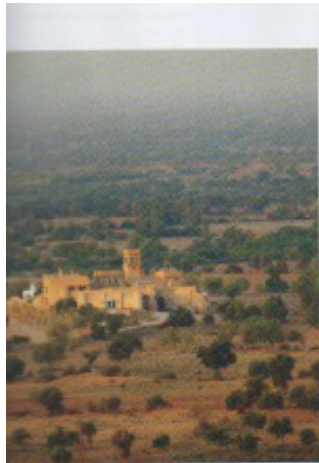


# CONDÉ NAST TRAVELLER

June 2018

“A mind blowing roam through Rajasthan”





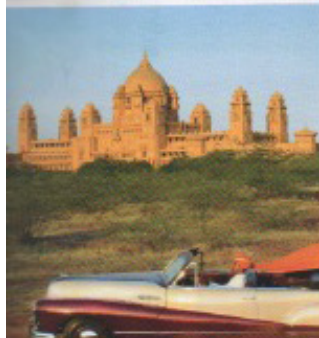
## THE ROYAL TREATMENT

CHILDREN EMBRACE THE SENSORY ASSAULT ON A MIND-BLOWING ROAM THROUGH RAJASTHAN

BY MELINDA STEVENS

ALL INVOLVED! INDIA IS ALL INVOLVED – from the moment we climb into the little van that will send us around Rajasthan, its windows looking onto a kaleidoscope world of bleating, beeping street life. My 10-year-old beams (forget the overnight flight, forget the tustes at the airport, forget the heat that hits like a brick): “Mama, I feel so alive!” Here are children with eyes like almonds, mothers with skin as worn as shoes, an unconcerned cow crossing the road, taking its holy unholy time. Drinks stalk, umbrella stands, a swathe of men having their hair cut, their manes wet and grooved like oars, slipper shops and flip-flops, reargrues the size of the sun. In the countryside around Amer, Rajasthan it feels as if we have stepped back into medieval times; ladies scythe the fields of corn the colour of dawn, a leopard hunts in the night, grunting in the chase. Everywhere we go – every font, every fudge – our paths are lit by candles, and there’s the strain of a star. Monkeys stare imperiously at us in the ruined temples, and pick at each other, the flame trees of the forest are in flower and shimmer filament orange in the heat. We spend an afternoon at a village house and try to carry an urn of water on our heads like the locals. Then off we roll to Jaipur and Suján Rajmahal Palace, a trippy dream of Willy Wonka happiness, where the wallpaper covers not just inside the house but outside too. The train hoots past the garden, men wear turbans the colour of candy floss, and we listen to jazz root-rotting from speakers in the drawing room where Princess Dasta used to keep cool. We paint elephants, we watch the furious whiplash of the carpet weaver’s loom. At the Gem Palace we sit in Filles Buicks parked out back and try on necklaces that cost a million bucks. At The Oberoi Udaivilas the children are given wooden ducks that they pull on pieces of string, clip-clipping over the miles of shiny black-and-white-marble corridors. We have supper on a boat at sunset and watch egrets flying home to roost, the lake a melted pink mirror. We zoom around town on tuk-tuks and buy bangles and boxes and pretty little linen dresses. One dusk, in the desert at Mihir Garh, we are looking out the long windows steed into the walls. We gaze at a slow procession of goats being hurried home, their bells tinkling away, the farmers bringing up the rear. Suddenly a horse dashes into view – a beautiful creature as polished as a chess piece – galloping across the field, snorting and neighing, its tail high in the air like a plume. At Umaid Bhawan, we have tea with the maharaja. He is not wearing a crown. The children politely pop sandwiches into their mouths, and then impolitely push them back them out again. At breakfast they feed the peacocks on the steps of the palace. At supper they dance with the dancing girls in the courtyard to the high-low holler of the hand. Before bed we look at the offerings around the sink in our bathroom; it is a shop in itself, everything you could ever want and more. Nail files, ear buds, toothpicks, shoe-shining kits, eye drops, mints, a packet of safety pins fanned out exactly according to size. We stare at it all for a long time. India: rigorous, glamorous, shocking, mesmerising. India is all involved.

**BOOK IT** Scott Dunn offers a Rajasthan trip from £4,200 per person, based on a family of four staying on a B&B basis, including three nights at Amer, three nights at Suján Rajmahal Palace, two nights at The Oberoi Udaivilas, two nights at Mihir Garh, two nights at Umaid Bhawan Palace and one night at The Oberoi, Gurgaon, flights, private transfers and guides. +44 20 8682 5075; scottdunn.com



June 2016 Family Special 91