

“A decade before The Serai, the equally impressive Sher Bagh opened in 1998 under the same ownership... my photographs won't do justice to Ranthambore, or this magical camp, which is managed to perfection.”



Top right: camps during the British Raj tried to include all the comforts of home, including suites of furniture. Left: delicious home-cooked Rajasthani food is served at Sher Bagh, only minutes away from the Ranthambore National Park. Above left and below: The Serai blends luxury with sustainability, from romantic lamp-lit sundowners among the sands to its swimming pool with a filtration system that recycles and conserves water. Above right: the tents at Chhatra Sagar offer opulent interiors and dreamy lake views

Later on, the staff, treated as family by the owners, cook organic and locally grown food. We eat like kings, and I feel instantly at home. The family have not only created the hotel—with its bougainvillea-covered walls and artisanal rooms and suites—but also six romantic tents nestling in the manicured gardens. Big as bungalows, they are elegantly designed with beautiful block printing and perfectly marry outdoor living with comfort. Intimate, with no traffic noise—a rarity in India—and with pastoral views as far as the eye can see, Ramathra Fort is a sanctuary in an otherwise untamed, natural landscape.

As a wildlife enthusiast, Ravi offers guests escorted tours to bird-watch in the local area, where grey partridge, night jays, hawks, doves, peacocks, pelican, kingfisher and cranes can all be found. Night safaris and excellent, unobtrusive village walking tours are also on the agenda. A sunset boating trip with Ravi, when we catch cat fish for our supper, gets me in the mood for my next destination—Chhatra Sagar, a luxury camp well known for its inspiring lakeside views.

After a bone-jarring journey past women in neon-coloured saris, hordes of cattle and enough photo opportunities to last a lifetime, I arrive at a 100-year-old dam, the centrepiece of the camp, which is alive with birdsong. Around it, 11 guest tents curve in a crescent shape, while two others lie imperially positioned high up on the hill. Tent-making is an ancient Rajasthani skill, so it is fitting that block printing and indigenous craft prevail here—inside, as well as out.

Flicking through a history book that evening, while eating an organic supper created with ingredients from the on-site farm, I read of Flora Annie Steel, co-author of *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, who wrote in 1888: “The first axiom for camp is not to do