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PALACE TO JUNGLE: RAJASTHAN LUXE MULTIPLE

Written by Meher Varma

Palace to Jungle: Rajasthan Luxe Multiple

Three Nights at Two of Sujan Group's Properties



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Day 1: Royal for a Day, Sujan's Raj Mahal

This month, the gates to Raj Mahal Palace – now a much-anticipated boutique hotel – quietly opened to a close circle of corporates and family friends.

The opulence of the palace – first featured in the glossy pages of Hello! Magazine – is felt within minutes of arriving at its doorstep. Before you can blink, you are relieved of your luggage as the attentive staff offers to take care of your immediate needs, whether they be quenching your thirst with champagne or putting your curiosity to rest with a full blown tour of the new property. We pick both, and this heady mix is advisable; the first few steps of the tour will land you in the overwhelming Darbar Hall that has you thinking you're staying at a museum.



Here – in a room that could do with a little more natural light – the pride and joy of Jaipur's royal family, and by extension, pre-colonial and British India is on display: trophies, mementos from polo games, and photographs of the Maharani and Maharaja of Jaipur dining with visitors like Jackie Kennedy abound. The artifacts show that Raj Mahal was historically the afternoon chill spot for Jaipur's king and queen, the top choice for their sumptuous alfresco brunches, laid back and private VIP dinners.

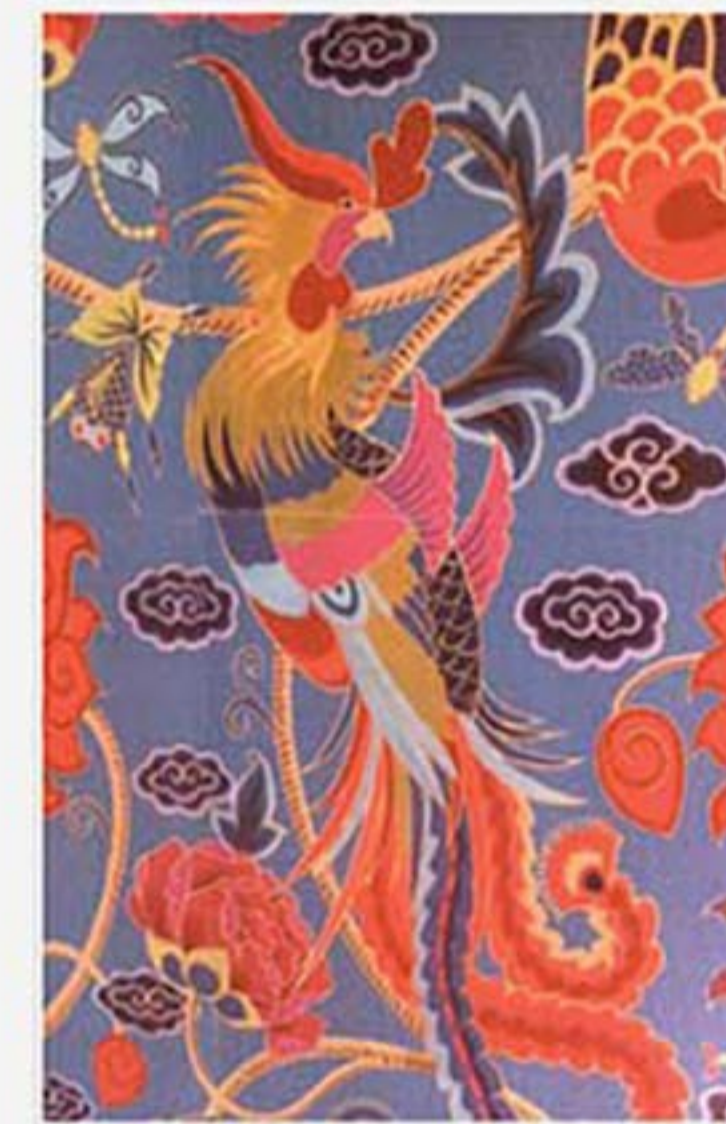


However, whether or not you give in to all your guilty pleasures by Maharanjing it up, or choose to stay in a slightly more humble suite, the food and service at Rajmahal is flawless. Expect it all: round cakes of silky butter in silver cases, duck confit at the snap of your fingers, access to a private Jacuzzi, or whatever it is you need. And when you want a break from your fantasies of being an exiled monarch, the hectic city of Jaipur bustles outside.

But luckily, this in-your-face history lesson is short-lived. Stepping out into the immaculately manicured garden is an expanse of never-ending green, a perfect cricket field. With the baby-pink colored palace visible against a pastel blue sky – or later, a star-filled velvet night – a lighter side of royalty comes alive, freshened up by the view of a sparkling pool in the distance.

