

“You’ll find it easy to become accustomed to the Maharajas’ world in such splendid surroundings.”

# THE INDEPENDENT TRAVELLER

TRAVEL SECTION OF THE YEAR 26.03.15



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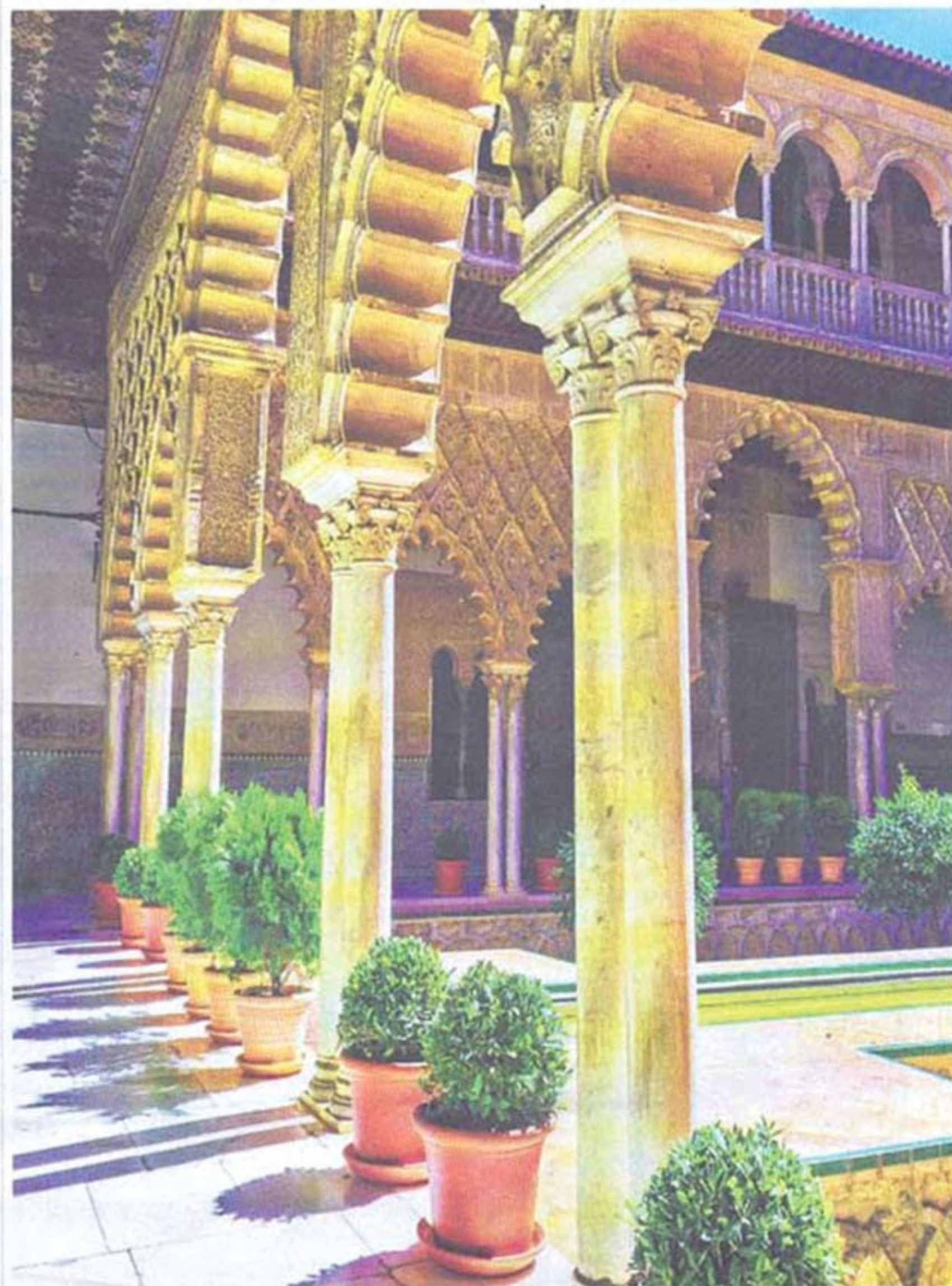
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## ROOM SERVICE SUJAN RAJMAHAL PALACE, INDIA

### In the pink with the Maharajas of Jaipur

Reviewed by Mary Lussiana

While Jaipur's Pearl Palace Heritage might be in the spotlight at the moment (it was one of the filming locations for *The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*), it is the city's Rajmahal Palace hotel that is on travellers' lips. Last month, a new chapter of its life began, as Rajasthanis clad in white starched jackets and pale pink turbans swung open the doors to reveal its entirely refurbished interiors by acclaimed designer Adil Ahmad.

