



ROYALTY AT ITS BEST

- By Aruna Rathod

The pink city has a distinctive character of its own – colourful, delicious cuisine and amazing palaces.

Rajasthan is always a pleasure to visit with its rich history of royalty and landscapes that are unmatched with sand dunes and the glory of the majestic deserts.

From the airport, the heart of Jaipur is just about half-an-hour away and it's easy to get around in this city with taxis and autos. Since I landed by 8 am, I decided to check into the Fortune Metropolitan hotel and asked where I could get an authentic Rajasthani breakfast. A kind gentleman at the counter told me to check out two authentic eateries called Rawat and Kanha near the railway station.

So, I found Kanha and was pleasantly surprised. A feast was ready – puris, chole, paneer gravy and mixed vegetables at 9 am! I decided to have the famous pyaaz ki kachori (a deep-fried savoury with a spicy onion mixture as filling) and a mirchi vada. Though mirchi vada is the speciality of Jodhpur, it is popular in most cities. But full marks to the kachori.



Welcome to Jaipur

I hired a taxi to see the city and the driver-cum-guide was a local and quite knowledgeable. So after checking into my club room, which was very luxurious I ventured out to explore Jaipur. We began with the Birla Mandir, situated at the foot hills of the Moti Dungri Fort. The Moti Dungri Fort stands on top of the hill while the stunning Birla Temple built from white marble stands below with its three domes to represent the three religions of India; a tribute to the secular nature of the country. A well-manicured garden around the temple lends a plenty of greenery and bright bougainvillea flowers lend a lot of colour.

After that, we drove to the Albert Hall Museum, a classic structure in the heart of the city. As we drove into the pink walled city, it was fascinating. Low buildings, painted in pinkish orange with jali work, it's like walking into a film set. Arched doorways at intervals amble into tiny busy roads that suddenly meet historic sights – this makes Jaipur a total pleasure. Entering through one of the doorways, we reached the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Jantar Mantar in Jaipur (next to the City Palace) where most tourists head. It could take anything from an hour to half a day. Jantar Mantar is an astronomical observatory used to measure the distances and positions of celestial objects. India has a total of five such observatories, the largest of which is in Jaipur.

A few metres away is the world famous Hawa Mahal, a treat to the eyes, full of intricate details and standing in the middle of the market place.



Post lunch, we headed for the Amer Fort, (also known as Amber fort) one of the most famous landmarks of Jaipur. As we drove out of the city towards the hills, our driver talked about the great wall of Amer. And we spotted it on the slope of the hills, a boundary wall that went on for miles. After a few minutes, we spotted the fort, which is situated on top of the hill, and it looks panoramic! A sprawling fort-palace, it is magnificent. I was waiting to reach the top and explore the palace.

Amer, originally, was the capital of the state before Jaipur. It is an old fort, built in 1592 by Raja Man Singh. The colour of the fort is a light yellow, built of sandstone and the Maottha Lake in the foreground, with its landscaped garden, is visible from the top.





royal way to reach the fort is on elephant back, but one needs to reach early, by 9 am to book the elephant, as the elephants go up only during morning hours and it's quite exorbitant at Rs. 950 per head. It takes about half-an-hour to reach the fort.

Once you enter the fort, it has a huge courtyard and after buying your tickets, you can proceed to explore. The views from every pavilion are absolutely stunning and picturesque, the scale is magnificent. A few steps to the second level takes you to the meeting hall and another level to the Sheesh Mahal and a manicured garden. The next and last level allows for a fantastic view over the city and is breezy. A photographer's delight, one can spend an entire day at this great structure and relive the glorious past of kings and queens.

Fascinating Step Well

Our driver decided to take us to another unique spot near the fort – a step well. Called the Panna Meena Ka Kund, it is the middle of a village. Built in the 16th century, the step well is fascinating with steep steps on all four sides. The place was used by the community for meetings and congregating. Visitors are not allowed to go down any steps, but can stand on the borders and marvel at the structure.

Blue Pottery

Jaipur is famous for its blue pottery and it was imperative to visit one of the workshops. Right from tiny bowls to large platters and planters, it was fascinating to see these pieces of art. Tiles, pots, beads, bowls – it's a riot of bright blues, yellows and greens. It would be sacrilege not to pick up a piece from Jaipur. I picked up wall plates in a Turkish design in light and dark blue to end my fantastic trip to this beautiful city.

Taking The Best Route

There are four ways to go up to the fort. One is by foot, and it's a gently ascending slope about a kilometre. So, if you can brave it, go ahead. The next is by the jeep, which is normally taken by the busloads of tourists, who arrive and park at a distance and then proceed by jeep. The last and best way is with your private taxi, which drops you at the back entrance after which you can take a short climb up to the majestic palace. The most

