MUSEUMS & HERITAGE PROPERTIES IN RAJASTHAN
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UNESCO Heritage Sites of Rajasthan

Jaipur—The Pink City

Ranking among the latest additions to the list of UNESCO-acclaimed World Heritage Sites in India, Jaipur joined this exclusive set of built-up heritage structures on June 6, 2019. Brimming over with old-world nuances, this charming city, painted a salmon pink, and Rajasthan’s state capital, offers a bewitching experience to visitors from around the globe. Apart from its atmospheric streetscapes in the Old Quarter, enclosed in a walled setting with decorative gates, Jaipur is also home to two other UNESCO sites—Jantar Mantar and the nearby Amber Fort.

Historic structures such as the planned city of Jaipur feed into our ideas of how to conserve and build in the future. Jaipur was founded in 1727 by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, as his new capital. The principal architect was Vidyadhar Bhattacharya.

Jaipur’s streets were set along a grid pattern (based on the tenets of Vedic architecture)—was also intended to serve as a new commercial centre. The importance of this aspect of Jai Singh’s vision is reflected in the dedicated spaces laid down in the walled city for merchants selling their wares. To lure the traders to come and settle in the new city, Jai Singh offered them concessions in tax and
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gifts of land. Set aside also was a dedicated space in the bazaar for artisans.

The walled city was made up of nine blocks, of which seven divisions have been identified—Purani Basti, Topkhanadesh, Modikhana, Visheshvarji, Ghat Darwaja, Ramchandra Colony and Topkhanahazuri. Three chaupars (urban squares)—Choti Chaupar, Bari Chaupar and Ramganj Chaupar—marked the crossings of four main streets. The main bazar precincts within the walled city include Sireh Deorhi Bazar, Johari Bazar, Tripoliya Bazar, Ramganj Bazar, Kishanpol Bazar, Moti Bazar, Gangauri Bazar, Suraipol Bazar and Ghat Gate Bazar. Architectural features of the bazar streets included chajjas, projecting vertical blocks on brackets and arches marked by delicate latticed screens. Right across the city were scattered a slew of havelis, and Hindu temples and shrines served each neighbourhood quarter. The wraparound wall encircling the city was pierced by four gates set at the cardinal points.

Of significance among the historic chowkries (street blocks) in this 18th-century planned city, Chowkri Modikhana takes its name from the Modis (trader communities). Filled with havelis, temples, public buildings, museums and artisan areas, Chowkri Modikhana illustrates the unique aspects of the living heritage of Jaipur’s walled city. This historic urban quarter today is a mix of heritage buildings dating to the 18th and 19th centuries along with present-day developments. Its historic character is defined by its havelis marked with traditional
entrances, historic, as well as modern houses, and temples.

Originally the Chowkri Modikhana was planned to create a residential space for the trader community. Today, this chowkri setting is recognised as a valuable part of the historic civic heritage of the walled city which features various architectural elements of importance, including elevations, façades, courtyards, open spaces, verandahs, ekdhalia, arched niches, chajjas, jharokhas, chhatris, as also ornamentation in terms of murals, marble carving, ornate parapet and forecourt, multi-foliated arches, painted motifs and brackets, etc. Providing us an excellent showcase of its historic lineage is Kala Bhavan, with its frescoes and old gas lamps dating to the early 20th century, the Kalyanji Temple with its exquisite murals, the Sanghi Juta Ram Jain Temple (1778) featuring fabulous kundan work in the courtyard—which details the narratives from the Jain religion, traditional artisans making brassware. Signing up for a heritage walk is a sure-fire way of discovering interesting historic treasures such as Chowkri Modikhana.
**Jantar Mantar**

In 2010, the Jantar Mantar in Jaipur was one among seven sites in the world which were added to UNESCO’s World Heritage list. Imbued with religious significance, it was used by ancient Indian astronomers to understand the workings of celestial phenomenon such as eclipses, and to track the location of the stars as the earth orbits around the sun, following the positioning of the constellations and determining the celestial altitudes and related ephemerids.

Built by Sawai Jai Singh II in 1734, the Jantar Mantar in Jaipur is an astronomical observation site which also features a set of around 20 main fixed instruments including the world’s largest stone sundial. Several instruments are impressive in their dimensions, and some are the largest ever built in their category. They are monumental examples in masonry of known instruments but which in many cases, have specific characteristics of their own. Designed for the observation of astronomical
positions with the naked eye, these embody several architectural and instrumental innovations. The astronomical instruments here were used to calculate celestial coordinate systems, the horizon-zenith local network, the equatorial system and the ecliptic system. It is the largest observatory of its kind. It is also the most significant, most comprehensive, and the best preserved of India’s historic observatories. The observatory forms part of a tradition of Ptolemaic positional astronomy which was shared by many civilisations. It contributed by this type of observation to the completion of the astronomical tables of Zij. It’s a late and ultimate monumental culmination of this tradition.

Through the impetus of Jai Singh II the observatory served as a meeting point for different scientific cultures, and gave rise to widespread social practices linked to cosmology. It was also a symbol of royal authority, through its urban dimensions, its control of time, and its rational and astrological forecasting capacities. The observatory is the monumental embodiment of the coming together of needs which were at the same time political, scientific, and religious. It is an expression of the astronomical skills and cosmological concepts of the court of a scholarly prince at the end of the Mughal period, and bears witness to very ancient cosmological, astronomical and scientific traditions shared by a major set of Western, Middle Eastern, Asian and African religions, over a period of more than 15 centuries.

Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II was an acclaimed king and warrior, but not everyone is aware that he was also a notable astronomer and mathematician. A scholar of merit, Jai Singh diligently applied himself to the study of ancient literature, but his curious mind also engaged with traditional knowledge of medicine as well as other sciences. His love for astronomy was such that he even built astronomical observatories not only in Jaipur but also in other cities: Shahjahanabad, Mathura, Ujjain, and Varanasi. The one in Jaipur is the best preserved of the lot.
Hill Forts of Rajasthan

The Hill Forts of Rajasthan, identified as a UNESCO-acclaimed World Heritage Site in 2013, include the majestic citadels of Chittorgarh; Kumbhalgarh; Sawai Madhopur; Jhalawar; Jaipur; and Jaisalmer, all significant for Rajasthan’s military architecture. Located in different cities, as a serial cultural property, this recognition was the first of its kind ever by UNESCO.

Chittorgarh, former capital of the Sisodia clan and the target of three sieges is richly associated with Rajput history and folklore. Ranthambhore in Sawai Madhopur is a fine example of a forest hill fort; the remains of the palace of Hammir within it are among the oldest surviving structures of an Indian palace. Constructed in a single process (except for the later-added Fateh Singh Palace), Kumbhalgarh retains its architectural coherence. Gagron, the exemplar river-protected fort was also valuable for its strategic location on the trade routes. Amber Palace represents a key phase (17th century) in the development of a common Rajput-Mughal fort style. Jaisalmer is an example of a hill fort in a desert terrain with the added importance of being a sacred (because of its historic Jain temples) and secular (urban) fort. The serial site, comprising these six forts, is significant for the architectural manifestations of Rajput valour, brav-
ery, feudalism and cultural traditions. The elaborate fortifications, built to protect not only garrisons for defence but also palatial buildings, temples, and urban centres, and their distinctive Rajput architecture, are an exceptional testimony to the cultural traditions of the ruling Rajput clans and to their patronage of religion, arts and literature in Rajasthan over several centuries.

The Hill Forts of Rajasthan exhibit an important interchange of Princely Rajput ideologies in fort planning, art and architecture from the early medieval to late medieval period. The architectural splendour of these forts, some upto 20km in circumference, are emblematic of the might of the Rajput princely states that flourished in the region from the 8th to the 18th centuries. Within the great embrace of their defensive walls are located major urban centres, palaces, trading centres and other structures including temples that often predate the fortifications. This eclectic range of buildings and structures saw the growth of an elaborate courtly culture that supported learning, music and the arts. These forts have been sited around natural defenses offered by the landscape: hills, deserts, rivers, and dense forests. Their sophisticated water-harvesting structures are largely still in use to this day. As a series, the six components together form a complete and coherent group in themselves to amply demonstrate the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value.
Forts of Rajasthan

Chittorgarh Fort, Chittorgarh
The story of Chittor is primarily the story of its 700-acre fort. Said to have been founded by the Mauryas—when it was called Chitrakut—it fell in 734 to the Gehlot founder Bappa Rawal and was occupied for the next eight centuries by a succession of Rajputs and Gujaratis, with intermittent Muslim assaults. Having housed 70,000 people in its heyday, the fort is today more a 500-foot-high colony than a monument. As a testimony to its origins and its many rulers, it’s littered with Hindu, Jain and Muslim construction, sometimes merged in one building.

Chittor was the Sisodia capital of Mewar from the early 13th century until the Mughal Emperor Akbar’s conquest of 1567, at which point Rana Udai Singh decamped to the hills. Many battles were fought in and around this strategic bastion. The town faced three sieges, and each time, the women and children committed jauhar, or mass suicide, in the face of defeat. Today, the uphill road to the fort passes through various gateways, some with recognisably Gujarati elements.

Rana Kumbha’s Palace, one of the fort’s most evocative sections, is a model of Rajput architecture. Though Kumbha didn’t establish the complex, what he did during his long rule (1433-68), is renovate and add to it considerably. Just inside the entrance, you can see where he sat to watch the sun rise and pray to Surya, to the tunes of musicians seated in the chhatri opposite. You can’t miss the 37m-high Vijay Stambh or Victory Tower, built in the 15th century by Rana Kumbha to
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commemorate the victories against Malwa and Gujarat. The impressive structure rises nine storeys and is covered head to toe with Hindu deities. Allah’s name is inscribed in Arabic on the third and eighth storeys, but that didn’t stop later Muslim invaders from taking shots at this amazing structure.

Drive up the fort’s eastern side for a last spectacular treat—a landscape of sandstone scree, wildflowers and trees culminating in the Suraj Pol, which faces east above a 5th-century Maurya-built portion of the Fort’s wall. On the way back, you’ll pass the Kirti Stambh, a 12th-century Jain tower honouring Adinath, the first Tirthankara. Even today Chittor’s fort summons up colourful images of its historic invincibility and recalls the heroic deeds of Sisodia rulers Rana Kumbha and Rana Sangha. History having moved on, the beauty of this windswept swathe of eastern Mewar today ruminates over its past in its quietude.

Kumbhalgarh Fort, Rajsamand

Perched upon a remote pinnacle, at a height of 3,600ft, set in the world’s most ancient rock, the Kumbhalgarh Fort was established on the site of an ancient citadel Machchindragarh, built by Samprat, a grandson of King Ashoka of the Maurya dynasty, in the 3rd century BCE. It was the base of Maharana Hameer, who went on to establish the rule of the Sisodia dynasty after the end of the rule of the Rawals in Mewar. Small additions and alterations were made to the citadel till the time of Rana Mokal, the father of Rana Kumbha who ascended the throne of Mewar in 1433.

The fortress is inextricably linked to Rana Kumbha since 1448 when he put the stamp of his fantastic military genius by shoring up this fortress into a second line of defense to his fortified capital—Chittorgarh. From its sentinel peak, cloaked in impenetrable forests, Kumbhalgarh Fort became a lethal weapon for Rana Kumbha against the assaults of the Muslim rulers of Delhi, Malwa and Gujarat.

Rana Udai Singh escaped certain death here to become heir to Mewar. The
joint forces of Mewar and Marwar met at Kumbhalgarh in 1539-40 to expel the usurper Banbir from the throne of Mewar at Chittorgarh. Banbir was killed at the battle of Maholi and Udai Singh was declared Maharana of Mewar. Udai Singh established Udaipur as his new capital but Kumbhalgarh was to remain an important part of his domain. The fortress was also the birthplace of the legendary warrior king, Rana Pratap. It is from Kumbhalgarh that he rode out on his famous steed, Chetak, for the battle of Haldighati against the army of the Mughal emperor Akbar. Kumbhalgarh Fort has returned to the limelight as a UNESCO-acclaimed heritage site and for its tourist attractions, among them its 35km-long massive wall. Wide enough for eight horsemen to ride abreast, it is said to be the second longest in the world after the Great Wall of China. Punctuated by 700 bunkers and battlements, the walls were frequently embellished with spikes to withstand an elephant charge. Eight massive gates and cascading defensive walls along the route up to the heart of the great fort acted as an effective deterrent to any invader.

The much-visited renovated fortress, rings with the sights and sounds of the annual Kumbhalgarh Festival, which features a display of regional specialities such as ethnic wear, jewellery, handicrafts, and souvenirs, as well as dance and music performances. Visitors to the fort can enjoy the fort’s history recounted in a stunning sound and light show.
**Sajjangarh Fort, Udaipur**

A dreamy fortified palace perched atop a hill, 5km west of Udaipur city, Sajjangarh is now known as the Monsoon Palace for the stunning views it affords. The glorious panorama of the Fateh Sagar Lake, Udaipur City Palace, and Chittorgarh, under the romantically darkening sky, is simply breathtaking. Sunset views are no less riveting. It heady perch, Bansdara Hill—raises its head from the lush expanse of the Sajjangarh Wildlife Sanctuary in the Aravallis.

The palace was commissioned in 1884 by Maharana Sajjan Singh and further developed by his successor, Maharana Fateh Singh. The original plan for a nine-storied astronomical observatory was shelved with the untimely demise of the Maharana demise, but the elegant grace of what transformed into a hunting lodge eventually is still a timeless delight.

Marble pillars, rich with floral carvings, make up the foundation of Monsoon Palace and the walls of the palace itself are plastered with lime mortar. Jharokhas, turrets, fountains and domes are present everywhere as proof of the splendour of Rajputana architecture. Living quarters are wrapped around a massive central court which features a grand staircase. It’s not hard to understand why the makers of the 1983 Bond thriller Octopussy picked it as one of the film’s locations.

**Jaisalmer Fort, Jaisalmer**

The very first glimpse of the golden Jaisalmer Fort, occupying pride of place in a monochromatic sandy landscape, is bewitching. Inside the citadel, turbaned faces carry a smile hidden in thick moustaches, long skirts catch the brilliance of the sun in their mirrorwork and the cobbled streets and the painted houses promise a view of an enchanted world. It’s also a world that has managed to survive for long. The fort, whose walls chronicle the deeds of its Rawals and the riches of its traders, recently celebrated 850 years of uninterrupted vitality. Its havelis speak of the long trains of camels that trekked across deserts to reach Sindh and Afghanistan and West Asia, carrying silver, cloth and expensive goods. Its musicians sing the songs of its daily existence, of the beauty of their desires, and this music will echo in your ears long after you’ve left Jaisalmer Fort.
From the outside, the fort looks small and toy-like, a fragile castle built on a miniature hill. You enter the fort from the First Fort Gate at Gopa Chowk. Yellow stone towers all around, often becoming golden, and stone-paved passages wind through a series of massive and intricately positioned gates. All of it is teeming with life and history. Walk about in the narrow streets of the fort soaking in the ambience; often you will lose yourself in the maze, but not for long—the fort is not big enough for that.

Rawal Jaisal, a ruler belonging to the Bhati clan of Rajputs and who gave his name to the town, is said to have started constructing the fort in 1156. Later rulers added to the edifice, which faced attacks by armies from Delhi and Jodhpur. Throughout its history, people have been living in the fort, and this adds to the extraordinariness of the place. The main courtyard of the fort is called Dussehra Chowk, below the Rajmahal, reached after passing through Hawapol, the last of the gates. From here streets paved with stone and busy with touristy shops, hotels, restaurants, temples and houses lead to various parts of the fort. Enlivening these winding lanes are children coming back from school, women cleaning and washing, and milkmen with metal pots on their motorcycles. You can walk up to the ramparts and the numerous bastions, and absorb the stunning views of the town outside the fort and the rocky landscape beyond.
**Mohangarh Fort, Jaisalmer**

Built by Maharawal Jawahar Singh of Jaisalmer in 1944, this is the last built fort in India. What once served as a quaint getaway for the royal family now operates as a heritage hotel, where guests can experience the regal lifestyle amidst a scenic and sandy landscape. Popular Hindi films like Sarfarosh and Tashan have been shot here. The fort is built in yellow sandstone and adorned with intricately carved balconies and white marble elephants. Architecture lovers would fancy the Zenana Mahal and Mardana Mahal and their Italian marble flooring. Colourful motifs and handmade tiles adorn the walls of these sections, which were used by the women and men of the royal family.

