

On the blue blood trail in the blue city of Jodhpur

Discover the bewitching capital of the Marwars...

Geographically placed in the middle of the J-trilogy, Jodhpur has struggled for elusive attention that its more favoured siblings, Jaipur and Jaisalmer, have lapped up far easily. But the second largest city in Rajasthan is coming into its own as the exotic blue city with a historically invincible fort defining the skyline and ambitious facelift on the agenda. Go back in time, dig into its royal roots. Even if you have only a weekend. Domestic carriers like <u>Indigo</u> will get you there from Delhi in about an hour, so scavenge for the <u>cheapest air tickets</u> this winter and make it happen.

Fabulous fortifications

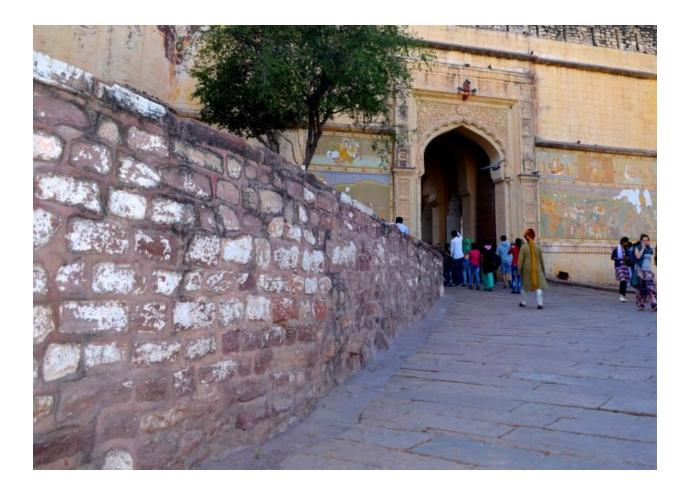
An involuntary 'wow' escapes your lips at first sight of the magnificent structure even as your aircraft approaches the country's largest defence airport. Mehrangarh (Sun Fort) rising 6m to 36m perpendicular is chiselled from that rocky hill it crowns. Believe it or not, it was virtually impregnable even back then. The 5-kilometre long battlements certainly seem to have been 'built by Titans' as Rudyard Kipling described them.



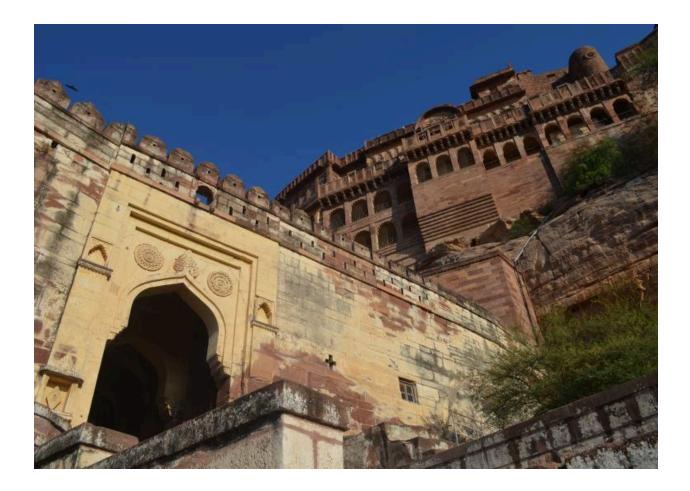
Mehrangarh is a mid-15th century masterstroke of Rao Jodha, who strategically moved the Marwar capital from Mandore. 17 successive generations of Rathores, the largest ruling clan of Rajasthan ruled here over 500 years, expanding the majestic fort beyond its original shape. But the amalgamation of palaces is hardly visible to the untrained eye...so consistent are the architectural styles. Give it a shot.

