

Rajasthan

A haunting experience

When you think of Rajasthan, a desert with layers of arid sands comes to the mind and when you think of a desert in the monsoons, none would imagine lush green covers stretching as far as the eye can see with green foliage all across the rugged mountain slopes. Rajasthan in the months of end June and July in recent years has been a very different experience, especially when you



discover green cover instead of the expected sands. And the drive by road makes the journey all



the more memorable as you meander through streets lined with mud houses, go past the *bindinis* – as the village women are so oft referred to in Rajasthan – balancing deftly pots on their heads and their bright, colourful skirts sway in the breeze and of course the camels plodding on.

Rajasthan is soaked in history, and the forts and palaces dotting almost each of the cities from a Jaisalmer to Jodhpur, to Bikaner to Jaipur fold within themselves numerous tales of brave warriors and the sacrifices of its valiant queens. But in a quiet village en route to the well-known Ranthambore Tiger Reserve lies Bhangarh or locally referred to as the haunted city. As you motor your way slowly and patiently through the mud roads and amid farmlands, a short detour off the main road onto



another narrow lane takes you to another world – a world so different and so nestled deep into the mountains and literally the sands of time that it almost seems a lost civilization. And a lost civilization it is ensconced in the walled ruins of what once was the seat of the warrior general of Rajasthan. This ancient township was founded in the later half of 16th century by Raja Bhagwant Singh, the then ruler of the princely town of Amber. It later became the capital of Raja Madho Singh, who was a Diwan or a Counsellor in the court of the Mughal Emperor, Akbar (A.D 1556 – 1605). Bhangarh beckons you even on a hot summer afternoon.



As you cross the entry gate, be ready to move into a different era. It is inviting, it is eerie but it is breathtaking as you take your first steps onto the ancient streets that guide you with well-marked signages that read – fort, *jauhri* or the crafts bazaar, temple and more...and all in ruins. The first glance offers

you a panoramic view of a township once bustling with life, artistic works and trading. The well-defined contours of Bhangarh start becoming evident as you saunter along the cobbled route, which has a series of equal size kiosks in two rows running parallel to each other.

Move away from *jauhri* bazaar and you come again to single rows of parallel gates facing each other lining a cobbled street. Beyond these garland like row of gates are steps leading to an open platform. Interestingly, each of the quarters looks similar and extremely finely planned. Quite



surprisingly, the roofs of most structures are not there. It almost seems as if in a single slice the entire city-village had been beheaded. And there hangs a tale. No one till date is permitted to enter into this ruined city-village before sunrise or after sunset. The Archeological Survey of India's Office is also located outside the limits of Bhangarh. It is said that Bhangarh was cursed by a saint.

Spurned by the princess of the land, he cursed the city-village, which invited his wrath. Cursed it was that it got destroyed overnight – so goes the story. It is difficult to understand that amidst a ruined township, how the beautifully carved temples stand intact.



History and stories of yore lace the winding dusty and cobbled pathways. Yet the remnants of the city-village are so perfectly evident that you can conjure images of a dwelling resonating with



energy, people, voices and war.... Crossing the meandering pathways, you again move



through another iron gate and large acres of open, green lawns greet you. Standing in the midst of these lawns, you can see temples around built in *nagara* style architecture, marketplace, dwellings. And a few step forward, an imposing fort embedded in the rocky mountains stands atop you. It beckons you and invites you to explore the

deeper reaches of history.

Believed to be originally with seven storeys, only five are visible today. Interestingly in Rajasthan, the larger cities boast of huge palaces adorned with beatific engravings and precious jewels. This in contrast, the palace fort in Bhangarh shorn of design and



splendour stands raw and naked – built in solid rock – almost as if boasting of the numerous wars that it has weathered. Immediately, you are tempted to climb the rows of steps to reach its



inner precincts. Whilst the outer façade of the fort stands strong, the inside is quite in ruin. The view of the Bhangarh from the fort is, however, simply splendid and very imposing. Imagine the



king - or the Diwan in this case - standing aloft in the fort-palace proudly surveying his city, his people, the happiness. The structures are all well-separated by distances – large enough to mark the limits of the walled township and yet at the same time, each of the structures – fort-palace, temples, marketplace, residential areas – seems cohesively integrated into a well-planned township. Interestingly, Bhangarh has known fewer tourists as it is nestled deep into the forest, mountainous area, off the tracks of any of the main city routes. The sparse populace that you do



come across comprises the folk from nearby villages that is attracted to the township more by its haunting tales, and a few tourists, largely foreigners resident in the nearby luxurious Amanbagh resort, who saunter into Bhangarh in search of a quiet trek.

Spend a day in Bhangarh from sunrise till sunset and feel history, which is palpable and almost touching or shall I say haunting. Bhangarh invites you. Experience India!

Directions:

From Delhi – Between Manoharpur - Dausa

On NH8, from Delhi turn left from Manoharpur (~ 196Km) just visibly short of Ajmer Sikar Expressway.

Manoharpur – Pratapgargh – Ajabgargh – **Bhangargh** - Dausa

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