Romancing Rajasthan

This winter, experience the splendour of some of Rajasthan’s most exquisite locations.

By Ruchira Mittal

Wherever you go in Rajasthan, you can’t remain untouched by its vivaciousness. Drive out of Delhi, you will notice that the vegetation slowly succumbs to the harsh beauty of the desert. The deeper you drive into the desert, the softer the language will become. Rajasthan is easy to spot, women and men dressed in the brightest of colours, in defiance of the desert’s arid brown. A sense of the ancient exists everywhere, from the heady aroma of its delectable cuisine to the dancing colours of its native costumes. The experience changes most, forever. Rajasthan is too vast to cover in a jiffy. Therefore, we have picked out four of the most exquisite locations for you to experience, this winter.

Udaipur: Let’s start about 660 kilometres west of New Delhi, in the erstwhile nub of the celebrated kingdom of Mewar and one of Rajasthan’s most spectacular cities, Udaipur. Nestled in a fertile valley, it is a city of palaces, essentially built around the three lakes of Pichola, Fateh Sagar and Umaid Sagar. In the heart of the city, as the setting sun burns a fiery orange and the undulating Aravali range turns purple in the background, reflect upon the stunning architecture of the palaces girdling the golden waters of...
the lake. Sit right there, and contemplate life’s wonder, in the mysterious light from the alcoves of the Lake Palace hotel and the ethereal glow of the crystal clear, starlit night. Tear away from the sprawling palatial acres, and weave through the inner city’s magical bylanes, jostling in its noisy little markets. Full of handicrafts and irresistible buys, the Bara Bazaar near the Jagdish Temple and Bapu Bazaar near Suraj Pol are memorable experiences.

Chittor: Once one of Rajputana’s most magnificent citadels, the fort is situated 150 kilometres from Udaipur. Nearly 700 years ago, it housed the fabled and beauteous Rani Padmini of the Sisaudia clan. Drawn by her irresistible beauty, Delhi’s Turko-Afghan ruler Alauddin Khilji attacked the fiercely protected fort, early in the 14th century. She preferred to die fighting, rather than give herself up. More than two centuries later, historian Malik Mohammad Jayasi immortalised her story of honour and sacrifice in his epic Padmavat. The legend leaps out at you from the walls and ramparts of the fort.

Jaisalmer: Have you stood in the middle of the desert and watched the sun go down? And have you then watched the evening wrap a loving arm around the shoulders of sun-baked day? You should, in Jaisalmer, this winter. Wait a little longer and feel the night unfurl above you like a star-studded sheet of calm. Drive 575 km west of Udaipur, into the golden city at the edge of the desert, where the sun comes down and kisses the specks of sands and startled sprigs of grass before it’s gone for the night. The Sonar Quila, or the golden fortress, rises like a colossus from the sands. Jaisalmer is a city of havelis (artistically designed private mansions). In Jaisalmer, you have no idea where the desert ends and where life takes over. Jaisalmer affects you.

Jaipur: The capital of Rajasthan, Jaipur was founded in 1727 by the Kachhwaha Rajput king Jai Singh II. Jaipur is a five-hour drive from Delhi on most days, but you must take the route into town that cuts through the hills lined by the imposing ramparts of the sprawling Amber fort. History is etched in white and red sandstone in its architecture. A sound and light show at the fort is a popular attraction. In 1853, the ruler of Jaipur, Sawai Ram Singh, had all the city’s buildings painted pink to welcome the visiting Prince of Wales. Large parts of the city, including all its official buildings, are still painted in that colour, hence the name Pink City. It rightly boasts of the best in cultural heritage and markets.

The wide straight avenues, roads, streets, lanes and uniform rows of shops on either side of the main markets are arranged in nine rectangular city sectors. The walled city especially reflects its profound architectural planning. Tourists can enjoy shopping for gems, garments, blue pottery and much more. If you are adventurous, you will go looking for the best savouries and sweets in the walled city. Glistening mountains of sinfully sweet mava vanish as eager buyers throng the shops in the narrow bylanes of the market. For the not so daring, the LMB restaurant is the place to sample Rajasthan’s cuisine.

In the main city, visit Amrapali at Paanch Batti for gorgeous handcrafted silver jewelry. Don’t forget to bargain, you could just be pleasantly surprised. Indulge some more when you step out of the store and try the famous lassi just across the road. Yes, you can ask for it with or without the generous sheet of cream, cut and carved into solid biscuit-sized slices and placed right on top of the blended and sweetened yoghurt. Jaipur’s metropolitan side caters to all tastes! If you are feeling giddy at the thought of how much there is to see and do, indulge in an evening at Chowkhi Dhani on the Ajmer-Tonk Road. Be treated like royalty, dine in Rajasthani splendour and let the colours and vibrancy of Rajasthan fill up your senses.