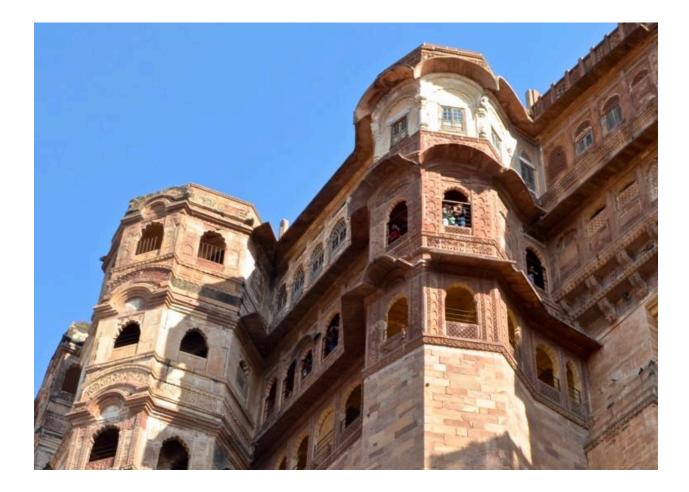


Seven solid gates along a steep cobbled pathway up the fort to exhaust invasive armies, even those riding on elephants. Massive walls that even Tom Cruise in his Ethan Hunt avatar wouldn't be able to scale. And a neck-craning monumental facade that unashamedly proclaims the might of the Rathore imperials.





