“A mind blowing roam through Rajasthan”
THE ROYAL TREATMENT

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

BY MEENAA STRONG

ALL ROYALITY ROCKS IN ALL ASPECTS – from the moment we clamber into the Rolls Royce that will whisk us around Jaipur, the ostentatious building onto a kaleidoscope world of bustling, braying street life, My 8-year-old brother (who the overnight flight forgot to turn off the tea at the airport, forget the toast at the airport, forget the heat that hits like a brick) Mama, I feel so tired! Here are children with eyes the almonds, needles with skin as worn as shoes, an unconscious converting the road lacking its holy holy holy tree, Drink stalls, umbrella stalls, a smattering of cows having their ear cut, their muzzles wet and greased by the owners, shop stops and flip-flops, emerging in the way of the sun. In the countryside around Aamby Valley it seems as if we have stepped back into medieval times laden with looks of the cobble of dawn, a leaping hare in the night, greenness in the doon. Everywhere we walk, we walk, we walk – eyes are held up by needles, and faces of the stream of a sari. Monkeys stare intemperately at us in the nature temple, and pick at our hair, and the flame rises of the forest are in swarms and shimmering filigree against the breeze. We spend an afternoon at a village home and try to savour every sun of water or other heads like the bark. Then off we roll to Jaipur and Suján Raprahn Bagh, a sleepy dream of Willy Wonka happiness, where the wallpaper never gets too much the breeze but outside too. There, too, past the garden, men wear turbans the colour of candy floss, and we listen to jazz music from a balcony in the dressing room where Princess Diana used to keep cool. We paint elephants, we watch the fantasy whirl of the carpet weaver's Aliz. At the Garden Palace we sit in pillars with brass and look up and see there are more than a million boughs. As The Owens Hotel, the children are given wooden dolls that they pull on pieces of string, cup-feeding over the miles of flowery back, and their marble confections. We have tea with a bread at sunset and watch the entire family being seated on the roof, the lake a mother of pearl. We zoom around town on tuk-tuks and pop bracelets and brown and pastel little flowers down our desks. One desk, the closest to Mildred, we are looking out the long windows to the walls. We are at a slow procession of goats being herded home, their bells tinkling away, the horns bringing up the rear. Suddenly a horse dashes into view – a beautiful creature – polished as a chess piece – galloping across the field, crown and vigilant, its tail high in the air like a plume. At Umaid Bhawan, we have tea with the maids, and the teapot is covered, and the children proudly pop sandwiches into their mouths, and then impulsively push them back down again. As breakfast rolls is laid on the plate, and the mirror is across the sink, and the platter is in our bathroom. It is shop in itself, everything you could ever want and more. Next stop the bath, toothbrushes, shoe-shining kit, water down minus, a packet of wet wipes flushed out exactly amounting to size. We start the day at a long time. Inside gorgeous, glistening, Hooking, commenting, India in its finest.

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