*The gorgeous entrance of the Mohangarh Fort in Jaisalmer*

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**Junagarh Fort, Bikaner**

Bikaner’s history is inextricably linked with that of its ruling family and their seat of power, the Junagarh Fort. This red sandstone fort lies at the centre of Bikaner. Raja Rai Singh commenced the building of Junagarh a full century after Bikaner had been founded at **Rati Ghati** by Rao Bika.

In 1589, Rai Singh ordered the more spacious and strategically superior fortification of Junagarh, which was completed in five years. Enter through its stone elephant-flanked gates, go past the hand-prints of the ranis, and you come to the ceremonial courtyard, where you get the first glimpse of the architectural treasures of Junagarh.

Surrounded by a moat for defence, with public and private buildings added by succeeding maharajas, the whole effect is that of a series of buildings that seemingly blend on the outside but are vastly different within. The oldest parts are constructed in yellow sandstone (‘golden stone’ of Jaisalmer) while the rest are mostly in red sandstone.

The most opulent of the palaces within the fort is **Anup Mahal**, which includes the **Raj Tilak Mahal** with embossed lacquerwork of striking lavishness. **Badal Mahal**, painted with large blue clouds, gives pride of place to a large portrait of Maharaja Sardar Singh, painted by a visiting Italian artist. The courtyards house the family **temple of Jorama**l, as well as **Har Mandir**, where weddings took place. The **Karan Mahal** courtyard leads to **Dungar Niwas**, with its fine inlays reminiscent of *pietra dura*. The **Chandra**
Mahal is beautifully painted and was built by Gaj Singh, along with Phul Mahal, which boasts the small bed of Rao Bika.

Maharaja Ganga Singh, the last of the royals to inhabit Junagarh, gifted it the stately Durbar Hall, which has a floor as well as ceiling made entirely of wood. The hall is now a museum filled with an eclectic collection of family and clan memorabilia. The entrance courtyard of the fort now also houses Prachina, a storehouse of vintage textiles and costumes, as well as a souvenir shop. The Junagarh Fort Museum displays clan memorabilia and personal artefacts of the Rathores. A speciality of the museum is that it has Sanskrit and Persian manuscripts, miniature paintings, jewels, and dresses of gods’ idols.

**Mehrangarh Fort, Jodhpur**

Rao Jodha of the Kannauj family founded the house of Jodhpur in Marwar, the Land of ‘Maroo’ or desert, thus named because of the region’s extreme weather conditions. Their first capital was at Mandore, an honour which went to Jodhpur after the Mehrangarh Fort was made in the 15th century. The fort was built with defence in mind, and the slopes and sudden twists and turns in the structure were meant to hinder the movement of enemy elephants. Built atop a 150-m high hill in 1459 by Rao Jodha, the
fort has withstood many a battle, as is evident today from the marks of cannonballs on the fort walls. There is a museum here with an exquisite collection of artefacts, including some very fascinating armoury. The first several rooms of the museum are arranged around a courtyard called Sangar Chowki, where coronations were held until 1952. Inside, in the delicately worked sandstone apartments, there is a collection of palanquins and elephant seats. Up one level is a room full of excellent miniature paintings in the Marwar style of the 18th and the 19th centuries. After this comes a series of apartments decorated with gilded wood, Murano glassware, Chinese tiles, murals, an opulent mix-and-match from different regions and historical periods that covers every available square inch of space. The royal splendour of the first family of Marwar is evident in the spread of costumes on display.

**Siwana Fort, Barmer**
Seemingly quite innocuous, this fort in Barmer district has a luminous history dating back to the 10th century. Built by Veer Narayan, the son of King Bhoj, its
ownership traded many hands right from the Sonagara Chauhans to Akbar to Allauddin Khilji. Set upon a strategic spot in the Aravalis it offers grandstand views despite its rather dilapidated state. The lake inside the fort appears to be a bottomless lake, but strangely enough it’s always full of water even during famine.

**Amber Fort, Amer**

Amber, also known as Amer, was the capital of the Kachhwaha Rajputs for over 700 years. The fort was established in 1592 by Maharaja Man Singh and successive rulers added to the majestic structure. The Amber Fort straddles the hillside overlooking the small Maota Lake. Of interest here are the stunning Diwan-i-Aam, built of sandstone, the magnificent Ganesh Pol, Sukh Niwas, Jai Mahal, Jas Mandir and Sheesh Mahal.

**Jaigarh Fort**

This stunning fort lies within walking distance of Amber and was once the royal treasury. Of interest here is the Jai Vana, a huge cannon on wheels, and the gorgeous view of Jaipur from the fort’s ramparts.
Gagron Fort, Jhalawar
The dramatic mass of Gagron Fort wrests your attention at the junction of the Ahu and Kali Sindh rivers, which protect it from three sides. In the classical categorisation of forts in India, this is a rare one because it is a *jal-durg* (water-protected fort) as well as *van-durg* (forest-protected fort). The fort was declared as a UNESCO world heritage site in 2013 and draws visitors from all over.

This fort has witnessed as many as 14 battles that were fought for its possession. Alauddin Khilji, the Sultan of Delhi, besieged it unsuccessfully for 11 years. In 1561, Akbar captured Gagron, and the Mughals held it till 1715 after which it was gifted to Bhim Singh of Kota by Aurangzeb in 1707. The Fort still retains its Rajput aura—with its barracks, magazine, palace and stable. The fort of Gagron was one of Jhala Zalim Singh’s, favourite retreats and he was here when the Maharao of Bundi, Ummed Singh breathed his last in 1819. The fort serves up spectacular views from the *burj* at the very end, and unexpected treats in the form of well-preserved chambers, stunning doorways and arches and pillars.

Bala Qila, Alwar
Towerin over the erstwhile kingdom of Alwar in the Matsya region of the Aravali range, the Bala Qila of the Nikumbha Rajput rulers dates back to the 10th century. The lazy sprawl of this massive fortress expands over the hills like the wingspan of an eagle protecting its young. Alwar is said to have been the
youngest kingdom in ancient Rajputana. Like the others it never shied away from pomp and pageantry. In the 175-odd years of their reign the rulers of Alwar left behind over 52 forts and innumerable palaces. The Bala Qila, of course, rises above them all, with its massive girth brooding over the beautiful city skyline. The fort’s walls spread out over the hills like tentacles, piercing the green cover in wild sweeps. Rising 3,000m above the city, the Bala Qila features 15 large and 51 small towers with their 446 outlets for musketry, which would have hailed fire and brimstone on many an enemy.

**Lohagarh Fort, Bharatpur**

Literally translating to ‘fort of iron’, the legendary Lohagarh Fort was named so because the British rulers could never penetrate it. Built by the Jat rulers in the 18th century, it is one of the strongest citadels ever made, and has only two entry points. Situated on an artificial island, the menacing fortress is encircled by a deep moat. Within its embrace lie the Kishori Mahal, Mahal Khas, Kothi Khas and Moti Mahal. A government museum exhibiting a wide variety of weapons stands as living testimony to the military might and courage of the Jat rulers.
Chhatris

Jaswant Thada, Jodhpur
This is a beautiful marble cenotaph dedicated to Maharaja Jaswant Singh II, who ruled over Marwar in the latter part of the 19th century. Jaswant Singh tried to set up a welfare state and was known for his reform measures. Commissioned by his son Sardar Singh, the grounds around the cenotaph became the crematoria for subsequent rulers.

Devikundsagar Chhatris, Bikaner
Those more inclined to lay their faith in history may find the picturesque Devikundsagar Chhatris worth a visit. These elegant memorials to the royals of Bikaner feature footprints beneath the images of mounted kings depicting the women who committed sati. Memorials carved with suns and lotuses mark the final resting places of princes and princesses.
**Ahar Cenotaphs, Udaipur**
Now famous as the cremation site of the royal family of Mewar, Ahar has an array of cenotaphs of 19 Mewar rulers, built over four centuries. The first and the most striking cenotaph is that of Maharana Amar Singh, who after abdicating his throne spent his last days in a haveli here. Ahar is also an ancient site with a history going back to 2000 BCE. The Archaeological Museum here is worth visiting for those interested in history.

**Chaurasi Khambon ki Chhatri, Bundi**
The finest cenotaph in Bundi is to the south of the town; this is the Chaurasi Khambon ki Chhatri (84-pillared cenotaph). This artistic 17th-century creation is a two-storeyed structure set upon a high plinth. To the northeast of the town sprawls the Jait Sagar, on whose embankments stands Kshar Bagh, the final resting place for Bundi’s royalty, featuring cenotaphs from the 16th and 19th centuries.
Cenotaphs of Gaitore, Jaipur
Nestled in the valley between Nahargarh and Ganeshgarh, Gaitore is a walled complex housing cenotaphs erected in the memory of Jaipur’s deceased rulers. The cenotaph built for Sawai Jai Singh is the oldest. Ram Singh II’s cenotaph, like Jai Singh’s, is well-decorated with carved stone pillars and panels on the domes. Just as the rulers had dedicated chambers for women in their palaces, a separate cremation ground was reserved for them as well. The Maharani ki Chhatri (Maji ki Chhatri) was one such.

Moosi Rani ki Chhatri, Alwar
In the shadow of the lofty Bala Qila in Alwar lies a placid waterbody, the Sagar Lake, whose waters mirror the elegant lines of Moosi Rani ki Chhatri, one of the township’s finest features. Ringed by the Aravalis, the elephant-shaped complex features a double-storied marble and sandstone memorial pavilion, raised by Raja Vinay Singh in 1815 in
memory of Maharaja Bakhtawar Singh and his consort Rani Moosi.

Bara Bagh Cenotaphs, Jaisalmer
Made of golden sandstone and housed in the oasis-like verdure of Bara Bagh, within sight of the lonely stretches of the Thar Desert, are a host of cenotaphs of Jaisalmer’s royals. Among the carved chhattris featuring exquisite chiselled pillars is one of Raja Jai Singh II. Bara Bagh lies just 5km from the city.

32-pillared Cenotaphs, Ranthambore Fort
Made of golden sandstone. Built in the memory of 32 long years of the king’s rule, the 32-pillared structure is an impressive structure revealing the erstwhile grandeur of the fort area. The cenotaph was constructed on a Shiva temple and contains a shivling inside. Another 32 pillared cenotaph which was being built lies incomplete beside it.
Palaces and Havelis

SHEKHAWATI

**Painterly Havelis**

Follow the ancient caravan trade routes along the fringes of the Thar Desert in Rajasthan’s northeastern region, and discover the splendour of the painted havelis of Shekhawati, chanced upon by two travellers, hoteliers Aman Nath and Francis Wacziarg, of Neemrana fame…and the rest is history. This assorted collation of artistic profusion showcases the wondrous marriage of business and art, as the wealthier the businessman, the more ambitious was his vision of divvying up his haveli with elaborate frescoes on ceilings and walls, within and without, to enhance his status in the eyes of his peers in society. For visitors the largest open-air gallery in Rajasthan is a banquet of painterly delights given the quality of the works and the range of subjects—mythological tales and scenes from contemporary life, the reigning themes, offering the viewer interesting vignettes of a bygone era.

**Mandawa**

Mandawa came into being in 1756, when Nawal Singh built the fort that has now been turned into the hotel called Castle Mandawa. It only became a full-fledged town after Nawal Singh’s two grandsons decided to make it their home at the close of the 18th century. Mandawa attracted many merchants to set up shop. Of interest here are the murals of **Gulab Rai Ladia Haveli**, which are quite exceptional, especially in the variety
of their themes. It is quite a mixed basket—
scenes from the life of the owner with the
fort in the background; a curly-headed Greek
‘portrait’; a woman giving birth; mirror im-
ages of a tiger and a horse; a bird tending her
eggs; a couple making out in a train compart-
ment and another on a chair.

The Bansidhar Nevatia Haveli shows
the Wright brothers’ maiden flight and a Eu-
ropean making a telephone call—presumably
reproduced from magazines. A rather nation-
alistic tug-of-war between a strongman called
Prof Ramamurti and a motorcar driven by
an Englishman is also portrayed in a paint-
ing. The baithak or sitting room of the Sneh
Ram Ladia Haveli has a rather amateurish
though amusing group portrait of rulers of
various princely states. On the other hand,
consider the almost photographic portraits of
the merchants who owned the haveli.

At the Murmuria Haveli, check out an
artist’s amusing attempt to set Indian themes
against a European background—Krishna
shepherd ing cows in a typically English coun-
tryside, for instance. The Double Goenka
Haveli has amusing erotica painted on the
outer left wall such as a melange a trois. Ac-
cess to this wall is through a narrow passage.
Churi-Ajithgarh

En route to Nawalgarh, 10km from Mandawa, the twin towns of Churi and Ajithgarh were founded in the late-19th century and were home to the well-known Marwari families of the Kejariwals and the Nemanis.

The Shiv Narayan Haveli has some interesting murals—portraits of Bengali women, a moustachioed Shiva posing with his entire family, an unusually morose-looking Krishna and Vishwamitra looking lustfully at a seductive Menaka. It is said that one room, mostly kept locked, has one of the most explicit samples of erotica in Shekhawati. The haveli behind Shiv Narayan’s has an interesting mural of Indian nobles looking at a model locomotive.

Dundlod, 20km from Mandawa, is a small and relatively tidy town, which was founded in 1750 by Keshri Singh, also the founder of Bissau. The Dera Dundlod Fort, founded in 1750, has been converted into a hotel. Of interest here is a very opulent hall, called the Diwan-i-Khana, which features murals of maharajas riding horses of renown. At the cluster of Goenka havelis, you can see two white men with a giraffe and a rhino and a man grooming himself. The Jagathia Haveli’s outer wall has one of the most detailed scenes of a railway station.

Fatehpur

A 20km distance away from Mandawa lies Fatehpur, one of the oldest towns in Shekhawati. Established in 1451 by Fateh Khan of the Muslim clan Kayamkhanis, it is the hometown of well-known Marwari business families such as the Singhanias, Poddars, Devras, Saraogis and Choudharys, who built some of the most opulently decorated havelis here.

At least one haveli here offers a ‘different’ experience—not because of its painted walls, but because of the inspiring endeavour of a Frenchwoman to give these fading works of art a fresh lease of life. A painter
herself, Nadine le Prince bought the Nand Lal Devra Haveli in 1998, and set about restoring its frescoes, aided by local artists. The haveli now goes by the name of Nadine le Prince Haveli.

Of note here also is the Singhania Haveli with its huge painting of four elephants cradling goddess Lakshmi with their trunks and exquisitely painted dancing gopis. The Choudhary Ki Haveli is one of the most richly painted in Shekhawati. The outer left wall has some interesting erotica and other amusing paintings.

**Bissau**
The three important havelis of Jasraj Sigtia, Govindram Sigtia, and Ramlalji Jai Narayan Tiberwala Haveli are in the same dusty lane.

**Jhunjhunu**
Of interest in this township, just 26km northeast of Mandawa, is Khetri Mahal, near Nehru Bazaar, and the many havelis near it. The Khetri Mahal is a run-down palace dating to 1770, and offers good views of the town. The Modi Havelis nearby have some exquisite murals, though some have been lost to modern paint, while the Kaniram Narsinghdas Tibrewala Haveli has two painted trains. The Mohanlal Ishwardas Modi Haveli also boasts of a train mural, among several others.

**Nawalgarh**
Founded in 1737 by Nawal Singh, a son of Shardul Singh, Nawalgarh was able to attract a number of rich Marwari merchants who built many richly painted havelis here. Most of these are in a state of disrepair now, the exception being the Poddar Haveli, which has been turned into a museum. Although the haveli is not very old—it was built around the 1920s—the murals have been carefully restored to their original glory. As for the other murals, it seems the Nawalgarh artists had much greater freedom in choosing their themes. For instance, there are pirated editions of Ravi Varma’s works and imaginative illustrations of a whole range of early-20th century technologies such as the air balloon, the Wright brothers’ attempt at flight, motorcars, modern railways and sewing machines.

But in terms of artistic brilliance, the painted ceiling of a small room in the fort...
called Bala Qila stands out. The room, studded profusely with mirrors, is circular, about 8ft in diameter and almost as high. The murals, lustrous and colourful, depict an artist’s impression of the cities and armies of Jaipur and Nawalgarh in the 1850s.

Aath Haveli is where you can see a long train with one passenger per compartment, a woman feeding a child and at the same time doing her make-up and a couple making love.

Morarka Haveli is right across the back street from Aath Haveli, and has one of the most elegantly and finely sketched paintings. Two prominent frames show the celebration of traditional festivals like Teej and Gangaur. Saraogi Haveli has amusing reproductions of Ravi Varma’s paintings. The seduction of Vishwamitra by Menaka is erotic. Check out the front wall at Sheksaria Haveli, whose murals have been all but whitewashed. Portraits of gods have, of course, been spared! Chaucharia Haveli has women angels alongside Europeans going up in air balloons.