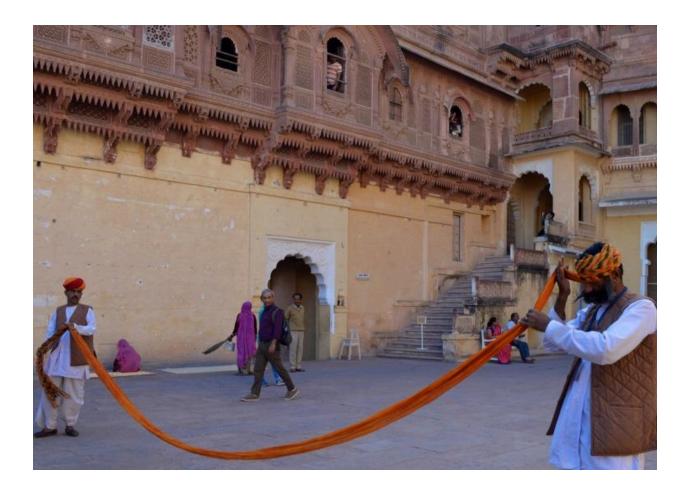


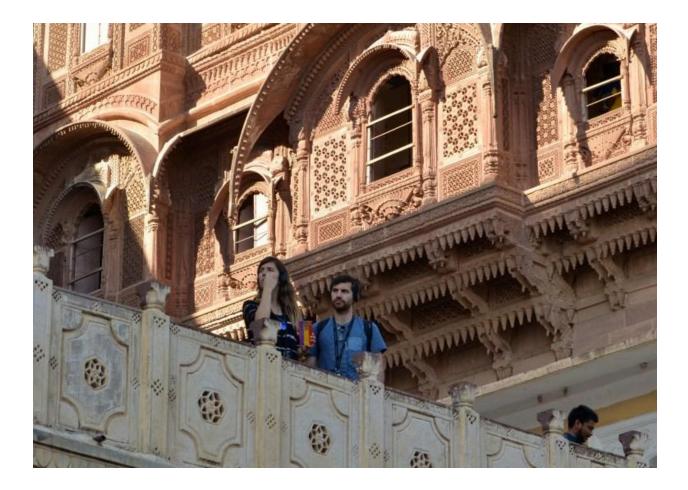




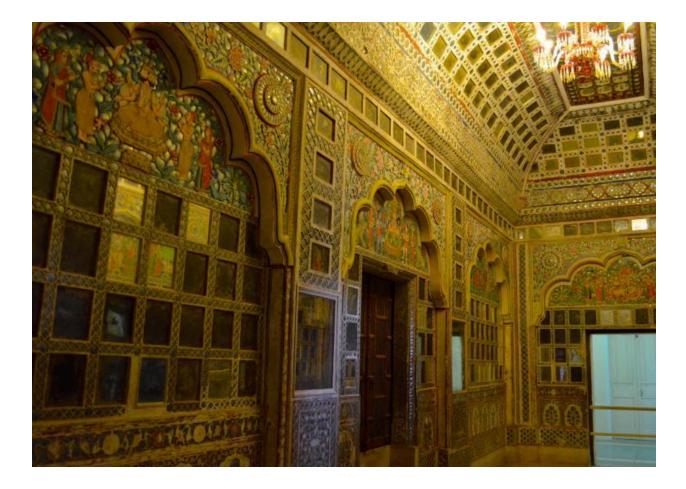


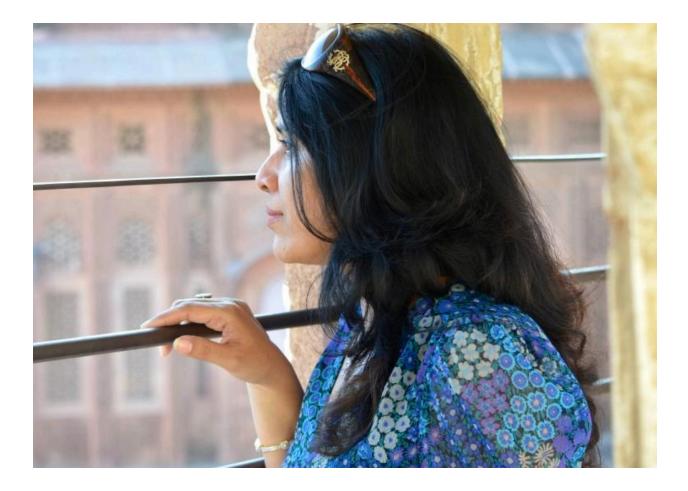
Witness a ceremonial turban-tying. Learnt the nuances of Marwar art. Ogle at the unusual Art Nouveau inspired keyhole staircase. And get dazzled by the palace interiors...ornate carvings, lavish palanquins, glittering mirror work, exquisite gold Usta art and intricate jharokhas.