Back inside the palace is where the work really is, and a tour of the ten private suites – each with a large private bathroom and balcony – is intoxicating. It is here, in the intricate wallpaper, the shimmer of the chandeliers, and the riot of color, that interior decorator Adil Ahmad's genius comes alive. With a carte blanche from the Princess to do as he pleased with her family home, Ahmad has created a wonder.

During a leisurely half an hour stroll through the palace, you learn how art deco can blend with Indian craftsmanship, and how restoration intersects with hospitality. And while some suites – like the Mt. Batten – give a feeling of family, relaxation and vacation, others, like the iconic Maharani suite – a room as large as a tennis court – hits notes of kitsch, royalty, courtesan, and naughtiness, all at once. Never to be forgotten is the fan-shaped headboard that comes with the bluish red bed, propped up against suggestive floral wallpaper. Also, if that wasn't enough, small, plush bedroom slippers lie on a mini step, inviting you to be tucked in to the soft sheets, and dream of a world that was probably never yours, but now could easily be (well, at an impressive price tag).



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In an easy three and a half hours, you are transported from Raj Mahal's decadent palace to the sepia-toned landscape of a real Rajasthan jungle. The continuities between that Rajasthan and this one are provided to you by the Sujan Group's brilliantly crafted hospitality. Capturing the diversity of Rajasthan, a trip to Sher Bagh from the Palace shows you that luxury is multiple, and that you don't necessarily need a chandelier in your room to feel like you were born under the best star possible. Instead, when you're at Sherbagh lounging on a leather couch with a tiger printed throw, look above you at the campfire-mirrored constellations, and give in to your wild side.



Additional Info:

- Most guests stay about two nights.
- Rooms start at approximately Rs. 30,000 a night
- Dress Code: although it may seem like you have to lounge in chiffon saris and emeralds, smart casual is just fine.

Sujan's Sher Bagh

Day 2+3: A Drive to the Wild Side



Another brainchild of Jaisal and Anjali Singh (read about the Seral too: <http://www.aswglobalist.com/journey/the-seral/>), Sher Bagh is a trusted destination amongst both the jet-set and those who have the forest in their blood. Despite not belonging in either of these categories, we felt instantly at home upon arrival and engaged by the Singhs' legacy of wildlife conservation.

At Sherbagh, the hierarchy between man and beast is beautifully unsettled. Every nook and corner of this property will remind you that nature rules, and that you are in tiger territory. Whether in the details of the clothes at the boutique shop or the tiger eyes mural that presides over you while you dine, you feel comfortably captive in the land of animal.

Tiger-chic is not only about aesthetics. Probe Hajra – the fearless manger at Sherbagh – when you're gathered around the campfire at dinner to ask just who roams this site. But don't let these stories make you panic; the staff at Sherbagh can interpret natural sounds from miles away, have night vision, and can warm your roti over the campfire while telling a story and sipping a beer. So, sit back, relax and have a tigertini (a lethal cocktail that goes down very easily).



While Sherbagh's uber luxurious tents, perfect library bar, and small but lush pool may make you want to laze endlessly, even day-old guests will urge you to go try your luck at what every man is in the game for: a glimpse of the tiger, of course.

Gypsy rides into the jungle can be set up with a few hours of notice (at Rs. 4,000/head). Many tourists do this ride multiple times, and some just once – this variation usually depends on whether "they see or don't see" one of the 40 plus tigers that roam freely. In fact, a glimpse into the hotel's comment book exemplifies the personal worth guests feel in relation to these sightings: "We were lucky! Four tigers! Successful Trip," or "No Tigers L but Great Stay."

Safaris and the National Park



But if you can get past judging your own life's worth through these sightings, the beauty of the Rest of the Jungle is precious. We were fortunate enough to have a pair of hawk-eyed bird watchers on our jeep that pointed us to rare, exotic species of birds while a knowledgeable naturalist sweetly stopped the vehicle to photograph a model-esque spotted deer. "Bar snacks for the tiger," he joked, explaining their large numbers and cautious movements.

Everything Else

If you're not yet enticed, allow me to add that the food at Sherbagh – especially for a campsite – is also extraordinary. The eggs at breakfast are organic, the salad leaves at lunch come from the property's kitchen garden, and the meats at dinner are succulent. At high tea, lovely muffins and cakes are served with steaming hot cups of chai – true perfection if you are returning from a three-hour game drive. (Note: lunch is usually continental and dinner Indian, but the staff is happy to accommodate all your dietary requests and preferences).



In short, when it comes to hospitality, and especially luxury hospitality with a cause, Sherbagh's nailed it.

Added Notes:

– While the average tourist here is in their 40s or 50s, do not be fooled: Rihanna, Katy Perry and Snoop Dog were just chilling around this campfire not so long ago.

•Tents are approximately Rs. 30,000/night (all meals included)