Mahansar
Just 28km from Mandawa, Mahansar is a charming, laidback little town. It is also known as the traditional business bastion of
the Poddar family, which moved its flourishing business in chintz and opium to this town in the early 19th century. The family commissioned some of the most accomplished murals in Shekhawati. Among them, the Sone-ki-Dukan (Golden Shop), which was the head office of the Poddars and was so called because of the lavish use of gold in the murals inside, is the piece de resistance. Whoever painted the murals was not only a consummate illustrator but also possessed a great sense of colour and composition. In particular, check out the elaborately depicted war between the armies of Rama and Ravana, Rama’s wedding, Vishnu’s incarnations and a schematic representation of Dwarka. Also worth contemplating is a portrait of Krishna, in which he is a composite of many creatures—snake’s tail, tiger’s torso, elephant-horse-snake as neck, horse’s limbs.

**Ramgarh**
Situated just 6km from Mahansar, it was one of the wealthiest towns of Shekhawati in its prime. Indeed, it is still referred to as Sethon-ka-Ramgarh to distinguish it from its namesakes. Founded in 1791 by the Poddars, Ramgarh boasts the largest number of murals in its havelis in all of Shekhawati.

**BAGAR**
**Piramal Haveli**
Built in 1928 by Seth Piramal Chaturbhuj Makharia, who made a fortune in Bombay trading cotton, silver and opium, boasts of colonial frescoes, including some of flying
angels and gods in motorcars. It lies 40km away from Mandawa.

**CHURU**

Churu serves up a nice set of painted havelis. Half the mansions here belong to the Kotharis and the rest to the Suranas. **Malji ka Kamra**, near the bus stand, has statues of women with wings and angels. Nearby is the **Surana Double Haveli**, known for its 1,111 windows. The **Banthia Haveli** features a fresco depicting Jesus smoking a cigar while the 24 Jain tirthankaras make an appearance on the inner court of the Kothari haveli. This haveli has now been converted into a heritage hotel and has been designated as ‘Hawa Mahal of Churu’.

**JAISALMER**

The wealthy merchants of Jaisalmer chose to be remembered by posterity by commissioning some of the most ornate residences human beings ever built. These havelis were built in the 18th and the 19th centuries when trade was most lucrative, before the rise of sea trade and the Bombay harbour made land routes redundant. Made of yellow Jaisalmer sandstone they are adorned with
jaalis, carved balconies and elaborate façades. The most skilful stonework is done on the outside, reminding you that the havelis are a show of wealth more than anything else. In some of the havelis, the top portions are later additions and this is clearly discernible in the quality of stonework.

**Patwon-ki-Haveli**

The biggest and the most ornate of the havelis is the Patwon-ki-Haveli, a set of five houses adjacent to each other, built by five Jain brothers in the first half of the 19th century. The most impressive work is on the outside, and the work is so intricate that the more time you spend studying it, the more it reveals itself to you. The multi-storied buildings are constructed in the traditional style of rooms set around a central courtyard. There are remnants of exquisite paintings on some of the walls; many walls have lovely jharokhas opening out to the courtyard or the street below. From the terrace there are great views of the fort. One of the havelis now has a shop selling brocades and embroidered textiles to tourists.

**Salim Singh-ki-Haveli**

Built in the early 19th century and named after a notorious prime minister of Jaisalmer, this haveli is made of stone without the use of any cement or mortar. Elephants carved out of stone welcome you into the haveli. Notice especially the upper storeys, which are replete with delicate carving and garnished with charming balconies.
Nathmal-ki-Haveli
Built by two brothers in the late 19th century, this haveli is still partly inhabited. The exterior is beautifully carved. There is no entry fee and the family living here tries to earn money by selling paintings and artefacts to visitors.

The 20th-century Badal Nivas Palace features a tazia-like tower constructed by the Muslim stone carvers of the town for their ruler. Sarvottam Vilas Palace stands out for its exquisite glass mosaic and blue tile work, while the 18th-century Moti Mahal’s floral paintings and beautifully carved doors are a magnet for visitors.
The City Palace complex in Jaipur has many beautiful buildings.

**JAIPUR**

**City Palace**

An integral part of Jaipur’s Walled City, the City Palace complex is a fine example of this pattern. It is a sprawling enclosure with many courtyards, gateways and gardens.

Today, the former maharaja and his family occupy a part of the City Palace. From the Atish Pol entrance head for Mubarak Mahal, with its exquisitely decorated marble and sandstone exterior. The Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, is one of the finest museums in the city. A part of it houses the toshakhana or the royal wardrobe section. The other part is the pothikhana or the manuscript section. To the north of Mubarak Mahal is the Sileh Khana, once part of the old gunijankhana, or the Department of Music and Dance. It now houses an armoury.

Located on a raised platform in the inner courtyard is the Diwan-i-Khas, a simple structure where an impression of intricate design has been created by the clever use of pink and white colour on its walls. Of interest here are the two silver water containers, the largest in the world, mentioned in the Guinness Book of World Records.
Diwan-i-Aam, the hall of public audience, is an enclosed area where court durbars and ceremonies used to be held in the olden times. Built by Sawai Pratap Singh, this enormous hall houses the king’s vast collection of art such as intricate miniature paintings, old manuscripts and beautifully designed carpets. Beyond this lies the huge seven-storied Chandra Mahal, which happens to be the oldest part of the palace complex and also where the erstwhile royals reside currently.

Ram Bagh Palace
In its earliest avatar, which one can trace back to 1835, the palace was a more modest home for a favourite maid of the Jaipur royal family. It was later transformed into a hunting lodge and finally a palace in 1925. Converted into a hotel in 1957 by Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II, who lived here with his wife Gayatri Devi, it was leased out to the Taj Group of Hotels in 1972.

Hawa Mahal
Also known as the Palace of Winds, Hawa Mahal is Jaipur’s most famous monument. Sawai Pratap Singh built this rather unusual palace in 1799 for the royal women in purdah. The salmon-pink confection is a fusion of balconies, overhanging windows, curvilinear roofs, domes, finials and perforated screens which enhance the loveliness of this viewing.

Jaipur’s Hawa Mahal or Palace of Winds at sunset
**Havelis**

The havelis in Jaipur stand out for their architectural features such as arched entrances, carved balconies with coloured-glass windows and painted inner chambers. Topping the list is the huge **Natani ki Haveli**, also known as the Saat Chowk ki Haveli because of its seven courtyards, which overlooks Chhoti Chaupar. The Natans were important officers in Sawai Jai Singh’s court. Half the haveli now houses the local police station while the other is being used for a girls’ school.

**SAMODE**

**Samode Palace**

Set upon a hill, an hour’s drive from Jaipur, the luxurious Samode Palace’s USP is its magnificent Sheesh Mahal and the painted Durbar Hall; the beautiful frescoes, the elegant furnishings, the fountains and marble all add to the atmosphere of lavishness and indulgence. The expansion of the palace began under Rawal Berisal in the early-19th century and this work was continued by his descendant Rawal Sheo Singh, also the prime minister of Jaipur state in the mid-19th century. Samode was made a hotel in 1987, with 41 rooms, each opening into either a balcony or a patio.

**KARAU LI**

**City Palace**

The four-hour drive from Jaipur is well worth your while when you go exploring the palace enclave in the walled city of Karauli.

The palace entry is via the **Ganesh Gate**. Arjun Pal built the palace, along with the town, in the 14th century. However, little or nothing of the original can now be seen. What you do see is the structure erected by Raja Gopal Singh in the 18th century. He chose to adopt the Delhi style of architecture—the abundance of red sandstone in Karauli, similar to that used in Delhi, made this rendering easy. The more embellished additions came in the 19th century. White and off-white stones
have been used very becomingly, painted upon with bright blues, reds, browns and oranges. From the terrace atop the palace, you can see the town laid out by the river Bhadrawati below, and the ravines and hills beyond. The labyrinthine pathways through the palace and the many stairways climbing up and down should afford you a happy half-day.

The Diwan-i-Aam, the hall where the king met his subjects, has exquisite floral patterns in bright colours on the walls and ceiling as well as painted wooden doors. The upper floor has jaali work on the walls, from behind which ranis could observe the goings-on below. The coloured glass jharokhas of the Rang Mahal, with their one-way visibility, made for beautiful purdahs. The mirror theme continues from the hall to the walls and ceilings of the bedrooms.

BIKANER

Lallgarh Palace

The greatest symbol of Bikaner’s aspiration to be one of the world’s modern kingdoms was the building of Lallgarh Palace (named after Maharaja Lall Singh, who insisted on the two ll’s). On the one hand, it served to advertise Ganga Singh’s endeavour to make Bikaner more robust economically (to which end he developed the state railways so as to exploit local coal deposits and commissioned the Ganga Canal waterworks to overcome drought). On the other, it also served as a link with the traditions of the past. And all this was achieved through an architectural plan drafted by Sir Swinton Jacob, the foremost architect of the early-20th century.

A huge but compact palace, Lallgarh is built, appropriately, entirely of red sand-
stone. A prominent feature of Rajasthani architecture, pierced stone screens, or jaalis, keep most of the sun out as they let even the tiniest whiff of breeze in. Inside, the palace wings combine Western en-suite living with the need for zenana privacy and concealed corridors.

The main building consists of the personal living quarters of several members of the royal family, some of which have been recently renovated while others still retain their past grandeur. Though Lallgarh has several small courtyards, the two main ones now belong to two separate hotel complexes—one managed by the Maharaja Ganga Singhji Trust, the other by a private. Since part of the palace is also the Maharaja Sadul Singh Museum visitors can enjoy looking around the handsome corridors and impressive stonecraft. Anup Sanskrit Library at Lallgarh is one of the largest private collections of manuscripts in India. The initial collection was put together by Maharaja Anup Singh, who ruled from 1669 to 1698, during his Golconda campaign to save them from possible destruction by the Mughals. It is, however, no longer open to the public.

**Jodhpur**

Umaid Bhawan Palace

The palace is a magnificent structure with its Indo-Saracenic architectural lineage. Constructed from sandstone it was commissioned by Raja Umaid Singh, the then Maharaja of Jodhpur, in order to give relief and work to his subjects affected by the famine of the late 1920s. It was a work-In-progress for 15 years and gave employment to 3,000 artisans. With the Government of India move to abolish the princely privy purses in 1977, the current royal Maharaja Gaj Singh converted a part of the palace into a hotel. Today, the complex comprises three sections: the royal apartments, the hotel, and a museum. The royal wing is closed to tourists.

The imposing building presents luxury on a grand, 347-room, 26-acre scale. One of the largest private residences in the world and one of Asia’s youngest palaces, Umaid Bhawan is a curious blend of identities, with a rich individuality that hides just behind its five-star-hotel façade. Designed by Edward-
ian architect Sir Henry Vaughan Lanchester, the structure has a strong colonial air even though the layout of the gardens is essentially Mughal: a clean expanse of green with a large courtyard; dressy white pavilion in the centre; symmetrically lined bushes. Most essential to visit here is the black-and-gold painted Oriental Room featuring murals of the Ramayana by Polish artist Stephan Norblin.

UDAIPUR

The City Palace
Commissioned in 1559 and constructed along the eastern bank of Lake Pichola by Maharana Udai Singh II when he made Udaipur his new capital, this is the largest palace complex in Rajasthan comprising a cavalcade of palaces built over 400 years. Twenty-three Maharanas of Udaipur contributed to this structure; despite this it maintains a graceful uniformity. Its great mass notwithstanding nor the profusion of architectural elements—jharokhas, columns and towers—the elegant palace is an absolute treat for the eyes.

Enter the palace complex from Badi Pol and head for the Tripolia Gate with seven arches or toranas to its left. Further ahead is the entrance to the palace building and above the entrance, the Mewar crest, an image of the Sun God, flanked by a Rajput warrior and a Bhil. Shambhu Niwas is the present home of the Mewar family. Further south are the stunning Fateh Prakash Palace and Shiv Niwas Palace, both luxury grand heritage hotels.
DUNGARPUR
Udai Bilas Palace

Nestled by the pristine Gaibsagar Lake, Udai Bilas Palace reeks of old-world charm and makes for a rejuvenative experience. A stay at the palace offers great opportunities for bird watching and exploring Dungarpur’s tribal life. The palace stands as a great specimen of Rajput architecture and is embellished by fine murals, tastefully done miniature paintings and intricate stone carvings. The venerable history of the palace goes back to the mid-19th century, when Maharawal Udai Singh II, who was a great patron of art and architecture, built the Pareva wing in bluish grey local stone, along with the magnificent Ek Thambia Mahal, which boasts finely sculpted pillars and ornate balconies and balustrades. The interiors of the palace are

An architecturally unique tower inside the Udai Bilas Palace
adorned with art-deco style furnishings. Of special note are the hunting trophies and crystal chandeliers. The palace was further enlarged by Maharawal Laxman Singh in 1940, who added three wings, creating the famous courtyard of the palace. A part of the palace still serves as the royal residence. During your stay at the property, you can expect special candlelit dinners by the lakeside, an exotic swimming pool and a jacuzzi, among other modern amenities.

BUNDI
Garh Palace
This is a fortified complex of many palaces built by different kings between the 17th and 18th centuries. Unoccupied in the second half of the 20th century, it lay decaying till recently, when the potential of tourism-generated revenue inspired a clean-up and re-opening. You enter through the huge Hathi Pol into a world where local stone has been used in typical Rajput-style architecture to create jharokhas, pillars and intricately carved brackets. The Chhatra Mahal has ceilings adorned with floral patterns, and wall murals depicting Krishna lifting the Govardhan, elephants and other animals and the life at the palace. The Phool Mahal depicts a royal procession. The mythological paintings in Badal Mahal show Chinese influences in the faces and the flowers.

Patronised by the Hada Rajputs, Bundi art derived from folk traditions and Mughal painting. The initial spurt of paintings came under Chhatra Sal, who established a painters’ school in the Chhatra Mahal, within the Garh Palace, in the mid-17th century. The tradition reached its pinnacle under Ummed Singh more than a century later, when the Chitrashala paintings were done. Ummed Mahal, better known as the Chitrashala, is part of the Garh Palace, with a separate entrance, and is located on a slope. Built in the 18th century, it is a set of rooms on a raised platform above a garden courtyard, and its walls and ceilings are embellished with a range of paintings.

KOTA
City Palace
Set within the embrace of the impressive Kota Fort, the elegant City Palace is awash with a galaxy of the treasures of its past. Visitors are permitted only into the royal apartments such as the Bada Mahal, and the museum, and not in the Kunwarbade ka...
Mahal and the Raj Mahal. The richness of detail in the delicate pillars, mirror inlays and murals that wash the walls in colour is what makes Kota’s City Palace exceptional. Among the murals are court scenes, pilgrim maps, fantastic landscapes and portraits, but do look out for the famous hunting scenes that made the Kota school of painting so well known.

JHALAWAR

Garh Palace

The impressive palace at the centre of the town presently houses a government museum. Some exquisite paintings and mirrors on the walls of Zanana Khas are still in very good condition. The excellent frescoes on both walls and mirrors are prime examples of art made by Nathdwara painters. The Palace was built by the first ruler, Jhala Madan Singh, during 1840-1845 and his successors later added beautiful paintings inside the rooms which can be seen even now in excellent condition. You can walk through and see the Sheesh Mahal rooms partitioned into cubicles, splendid frescoes with electric fittings. A few locked rooms are repositories of every variety of artistic expression, from miniature styles to portrait paintings.

BHARATPUR

Deeg Palace

A blend of Rajput and Mughal architecture, this complex has beautiful fountains, perfectly lined passages and sprawling gardens that will take your breath away. Tucked away a few kilometers from Bharatpur, this water palace served as a residence for the Jat Kings. The Deeg Palace was built by Badan Singh and later revamped by his son Suraj Mal. There are six Bhawans open for public viewing along with the Deeg Fort and Deeg Museum. The most interesting bits lie inside Gopal Bhawan and Kishan Bhawan, where the artefacts include everything from old...
furniture to a stuffed tiger. Holi at Deeg’s Monsoon Palace is quite unique. During the festivities the many fountains of the palace are quite resplendent as they spew misty sprays in many hues of Holi, while artists and performers arrive from all corners of the country to enthrall the visitors.

The charming pink sandstone complex, with its palanquin-style roofs and beautiful buildings, shimmers in the waters like a surreal painting. Apart from the bhawans, the Deeg Fort and Deeg Museum are also open to the public.