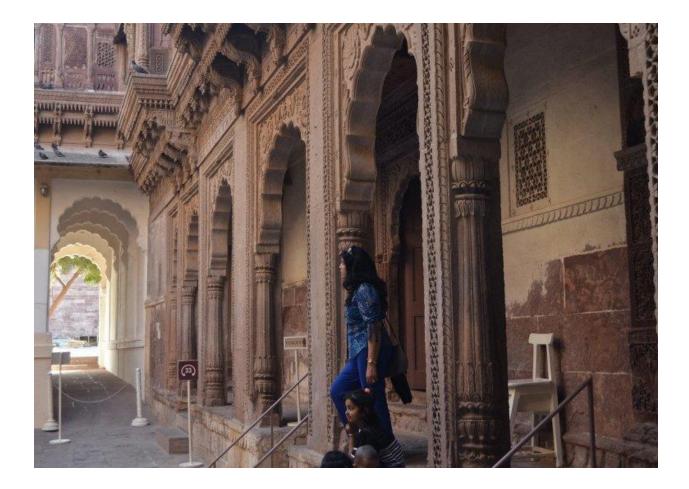




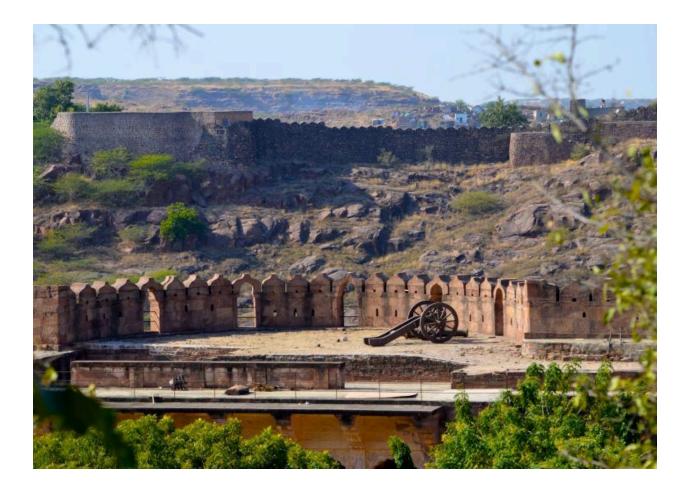


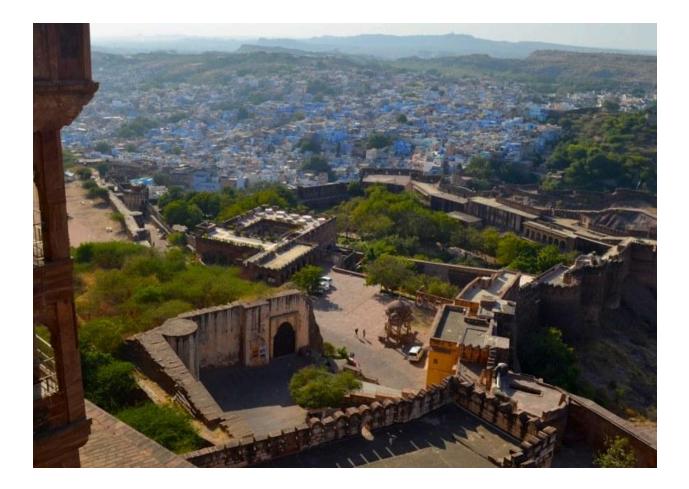


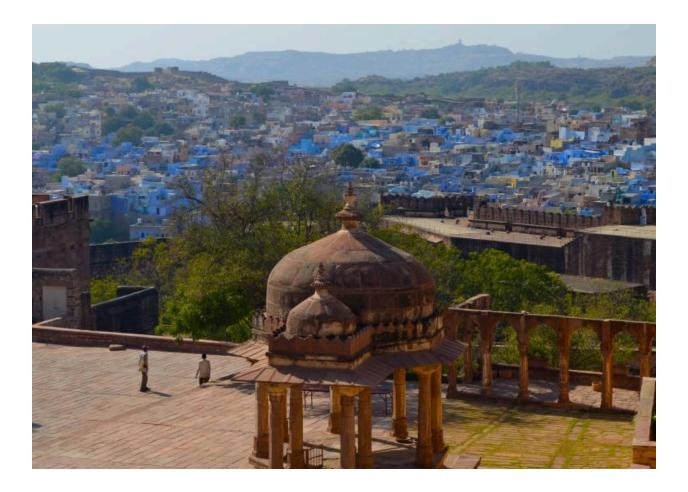


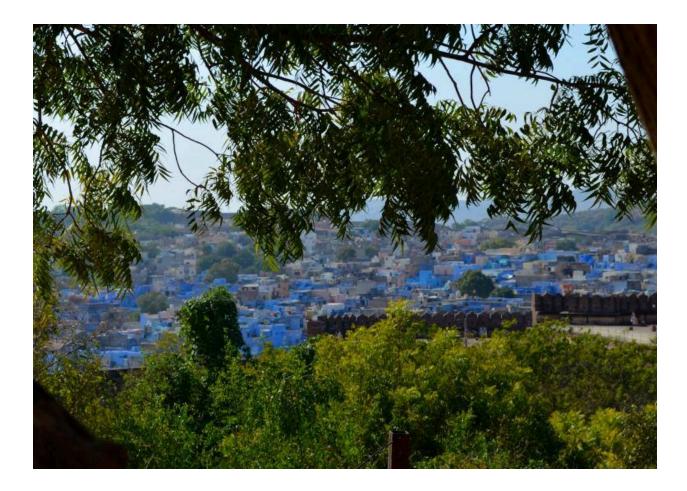


And my absolute favourite: the bird's eye views over the city and the brilliant blue houses sprawled for miles. That's where you're going next.











Brahmapuri blues

The curious cab driver just can't digest it. "Why are you going to Brahmapuri? There's nothing there", he insists. Appraising you sympathetically through the rear mirror. Poor, stubborn tourists...they've been misguided. "The blue houses?" (Still sceptical. Even suspicious). "Do you want me to wait, in case you change your mind?" Smile, thank him and descend onto the congested streets, munching on your oversized Pyaz Kachori. The spicy snack will be your lunch substitute this afternoon.

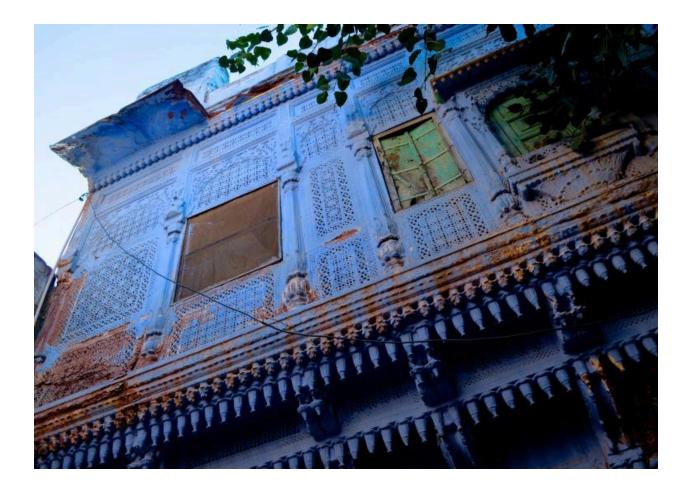
Some locals are still clueless that this iconic Brahmin quarter, forms the most instagrammed image of Jodhpur and, in fact, the very identity of the royal city. So why are some houses in this neighbourhood painted in powder blue with natural indigo dye? Cooling and bug-repelling, thanks to copper salt added to lime wash. Possibly, once affordable only by affluent Brahmins. Theories, all.

