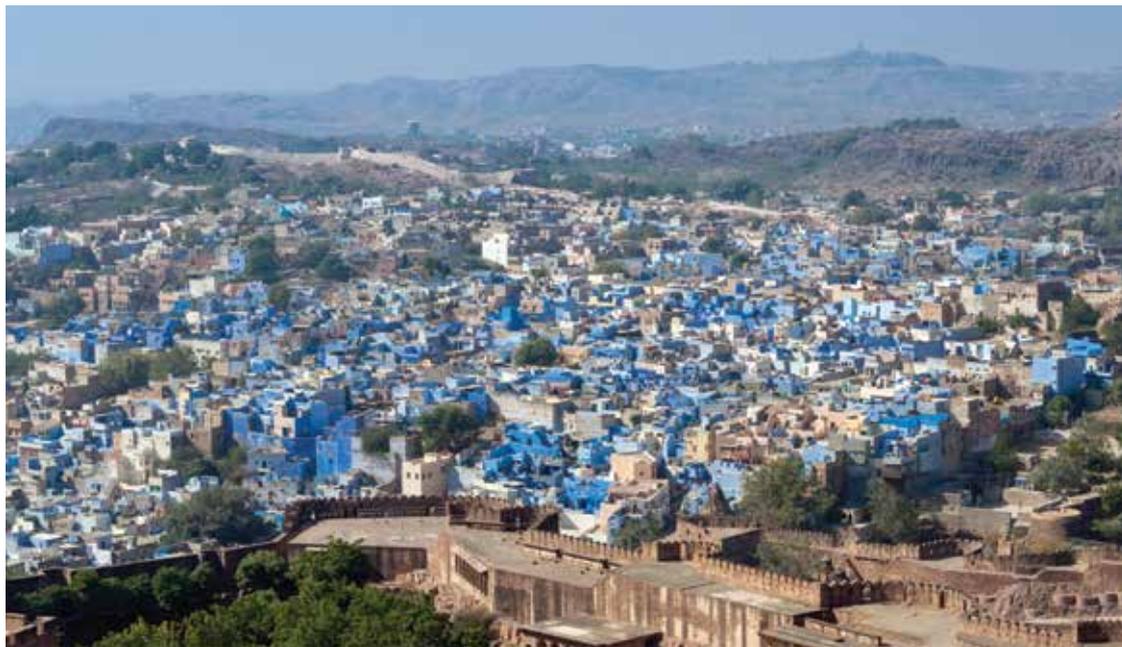


TOURISM UPDATE



PHOTOS BY AJAY SOOD (TRAVELURE)

▲ **War Art:** Antique dagger belonging to Jodhpur's royal family on display at Mehrangarh Fort.

◀ **Blue Faith:** The historic Blue City preserves its colour allegiance to the royal Rathores of yore.

▼ **Boutique Bonanza:** Ajit Bhawan, another erstwhile royal residence that visitors frequent for a privileged stay at Jodhpur.

Beat the Blues at Sun City

There is more to Jodhpur than its rich royal heritage. Discover it this season—the best time in the Blue City. **BY BINITA SINGH**

It's royal, it's imposing and it's blue! It is the origin of the famous *mawa kachoris* (flights have been delayed famously over this delicacy) and yes, it is the place that sashays on the international fashion ramps in an eponymous *avatar*—the world renowned piece of sartorial elegance—the Indian breeches. That in short is Jodhpur, the second largest city of Rajasthan and seat of erstwhile royals, the famous Rathores. But there's much more to explore in this royal township. To do this, we recommend a trip to the desert town in the months between October and March, the best time to visit the Gateway to the Thar. Yes that's another of the monikers of the Blue City and the Sun City. Situated on the edge of the Thar desert, the town is bright and sunny, hot and dry—a typical desert weather for most parts of the year. Unless the idea is to get



a real desert experience, heat, sand and all, it is perfect to visit the city of blue houses in the pleasant season. Many buses, trains and flights take the visitor to the royal abode. But a road trip to Rajasthan has its own charm and so does a trip on the Palace on Wheels—Royal Rajasthan on Wheels. Board this regal chariot at Delhi and take a seven day round trip of Rajasthan, visiting all the former princely states ensconced in luxury. Whatever be the choice of transport, Jodhpur is regal, scenic and mesmerising—on every visit.