Vintage furniture and stuffed big cats headline the exhibits kept inside Gopal Bhawan and Kishan Bhawan, both of which form the museum. A visit of the galleries in the many halls and also the quarters of the maharaja, the zenana and the queen’s apartments, comes highly recommended. Gopal Bhawan is one of the most stunning parts of the Deeg Palace complex, with two waterfront summer retreats and two pavilions named Sawan and Bhadon.

TONK
**Sunheri Kothi**
En route to Ranthambhore you must stop at Tonk, which is awash with a slew of havelis and colonial buildings. At the core of it stands the richly ornamented Sunheri Kothi. Don’t be fooled by its plain exteriors. Inside you’ll discover that every square inch is studded with tiny mirrors and painted in bright hues. Permission to explore the haveli is given by the MAKA Arabic and Persian Research Institute.
Stepwells

Chand Baori, Abhaneri
Over a thousand years old, the stunning Chand Baori is sequestered in the little-known ancient village of Abhaneri in Rajasthan’s Dausa district, 90km from Jaipur. Chand Baori is said to be the world’s largest-known stepwell…and probably the most stunning architecturally.

Believed to be the brainchild of 9th-century Pratihara king Chanda, and from whom it rightly takes its name, this amazing water-harvesting structure stands 19.5m in depth and is dedicated to Hashat Mata, Goddess of Joy and Happiness. Walled in a vast rectangular courtyard, inset with a wraparound corridor, the 13-storied inverted pyramid-shaped baori (which is wide at the top and narrows sharply as it approaches the surface of the water) is accessible on three sides by dozens of double flights of steps (totalling 3,500) on 10 landings. The fourth side of the structure hosts a three-storied pavilion embellished with jharokhas, carved pillars, galleries and the two projecting balconies featuring idols of the Hindu deities Mahishasurmardini and Ganesha.

What continues to astonish architects to this day is the baori’s precise symmetry and geometric design. Visitors today are not permitted to enter the stepwell, which is cordoned off by a railing to prevent accidents. But if you like, be here during the Sharad Navratras for the annual two-day Abhaneri cultural festival (Sharad Navratri) held in the precincts of the stepwell, and you can enjoy traditional street plays, folk songs and Kachhi Ghodi, Kalbeliya, Ghoomar, and mesmerising Bhangai dance performances.
The spectacular Chand Baori in Abhaneri
**Raniji ki Baori, Bundi**
The medieval city of Bundi is famous for its 50-odd ancient wells and tanks, sources of water in a land starved for water. The Raniji ki Baori is the most famous because of its impressive composition with arches and pillars, and beautiful embellishments. Commissioned by Rani Nathvatiji in 1699 (who is said to have built 20 other *baoris*), this is the most well-maintained *baori*. A pair of matching stepwells (just outside Chogan Gate) go by the name of *Nagar Sagar*. The 16th-century *Bohraji-ka-Kund* (north of Nawal Sagar) is pretty impressive and attracts birdlife post-monsoon.

**Hadi Rani ki Baori, Todaraisingh**
One of the most impressive stepwells of the country, the Hadi Rani Baori in Todaraisingh was constructed in the 12th century. The rectangular-shaped stepwell is a double storeyed structure and each of its corridors is flanked with an arched doorway. The first storey of the stepwell houses images of Lord Brahma, Ganesha and Mahishasuramardini. Though asymmetric in its design, the attractive steps were built to contain water. The stepwell is surrounded by a well-kept garden.

*Entry Free*

**Mertaniji Baori, Jhunjhunu**
This one-of-its-kind stepwell was built by Mertani Ji, the queen of Shardul Singh Shekhawat of Jhunjhunu in 1783. On one side of it there is an artistic well and on the other, there are hundreds of stairs to reach
the water level from the main gate. It is about 100 feet deep and is constructed in three parts. Here there are artistic stairs, cells and corridors, where in ancient times the passerby could take rest after having refreshment and bathing. It is said that the water in the stepwell is rich in minerals that can cure skin diseases. The stepwell held utmost importance in ancient times, as people would stop here to quench their thirst without having to pull a bucket out of a well.

**Stepwell at Neemrana**

Neemrana is home to a well-planned stepwell, which served the utilitarian purpose of supplying water in the region. The nine-storeyed stepwell is aligned in the east-west direction and each of its storeys is connected with the well through a small opening. Each storey is provided with projected chhajjas on its inner side. The Baori is said to be constructed by Chauhan ruler Raja Maha Singh in 1740 AD and stands as a fine example of water management system in the bygone era.
The magnificent Jain temples at Ranakpur
Temple

Jain Temples, Ranakpur

The Jain temple complex with its four shrines, at Ranakpur, showcases the exquisite cohesion of architecture, sculpture and crafts and sequential space. The inspiration behind this splendid religious structure were Acharya Somasundara Suri, a great religious leader of the time, Dharana Shah, minister of Rana Kumbha (ruler of Mewar in the 15th century), Rana Kumbha himself, and the architect, the man who transformed this dream into a reality—Depaka.

Despite its complexity, its luxury of space and great mass, or the loftiness of the temple site, nothing has taken away from its exquisite symmetry or its architectural balance. Strangely enough, thanks to the tangle of pillars one doesn’t realise there are barely any walls separating the inside from the outside, which enhances the sense of space even further. An eternal delight is the profusion of embellishments, in the form of ornate toranas, the delectable carvings, innumerable elegant and lofty pillars and many shikhiras, that mark the complex comprising the Chaumukha Temple, Parsavanath Temple, Neminath Temple and Surya Temple. The Chaumukha Temple houses the temples’ lead feature: the massive Chaumukha Adinath idol residing in the sanctum sanctorum.

The longstanding interest for architects around the world has been the site’s 1,444 densely sculpted pillars, of which no two are said to be alike.

Shrinathji Temple, Udaipur

If Nathdwara, 48km northeast of Udaipur city, is the ‘Gateway to God’, its beautiful Shrinathji-ki-Haveli is the home of Lord Krishna in his child avatar; Krishna is also revered in his incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Said to trace its history to the saint-poet Meerabai, the temple is a must-visit not only for devotees but also for history and culture buffs who come to view the daily routine Shrinathji being dressed in different poshaks every day.

Goswami priests in 1672 installed the idol of Shrinathji at Nathdwara after it was rescued from Vrindavan from the scourge of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. It was enshrined at this site because the rescued idol, ‘refused’ to be moved from where it had been placed after its rescue— this event was taken to be divinely ordained. The understated white-marble exterior is complemented superbly by the carvings on its walls. The foundation of the structure is laid on the fortified mansion of Mewar’s famous Sisodia Rajput clan.
The kalasha at the shikhara of the temple is marked by Vishnu’s iconic weapon, the Sudarshan Chakra, and the seven flags represent the different houses of the Pushti-marg Sampradaya. In a brilliant example of Rajasthan’s haveli architecture permeating a temple’s construction style, the different rooms at the premises are storehouses for supplies such as milk, sugar, betel and flowers, with even a treasury, a stable and a jewellery chamber.

Eklingji
Built in 734 A.D. is the beautifully sculpted temple complex with 108 temples within its high walls. The temples are dedicated to Lord Shiva, the presiding deity of Mewar rulers. The walled complex encloses an elaborately pillared hall or ‘Mandap’ under a huge pyramidal roof and has four faced image of Lord Shiva in black marble.

Ambika Mata Temple, Jagat
58 km southeast of Udaipur the village of Jagat has the well preserved 10 century Ambika Mata Temple dedicated Goddess Durga. Its walls depicting Goddess attended by sensuous maidens in seductive postures, couples making love, dancers and musicians give the temple a popular reference as the Khajuraho of Rajasthan.
**Rishabhdeo Temple**

This is a 15th-century Jain Temple of Rishabhddeoji, one of the twenty four Tirthankars of the Jains. Located in Dhulev, the temple is not only an important centre of pilgrimage for Jains but also for Meena tribals, Bhils and Vaishnavites. You are welcomed by two intricately carved black stone elephant idols as you enter the temple. The sanctum sanctorum houses a 3.5 feet long imposing idol of Lord Rishabhdeo, which is carved out of a single piece of black stone. The deity can be seen sitting in padmasana posture. The deity is also referred as Keshariyaji as devotees offer generous quantities of saffron to the lord. The temple comes alive during the Kesar Puja, which is held here with great fervour.

**Dilwara Temples, Mount Abu**

Protected from Islamic invasions, hidden deep within a remote and lush valley in the Aravalis, are Vimala Vasahi, Luna Vasahi, Piththalhar, Khartar Vasahi and Mahavir Swami, five 11th-century Svetambara Jain temples. Each is a fabulous representation of the finest aspects of Rajasthani stone carving and sculpture. The plain exteriors of Dilwara’s Vimal Vasahi and Luna Vasahi are the perfect foil for the richly ornate interiors.

Built by Vimal Shah, a minister at the court of the Gujarati ruler Bhima Dev 1, the **Vimala Vasahi** (1031) is the oldest and dedicated to Adinath, the first Jain tirthankara. A galaxy of beautifully sculpted deities and ornate interiors enhances the importance of the bejewelled icon. The courtyard entrance is adorned by 48 beautifully carved pillars. Dedicated to Neminath, the 22nd tirthankara, and even more ornate and remarkable for its marble tracery is the **Luna Vasahi**, which was built two centuries on by two brothers Tejpal and Vastupal.

**Saas Bahu Temple, Nagda**

Holding true to its intriguing name, this temple complex will remind you of Khajuraho, thanks to its architectural brilliance. Dedicated to Lord Vishnu, the temple was originally called Sahastrabahu Temple after the thousand-handed deity. According to legend, these temples were built by King Mahipala of the Kachchhwaha dynasty around
The two main shrines in the complex, the Sas temple is encompassed by ten smaller shrines, while the Bahu temple houses five smaller temples. The temple walls are decorated with intricate stone carvings which include imposing sculptures of male and female deities, damsels and regents. Some of the carvings also depict scenes from the Ramayana. The temple is located on the way to the much revered Eklingji Temple.

**Jain Temples, Jaisalmer**

Sequestered in the golden shadows of the historic Jaisalmer Fort are seven exquisitely carved Jain temples made from the same golden sandstone used to build this iconic fort. Dating between the 15th and 16th centuries, the shrines are well maintained today after a makeover in the 1970s. The largest of the lot and the most impressive is the **Parsvanath Temple**, dedicated to the 22nd tirthankara. The grand entrance is topped by an image of Parsvanath. The ceiling of the mandap features a sculpted demon head with five bodies. Close by lies the **Chandraprabhu Temple**, raised to the eighth tirthankara. Residing in the sanctum are four images of Chandraprabhu guarded from outside by finely sculpted statues of other tirthankaras. An upper gallery features images of Lord Parsvanath carved from marble. The **Rishabhadeva Temple** is renowned for its beautiful sculptures. A dimly-lit **Sambhavanath Temple** has steps going down to the basement-level **Gyan Bhandar**—a tiny, fascinating 16th-century library filled with ancient manuscripts. The other Jain temples of note are **Shitalnath, Shantinath** and **Kunthanath**.

**Lodurva Jain Temple, Jaisalmer**

The original bastion of the Rajputs, out in the western flank of the vast desert before Jaisalmer Golden Fort was raised, Lodurva—16km northwest of Jaisalmer—is a magnet for visitors for its ornate sandstone temple complex built in a style reminiscent of the Dilwara style of temple architecture. Dating back almost 1000 years ago, the temple is dedicated to Parshvanath, the 23rd Tirthankara in Jainism. Restorations were carried out throughout the complex in the 17th century.

Leaving behind the cactus-strewn desert landscape, you enter the temple complex.
surrounded by a rather drab boundary wall. Gazing upon the ancient shrine what catches you eye is the most striking aspect of its architecture—the torana (an ornamental gateway in Asian architecture) which appears to almost garland the Parshvanath Jain Temple. Built of sandstone, the glow cast by the bright walls of the temple reminds one of the golden patina of Jaisalmer’s Sonar Kila.

The arches, and the dizzying latticework on the slanting jharokha walls point towards the intricate detailing of the highest order in Hindu temple architecture; the carved pillars—some of them featuring unbelievable anthropomorphic forms, will transfix the onlooker. The statue of Parshvanath is an arresting creation, with the idol of the Tirthankara in black Kasauti stone. A canopy of about a hundred snake hoods is raised above him and a cavalcade of human and animal carvings, rendered on white marble, surround the deity.

Karni Mata Temple, Deshnoke, Bikaner

Just 30km away from Bikaner stands one of India’s most unique temples. In local parlance called the ‘rat temple’, the Karni Mata Temple at Deshnoke revels in this moniker because it’s quite simply overrun by rats, considered to be holy by the endless stream of devotees who won’t turn a hair when these temple denizens scamper across their path during their devotions.

Given that it was Karni Mata who had bestowed her blessings on dynastic head Rao Bika, the royal family has always held the saint-goddess in high regard. The deity is revered for protecting the city to this day against everything from war to disease! Local lore has it that if you step on one and kill it, you will be struck by grave misfortunes—unless, of course, you choose to make up for it by presenting the temple a rat made of gold! The shrine is also notable for its marble façade and silver doors.

Hindu and Jain Temples, Osian

A 65km drive from Jodhpur takes you to the golden sands at Osian where you will discover a clutch of medieval temples of ancient Brahmanical and Jain vintage. Check out the beauty of the torana and the painterly renditions in the interiors of the oldest—the Surya Temple, said to be the finest in the country. The Harihara
Temple I and Harihara III are of exceptional beauty. Notable too is the Jain Mahavira Temple and its idol of Lord Mahavira. Suffused in the legend of the marital discord between Brahma and his wife Savitri, this lone Brahma Temple is a reminder of Savitri’s curse on him that he would never be worshipped; but then she tempered down the curse by permitting his worship in Pushkar only.

Brahma Temple, Pushkar
It is said that Pushkar has one of the rare temples in India, dedicated to lord Brahma, the creator in the Hindu pantheon; it’s quite and possibly the only major one. According to a legend, Brahma is said to have been cursed by his wife Savitri that he would be worshipped by none. However, later she relented and allowed him to have a dedicated site for his worship. Pushkar, home to the 14th-century Jagatpita Brahma Temple, marks that site; some believe it to be over 2,000 years old.

The Jagatpita Brahma Temple set in pristine white marble faces the Pushkar Lake, and its distinctive red shikhara beckons devotees from afar. Devotees entering the temple precincts are greeted by the hamsa (goose), the vahana (vehicle) of Brahma at the gateway. Another distinctive feature of the shrine are its blue pillars.

The sanctum sanctorum reveals a four-faced idol of the deity, a classical representation of his omniscience. The temple also houses a silver turtle, featuring marvelous carvings. Huge throng descend on the shrine on the occasion of Kartik Poornima, which also marks the beginning of the famous Pushkar Fair.

Arthuna Temple Complex, Banswara
Arthuna is home to several temples and temple complexes, believed to have been built between the 11th and 13th centuries. These structures, built in the Nagara style, marked by an unparalleled set of carvings and sculptures, were unearthed in the 1950s by the Archaeological Survey of India.
The principal temple in the complex dedicated to Lord Shiva is the Mandleghwar Shiva Temple, constructed in 1080 CE by the Paramara prince Chamundaraj, as a memorial to his father, Raja Mandalik. Other temples in this complex, associated with the Lakulisa sect in Shaivism, are the Someshwar Mahadev and the Arthuniya Hanuman Temple. All of these structures bear beautiful stone carvings depicting Devi Chamunda and episodes such as the vanquishing of the demon Andhaka, in addition to the iconic Shiva Tandava. The Jain temple complex includes a temple built in 1190 CE by Bhushana, and has the Hindu shrine of 64 Yoginis nearby.

Another group of temples known as the Hanumangarhi complex is worth exploring—it was here that a rare idol of Lord Hanuman in black stone was discovered. The Shivacharya Temple bears a connection with a group called the Kanphate Nath Yogis.

**Tripura Sundari Temple**
Dedicated to goddess Tripura Sundari, also known as Turita Mata, the temple is one of the Shaktipeethas and draws devotees throughout the year. Inside the sanctum sanctorum of sits an attractive idol made in black stone. The deity can be seen riding a tiger. Historians believe that the temple was constructed before Samrat Kanishka’s rule.
The rulers of ancient Marwar and Mewar are believed to have been ardent disciples of Maa Tripuri Sundari. Located 18km from Banswara, the temple has undergone restoration over the last couple of years.