Find a local guide to navigate your way. Or like us, just wander into the maze and get lost, looking for ultramarine houses hidden in this poor neighbourhood. Mongrels guard each grimy lane. Silence echoes in the porch of an empty school. Melodious sounds of kirtan emerge from a tiny temple. A woman vehemently shakes her head to reject your photographic advances. Cows block the way. Men gossip lazily. Just walk on in search of more lapis lazuli. And try to remember the way back...its a maze. Without street signs or directions.









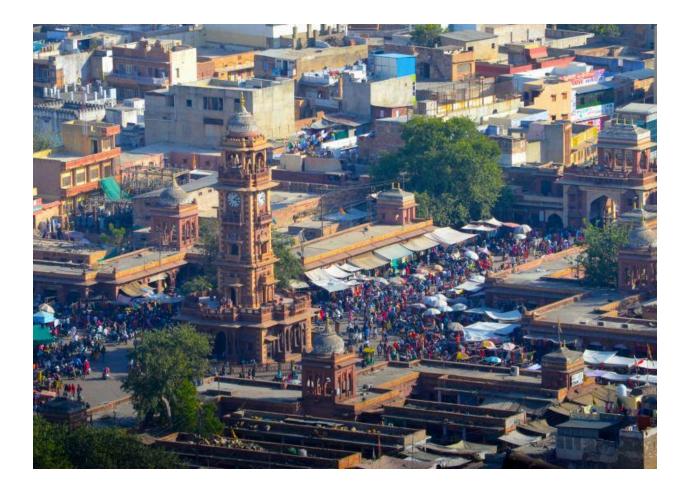


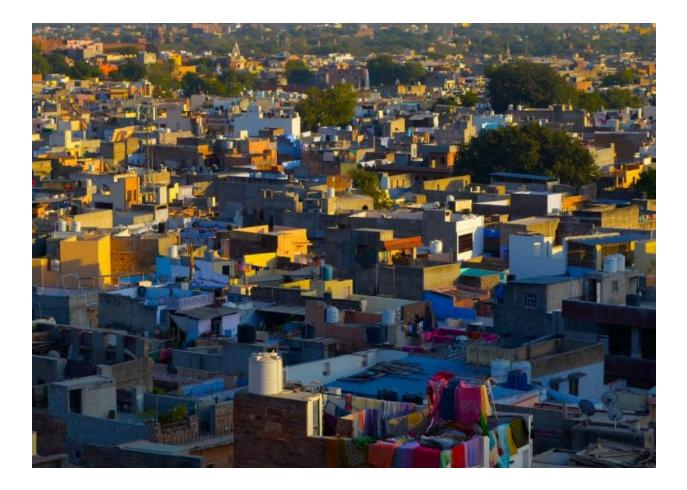




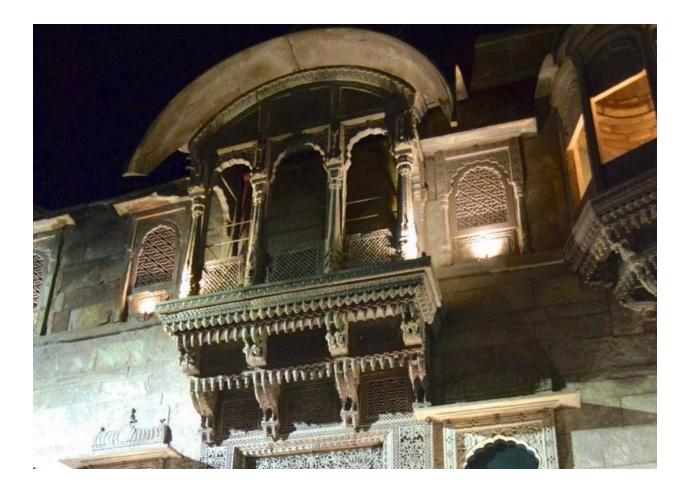
Walled city wonders

Continue the wonderfully aimless drift through the densely packed 2 square kilometre labyrinth of the walled city, enclosed inside six pols (gates), named after the cities they face. A cobbled chowk (square), dominated by a majestic Clock Tower and surrounded by temples, mosques and schools. Bazaars segregated by wares: spices, cloth, jewellery, grains, betel-and-nut, sweets, achar and mirchi. Narrow streets, planned to remain shaded, offering protection from the merciless sun and dry, windy desert. Havelis with elaborate inner courtyards, facades with detailed carving and picturesque jharokas (enclosed balconies), typical of medieval Rajasthan. And dozens of step-wells...water tanks and spaces for social gatherings, even worship.