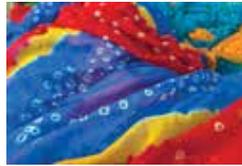
It is the festive season in India and Jodhpur has

a number of world famous festivals lined up that double the visitor's pleasure. Sync your itinerary to catch one of the famous gatherings of Jodhpur beginning with the Marwar festival in October, the auspicious *Ashwin* month. Monsoon rains have ceased, the clouds have cleared to reveal an azure blue sky and there is a nip in the air. The days are sunny, not hot and the nights are pleasant and cool. Marwar festival, celebrated on a full moon night is a sensorial delight. The festivities extending to two days reveal a colourful cultural fiesta—revellers sporting colourful *bandhani odhanis*, the famous Jodhpuri *jootis*, and the royals and gentry in their pristine *jodhpurs* and *bandhgalas*. In ancient days it was called Maand Festival. Be a part of the traditional in memoriam to the true sons of the soil, the Marwar warriors, who gave up their lives defending the erstwhile kingdom. Drown your senses in the strains of folk music and dance into the twilight to the beats of the traditional percussion instruments. The folk dances and the ballads bring alive the area's romantic folklore of great princes and princesses, warlords and folk heroes. Played out in the backdrop of the imposing and impregnable Mehrangarh Fort, the beautiful Umaid Bhawan Palace and Mandore, it transports even the transient visitor to another era. Watch the equestrian skills at display at the polo match with magnificent horses and their equally royal riders and the camels getting tattoos at the camel tattoo show. Cap this experience with the Rajasthan International Folk Festival, also held around the same time at Mehrangarh Fort. A gathering of musicians, storytellers, dancers and singers from Rajasthan's folk communities and a select gathering of national and international artistes presents a potpourri of soul stirring fare that extends into the night. The other events worth catching are Jodhpur International Desert Kite Festival and the World Sufi Spirit Festival, the first held in January and the second in February at Mehrabgarh and Nagaur. These are recent additions to the historical and cultural fiesta of Jodhpur and have notched up its attractiveness index.

There will not be a dull moment in a trip to Jodhpur, with the city bustling with activity, visits to temples, monuments, forts and short excursions to the outskirts that add to the experience. Seeped in history, Jodhpur has a unique character that even a casual visitor wants to explore. The best place to start this historical journey is

FOUR KEY HIGHLIGHTS

1. COLOUR ME BRIGHT



Bandhej or *Bandhani*, the world famous tie and dye technique of colouring garments; shop for a vivid collection in Jodhpur.

2. JINGLE BELLS



These artistic terracotta windchimes, hardy and built to last, can be found hanging atop most doorways in rural Jodhpur.

3. ROYAL ABODE



Umaid Bhawan Palace, part heritage hotel, part museum, synonymous with luxury.

4. WAR GAMES

Rathores were great warlords. An axe on display at Mehrangarh Fort museum.



Spice Mix: This ancient contraption is actually a spice grinder. It was turned by bullocks to grind whole spices.

the Mehrangarh Fort. It is, in fact, the reason why the city houses are painted blue! Apart from the fact that it denoted the highest castes resided in these blue abodes, it also assured of their allegiance to the father of the city—Rao Jodha, chief of the Rathore clan. He founded the city of Jodhpur in 1459 and the city was named after him. Jodha has left behind a magnificent legacy for his children and India. Each generation made some additions to the fort, in the process, creating a magnificent masterpiece. Explore the ancient citadel of the Rathores and the sprawling city at its foothills stretching out to the 10 km long 16th century city wall. If the maze of medieval lanes and bylanes of the city, about 150 metres down the hill from the fort, are a journey of discovery of Jodhpur's unique culture and cuisine, the fort itself speaks of many myths and legends that have become entwined in city's folklore. The seven gates of the fort have their own intriguing history and the exquisite interior stands testimony to tales of mystery and scandal, love and betrayal. The imposing ramparts have stood sentinel over this invincible fort that never fell into an enemy's hands, ensuring its impregnability. Mehrangarh offers a virtual treat for the romantics and history buffs alike.