**Ganga Mandir, Bharatpur**
Taking over ninety years of blood, sweat and tears to construct, this two-storied ode to Goddess Ganga is a unique confluence of Rajput, Mughal and South Indian style of architecture. The marble-inlaid idol of the goddess sits atop a huge crocodile and the temple walls are marked by beautiful carvings.

**Laxman Mandir, Bharatpur**
This temple was established by a sage named Naga Baba, in honour of Lord Ram’s younger brother Laxman. Complete with intricate carvings, embellished doors and lovely arches, the temple is famous for its idols of Laxman, Lord Ram, Urmila, Bharat, Shatrughan and Hanuman—all made of ashtadhatu, a unique combination of eight metals.

**Nakoda Bhairav Temple, Barmer**
This temple is considered holy for both Hindus and Jains and attracts a large number of devotees on all days. Of interest are the beautiful carvings illustrating its inner walls. The intricate architecture includes 246 inscriptions, which tell a tale of renovations and additions over centuries.

**Temples of Kiradu**
Often dubbed as the Khajuraho of Rajasthan, the temples, now only five out of the 108 which presided here in Kiradu, Barmer
district, are steeped in an aura of haunting serenity. All document the architectural mores of the dynasties, which commissioned them—between invasions from the time of Mahmud of Ghazni (11th century) to the period of the Delhi Sultanate (13th-14th century). Of the five remaining temples, four are raised to Lord Shiva, the finest being the Someshvara Temple which is the best preserved. The fifth temple is dedicated to Vishnu.

**Diggi Kalyan Ji Temple, Diggi**
Built by King Dugva, this Vaishnava temple located at Diggi in Malpura tehsil, Tonk district, is known for its mesmerizing architecture, especially the marble-inlaid elegant prayer hall and the sixteen pillars supporting the shikhar. The temple hosts a four-armed white marble statue of Kalyan Ji, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

**Madana Mohan Ji Temple, Karauli**
The Madan Mohan Temple, adjacent to the Karauli city palace, is a Vishnu temple. It is considered highly auspicious to visit the Govindji and Gopinath temples of Jaipur and the Madan Mohan Temple of Karauli on the same day. The idea is to attend the morning aarti in one city and the evening aarti in the other. Located on the banks of
Bhadrvati, the temple is known for blessing thousands of warriors by ensuring victories for them in the battlefield. The sanctum of the temple houses intricately carved idols of Lord Krishna and his consort Radha. The temple is respected as one of the Char-Dhams of Karauli. The jugal prasad offered to the deity here, is offered by only one person every day, so the devotees have to wait for years to offer bhog to their beloved Madan Mohan Ji.

**Sun Temple, Jhalawar**
The finest temple in Jhalrapatan town is the 97ft high, 10th century Sun Temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu, also known as Padam Nabha temple. The temple is crowned with finely carved shikhara (spire). This high steeple is an amalgamation of miniature towers which seems to stick to the main tower, making it unique. The shikhara is build in layers and the size of the pillars decreases as the height increases, following a seven storey pillar format. This temple was first restored in 16th century and later in the 19th century. The columns and arches at the entrance are richly carved with the images of gods, goddesses and other hindu motifs.

**Kaila Devi Temple, Karauli**
This popular temple is located on the outskirts of Karauli, on the banks of river Kalisal and encompassed by the verdant Trikut hill range. It dates back to 1100 CE. Worshipped as one of the nine Shaktipeethas, the temple is dedicated to Goddess Kaila Devi, the tutelary deity of the Jadaun Rajputs of Karauli. The temple bustles with devotees at any given time of the year.

**Shri Mahaveer Ji Temple**
This spectacular temple is dedicated to the worship of the Jain Tirthankaras and prides itself on being one of the most visited Jain
pilgrimages in the country. The marvelous temple draws its sculptures, design, and architecture from the Jain school of art. Every year, a grand fair is held here during the Hindu calendar months of Chaitra and Vaishakh. The fair ends on the auspicious day of Makar Sankranti.

**Trinetra Ganesh Ji Temple, Ranthambore**

Located in the Ranthambore Fort, this is the oldest Ganesha temple in Rajasthan and dates back to 1300 CE. Legend has it that a war had taken place between King Hammeer and Alauddin Khilji at the fort. The fort housed essential supplies during the war, which lasted for many years. Once, when the stocks were getting over, Lord Ganesha appeared in his devotee Hamir’s dream and told him that the problem would be taken care of. The following morning, not only did an idol of a three-eyed Ganesha appear from one of the fort walls, the godowns too were filled, and eventually, the war got over. In a gesture to thank the Lord, Raja Hamir built the temple and the idols of Lord Ganesha and his family. To this day, the temple receives wedding invitations from all over the state. You can invite the Lord for your wedding by sending a card to Rathambore Trinetra Ganesh Temple, Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan – 322021.
The iconic Albert Hall Museum located in Ram Niwas Garden, Jaipur

Museums

JAIPUR
Albert Hall Museum, Jaipur

In a city dotted with myriad architectural gems, Albert Hall is perhaps the most stunning building of Jaipur. This is the oldest museum of Rajasthan and functions as the state museum. Also known as the Central Museum, the impressive museum is located in Ram Niwas Garden. Sir Swinton Jacob modelled this structure on the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

The foundation stone of the museum was laid by the Prince of Wales in 1876. The main purpose behind the grand structure was to ensure Prince Albert of England would visit the pink city during his India tour. Maharaja Ram Singh of Jaipur deemed it important to nurture ties with the court of Britain. The complex took 10 years to complete and took its current form during the reign of Madho Singh II, who used it as the state museum as per Madho Singh I's wish.
Adorned with carved arches made from inlaid sandstone, the museum stands as a fine specimen of Indo-Saracenic architecture and draws tourists and history buffs from all corners of the world through the year. The prime attraction of the museum is an Egyptian mummy, which overshadows all other exhibits kept on display. The museum has displays of Indian arts and crafts, including metalware, ivory and woodcarvings, jewellery, textiles, carpets, pottery, sculptures and paintings.

Of interest here too is a rare collection of coins belonging to the Gupta, Kushan, Delhi Sultanate, Mughal and British periods. On show is a rare collection of miniature paintings from the Bundi, Jaipur, Udaipur and Kishangarh schools of painting.

**Timings** 10am-4.30pm daily

**Hawa Mahal Museum, Jaipur**

Jaipur’s Hawa Mahal is a sheer delight for its elegant façade overlooking one of the busiest markets in the Old City. History buffs soak in its regal past and architecture enthusiasts can’t stop marvelling at its honeycomb-like structure. Also known as the Palace of Winds, the Hawa Mahal is located at Badi Choupad. All ornamentation is confined to the rear portion of this five-storied structure. In 1799, Sawai Pratap Singh, grandson of Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh, commissioned Lal Chand Usta to construct an extension to the Royal City Palace. The five-storied palace was built in the form of Lord Krishna’s crown, because Pratap Singh was a great devotee. What emerged in this rather unusual palace was its unique viewing gallery marked by a total of 953 small casements each with small lattice-worked pink windows, balconies and arched roofs with hanging cornices, from where the ladies of the palace, who were in purdah, could discreetly watch the goings-on in the busy market square below.

Maintained by the Archaeological Department of the state government, the palace is home to an archaeological museum located in its courtyard. After revelling in the cool breezes passing in from the lat-
Museums & Heritage Properties in Rajasthan

The museum is replete with exquisite miniature paintings and ceremonial armour, which speak volumes about the larger-than-life lifestyle of the rulers of Jaipur. Also notable are the sculptures collected from different parts of Rajasthan such as Ganeshwar, Virat Nagar, Raid, Sambhar and Museum of Indology.

On display are artefacts which were made from a variety of materials such as terracotta, arrowheads, fish hooks, swords, helmets and other antiquities of the maharajas of the Pink City. The prime attraction of the museum is a 2nd-century vessel which was excavated at Naliasar in Sambhar.

**Timings** 9am-4.30pm

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**Jaipur Wax Museum, Jaipur**

This amazing museum is Jaipur’s answer to Madame Tussauds, with a range of stunning wax and silicone statues of leading personalities from the fields of history, cinema, art, literature and the royal past of Rajasthan. It features 30 wax statues of eminent personalities like Mahatma Gandhi, legendary freedom fighter Bhagat Singh, Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, scientist Albert Einstein, Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan and pop legend Michael Jackson. Currently quite popular with residents as well as visitors, it falls under the purview of the state’s Department of Archaeology & Museums.

Located in the premises of the Nahargarh Fort complex in the foothills of the Aravalis, the museum is a busy addition to the city’s tourist attractions. Taking pictures with the life-like replicas of their favourite movie stars and people who have inspired them, is a memorable experience for the droves of visitors. Besides the imposing statues, the museum also has on display the 10-foot-long Bullet called Gati Gamini, the motorbike which has become a symbol of Rajasthan Tourism, thanks to the brilliant advertisements that have been splashed across television screens.

A special section is dedicated to honour the royalty of Rajasthan and one will find statues of the erstwhile maharajas and maharanis of Rajasthan. The best part about the museum is that each statue features a quick backgrounder of the celebrity con
cerned. The creations of renowned wax sculptor Susanta Ray, the statues are housed in two separate sections known as the Hall of Icons and Royal Darbar.

There’s also an interesting feature known as The One Minute Maharaja, in which a visitor can experience the regal life, lived by Rajasthan’s royals, with all the trappings of royalty. Visitors can also stop at the well-stocked gift shop at the museum to buy beautiful souvenirs.

**Timings** 10am-6.30pm daily

**Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur**
The Jawahar Kala Kendra is to Jaipur what the India Habitat Centre is to Delhi. This is where everything related to arts and crafts comes together. Located in the heart of the city, the multi-arts centre was established by the state government with an aim to provide space to the cultural and spiritual values of India and display its rich craft heritage, as also to preserve and promote Rajasthani arts and crafts. Divided into eight sections, JKK is an absolute delight for art lovers. Apart from housing an open-air amphitheatre, two permanent art galleries, and three galleries for hosting exhibitions, the centre is also home to the Alankar Museum. This museum showcases artefacts and an exquisite collection of wooden, ceramic and decorative items. The exhibits on display here range from intricately carved wooden doors and furniture to earthenware, lanterns, hookahs and more. The prime attractions in this museum are the statues and sculptures of Rajasthan’s iconic personalities. The entire range of artefacts displayed in the museum is as Rajasthani as it could be. Don’t miss the huge, carved wooden doors.
An intriguing aspect of JKK is its architectural lineage. Designed by Charles Correa, it is a contemporary building, yet based on an ancient notion of the cosmos—the Navgraha mandala—with one of the squares moved aside, to echo the concept that created the original plan for Jaipur city and the man behind it: the scholar, mathematician and astronomer Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II. The walls, too, bear artworks based on cosmology and astronomy.

When done exploring the museum, visitors can attend the several exhibitions that are conducted here regularly. The Jawahar Kala Kendra also organises frequent plays, workshops, camps and musical concerts. There’s also a small café where you can get a range of snacks and beverages. There is also a well-stocked two-storey library at the centre.

**Timing** 10am-9pm daily

**City Palace Museum, Jaipur**

Built by Maharaja Jai Singh II, seven years after the founding of Jaipur, the seven-storied Satkhana Mahal, or Chandra Mahal at the City Palace Museum is a veritable palace of illusions that abounds in floral and mirror decorations and ornate tiling.

Life-size portraits of Jaipur’s royals, along with Mughal and Persian miniatures adorn the ground and first floors. Sukh Niwas on the second floor leaves you spellbound with its delicate Persian-style floral patterns and Mughal
miniatures, and expansive view of the palace gardens from the terrace. The third, fourth and sixth storeys—Rang Mandir, Shobha Niwas and Sri Niwas—glitter with mirrorwork and decorations in gold, while Mukut Niwas, the top floor, is, quite literally, the citadel’s crown, serving up sweeping views of the walled city.

Located in the Mubarak Mahal are brocades from Surat, Aurangabad and Varanasi, handloom shawls and a 17th-century carpet from Kashmir, along with specimens of matchless sartorial excellence. Look out also for proof of Jaipur’s historical hand-block-printing prowess in the pieces from Sanganer. Of interest too are the Guinness record-winning silver urns housed in the Sarvato Bhadra. Sarvato Bhadra Chowk’s walls host the nightly sound and light show narrated by Amitabh Bachchan, as part of the unique Museum-at-Night experience.

The Durbar Hall for many years was the site of an art gallery; now restored, it houses paintings, sporting accolades, chandeliers, vintage furniture, and murals.

Also close by is the much-vaunted arms gallery, or the Sileh Khana. Word is that this section is home to by far the finest medieval arms and weaponry in the country.

Of note are the many weapons illustrated with inscriptions and embellishment, such as a diamond-studded dagger or hilts splendidly engraved with images of deities and hunting scenes.

A huge draw too is the impressive collection of hand-written manuscripts (close to 8,000) and 225 hand-drawn, traditional cartography-style maps, at the Pothikhana Archives section.

The Durga Saptashati and Bhagvata Purana come alive in the illustrated manuscript series at the painting and photography gallery, which also houses photographs by Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh II.

**Amrapali Museum, Jaipur**

Wandering through the hushed confines of the Amrapali Museum, one is transfixed with the idea of how Indian jewellery has so deeply imbibed the cultural complexities of each region. This geographic diversity lends

*Entrance to the Amrapali Museum, Jaipur*
itself to a rich tradition of ornamentation. The pieces on display here are a vivid reminder of how the art of ornamentation is an integral part of ordinary life.

The collection includes a stunning variety of chains, pendants, amulets, head and hair ornaments, earpieces, torso and shoulder ornaments, belts and buckles, armlets, wristlets and cuff bracelets, bangles and bracelets, rings and toe rings, and anklets, sourced over 40-odd years from the far reaches of the Indian subcontinent by Rajiv Arora and Rajesh Ajmera, founders of the luxury brand, Amrapali Jewels.

On the ground floor, one encounters delectable mina work on silver and gold pieces on display. Equally astounding are the gold toe rings. Or the umlakh (groom’s crown) from Himachal Pradesh with intricate reliefs on its panels. From Gujarat, comes a 12-foot-long silver chariot, a popular exhibit.

The kundan items are a reminder of the exquisite work of artisans in the workshops of Bikaner, Punjab and Delhi. Showcased in a set of beautiful vases and ittradan from Pratapgarh is the cameo-like beauty of thewa (pierced gold work over transparent glass). Silver holds a special place in the saga of Indian jewellery, depicted wonderfully in the tribal jewellery here. For some exquisite, handcrafted silver jewellery or duplicates of the pieces on display, head over to the museum shop.

**Timings** 11am-6pm; Sunday closed

**Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing, Jaipur**

To most locals, the Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing is still the Chanwar Palki Walon Ki Haveli of yesteryear. The museum’s open courtyard features an assemblage of boards explaining the elaborate hand-block printing process—from the selection of the design to be printed, to their carving on wooden blocks soaked in oil, and the subsequent printing using vegetable dyes, a technique that generations of traditional Indian fabric printers has excelled at.

Inside, alcoves and galleries showcase over a hundred printed pieces and blocks. One look at this permanent collection acquaints the visitor with a variety of natural and chemical techniques. The eclectic designs of the hand-block-printed textiles of Balotra, west of Jodhpur, come alive in another dedicated, permanent exhibition. The designs on display are among those that have traditionally featured on the gathered skirts of local women.
The galleries are divided into seven categories shedding light on the restoration of the haveli, local textiles, natural and chemical dyes, tools of block printing and carving, specimens of gold and silver printing, and a demonstration area. Resident craftsmen interact with visitors and take you through the process of carving the blocks and the art of printing.

When the museum heads into its summer hibernation (May 15-July 15), the informal demonstrations of the artisans often continue in the ground-floor courtyard.

**Timings** 10.30am-5pm; Monday closed  
**Sunday Timings** 11am-4.30pm

**Museum of Gem and Jewellery**

Jaipur is known all across the world for its jewellery craftsmanship, so it’s little wonder it’s also known as the ‘city of gems’. From mining to manufacturing, the fascinating story of a stone’s journey from a mineral to a gem has been gloriously displayed in the Museum of Gem and Jewellery. Tasked to preserve and promote the rich heritage of gems and jewellery of the city, it’s the perfect place to explore its renown for diamond cutting, polishing, carving and bead-making. From the intricate minakari and kundan work to the creation of gorgeous enamel jewellery, the museum takes you through the great legacy of the fine craftsmen of Jaipur.

Located on the first floor of the Rajasthan Chamber Bhawan, it is divided into many galleries which have on display a wide array of precious and semiprecious gemstones. It also showcases beads with their quality descriptions, characteristics and details of the different stones such as quartz, agate, jade, garnet and peridot. Visitors can also take a look at the various tools used by the craftsmen.

