

The Most Beautiful New Hotel In India: Sujan Rajmahal Palace



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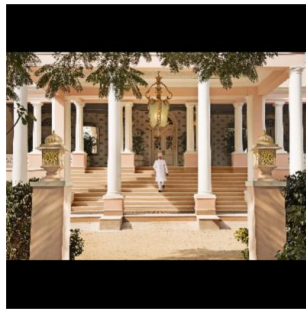
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Sujan Rajmahal Palace

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India has an abundance of royal palaces, many over the years transformed into hotels. But rarely has one made the transition with as much flair as Rajmahal, one of the palaces of the Maharaja of Jaipur. Opened last year by Sujan, the elite Indian hotel company known for its luxe safari camps, as [Sujan Rajmahal Palace](#), a member of [Relais & Chateaux](#), the intimate palace exudes dignity but with a vivid sense of style adding to its estimable history.

Built in 1729 by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II as a garden retreat for his wife, it was later the official residence of the British Resident Political Officer of Rajputana and then in 1958, a home away from the official home, the vast City Palace, for Maharaja, H.H. Sawai Man Singh II and his wife, the glamorous Maharani Gayatri Devi. Named by Vogue as one of the most beautiful women in the world, she exemplified the regal life of the princely states of the Raj, a life later recounted in her memoir “[A Princess Remembers](#).” Black and white photos of some of the notables who were guests here during that time—[Jacqueline Kennedy](#), [Queen Elizabeth II](#) of Great Britain, [Lord Louis Mountbatten](#) among them—are displayed in frames like family photos in the main salon and in the suites named after them.

The look of the suites is very different, however, than they would have experienced. Several years ago, the mother of the current teenage Maharaja decided that the house needed refreshing and turned to Sujan’s owners Jaisal and Anjali Singh and their friend designer [Adil Ahmad](#). Ahmad was given access to City Palace archives and family possessions for inspiration with the result of historic mixed with exuberant: restoring the intricate chandeliers and marble staircases of the original palace and maintaining the Art Deco feel of a 1930’s renovation by the royal family but adding jolts of color and contrasting patterns. The 51 shades of pink breakfast room, fuchsia bedspread contrasted with a black Deco headboard in the Maharani suite, the turquoise and violet print of the Kennedy Suite are eye openers but the intensity and design fusions are irresistible. (And there are quieter color schemes in several of the 14 suites such as the QE II and Mountbatten.)

Outdoors, there’s an easy grandeur in lunch under a shading marquis in the garden or dinner in a tent lit by candles. And the staff is professional and correct but doesn’t take itself too seriously. It was the festival of kites when I was there and Jaipur residents were flying kites from their rooftops. To help me experience it, staff members procured a couple of kites and we did battle, the kites cutting each other off in the treetops above the garden. If she were still alive (she passed away in 2009) and watching this spectacle, the spirited Maharani would have approved.