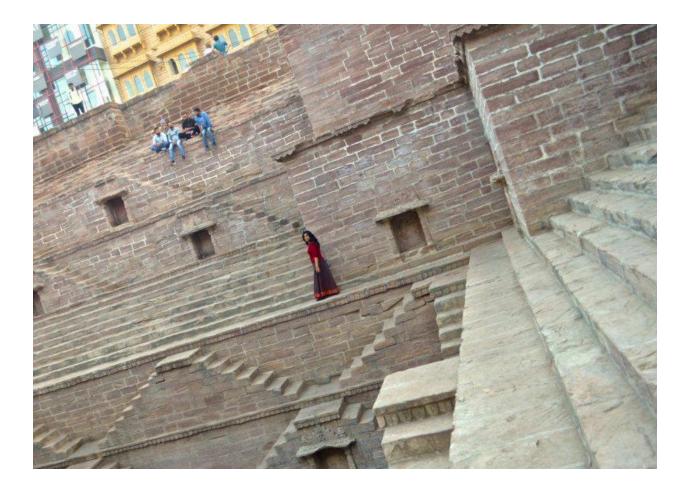




Land at a particularly magnificent one, an 18th-century architectural marvel, Toorji ka Jhalra. 60 feet deep with 400 flight of stairs. Complete with an admirable facelift. A fascinating deep chasm with a parade of carved columns and pavilions. Dizzying. Magical. Zigzagging steps, from one landing to the next, a harmonious repetitive pattern horizontally and vertically on three walls of the structure. It whispers to you. Don't resist. Descend carefully into the depths, till you're at the water surface. Deep inside the ground, where sunlight melts into shadow, hot air becomes cool breeze and din disappears into silence. Young girls giggle frivolously, men chatter boisterously and solo travellers absorb the ambience. Ignore the distractions. Melt into the past.

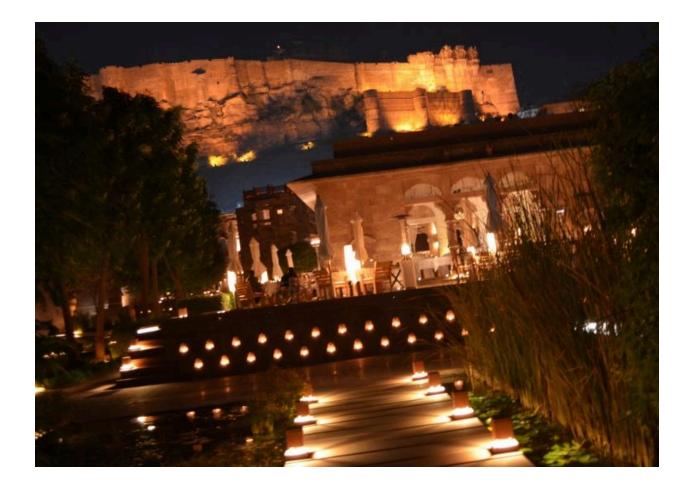








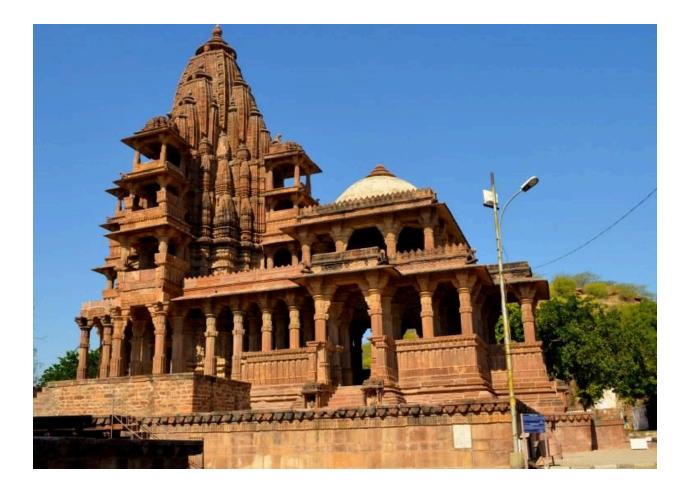
Nearby, snazzy boutiques and a stylish cafe announce modernisation and preservation initiatives. Stay on for a romantic dinner at Raas Haveli next door. Sufi songs from a nearby mosque provide background score and flickering oil lamps illumine the scene demurely. High up in the heavens, Mehrangarh glitters, bathed in soft gold. Dream.