The museum has over 50 sections that illustrate a stone’s journey. Each section has a particular theme such as rough and cut
stones, special rough stones, gemstone specimens, rocks, ancient manufacturing tools, etc. Then there are other intriguing sections like the ones on gemology maps, nature’s art gallery, colours of nature, mining and the fascinating jewellery manufacturing process.

Also showcased here are different types of fossils, African rough stones, dinosaur eggs, imposing idols depicting the nine planets or navagrahas and diamond-studded gold idols.

There are dedicated sections for the display of kundan, mina, silver and stone jewellery. It also houses a mini-theatre where an informative video is played to give deeper insights on jewellery making to visitors. Another section of the museum takes you through the latest jewellery trends across the country and allows exhibitors to sell their products for a set period of time.

The museum introduces you to 35 types of jewellery including off-beat French-enamel, Victorian, Tanjore, thewa and fusion jewellery as also traditional and modern jewellery, studded jewellery, Tibetan jewellery, temple jewellery and creative jewellery made from grass, glass, rope, leather, seashells, etc.

Timings 10am-5.30pm

Museum of Legacies, Jaipur
Housed in a heritage building that dates back to 1825, this museum is a new entrant in the list of must-visit museums in the state capital. A Government of Rajasthan initiative, the museum serves as a platform to showcase unseen collections of a wide range of exhibits. From textiles and jewellery to paintings and sculptures, the museum displays it all.

The Museum of Legacies is located in Kishanpole Bazaar of the walled city in proximity to the Ajmeri Gate and Choti Chaupad, both popular landmarks of Jaipur.

The museum has been divided into five different sections, each dedicated to a certain art form. Exhibits at the museum include marble jaali-work artefacts, antique silver jewellery, photographs of men and women adorning traditional ornaments, traditional costumes from each and every district of Rajasthan, durries featuring abstract and contemporary patterns and designs, huge Rajasthani puppets and much more.
The heritage building which houses the museum is steeped in history. The five sections of the museum take you through a wide range of art forms that tell a great deal about the rich artistic heritage of the state. These include sections on the history of jewellery making in Rajasthan, pichwai paintings depicting Lord Krishna, appealing embroidery work, a rare collection of semi-precious stones, marble art works and indigenous paintings created by Bhils. The highlight of the museum, however, are two giant puppets which were crafted by the talented puppeteer Vicky Bhatt.

**Timings** 12pm-8pm

**Rajasthan Rural Arts Programme (RRAP) Music Museum and Hub, Jaipur**

This museum in Jaipur showcases the past, present and future of Rajasthan’s living musical traditions. Registered under Jaipur Virasat Foundation, it is jointly owned by Jaipur Virasat Foundation, Anahad Foundation and Mehrangarh Museum. Fascinatingly, when you visit the museum, you will also get an opportunity to meet folk musicians and hear them create magic with their voices and handmade traditional musical instruments.

The museum was launched with an aim to promote, disseminate conserve and reposition the state’s folk music traditions. The best part is that you can interact with various musician communities of Rajasthan hailing from both
rural and urban regions. Several exhibitions, outreach programmes, residencies, workshops and events are also organised by the museum and these serve as a gateway to the varied folk music cultures of the state for the visitors.

The museum also serves as a venue for performances, a music guest-house, and recording studio. Hub, the open-air all-inclusive space, is conducive for learning, research and enjoyment of the amazing folk music of Rajasthan. Artists Ritu Singh and Surya Singh of The Wolf created interactive sound installations out of scrap here.

In this truly unique museum, visitors will discover the traditional aerophones known as algoza, a pair of end-blown double flutes, and the kamaicha, a bowed unfretted fiddle made from mango wood, goat leather, horse hair, goat gut, copper, and steel, exclusive to the Marwar region. Then there’s the mata, which is a type of idiophone used in the performance of the Pabu epic by the Nayak Bhopas. The bhapang is a plucked instrument played by the Jogi community of the Mewat region. The chang is used as an accompaniment in Shekhawati during Holi and Diwali performances.

That’s not all…there are many other kinds of fascinating musical instruments typical to Rajasthan waiting to be discovered here.

Timings 11am-6pm; Tuesday closed
Saturday Timings 11am-8pm

Beautifully painted musical instruments in varying shades
**Sculpture Park, Nahargarh, Jaipur**

A seamless amalgamation of the traditional and contemporary, the Sculpture Park at Madhavendra Palace within the monumental confines of the Nahargarh Fort complex is a prime example of collaboration between state government and private cultural philanthropy in the field of contemporary art. A true manifestation of 21st-century India, the park brings art into the public realm by reclaiming public space.

This is also the first contemporary public sculpture park of the country and serves as a perfect case in point of public-private partnership in the arts. The 19th-century fortified Madhavendra Palace has been converted into a gallery showcasing awe-inspiring sculptures. The posse of grand rooms and courtyard in the fortress display some great works of leading sculptors. The traditional architecture makes a great backdrop for the works. The Sculpture Park is aimed at building a sense of community, both micro and macro, local and international and fostering dialogue and initiating conversations that revolve around arts.

The Sculpture Park is not a permanent museum, but a venue for hosting various editions of contemporary arts exhibitions. The first edition took place in 2017 and hosted 24 artists with around 50 works. The second edition was held in December, 2019 and was hailed as a gathering of stalwarts and artists. Black and white films are also screened in the courtyard of the fortress. The Sculpture Park can rightly be called the artistic lung of the ‘Pink City’ which will continue breathing life into the creative spirit of Jaipur.

**Timings** 10am-5.30pm daily
UDAIPUR
Bagore ki Haveli, Udaipur
The residence of the former prime minister of the state, Amarchand Badwa, this haveli sits right next to Lake Pichola at Gangaur Ghat. This 18th-century haveli has been diligently restored. The 138 rooms around courtyards are set up to evoke the past and exhibit the traditional arts and crafts of the region. Expect to find a goodly selection of costumes and modern art on display. The interiors of the haveli are clad with glass and mirror interiors, which are a perfect example of the classical haveli style of interior decoration. Visitors also get an opportunity to see some exquisite Mewar paintings in the queen’s chamber apart from some great glasswork, which is reflected in exhibits like the two peacocks made from small pieces of coloured glass.

At the entrance of the haveli, there is a room dedicated to displaying the arms of the regal past. This room is known as haathi ka kumaala and houses swords, shields, knives, bows and arrows and many other important warfare paraphernalia used by the rulers of Mewar. The museum also features portraits of eminent rulers like Maharana Sardar Singh, Maharana Shambhu Singh, Maharana Swaroop Singh and Maharana Sajjan Singh.
The haveli was transformed into a museum by the West Zone Cultural Centre, which is worth your while.

**Timings** 10am-6pm daily

**City Palace Museum, Udaipur**
Located in the 450-year-old iconic City Palace, the City Palace Museum showcases the vast repository of building practices of Mewar, with various sections of the complex clearly depicting the varied influences of the times and the personal building styles of successive custodians ranging from Maharana Udai Singh II to the present—the 76th custodian of the House of Mewar, Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar of Udaipur. Over the last 50 years, the museum has gained immense popularity among tourists and history buffs and draws visitors from all corners of the world. From rare stone carvings and photographs to paintings; some of which date back to the late 1500s and old maps, textiles, palanquins and armoury; the museum is truly a treasure trove of antiquities.

The sculpture collection at Som Niwas Gallery: Divine Gesture, includes fine specimens belonging to the Gurjara-Pratihara period. On display are as many as 161 sculptures out of the 308 in the collection. The sculptures are a true representation of the religious beliefs and cultural traditions that have been followed in Mewar since time immemorial. These were brought to the palace by nearby villagers, who wanted to ensure their safety from invaders and robbers.
Photographers would be fascinated with the Fateh Niwas Gallery which has on display over 60 vintage photographs from the museum archives. This collection includes 28,000 archival photographs old cameras, equipment, glass plate negatives, and so on. The photographic material here dates from the mid-19th to the early-20th centuries. The best part about these photographs is that they also give visitors an idea about the nearby villages and local elements. The oldest photograph exhibited here was taken in 1860! For art lovers, the museum presents a rare collection of paintings belonging to the Mewar School, known for its vibrant colours. In some paintings, you will also see the use of gold and silver, which is a true reflection of the opulent past of Udaipur. The paintings offer vivid insights into the lifestyle of the Maharanas of Mewar, with scenes of their hunting expeditions and the grand rituals and festivals that were celebrated in Mewar.

In the day and age of GPS and Google Maps, looking at maps which date back to the 18th and 19th centuries is a fascinating experience. As part of the conservation agenda heritage of Mewar, the maps have been digitised so that future generations can partake of it.

Fashion lovers will learn a lot from the Gokul Niwas Gallery: The Curtain Raiser. The Mewar Regalia, Textiles and Costumes Exhibition houses costumes worn by the Mewar royals. The traditional outfits that will draw your envy include the angarakhas, chogas, ghagras, cholis and the intricately woven shawls, carpets, wall hangings and embroidered saris.

The museum features modes of transportation used by the royals in the past. Check out the palanquin collection at the Raj Niwas Gallery. The palanquins are decorated with detailed glass-inlay work, mirror work, ivory coating, wood carvings and polychrome designs. Also worth exploring is the armoury collection featuring swords, daggers, guns, rifles, pistols and revolvers used by the brave warriors of ancient Rajputana. The museum is well known for its vast collection of silver items, which are now showcased in the Silver Gallery titled Amar Mahal Gallery.

**Timings** 9.30am-5.30pm daily

*Ahar Archaeological Museum, Udaipur*

Right next to the Ahar cenotaphs, an intriguing museum awaits history buffs, who
would surely have a field day going through some rare archaeological exhibits here. The museum is divided into two parts. In the first part, you can marvel at findings from the excavations that were carried out in the nearby areas. These exhibits confirm to the Paleolithic age and include pottery, beads, tools and artefacts. Also exhibited are different types of painted red ware of chalcolithic period and copper and iron objects. The second part of the museum is used to showcase a great collection of sculptures, paintings and armour from a much later period. Another prime attraction at the Ahar Archaeological Museum is the Vishnu-Nag-Nathan sculpture. A 10th-century metal statue of Buddha is another highlight of this museum.

**Timings** 10am-4.30pm

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**Shilpgram, Udaipur**

This rural arts and crafts complex is located 3km from Udaipur near Havala village and serves as an ethnographic museum showcasing the lifestyle of the tribals and folk people. Sprawling over an undulating terrain of 70 acres, Shilpgram is beautifully encompassed by the verdant Aravalis.

The idea behind the setting up of Shilpgram was to introduce people, especially youth, to the lifestyle and crafts of the rural regions of the western states of India. The complex is dotted by thatched mud huts dedicated to the member states. Every hut is made in the typical rural fashion, exclusive to each state and boasts the architectural and geographical features of the huts made by the ethnic groups of every state.
Five huts from Rajasthan represent the weaver community of Mewar and seven huts are representative of the creations of the Gujarati communities known for their weaving, embroidery, bead and mirrorwork, wood work and rogar work. The huts of Maharashtra depict Konkan regions known for their footwear and dokra artwork while Goa is represented by five huts.

Inside these traditional huts, household articles of daily use provide realistic glimpses of the rural folk and their belongings. These objects range from terracotta items and textiles to wooden or metal objects, decorative items and tools used by craftsmen. Appropriate signages and explanatory details are also featured with every display to give a deeper insight to visitors. The museum also organises regular workshops for kids on a range of topics including arts, crafts, music and theatre.

Shilpgram also offers rural and urban artists several opportunities to collaborate through camps and workshops. These workshops give artists a chance to enrich their skill and art forms by closely observing each other’s styles. Shilpgram tries its best to promote contemporary urban ceramists, potters, designers and visual artists to work in close coordination with rural artists and craftsmen.

**Timings** 11am-7pm daily

**Crystal Gallery, Udaipur**

Udaipur’s Crystal Gallery is a living testament to the princely and extravagant life that the royals of Rajasthan lived. Housing one of the world’s rarest collections of Osler cut glass in existence, the gallery is truly a treasure trove of Rajasthan’s opulent and rich historical past. There’s an intriguing story behind how the gallery came into existence. In a shopping binge, Rana Sajjan Singh ordered an assortment of crystal objects from the iconic Birmingham-based F.&C. Osler & Co. in 1877. The maharaja died before the crystal chairs, beds, sofas, glasses, dinner sets and flywhisks arrived in Udaipur. Successors thought this was a bad omen and the extraordinary bequest stayed packed in boxes for 110 years before somebody thought it might be a good idea to display them after all.

The gallery houses an exquisite range of crystal items ranging from dining tables,
sofa sets, washing bowls and goblets to trays, decanters, perfume bottles, candle stands, crockery and beds. The prime attraction of the gallery is a jewel-studded carpet, which speaks volumes about the aesthetic sense of the royals and also their larger-than-life way of living. Also on display is a royal punkah or manually operated fan, made of crystal and soft red satin. The emblem of Mewar, featuring the Sun God, is embroidered at the centre of the fan and leaves the onlooker spellbound.

**Location** Fateh Prakash Palace  
**Timings** 9am-6pm daily

**Vintage & Classic Car Collection, Udaipur**

All the vehicles on show at this car collection and a museum have belonged to the Maharanas of Mewar. Despite some vehicles being almost 100 years old, each one has been painstakingly restored so that they are in working order. The collection is housed in the original former Mewar State Motor Garage (MSMG), a glorious setting for such a fine assortment.

The semi-circular motor garage with its forecourt is housed within a greater courtyard, creating a pleasant hideaway from the bustle of the streets. One of the original Shell petrol pumps is not only still standing, but also in a usable condition. The motor garage was built at a time when the only cars in town belonged to the MSMG.

The picks of the exhibits on display are the magnificent set of four Rolls Royce’s.

The first one is a 1924 Rolls-Royce 20 HP. Next is a 1934 Rolls Royce 20-25 HP that was originally a limousine and was later converted into a pick-up by Maharana Bhagawat Singh Mewar mainly to ferry the cricket team to and from the grounds. There is also a 1930/31 Rolls-Royce 20-25 HP that was originally a Tourer and was later converted into Safari Rolls Royce by Maharana Bhagawat Singh Mewar. The remaining one is a 1934 Rolls Royce Phantom II that was bought by the 76th Custodian of the House of Mewar, Shriji Arvind Singh Mewar.

The garage also houses a few horse-drawn carriages, solar vehicle prototypes and two enormous 1938 Cadillacs that are still used on special occasions. The four-door Convertible Maharanals car, while the saloon
is for the Maharani. Family crests adorn the rear doors of both Cadillacs, adding a royal touch to these two majestic automobiles.

Of the remainder of this grand collection, the bright red 1946 MG-TC convertible stands out from the rest. For lovers of sports cars, seeing this speed machine whose unmatched prewar elegance in terms of motoring, is an absolute must. Vehicles such as the rare 1930 Ford-A Convertible or the Vauxhall-12 are no less remarkable, if only because they have so much more panache than the cars now produced by those companies. Auto enthusiasts and history buffs are sure to have a truly enriching experience marvelling at these classic yesteryear automobiles.

**Timing** 9am-9pm daily

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Fateh Prakash Museum, Chittorgarh

Built by Rana Fateh Singh, the Fateh Prakash Palace stands near the Badi Pol as a fine specimen of contemporary Indian architecture. A part of the palace was converted into a public museum in 1968. On display are coins, artworks, weapons and other antiquities. One section also showcases wooden handicrafts made by the residents of nearby Bassi village. Visitors also get a glimpse of the lives lived by the tribal communities of the Mewar region. Also on display is an excellent collection of sculptures and mythological figurines. Most impressive include those of Lord Ganesha and Lord Indra.

**Timings** 9.45am-5.15pm
JODHPUR
**Sardar Government Museum**

There is an interesting story about the building of Jodhpur’s Umaid Bhawan that goes: in the 1940s, as the stately royal palace came to its completion, Maharaja Umaid Singh, who was quite knowledgeable about furniture, ordered it, along with the furnishings, for the 370-odd rooms of the palace, from Maples & Co. in London. Unfortunately, World War II was on, and a German U-Boat sank the ship on its way to India. But the maharaja wasn’t one to give in. He tasked the Polish artist, Stefan Norblin, who was doing the paintings for his opulent residence, with furniture duties as well.

