Regal Jaipur in India is the real star of Judi Dench’s new film

Newly released The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel is every bit as stylish as the first film, with Judi Dench, Bill Nighy, Maggie Smith and Richard Gere centre stage.

But India plays its supporting role with quiet charm and grace. Painted elephants, marble palaces, magnificent forts, vanishing cows, pale pink temples and flickering candles tell of the noise, smells and rich colours of this flamboyant country.

Fitted in Rajasthan, the film is based in its capital, Jaipur. But ask any resident of the city about the film and you’ll be met with a blank stare.

Our wonderful guide, Rajendra, was aware of it only because a client had pointed out the apparently very famous Judi Dench in the Rambagh Palace Hotel. Hollywood met Bollywood still rules the screens here.

While it might be too late to see Richard Gere in the crowded alleys of the bazaar, you will spot plenty of other desirable items. Jaipur is a shopper’s paradise, and Indians flock here for silk and the region’s hand-made, block-printed cottons. This is also considered the place to come for jewels. The mines are not mined here, but out, polished and set better than anywhere else.

Visit the iconic jeweller of Jaipur.

Shimmering splendour: Like Judi Dench, you’ll be captivated by beautiful Jaipur.

by Mary Lussiana

The Gait Palace, one-time court jewellers to the Mughal emperors and run by the Kathwada family since 1852. Here are rich diamond earrings, carved rings with floral motifs and moonstone necklaces. You can watch them being worked on in their basement workshop using skills that have been passed down through the generations.

For inexpensive sparkles, head to Bangle Lane (Manthan ki Rasta) in the old city, where you can choose from a multitude of colourful bangles for a handful of rupees. Made brilliantly produced by the female the jewel, they are embedded with mirror pieces, stones, beads or painted.

For fashion, Hot Pink is the most sophisticated venue, with high-collared men’s waistcoats and meenakari in all hues, as well as kahans and shawls.

The best block-printed fabrics, such that dates back to the 1700s, are at Riddhi Siddhi, where the cloth is spilled from floor to ceiling. Wander, too, through the spice market, past push wallahs filling bowl leaves and the flower market, where scented roses, fragrant jasmine and meenakari are made into garlands to offer to your favourite deities. The Pink City is so-called for its coloured walls, intended to replicate Indian sunstone, a more noble material than the lime and mortar of which the buildings are actually made. With its city gates and ornamental walls, it makes for a striking sight.

There are iconic landmarks, such as the five-storey, 18th-century Palace of the Winds, with its latticed screen facade allowing street life to be viewed without being judged inside.

Before 1727, when Sawai Jai Singh II created Jaipur, the City of Victory, neighbouring Amber, was the capital.

The magnificent Amber Fort, to which you can ride on an elephant, offers panoramic views over Maota Lake and the ornamental gardens that seem to float within.

TRAVEL FACTS
Ahonoshi & Kent (01242 851 868, abereconbrikenaint.co.uk) offers three nights’ B&B in Jaipur at the Rajmahal Palace with city tour, trip to the Amber Fort, transfers and flights via Heathrow with Finnair from £1,775 pp, based on two sharing a double room.

THE BEST EXOTIC CITY