattle fair takes place on the banks of the holy Chandrabhaga River near Jhalrapatan. Includes livestock trading and folk music, song and dance, while pilgrims bathe in a sacred part of the river known as Chandrawati.

## History

The kingdom of Mewar (the area encompassing Udaipur, Chittorgarh and Kumbhalgarh) has dominated the history of the south, which is splattered with bloodshed and vast doses of valour.

Chittorgarh, Mewar's former capital, was sacked by invaders from Delhi or Gujarat

three times between 1303 and 1568, each defeat ending in immense carnage, with its impossibly noble Rajputs (the ruling warrior caste) reliably choosing death before dishonour. While the men died in battle, the women committed *jauhar* (collective self-sacrifice), throwing themselves into the flames of huge pyres. After the third attack, Mewar's ruler,