The quintessential insistence on luxury and fine craftsmanship that one associates with Rajasthan’s erstwhile maharajas is unmistakable, not just in the Art Deco style and sumptuous sprawl of the Umaid Bhawan, but also in its humbler cousin, the Sardar Government Museum. The museum’s assemblage of European glassware and crockery, curious iron locks (one even shaped like a scorpion), ornate brassware, clay toys, Persian-style ‘ganjifa’ playing cards and leather accoutrements, are a convincing showcase of the life and times of the royal family.

Among the exhibits that in particular stoke the imagination of the visitor is the ivory collection, the members of which at first look seem old-fashioned. But soon, the sheer wealth of detail—the decorations on the procession elephant, the fur lines of the dogs perched on the smoking pipe, the railway station and motor car—drives away your indifference. The paraphernalia, which was an integral part of the royal household back in the day, is displayed in the Darbar Hall. The section also houses countless miniatures worth a dekko.

The stuffed leopards, crocodiles, and other trophies from the royal hunts of yore and the pickled specimens of marine life from the family’s private collection might not be everyone’s cup of tea. Antique guns, swords, iron golas and shell cases that are housed in the armoury section, are more like it, especially the iron helmet that is textured richly with some intricate damascening. History enthusiasts are sure to linger around the barometers, inscriptions and metal seals.

**Timings** 10am-5pm; Monday closed
Umaid Bhawan Museum, Jodhpur

One of the greatest palaces in the country, the grand Umaid Bhawan Palace is divided into three sections: the royal apartments, a heritage hotel, and a museum. The museum has a display of royal artefacts collected over the years, such as crystals, clocks, crockery and anything else that might have caught the royal fancy. The clock collection is perhaps the most interesting of all. The museum also showcases a special exhibition on the life of Maharaja Umaid Singh and the construction of the Umaid Bhawan Palace. One of the galleries in the museum takes visitors through the palace during the 1940s and 50s. It displays a range of impressive art deco furniture, dining and writing sets. There’s a sports section too. One gallery is called ‘Legacy Continues’ and introduces visitors to the present royal family and their regal life.

Timings 9am-5pm

A visitor at the Umaid Bhawan Museum in Jodhpur
Mehrangarh Fort Museum
In the spring of 2018, Houston’s Museum of Fine Arts was gearing up to play host to a royal Indian bridal procession. And arrive it did... led by mannequin horses in full regalia and a richly adorned elephant with a gilded howdah, in the form of a travel showcase from the Mehrangarh Museum of Jodhpur. This fabulous installation was accompanied by a real-time 20th-century style royal wedding which was screen-splashed on its walls, to whet the appetite of visitors at MFAH looking to dive into this exotic cultural fantasy.

For the first time ever, under the umbrella of the Peacock in the Desert: Royal Arts of Jodhpur exhibition, 250 artworks and objects, symbolising Marwar’s military history, the syncretism of architectural and fine art styles in 18th-century Rajasthan, and its evocative courtly life, deserted the confines of the Mehrangarh Museum to be showcased in America.

Among the four centuries of royal treasures of the Rathore dynasty of Marwar, which crossed the Atlantic for the MFAH showcasing, was a grand mahadol (palanquin), seized as war booty by Maha-
raja Abhay Singh from Gujarat’s governor Sarbuland Khan. The wood-and-glass structure, whose home has been Mehrangarh’s Palanquin Gallery, has always been a huge draw with the visiting public. Giving it a run for its money is a lavish 400-year-old, 4m-high red-velvet, gold silk-embroidered Mughal-style tent that is only occasionally displayed. On display too is a work called the ‘Shiva on His Vimana (Aircraft) with Himalaya, folio 53 from the Shiva Rahasya’, from 1827, one of the sumptuous opaque watercolour and gold paintings from the collection.

The Zenana section of the showcase unveiled the role of women in preserving traditions and as carriers of cultural exchange. The royal harem, a physical space where the royal ladies and their staff would meet, finds symbolic significance in the lacquered pavilion (baradari) which was on display along with delicately worked sandstone apartments, and an awe-inducing collection of palanquins and howdahs.

Court artist Sheikh Taju’s painting of Maharao Umed Singh of Kota on a tiger hunt—a highly stylised, almost surreal work, is said to have been a gift to the Jodhpur court. The confluence of Mughal naturalism and eclectic local styles comes alive in a painting by artist Dalchand, who fled from the Mughal court at Delhi to thrive at Jodhpur. Depicting the Maharaja Abhai Singh engrossed in an evening music-and-dance performance, the painting also portrays the rich textiles and furnishings at the royal court.

The sileh khana at the Mehrangarh Fort Museum is a formidable suite of swords, helmets, armour, watered steel blades, hilts with some exquisite decorative work—all reminiscent of Marwar’s long history of warfare and military tradition. Several rare treats also await history and heritage buffs in the 7 Period Rooms and 6 Galleries.

Timings 9am-5pm
NAGAUR

Ahichatragarh, Nagaur Fort and Museum, Nagaur

Nagaur Fort is a 35-acre complex with four main palaces and over 50 smaller buildings, surrounded by two fortification walls and—despite the arid climate—extensive gardens, fountains, pools, and water systems. The palaces located in the fort complex showcase period furniture, antiquities and a fantastic range of frescoes illustrating the palace interiors. Decorative details can be seen on the interior and exteriors, ceilings and floors. Considered to be of the highest quality, the subjects include both figurative and decorative elements which provide a wealth of historical information on court life, manner of dress and the use of the various palaces. The murals at Nagaur are considered to be the finest in Marwar. Even the quality of materials used is of the highest order. This includes organic colours, gold leaf and the traditional highly polished cody lime plaster they have been painted on.

Thanks to the support of four grants from the Getty Foundation, two from the UK-based Helen Hamlyn Trust and contributions from the Mehrangarh Museum Trust, the fort has gradually been restored to its former glory. In 2002, the Fort of Nagaur won the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Award for Culture Heritage Conservation. It was also shortlisted for the prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2011-2013.

The fort is built on a slightly hilly elevation, and once you get there, you’ll park by the entrance to richly illustrated Hadi Rani’s Palace, and enter the section of the zenani Deodi into what used to be the women’s wing. Overlooking gardens, waterbodies and fountains are buildings such as the Hawa Mahal. To another side is the Diwan-i-Khas, where an elaborate system for trapping fresh breeze, as well as channelling water through a network of shallow canals, must have added to the comfort of the stately apartments.

The fort also houses the Akbari Mahal, built surrounding a water tank with a Sheesh Mahal. Among the paintings of interest here is the one with ladies amid clouds and lightning bolts. The artworks in the Sheesh Mahal are among the most important examples of the fine, elongated figural style that is characteristic of Nagaur.

Timings 9am-5pm
JAISALMER
Jaisalmer Government Museum
As one pores intently over the marine fossils of the Jaisalmer Government Museum, the Thar Desert seems to transform into a placid bed of an ocean that was its prehistoric consort. The allure of these caskets of beings from millennia, formed of shale, sandstone and limestone, compete for your attention, with the present-day touristic attractions of Jaisalmer’s golden sandstone and camel caravans traversing the rolling dunes.

Jaisalmer’s Bandha village has been an absolute hotbed of activity over the past few years, with the Geological Survey of India unearthing a vast array of fossilised vertebrates belonging to the Eocene Epoch. The region is known for its rich paleontological history, and fossilised tree trunks, sedimentary rocks and sea shells from eons ago have been traditionally found here. The villages of Sanu and Kuldhara too have been centric to these findings. In a rarity, also displayed at the museum are soft-bodied animals like sea anemones.

Set up in 1984, the museum opens up the casements to Jaisalmer’s past. Rock-cut crockery, sculptures and jewellery from the 7th-9th century BC, clay models depicting musicians, decorative pots, metal artefacts, carved plinths and shikharas, rare inscriptions and embroidered dresses boasting fine work—there is a lot to see here. The glass case displaying a stuffed Great Indian Bustard and a Tilor—birds of the desert—are a huge draw. Snagging your attention is the intricate carving and relief work of the 12th-century sculptures and architectural fragments from the temple ruins of Kiradu and Lodhruva.

The eclectic collection of cloth toys, narrative miniatures, clay dioramas, traditional attires and musical instruments lend the museum a peppy, folksy vibe that visitors can never have enough of when here. Showcases decked with beens, bhapangs, kartals, morchangas and chimtas conjure up images of the plaintive strains of the Manganiyars—folk musicians who sing of the history of the desert, of battles and conquests, of planting and harvesting, and of Lord Krishna and Alexander the Great. There is a war plane of the Indian Air Force at the campus, which is a unique selfie point.

Timings 9.45am-5.15pm; Monday closed
Jaisalmer War Museum and Longewala War Memorial

Driving to the border outpost of Longewala, the vegetation suddenly gives way to a vast desert expanse, dotted in the distance by sparse shrubs and mud houses as one reaches Ramgarh. This is a familiar scene, especially with the windmills on either side of the road. This is the territory where the famous battle of Longewala, in the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971, was fought, a screen version of which we have seen in J.P. Dutta’s Border.

The battle ended in the annihilation of the poorly planned Pakistani offensive, including the decimation of a large bulk of their tanks—Chinese T-59s that were an upgrade to the iconic Soviet T-59 A model. One of the tanks, which were also used to quell the Tiananmen Square protests in China, is now showcased in the open area near the entrance of the Jaisalmer War Museum and Longewala War Memorial. The wrecker-in-chief of the Indian Air Force, the Hawker Hunter, also stands on display here.

On display too is the captured Pakistani Patton tank. The claims that the famed US tank couldn’t be destroyed by anything were silenced in the 1965 war between the neighbours when havildar Abdul Hamid demolished three of them with his recoilless gun. The open display at the museum, reminiscent of a company base camp, with its trenches, bunkers, and splintered paths, also showcases one of these anti-tank weapons, which were put to good use in both wars.

Those not completely satisfied by the events of the war as shown in Border, will be delighted to watch the video clip on the battle that is an optional part of the museum tour. A thorough account of the battle and an interview with post commander Major Kuldip Singh Chandpuri has a runtime of just 10 minutes, but is very informative.

At the Longewala War Memorial, the sentiments of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon’s war poetry wash over the discerning onlooker walking past murals depicting martyred soldiers and weapons laid around their sculptures. The engaging light-and-sound show narrates the battle in detail, supplemented by some impressive laser animation and voiceover—a must-do.

Timings 9am-6pm
BIKANER

Junagarh Fort Museum (Darbar Hall), Bikaner

The eclectic clan memorabilia of the royal family of Bikaner at the Junagarh Fort Museum reminds the visitors of its maverick, ambitious, 15th-century founder, Rao Bika. Having left Jodhpur, the kingdom of his illustrious father Rao Jodha as a 20-something, Rao Bika returned two decades later, storming the Mehrangarh Fort to claim the precious family heirlooms that were promised to him in exchange for relinquishing his patrilineal territory.

One of these rather-prized heirlooms is a ceremonial sandalwood throne that weighs about 1,100kg, now housed in the gorgeous immensity that is known as the Darbar Hall. A late addition to the mahals of the fort, the Darbar Hall is the legacy of the much-loved

The impressive facade of Junagarh Fort Museum, Bikaner
Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner. In a departure from the typical Rajput monument, the Darbar Hall boasts of a floor and a ceiling made completely of carved wood, with exquisite carvings.

The Fort Museum is also home to a silver throne, palanquins, a golden swing, swords and howdahs (richly decorated with elephant saddles) that transport visitors back into a time when luxury and craftsmanship were the order of the day and regular military clashes between Rajput principalities was rife. The Krishna Jhoola in Gaj Mandir is thronged by visitors from far and wide for its curious mechanism—the gopis on its frame dance when the jhoola is swung. These quarters are also where the interesting ‘swinging’ bed of Maharaja Gaj Singh is displayed.

From Gaj Mandir, it is a short walk to the Ganga Mahal. On display is a majestic and exceptionally well-maintained World War I biplane. The light bomber, a DH-9DE Havilland, was supposedly gifted to the maharaja for his services in World War I, and was reassembled from the parts of two shot-down planes.

Look out for a bed of swords and another of needles belonging to the Jasnathis (a community of siddhis) upstairs. By walking on nails and swords (as can be seen in a really old photograph displayed in the premises) and dancing over fire, these people would demonstrate their invulnerability to pain.

**Timings** 10am-5pm

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**Ganga Government Museum, Bikaner**

At the government-managed Golden Jubilee Museum, or the Ganga Singh Government Museum as it is generally referred to, Bikaner’s history is quite neatly packaged under one roof. Here are large oils by the German artist Mueller, sculptures from the Gupta and Kushan periods (a Saraswati, in particular, is remarkable), remnants from the pre-Harappan archaeological finds in Kalibangan, as well as armour, coins, pottery and carpets of more recent vintage.

In December 1915 Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner appointed an Italian scholar, Dr Luigi Pio Tessitori, to conduct a historical
and bardic survey of Bikaner and its surrounding regions. In 1937, the acquired treasures from different corners of Rajasthan were housed in a newly constructed museum on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Maharaja Ganga Singh’s reign. The maharaja himself gifted the museum some rare artefacts and other decorative objects from his own palace. The building was named Ganga Golden Jubilee Museum and on November 5, 1937, it was inaugurated by the Governor General and Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow.

The Government of Rajasthan’s Department of Archaeology and Museums took over the museum in 1950 and renamed it Ganga Government Museum. The museum features an array of engaging sections, dedicated to paintings, arts and craft, textiles and carpets, pottery, ancient coins and Rajput weaponry. From terracotta works dating to the Gupta period, to exquisite carpets, to Rajasthani traditional musical instruments and gold paintings made by local artisans, visitors have a treasure trove to explore at leisure. Miniature models of Gajner Palace and Lallgarh Palace particularly draw attention. A miniature of the Royal Bikaner train is also worth a dekko. Then there are decrees issued by the Mughals to the rulers of Bikaner. These include one issued by Crown Prince Jahangir to Maharaja Rai Singh, in which the Mughal emperor has requested the maharaja to reach Delhi as soon as possible. This was written when Emperor Akbar was nearing his end.

**Timings** 10am-5pm; Monday closed

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**Prachina Museum, Bikaner**

The entrance courtyard of the Junagarh Fort houses the Prachina Museum, a treasure trove of heritage. This is where you would get glimpses of almost every aspect of the regal lifestyle experienced by the rulers of Bikaner.

For the people of Bikaner, this museum is a matter of pride. The museum was started by Princess Siddhi Kumari of Bikaner with an aim to introduce visitors to culture and its huge impact on people and places through generations. The museum is a reflection of the extravagant lifestyle led by the rulers, evident in the displays of classical French furniture, beautiful porcelains vases from China and Japan, oil paintings by European masters, Belgian mirrors and stained glass and cut-glass chandeliers from Venice.
During the late-19th and early-20th century, Bikaner was greatly impacted by European influences and the confluence of indigenous and European tradition can be clearly seen in this museum today. This was a result of colonial art schools which altered the quality of everyday objects. The traditional objects used by the royal ladies for their beautification are suggestive of the old school way of body care while the ones added in the 19th century tell us that Europe had a great influence in the lives of the royalty; be it manicure and pedicure tools made of ivory, silver and featuring handles made of mother-of-pearl or the miniature make-up cabinets with Belgian mirrors and gold-embossed perfume bottles.

The royal costumes are reminiscent of the superior workmanship of the traditional designers and stylists during the princely days. A prime attraction of the museum are the artworks of the Usta community of craftsmen of Bikaner, who were adept at stone carving, painted stucco work and embellishment of camel hide oil bottles. The museum also houses a great collection of photographs that provide a rare glimpse into the fascinating lifestyle of the erstwhile rulers of Bikaner. The photographs belong to an album named Bikaner State, which was printed and published by P.G. Evrard, Paris in an undated book, during the 20th century.

**Timings** 9am-5pm
Sri Sadul Museum, Lallgarh Palace, Bikaner

The Sadul Singh Museum was established in honour of the rulers of Bikaner such as Maharaja Ganga Singh, Maharaja Karni Singh and Maharaja Sadul Singh and showcases an incredible collection of antiquities and relics. Among the major exhibits are paintings, armoury, war paraphernalia, trophies, photographs and decorative items. The museum introduces you to the heroism of the maharajas of Bikaner and gives a sneak-peak into their extravagant lifestyle. Located inside the famous red sandstone Lallgarh Palace, the museum sits on the first floor in what is known as the Ganga Niwas. The museum was set up in 1972 and also showcases a rare collection of Georgian paintings. Then there are personal belongings of the erstwhile rulers that you can look at, such as golf T-shirts, camera, clothes, earplugs and books. Do check out the royal buggy and the train brought to Bikaner by Maharaja Ganga Singh. History lovers can easily spend an hour or two at the museum engrossed in Bikaner’s rich legacy and artistic heritage.