The palace has had many lives since it was built in 1729 by the Maharaja of Jaipur as a garden retreat for his wife, on what was then the outskirts of the Pink City. In 1821, it became the official home of the British Resident Political Officer and continued as a British residency right up until Indian Independence in 1947.

In 1958, Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II – renowned for his prowess on the polo field and his beautiful third wife, Gayatri Devi – decided to use Rajmahal Palace as their private home, away from their formal residence, City Palace. Here, they entertained friends from the Queen and Prince Philip to Jackie Kennedy and Lee Radziwill. Now, the hotel's 15 suites and rooms are named after illustrious guests of the past.

Enter the small palace – still owned by the royal family of Jaipur – and music and light flow towards you through open rooms. Fresh flowers decorate the piano in the hall, from where the original marble staircase curves up to a corridor of rooms and suites. Bespoke wallpaper depicts polo ponies and peacock arches, or an element from the royal crest, such as the sun, which is also etched on the glass doors to the bathrooms.

Outside, an Art Deco pool is surrounded by tranquil gardens and a series of apartments – all



Royal treatment: one of the opulent dining rooms

right in the heart of the bustling Rajasthan capital.

As the sun goes down, guests can sip sour lassi on the lawns, or a pineapple and cardamom martini in the Polo Bar, then head indoors to the Orient Occident dining room to indulge in a Jaipur thali – an array of local delicacies, the highlight of which is the *jungle maas* (tender mutton cooked with red chillies and garlic). You'll find it easy to become accustomed to the maharajas' world in such splendid surroundings.

#### Location

Situated in the old town, Rajmahal Palace is a few minutes' walk from Jaipur's crenellated wall with its seven gates. Also within the wall are the Hawa Mahal (Palace of Winds) and City Palace, the Govind Dev temple and bustling bazaars. All these are within walking distance, or if it's too hot, jump into a motor-rickshaw.

The airport is half an hour's drive away, the train station five minutes'. Make sure to visit the fortified Amer Palace, which looms over a lake from its hilltop vantage point 10km from the city.

#### Comfort

Even in the city's oldest palace, technology is

#### TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

**Sujan Rajmahal Palace**  
Sadar Patel Marg, Jaipur, Rajasthan (00 91 141 414 3000; sujanluxury.com)

Rooms ●●●●●  
Value ●●●●●  
Service ●●●●●

Double rooms start at £16,000 (£167), including breakfast. Abercrombie & Kent offers three nights' B&B at the Rajmahal Palace from £1,775pp, including flights from London and sightseeing (01242 854 483; abercrombiekent.co.uk).

21st-century, with free wi-fi over the hotel and noteworthy service at every turn, including free laundry. Staff are mainly from the region, many having worked previously at one of the other Sujan properties – a highly polished group of safari camps within Rajasthan.

There are four categories of room in the initial 15, which will become 30 in the future. The his-and-hers Royal Apartments are splendidly opulent, with velvet armchairs, patterned sofas and silk rugs on marble floors; the Maharani has two bedrooms; the Maharani has a plunge pool. Both have private dining rooms, separate entrances and a chauffeur and butler on call 24 hours.

Royal suites – the Mountbatten, the Queen Elizabeth II and the Kennedy – vary in size, with the biggest, the Queen Elizabeth II (built for HM's state visit in 1961), consisting of two double bedrooms and bathrooms.

There are four further Palace Suites with generous bedrooms incorporating sitting areas, and five Palace Rooms which, while the smallest category, are palatial by any standard. Bathrooms mix tiles and marble and are enhanced by delicious rose and jasmine-scented organic toiletries in locally made marble flasks.

## MAKE ME AN OFFER A SPANISH CITY BREAK

**One holiday, three ways.** We targeted three companies to ask for their best offer on a Spanish city break in May: one budget (Barcelona), one food-focused (Bilbao) and one beach (Mallorca). Prices are per person, based on two travelling together.



**Budget £200 easyJet holidays**  
Includes easyJet flights from Gatwick to Barcelona, departing 15 May, plus two nights' accommodation at the three-star Condado hotel, just off Avenida Diagonal, including breakfast (020 3499 5232; easyjet.com/holidays).



**Food £995 MasterChef Travel**  
Includes BA flights from Heathrow to Bilbao on 16 May, and three nights' B&B at the three-star Hotel Codina. Plus a guided visit to La Brexia market, a cookery class, a pintxos tour, wine tasting and dinner at a Basque restaurant (0207 873 5005; mastercheftravel.co.uk).



**Beach £326 Lastminute.com**  
Includes easyJet flights from Gatwick to Palma de Mallorca on 8 May, plus two nights' room-only accommodation at the five-star Can Cera Hotel. The hotel is located in the heart of the old town, a short walk from the beach (0800 083 6000; lastminute.com).