Just a kilometre from the fort is Jaswant Thada, the white marble cenotaph built in honour of Maharaja Jaswant Singh II. The intricately carved monument with domes and lattices is a historical work of genius and a peaceful spot away from the hustle-bustle of the town. It is a good place to rest your

► **Fit for a King:** The *Mojris* or Jodhpuri *jootis* complete a royal ensemble.



► **Heritage Collection:** Sangneri block printing that flourished towards the end of 17th and in the 18th century in Sangner district of Rajasthan is sold on the streets of Jodhpur's markets.



► **History in a Capsule:** A view of the elaborate overhanging that dominates the foreground of Mehrangarh Fort's main courtyard.

tired feet after a hectic day of sightseeing. Just sprawl out on the front lawn and enjoy the magnificent view of the fort from the vantage point. While on historical monuments, a not to be missed destination is Umaid Bhawan Palace. Situated atop the Chittar hill this palace exhibits a strong influence of art-deco style and is an Indo-colonial architectural marvel. Built by British architect Henry Vaughan, it was completed in 1944. A part of the palace today is a heritage hotel and the rest is a museum. Staying at the ultra luxe hotel is a treat in itself. While browsing through the museum do take a look at the vintage car and watch collection of India's royals. Umed Garden with its museum, zoo and aviary is popular destination. Another spot for a communion with nature is the Rao Jodha Desert Rock Park. An example of ecological tourism, this wasteland around the fort covering an expanse of 200 acres was planted with a variety of plants in 2006. The park today is a treasure trove of foliage and flora that change colour with the season. Explore nature's bounty at peace and then head to Jodhpur Flying Fox for a more adventurous trip. This six-lane zip-lining adventure takes approximately two hours and is a thrilling ride suspended mid-air with the imposing Mehrangarh Fort in the backdrop.

The meek can give it a miss and head to the old town to discover its delights. If you have elected to stay in this busy town, it has over 100 guest-houses and the best budget hotels, there is hardly a chance of missing the iconic Clock Tower. The still ticking clock situated in the heart of the town is its pulse. The Sadar Bazaar runs right next to it and is bustling throughout the day. Take a walking tour and soak in the ambience of Jodhpuri culture. A walk also helps spot the best bargains on offer. Explore the market for the colourful *bandhani saris* or *odhanis* or block printed material, *jootis*, spices, handicrafts and much else that is sold here. Post a shopathon, Spice Paradise beckons. This is not the usual restaurant but a cooking class thrown in and is famous for its *masala chai* (spice tea) blend refined to a fine art. After a gastronomical meal, a visit to Janata Sweet Home may not sound too

appetising. But this is one not to be missed gastronomical tourism spot of Jodhpur. The iconic sweet shop is famous for its *mawa kachori*, a dish that originated in Jodhpur. There are temples and other palaces and monument to visit here, but a veritable treat await a few kilometres beyond Jodhpur's borders for the intrepid traveller.

The lifebelt of Jodhpur is the Jaswant Sagar Dam, constructed in 1892 by Maharaja Jaswant Singh. A boat ride enjoying the view is a thrilling experience, as the guide explains the intricacies of the dam. For the wildlife enthusiasts, an excursion to the Machia Safaria Park is mandatory. Nagaur, 135 km from Jodhpur is a must see for its Mughal architectural marvels. The Nagaur Fair held in February is a week-long cattle celebration and the renowned Rajasthani puppeteers hold shows here. A Guda Bishnoi Village Safari gives a taste of the real Rajasthan—the indigenous people inhabiting this stretch of Jodhpur are world famous for their eco-friendly ways of living. The Guda Bishnoi Lake is the watering hole of the Black Buck and home to many migratory birds. Not to be missed! The hectic pace dictated by so many marvellous spots can be tiring. Head to Bal Samand Palace, the summer pavilion of Maharaj Sur Singh of Jodhpur, for a rest before you depart. A stay at this regal heritage hotel is a real royal treat. Jodhpur, the Blue City, is certainly the best place to beat the blues! ■