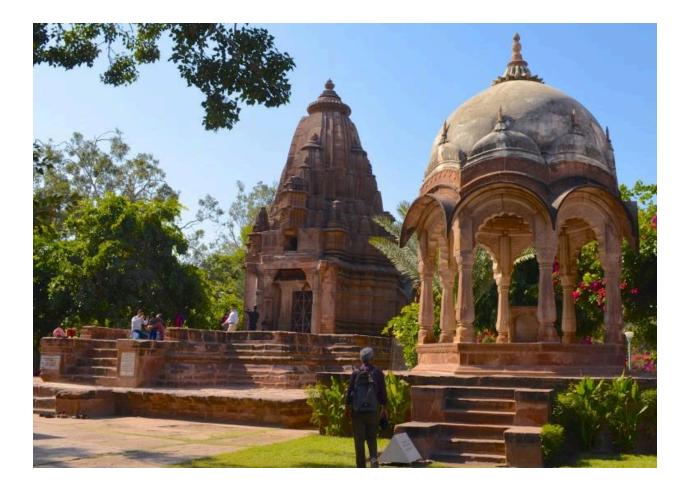


Mystifying memorials

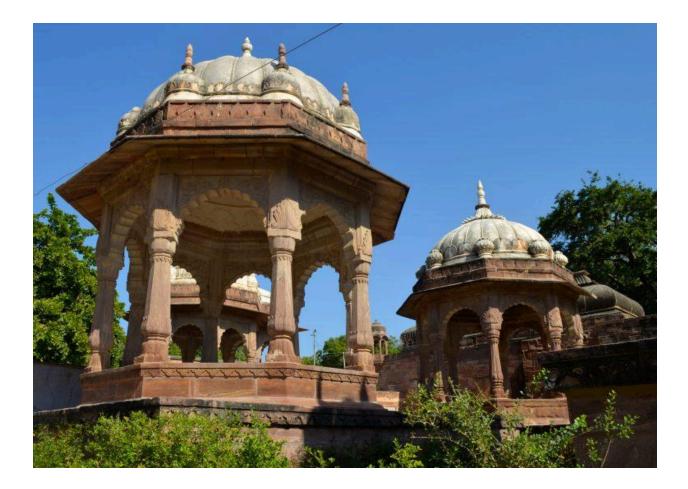
True to age-old Rajasthan tradition, (as in Ancient Greece and some parts of Europe), cenotaphs or empty tombs are built in memory of the departed. The ones for royals are almost works of art. So pay homage to the Marwar sovereigns immortalised at the ancient Mandore gardens. Its a lost city of grand, ornamental red sandstone cenotaphs. Are these memorials or temples, you wonder. There are richly carved domes, pavilions, pillars and spires. You almost expect to see priests and brass bells in the two enormous ones in honour of Maharaja Ajit Singh and Maharaja Jaswant Singh. Climb the steps bare-foot and explore the elaborate interiors. Bow down to the reverence in the atmosphere.

