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RAAS, Jodhpur

RAAS bills itself as Jodhpur's first boutique hotel, but that doesn't even begin to do it justice. The bedrooms are hip and the bathrooms sleek. At RAAS's main selling point is its stunning location, smack in the middle of Jodhpur's ancient walled city, close to the Clock Tower, and with amazing views of mighty Mehrangarh Fort, the best-preserved fort in India (a trick of perspective makes it seem as though you could reach out and touch it). The hotel itself is a combination of new and old: some rooms are in the ruins of the original haveli,

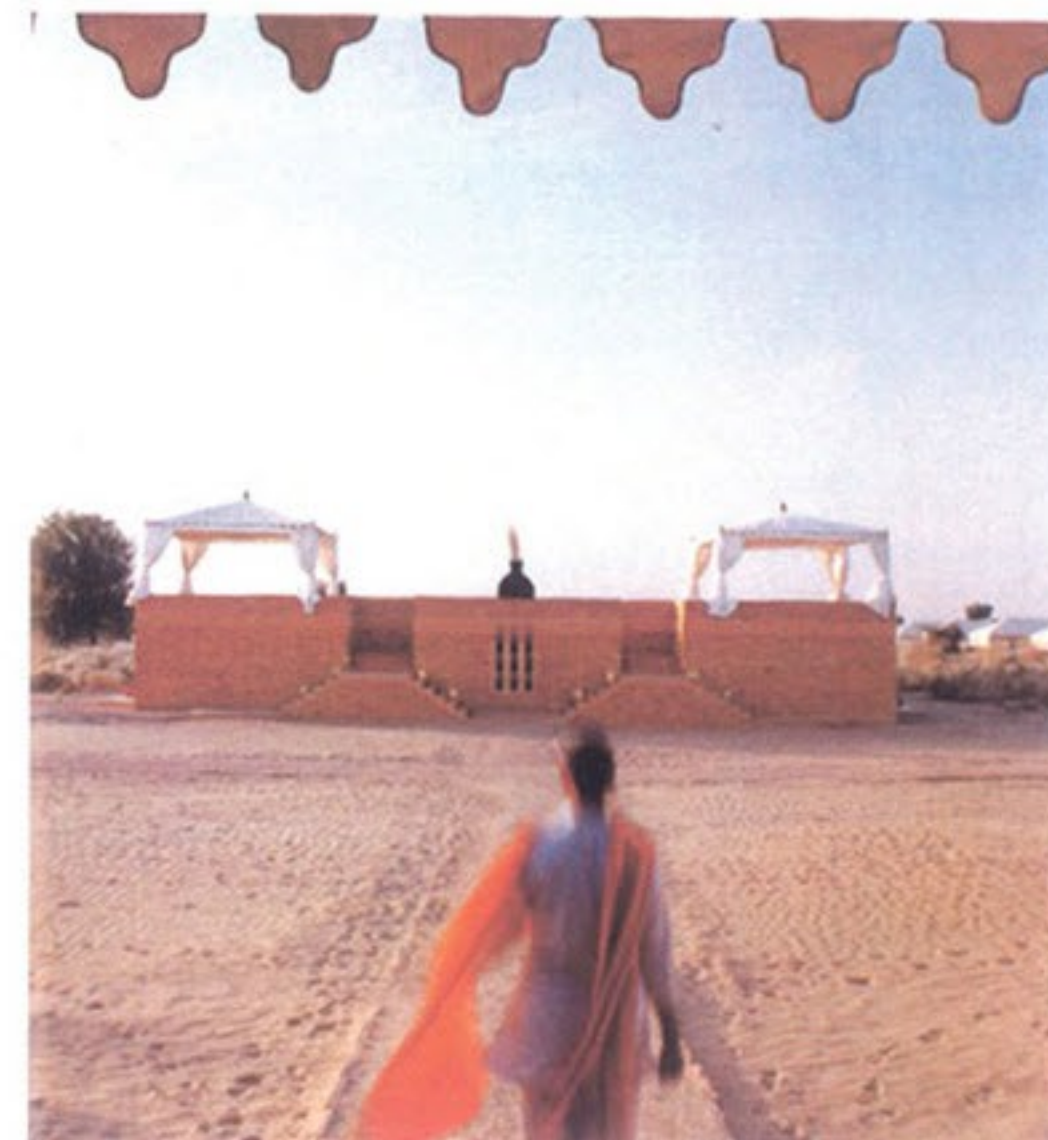
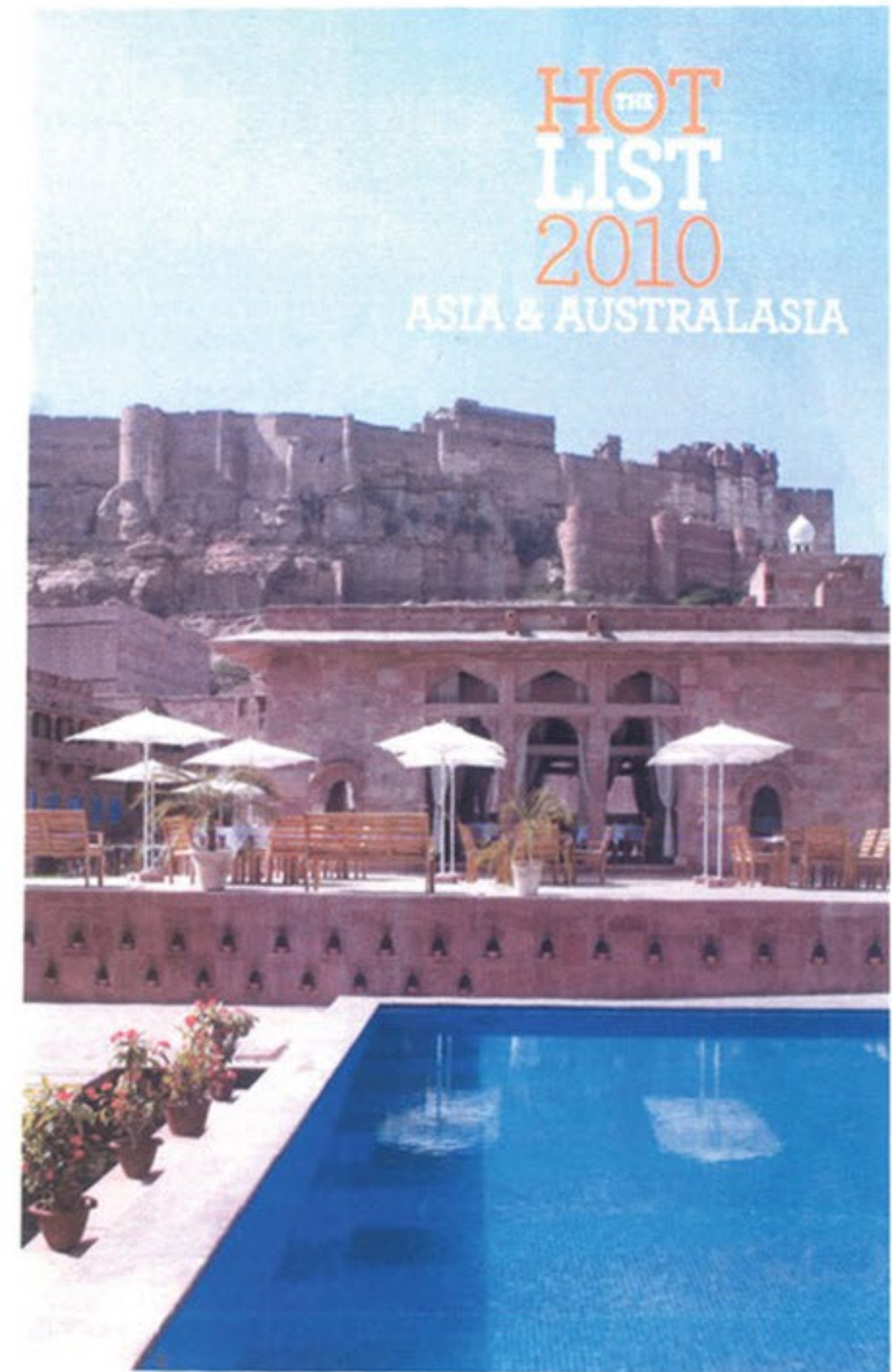