Timings 10am-5pm; Sunday closed
KOTA
Rao Madho Singh Museum, Kota
The Rao Madho Singh Museum is a small window into Kota’s past that will take you through the pages of the rich history of the Hadoti region of Rajasthan. Situated in the Garh Palace complex, the museum is famous for its incredible collection of Rajput miniature paintings, which belong to the Kota school of painting. The museum captures the fancy of visitors through some great photographs, fascinating sculptures, arms and armour along with regal memorabilia and really valuable antiques like seals and epigraphs.

The museum, which is named after the son of Kota’s first ruler, also houses attractive murals and frescoes. The story behind the establishment of this museum goes something like this. It was the year 1936 and the government received a detailed exploratory tour report by Dr A.S. Altekar, a professor with Banaras Hindu University. The professor had explored 14 sites near Kota and in his report wrote a great deal about the region’s historical and cultural importance. It inspired Rai Bahadur K.N. Dikshit, former Director General of Archaeology to explore the region and persuade the ruler of the erstwhile state of Kota to set up a department of archaeology.

The Rao Madho Singh Museum garnered many exhibits over time before it was shifted to the Hawa Mahal in the fort in 1951, where it remained till 1994 under the management of the state department. It was then shifted back to the Brijwilas Palace as the exhibits had grown exponentially, thanks to Maharao Bhim Singh. The armory section features a sword belonging to Prithvi Raj Chauhan and 18th century matchlock rifles with exquisite carvings of animals, mythical beasts and floral designs. The prime attraction is the sculpture gallery, which houses imposing sculptures belonging to the period between the 8th and 12th century. Of interest here are the 9th century Shesh Shayyi Vishnu or reclining Vishnu from nearby Barol and the 3rd century CE Yupa-inscribed sacrificial pillar (which signifies the revival of the Vedic religion) from Badwa.

Timings 10am-5pm

Kota school murals in the Durbar Hall at the Madho Singh Museum
BUNDI  
Chitrashala Art Gallery,  
Taragarh Fort, Bundi

The small yet historical town of Bundi in Rajasthan’s Hadoti region is renowned for its painterly heritage, commonly known as the Bundi School of Painting. When clubbed with the Kota and Jhalawar styles, it becomes part of the Hadoti School. The miniature painting traditions of Bundi started as early as around 1625 in the reign of Rao Ratan Singh. The first set of Bundi miniatures, a depiction of Indian ragas, was painted at Chunar. Impressive examples of the Bundi paintings can be found in the manuscripts of the Bhagwata Purana in the Kota museum. The other known paintings of Rao Chattarsal are a group of four paintings, i.e., Ragini Vibhasa, Krishna stealing butter, Ragini Varari and Raga Malkounsa which are excellent examples belonging to the end of his reign (1650-60). The blend of Mughal and Deccani art elements in the Bundi style are unique. The colours most preferred by the artists of yore were blue, green and touches of deep terracotta red as well as subtle touches of yellow.

Some of the finest representations of this art form can be enjoyed at the Chitrashala Art Gallery, housed in Ummed Palace, one of the many palaces located in the Taragarh Fort Complex on Nagpahari Hill. The Chitrashala Art Gallery comprises a set of rooms built on a raised platform above a garden courtyard, with richly illustrated walls and ceilings. The art gallery is managed by the Archaeological Survey of India.

Built by Raja Rao Ummed Singh, the Chitrashala features open galleries that showcase a great collection of Bundi wall paintings. Most of these paintings are based on the life and times of Lord Krishna, easily identifiable by his blue skin. The paintings feature court scenes and scenes from the Ramayana, a series of paintings depicting a range of musical melodies known as ragas from a specific painting genre from the second half of the 15th century, as well as the Bundi artist’s favourite—Krishna Leela. Other themes that have been used by the skilled painters include mythological tales, love stories, recreational fight scenes, hunting scenes, proceedings of the royal court and war scenes.

Timings 8am-5pm daily
JHALAWAR

Jhalawar Government Museum

The best treasures Jhalawar town has to offer are locked up and accessible only to those who are persistent. The original residence of the royal family, the Garh Palace is, as its name suggests, a grandeur-defining citadel-palace. Located at Garh Palace, you can see abundant treasures of ancient Indian art in here. It houses lovely sacred sculptures, rare manuscripts, paintings, coins and interesting 5th and 7th century inscriptions. The exhibits of the museum are displayed in different galleries.

In the sculpture gallery are sculptures from various places and eras. Luckily, most of these are well preserved. The sculptures and architectural fragments of the 8th century city of Chandravati and statues and epigraphs from the Jhalrapatan region are displayed here.

The stunning Ardhnarishwar sculpture is a prime attraction here and was also displayed in the Russian capital Moscow during the Festival of India celebrations. Other brilliant sculptures include those of Narvagrah Chamunda, Chakrapurush, Lakulish Surya, Batukbhairav and Sur Sundari.

Of particular interest is the intriguing aspect of a rather blurry, but clearly enraged Chamunda. Carved from a single slab of red sandstone dating to the 8th century, she is holding aloft the navagrahas, her expression is fearsome, a corpse dangles from her other hand, and a headless dog/jackal stands by her side.

The gallery is dedicated to miniature paintings from the Jaipur, Bundi and Kishangarh schools of painting features works depicting the Vedas, Dev Swaroops, Nayak-Nayika, Brahma-sah, Krishna Leelas and folk life. The museum also showcases rare manuscripts like the Bhagwat Purana, the Avatar Charitra, Bhasha Charitra, Purshottam Mahatmya and Quran Sharif. Hand-crafted items such as animals, figurines and other artefacts, created from marble, also attract visitors’ attention.

Quite evidently, any museum in Rajasthan would be considered incomplete without the paraphernalia and iconography of warfare. The Jhalawar Government Museum also offers a chance to visitors to get a glimpse of the weapons used by royalty in former times. These include swords, shields, bow and arrows, daggers and horns.

Timings 9.45am-5.15pm; Monday closed
ALWAR

City Palace Museum, Alwar

Walking through the Mahal Chowk of the City Palace, some years ago, might have been worth your while if you wanted to check out the raised platform upon which stood a gold and velvet armchair-like throne. A fresh impetus yielded by the infusion of over Rs 2.5 crore and its considerable makeover has been pivotal to the influx of tourists to Alwar’s museum and its fill of exhibits, many quite unique.

The City Palace Museum is divided into three sections: the first hall has royal robes and clay toys—an interesting exhibit here being the bicycle of Maharaja Jai Singh with three hub gears and brakes built into its pedals. The second hall is a storehouse of some marvellous paintings, including large canvasses of notable Central Asian conquerors, right from Timur to Aurangzeb. The third has a display of weapons, and placed without obvious distinction among
other weapons are the swords of Akbar and Jahangir. Walking through the pages of history in this museum, you can also marvel at a one-of-its-kind collection of ivory sculptures, lacquered crafts, stuffed animals, earthen pots and ancient brass antiques collected from around the world. Among its considerable sculpted delights are the rare idols of Nrityarat Ashtabhuja Ganesh, Sthanak Vishnu, Surya riding his seven steeds, Shiva and Parvati astride Nandi, and Mahavira in dhyan mudra.

The upper floors of the museum have a splendid range of miniature paintings of the Alwar School. The colours are as fresh as ever and delight the visitor with their cameo-like beauty. Linger over the Mahabharata painted by the artists of the Alwar school and the really miniature Koran, even as a rush of visitors crowd the massive silver table used to entertain the nobility of the Raj era. However, if you are someone who prefers guns to roses, head for the vast collection of armoury.

Maharaja Vinay Singh, who built the City Palace (1815-57), was a great patron of the arts and letters and was not averse to spending vast sums of money to enhance his collection of books and paintings. Legend has it that he coughed up Rs 50,000 (quite a tidy sum for those days), just to get his hands on the beautifully illustrated copy of the Gulistan of Sheikh Sadi. Other notable treasures here are the Waqiat-e-Babri (autobiography of Babur) and Bostan (‘The Garden of Spring’).

The armoury proudly flaunts swords wielded by Akbar, Dara Shikoh, and Hazrat Ali. A particularly deadly coil called the nagphas that was used to choke the opponent will make you flinch. Of particular interest is the dual armament, serving both as firearm and sword, and two swords in one scabbard.

Timings 9.45am-5.15pm; Monday closed
SHEKHWATI

*Podar Haveli Museum, Nawalgarh, Shekhawati*

Even while absorbed in taking a selfie at the iconic frontage of the 1902-built Ramnath A. Podar Haveli Museum, the resigned minimalism of the first-floor balconies, reining in the flamboyant grandeur, is still hard to miss.

Inside, if the courtyard is awash with murals of Hindu gods—Ganesha, Lakshmi, Krishna serenading his gopis, wedding processions, festivals, royal sentries and newlyweds—the rooms also depict rotund English men and women, the Wright brothers in flight, railways and steam ships. Walking into the marble gallery, you might even give a start as you come face to face with the bust of a Rajput woman looking entrancingly at you from under her veil.

The tour begins with a guide taking visitors through the fresco-making technique itself. He explains that frescoes last longer than murals because the binding of the former with the base—which requires a wet plaster layer—is better. All of the 750 frescoes in the haveli have been restored to their original condition, so its reputation not just in Nawalgarh but in all of Shekhawati isn’t without good reason.

The painted havelis of the region remain in a state of neglect, with the exception of a few, including the resplendent Podar Haveli. But before that, for two centuries, these structures—over 2,000 of them—served as larger-than-life canvases of the wealth and opulence of the sons of the soil.
returning from faraway lands, having made huge profits and accumulated massive reserves of wealth.

Among the miniature representations of a few of Rajasthan’s forts and palaces, apparel and headgear of its many communities and their festivals and fairs, the miniature painting section at the Podar Haveli Museum still wrests your attention. The specimens—from the Shekhawati, Udaipur, Bundi and Kishangarh schools of painting—illustrate scenes from Indian mythology and folklore, including the Radhogarh Bharat Milap, a tableau-style work in the Kota-Bundi tradition (which is now known as the Hadoti School).

**Timings** 8am-8pm

**AJMER**

**Ajmer Government Museum**
The museum resides in the Akbari Fort, which dates back to 1570. Over the last few years, a lot of restoration work has been accomplished to enhance the attraction of the museum and its exhibits. The Excavation Gallery displays exhibits from important centres of the Harappan civilization. Also at
Museums & Heritage Properties in Rajasthan

Museum are copper plates used by the erstwhile rulers and sculptures of Hindu deities and Jain Tirthankaras. Miniature paintings of the Mewar, Bundi, Kota, Bikaner and Kishangarh schools, have many a art aficionado flocking. The Coins gallery showcases gold, silver and copper coins issued between the 6th and 1st century C.E. In the Decorative Arts Gallery, marvel at wooden artefacts, marble plates and ivory necklaces. The Weapons Gallery, showcases a wide range of swords, shields, daggers, knives, spears and axes.

Timings 9am to 5pm; Monday closed

BHARATPUR
Bharatpur Palace Museum

Part of the Matsya kingdom, Bharatpur is richly endowed with a history and heritage that dates back to the 5th century BCE. Of interest at the museum are the murals that adorn the walls and the ceilings of the palace and the Kamra Khas Museum, also known as the Government Museum, which holds an excellent collection of antiquities, including over 580 stone sculptures and more than 860 craftware items.

Timings 12pm to 8pm; Monday closed
DUNGARPUR

Government Archaeological Museum, Dungarpur

A walk through the three galleries of Dungarpur’s Rajmata Devendra Kunwar Government Museum is a walk through time. Its metal statues, stone inscriptions, miniature paintings and coins are not only a tangible narrative of what we have read in textbooks, but also proof of the Vagad region’s rich archaeological reserves and the treasures that were once the pride of the private collections of the royals.

A decade after India’s Independence, Rajasthan’s archaeology and museums department decided to come up with a centre to showcase sculptures excavated from the villages of Galiyakot, Amjhara and Baroda. Initially displayed at Dungarpur’s Panchayat Samiti Hall, these ancient figures swelled in number with more excavations over time.

In 1988, the Government Archaeological Museum was inaugurated on land that was donated by the royal family of Dungarpur. About two hundred sculptures, including those depicting Jain tirthankaras and incarnations of Hindu deities, all of them in stone, take the viewer back to Ajmera under the Gupta rule. These sculptures are almost reminiscent of the Sheshashayi Vishnu idols of Deogarh. Nagendra Singh, who donated more than 30 timeless pieces to the museum, was a custodian and collector of indigenous artistic traditions.
The exhibits that came from his personal collection have Shiva at their forefront, followed by sculptures of goddesses and pedestals, engraved pillars and arches.

**Timings** 9.45am-5.15pm; Monday closed

**Juna Mahal**

Just two hours from Udaipur, lies the lakeside retreat of Dungarpur. The Udai Bilas Palace, now run as a hotel, nestles along the verdant stretches of the Gaibsagar Lake. Station yourself here but what you cannot miss is a visit to the old palace, or **Juna Mahal**, 4km southeast of the Udai Bilas Palace.

Some claim, with justifiable reasons, that it is the oldest existing royal palace complex in India, perhaps in the world. The construction of the palace was started sometime in the 13th century and for about 650 years it was occupied by the Guhilot Rajputs. Throughout these centuries the palace
building grew, usually vertically. Now, it is a wonderful edifice, nine storeys high, with two levels underground. The Juna Mahal has a dominant location on a 1,476-foot-high hill atop the old township of Dungarpur, and its towering chhatris and engraved balconies are eye-catching even from a distance. The palace is made of a beautiful bluish-grey local stone called pareva stone and is an exquisite example of temple architecture being introduced into royal residences. The decorative elements include pillars, brackets and arches; the carvings depict warriors, dancers and musicians. The palace’s various chambers are tastefully decorated with ornamental mirror-work, stone inlays and glass inlays.

However, the most impressive are the paintings. There are depictions of gods, with Krishna and his playful stories being the favourite. There are court scenes and hunting expeditions. On the walls you will see the Gangaaur Festival being celebrated, the Bhils of Dungarpur being defeated in a battle by the Rajputs and a portrait of Queen Victoria. There is also a whimsical display wherein murals dramatising highly athletic Kama Sutra postures are concealed discreetly in a cupboard.

Timings 9.30am to 4.30pm
HANUMANGARH

Sir Chhotu Ram Memorial Museum, Sangaria

The Sir Chhotu Ram Memorial Museum or Gramothan School Campus Museum in Sangaria, Hanumangarh, makes for an intriguing visit. In 1938, Swami Keshwanand put some stone statues in the school hostel, without a clue about their historical value. When more and more students came to see these statues, he got them shifted to a room. This further inspired Swami Keshwanand and he turned into a collector of rare things. Today, the museum displays an interesting collection of not only statues but also of coins, pictures, costumes, artefacts, and much more.

ASI Museum, Kalibangan

Probably one of Rajasthan’s most fascinating museums, the popular Kalibangan museum at Hanumangarh showcases artefacts from the early Harappan civilization of 3000 to 2700 BC. On display here are Harappan seals, bangles, terracotta figurines, stone balls, grinders, bricks, and much more. The museum was first established in 1983 with an aim to introduce visitors to the materials which were found in the excavations carried out in the region between 1961 and 1969. It was recently renovated at a cost of Rs 80 lakh and reopened in 2017. The museum is divided into three galleries.

Timings 9am-5pm; Friday closed
KARAULI

*Karauli City Palace and Museum*

Arjun Pal built this palace along with the town, in the 14th century. However, little or nothing of the original palace can now be seen. What you do see is the incredible structure erected by Raja Gopal Singh in the 18th century. He chose to adopt the Delhi-style of architecture—the abundance of red sandstone in Karauli, similar to that used in Delhi, made this rendering easy. From the terrace atop the palace, you can see the town laid out by the River Bhadrawati below, and the ravines and lush hills beyond.

You can also take a look at the the Diwan-i-Aam, the hall where the king met his subjects, has exquisite floral patterns in bright colours on the walls and ceiling as well as tastefully painted wooden doors. The upper floor has delicate jaali work on the walls, from behind which the queens could observe the goings-on below.

The coloured glass jharokhas of the opulent Rang Mahal, with their one-way visibility, made for some of the most beautiful purdahs. The mirror theme continues from the well-decorated hall to the decorated walls and ceilings of the bedrooms. Barahdwari, which is the women’s dance hall, is lined with impressive moustachioed portraits of the kings of yore.

**Timings** 6 am-7 pm