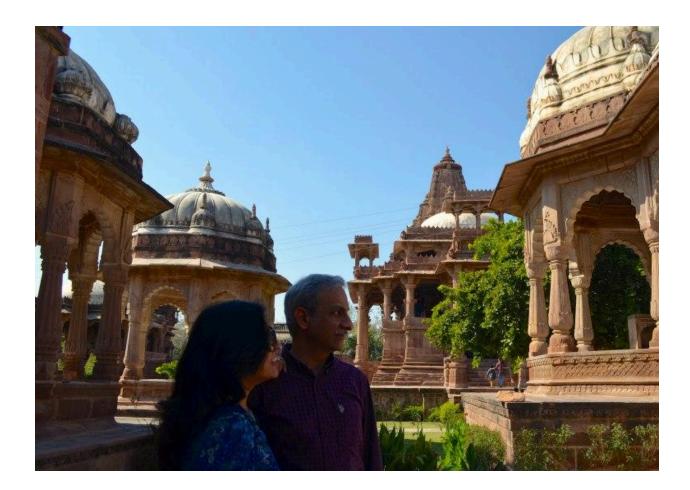








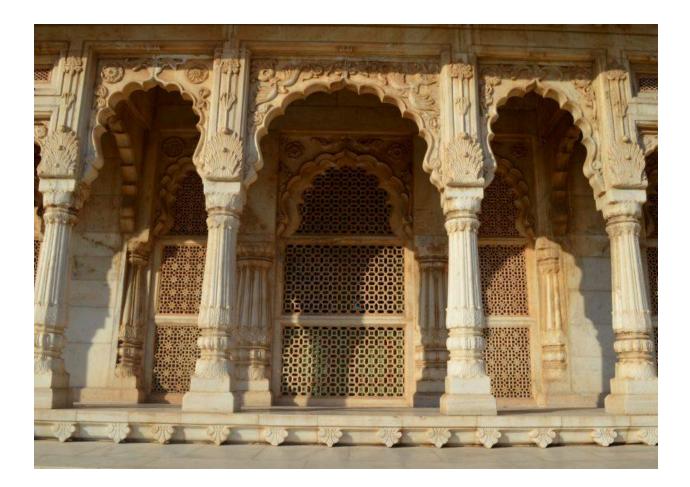


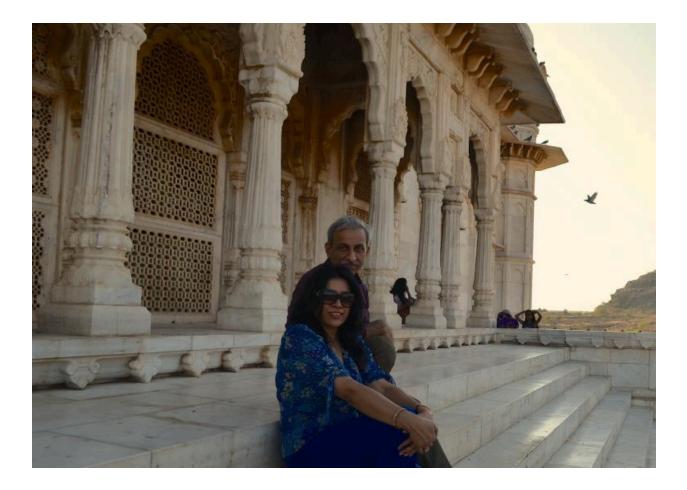


Compare the ancient with the comparatively modern at Jaswant Thada, the 19th-century burial ground of the Marwar rulers in Jodhpur. This one is sheer poetry in pure, fine marble, combining Mughal and Hindu design elements so gracefully that you are left wordless temporarily. A multi-tiered garden with carved gazebos frames the monument immaculately. Again, that illusion of a contemporary temple than a tomb. A striking central dome surrounded by several smaller supporting ones, an outer terrace aka the Taj Mahal and exquisite lace-like jaali work. Flocks of dark pigeons speckle the whiteness. Soothing breeze creates ripples over the small crystal clear lake close by.

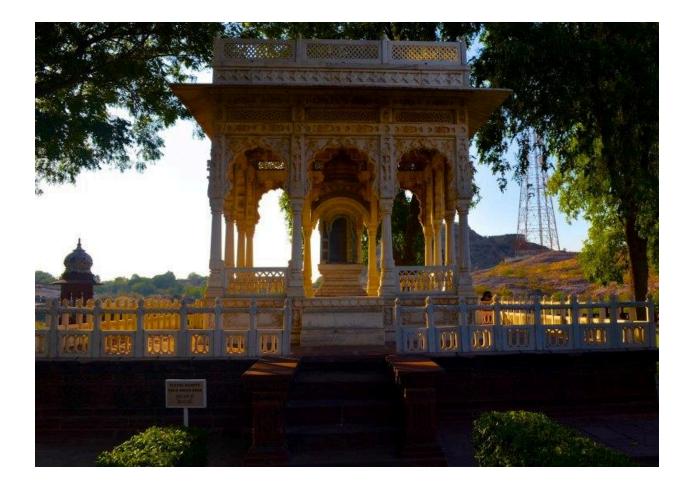














Girls take selfies, men taking selfies, families take selfies...but nothing can destroy the quiet glamour of the scene. Or the entire weekend. Because the land of the Marwars has crept stealthily into the depths of your heart. To stay.