now restored, while others are in entirely new buildings, cleverly constructed from the local rose stone so that, although modern, they do not clash. In a central courtyard is the hotel swimming pool and two restaurants. There is also a small spa. Unlike most of Jodhpur's smart hotels, RAAS manages to be both stylish and soothing without feeling the need to remove itself from city life altogether. The call to prayer from a nearby minaret punctuates your stay atmospherically, and you only have to step outside the hotel's majestic gates to find yourself on a crowded street, full of motorcycle rickshaws, cows and puri sellers. It's a truly seductive combination.

WHEN TO GO October to March: daytime temperatures hover around 25°C, but early mornings are still cool enough to take a walk up to Mehrangarh Fort.

ROOM TO BOOK Take your pick. Only four suites don't have a stunning view of the fort, and they compensate for this deprivation with private gardens and haveli views. 00 91 291 263 6455; www.raasjodhpur.com. Doubles from Rs15,000 (about £220)

Left and right, a public lounge area, and pool and restaurant terrace at RAAS, Jodhpur, with Mehrangarh Fort in the background. Below, The Serai in the desert outside Jaisalmer. Opposite, dining at The Peninsula Shanghai



THE SERAI, Rajasthan

The Serai is a camp of 21 tents set in 30 acres of Thar desert, half an hour's drive from medieval Jaisalmer, Asia's oldest inhabited fort city. The harsh quietude of the desert after the hustle of Jaisalmer is a balm to the soul: the night skies, the stars twinkling like diamonds on velvet, has to be seen to be believed. The Serai brings a new level of luxury to this part of western Rajasthan. Its grand, decadent tents, decorated with campaign-style furniture, durries and throws for chilly nights, all have both a sitting room and a private terrace, and almost hilariously vast bathrooms. The camp has a stunning pool, inspired by a traditional Indian step well, a spa and an exquisite (and discreet) boutique. Meals – either traditional Rajasthani or Western – are taken in a dining tent or served picnic-style, by a fire out in the scrub. The overall effect is like something out of a dream: romantic and completely magical, especially at night, when your path to bed is lit by hundreds of torches and candles and, having taken delivery of your hot-water bottle, you drift off to sleep to the eerie cries of the desert wildlife.

WHEN TO GO Late autumn, when the days will be gloriously warm, but the nights chilly: wrap up in one of The Serai's cashmere blankets and enjoy a gin and tonic by the fire.

ROOM TO BOOK One of the six Luxury Tented Suites, each with a private walled garden and sunken hot tub. 00 91 11 2374 3194; www.the-serai.com. Tents from Rs25,000 (about £360)