“60 New Hotels We’re Loving Right Now.”
Suján luxury hotels

CONDE NAST USA-HOT LIST DESIGN STARS

USA, May 2015

Suján luxury hotels

Kashaulas, are sixth-generation jewellers, most fa-
rous, and most captivating jewelry store. The word
ative, though, may be underselling what the Gem
Palace is in on the second floor of the mustard-colored
boulevard it occupies in the center of old Jaipur; you’ll
find its workshop, where dozens of craftsmen sit
cross-legged on the floor of their stations, polishing,
cutting, and soldering. Of the many unforgettable
moments you’ll find here, one is realizing that these
kinds of cloudy, aligre-colored rock as large as or-
cher eggs are in fact rare emeralds. Upstairs, you’ll
also find Munmun: The Gem Palace, the glittering
atelier of the late Munna Kasaula. Munna was one
of the Gem Palace’s co-owners and was responsible
for some of its most inventive, opulent designs. To-
day, his charming son, Siddharth, continues his leg-
acy. (Atelier visits are by invitation only, but Victoria
and Bertie Dyer of the Jaipure-based India Bear can
get you in.) Downstairs, you’ll find more-affordable
(though still fabulous) pieces: rose-cut diamond studs,
silver tribal bangles, semi-precious stone rings.

Jaipur is blissfully easy to navigate (no Mumbai-
lke traffic here), which means it’s only a ten-minute
drive to Jaipur Modern for lunch. Like the waves on
offer—over-saturated indigo coffees, women’s
floppy seances in sherbet-colored loons—the ad-
joining restaurant, The Kitchen, takes ancient tech-
niques and remasters them into something new. The
zigzagged black-and-white marble tabletops were
made in neighboring Agra famous for its marble-
work; over the local craftsmen built a little abode
called the Taj Mahal, and the walls are covered
with a mosaic of bricks in sizes of wood. This is one
of the few places in Jaipur where you can have
a fresh salad, so order some greens and finish
with the house-made mango sorbet.

You have two more stops today. The first, Teatro
Dhura, is run by a group of young friends and calls
itself a concept shop—a term so indeliberately ap-
plied that it’s lost any cachet it once had. But at
Dhura, there really is a concept to gather in one
place the clothes, jewelry, accessories, and house-
wares from some of the country’s emerging de-
signers. The things to buy here are the lightest
weight cotton pants and blouses, made from fabrics
printed with traditional motifs but cut in contem-
porary, slightly fashion-forward patterns. After
this, head off to Trunks Company, which is located
in an industrial part of town, on the second floor
of a dingy building that offers no clue as to what’s
inside: a moodily lit, windowless room in which
various dramatically backlit trunks are arranged
like mezzopin. The trunks, crafted locally of Ital-
ian leather and lined in brilliant-blue suede, can be
made in practically any dimensions you choose, to
store whatever you feel is most in need of protec-
tion—to be watched, jewelry, or curios.

By this time, you’ll be ready for a drink (jaipur
is actually fairly temperate from November through
March, but be aware of the sun: there’s very little
tree cover here, and it’s easier to overheat than the
temperature might lead you to assume). For such
a small city (for India, that is), Jaipur has more
than its share of excellent and memorable hotels.
In town, there’s Samode Haveli, a restored nine-
teenth-century noblemen’s house whose charm
lies in its slightly faded elegance, as well as the Taj
Ram Bagh Palace, located in what was the resi-
dence of the final Maharaja of Jaipur, who died in
1970. Here, a Raj-era India lives on, from the Pokh Bar
(adorned with trophies and polo memorabilia) to
the wisteria-shaded lawn that seems to call out for a game
of croquet. Or you can drive 15 minutes out of town to
the Oberoi Rajvilas, a Mogul-inspired dream com-
plete with riveting pools, flowering trees, and a
lobby covered with a king’s raison of marble.

I’ve stayed in all of these hotels, and they’re
all wonderful. But my latest obsession is the just-
opened Sujan Rajmahal. Before it was converted
into a hotel in the 1920s, the eighteenth-century
Rajmahal was the Jaipur royal family’s palaisosome,
place for visiting dignitaries and friends to stay
(Jackie Kennedy, Lord Mountbatten, and Queen
Elizabeth among them). A just-completed reno-
vation has transformed the structure—which had
been left to languish for years—into a chic 20-room
hotel with a carved-marble staircase, seventeen-
upholstered sofas and chairs in colors like bottle
green and kingfisher blue, and, best of all, 40
different, wildly colorful wallpapers. And if you book
the Maharani’s Apartment—which has its own
pool and is decorated with the last Maharani’s pe-
ters 1930s Art Deco furniture—you’ll finally get
to sleep like a royal. How could you possibly resist?

But 2! Today, you’ll continue your tour through
Jaipur’s shops, which, different as they are, share
a single, essential quality—an embrace of the new
(be it in style or technique) that still manages to cel-
lbrate the pleasures and signs of the traditional.

This aesthetic is on particularly lovely display at
Satyana, a store on the ground floor of the City Palace
class, which houses both an excellent museum
containing the royal family’s collections of paint-
ings, weavings, and textiles, as well as a sepa-
rate wing, the royal family’s home. At Satyana, you’ll
find shawls in cotton so fine you can see through
them, all block printed in Mogul designs (paisleys,
tulips) in red gold or silver leaf, a combination
at once humble and deeply luxurious.

Anyone who’s been to India knows that it’s impo-
ssible to leave the country without being con-
verted into a dedicated collector of scarves and
shawls (not quite the same as a dedicated wearer
of scarves and shawls, mind you). At Andraah,
which is run by three brothers from Kashipur,
you’ll find luxurious scarves and shawls gently
(although bedsheets), all woven from the softest cashmere
on the market. They’re pricey—embroidered pieces can run into the thousands—but top quality.

After lunch at the outdoor Verandah restaurant at the Taj Rambagh Palace (be sure to order the ginger lemonade, which is both bitter and sweet, it’s a very brief drive to yet another former palace turned hotel, the twentieth-century Narain Niwas. You, however, are here to visit the three boutiques and restaurant housed on the complex’s grounds. Your first stop, Hot Pink, founded by the Pakistani jeweler Marie-Hélène de Taillac, may well be one of the most beautiful shops in the world. Here, in a sunlit, marble-floor space, racks of women’s clothes—dresses in patterned cotton lawn, and silk tunics in candy-bright hues, most of them by Indian or French designers—are arranged by color; an automobile is stocked with embroidered silk pillows and throws. Then go right next door—just past the large, water-filled stone dish, its surface filled with fuchsia rose petals—to Anshika. There are clothes here as well (mostly tunics and Kurtis), but the things to covet are the fabulous Thakur furniture: wooden tables and chests of drawers slathered with a layer of plaster of paris and decorated with chips of ivory in crisp geometric designs. There’s also a good selection of equestrian accessories—polo has been a big deal in Jaipur (and across Rajasthan) since the time of the British Raj. Finally, stroll around the corner to Lili. One might see Lili—founded by a French interior and fashion designer named Thierry Journaux, a member of the city’s significant European expat community, who worked with both Thierry Mugler and Andrée Putman—as a celebration of all things color: The women’s shop is dominated by a raspberry-pink silk sofa, the men’s, acid green and marigold-yellow silk lanterns shaped like neoclassical vases. Journaux has designed all of these, along with the textiles (couches, bedding, and fabric by the meter) and clothes (lightweight silk dresses for women, button-downs for men), each of which is made locally.

After such athletic shopping, you’ll need what comes next: a drink and dinner at Bar Palladio. This peacock-blue restaurant (which doubles as a bar and triples as a performance space) is a sumptuous, gorgesously realized fantasy whose tented ceilings and custom-printed floral banquettes evoke Mughal-era splendor, and whose languorous, lounge-all-day tamer pays homage to the previous European-era cafés (and indeed, the restaurant’s Swiss-Italian owner, Barbara Holzl, used to work for Villa Cipriani before she moved to Jaipur a decade ago to open an embroidery factory). But more than just a fantastical picturesque place to have a Pimm’s Cup (made here with mango and pineapple) and a decent fisticuff of Jaffa, it’s also a sort of glamorous public living room, a place where locals, expats, and visitors can smoke and drink the afternoon (and evening) away. It’s kind of restaurant that might inspire your own fantasy of moving to Jaipur—or, at the very least, of coming back, again and again.

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