

Rajasthan's postcard-worthy palette

The 15th-century Mehrangarh fortress sits about 400 feet above Jodhpur, in the northwestern state of Rajasthan.

By Rob Garratt

For those in the business of travel promotion, fate was generous when it came to dishing out the goods to the northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan, which, according to a popular local saying, boasts more history than the rest of the country put together.

"The Land of Kings" has attracted curious travelers for generations, entranced by fairy-tale visions of majestic forts, wind-swept desert plains and mighty maharajas. But the real public-relations coup is the way each of its key cities has been neatly color-coded by the annals of time, like a bygone theme-park map.

I chose to round out a month backpacking the length of India with stops in the "White City" of Udaipur, the "Blue City" of Jodhpur and the "Pink City" of Jaipur.

Traveling south to north I began in Udaipur (some travelers instead move west to east, beginning close to the Pakistan border at the "Golden City," Jais-

almer). My preconceptions were largely limited to knowledge that much of the James Bond film "Octopussy" was filmed amid the town's characteristic chalk-white palaces.

It's a claim to fame the locals are in no hurry to forget: We spotted perhaps a dozen restaurants and guesthouses advertising evening screenings of the 1983 movie.

But the real thing actually looked better than in the movies.

The town is split in two by the picture-postcard Lake Pichola. At night the bright, white palaces of Jag Niwas and Jag Mandir islands and the City Palace on the eastern bank are all artfully lit in soft, amber hues. The effect casts spellbinding reflec-

tions across the water's surface, a view best enjoyed from the excellent lakeside restaurant Ambrai, or any one of the casual rooftop eateries on the western bank, Hanuman Ghat.

Around a six-hour bus ride north lies Jodhpur — and boy, it really *is* blue. The old city is set around Mehrangarh, a huge 15th-century fort jutting out from a rocky outcrop about 400 feet above the city skyline. Stacked below is a tangled mishmash of weatherworn three- and four-story buildings and a maze of cobbled streets winding inside the old city walls.

Another seven hours east lies Jaipur, the state capital, which is well known as a point on the classic "Golden Triangle" between Delhi and Agra's Taj Mahal.

Arriving from any direction, it's hard not to feel underwhelmed by Jaipur.

For starters, it's not really pink. Moreover, the popularity means tourists are likely to encounter everything one might fear from a trip to India: inflated prices, rude street vendors and beggars.

But there's one reason a visit to Jaipur

remains compulsory: the majestic Amber Fort, an imposing hilltop outpost sitting some seven miles from the city. Built in the 16th century and reached by climbing a series of serpentine staircases, the towering, honey-hued structure is more grand, formidable and golden than any Photoshopped postcard could ever capture. This is the romantic land of the maharajas so many travel to India to see.

Visit tourism.rajasthan.gov.in.



Udaipur still has many restaurants and guesthouses that show "Octopussy," the James Bond movie filmed there.

PHOTOS BY SANNA KONTINEN

Grand Hyatt Mumbai: Living large

By Kristy Alpert

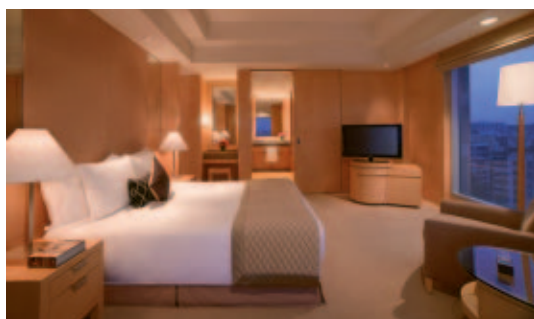
I felt oddly at ease as I stood in a sea of bold colors and glittering lights, wrapped in silk and draped in jewels with the warm night air of Mumbai acting as a shawl to my bare and freshly hennaed arms.

The blush-toned bubbles were still sparkling to the top of my Champagne flute as a waiter approached with a bottle to splash a few more drops of Billecart Salmon Champagne into my glass.

I was in Mumbai at a *Diwali* ("the festival of lights") celebration, and, although it was my first time wearing a sari and my first time in India, there was something magically familiar about the scene that was playing out before my eyes. Almost like I had had this dream before.

Only now, I wasn't dreaming.

I was invited among a host of socialites, lifestyle influencers and media members



A Grand Executive Suite bedroom at the Grand Hyatt Mumbai, where a *Diwali* celebration was part of Grand Hyatt's Living Grand program.

from India and abroad to attend a *Diwali* celebration thrown by the Grand Hyatt Mumbai.

Not surprisingly, the evening was just as grand as the hotel's name.

The event was held in the outdoor courtyard of the hotel and included performances by Bollywood dance troops with spectacular pyrotechnics, glittering decorations from the local store Good

Earth and a curated dinner brimming with the flavors of India — including locally sourced ingredients such as Andaman rock lobsters, Kashmiri morels and Kerala vanilla beans — and exquisite wines served at a decadently grand table.

For most of the guests in attendance, the event would be described as rare, bespoke or even once in a lifetime, but for the staff and regulars of the Grand Hyatt brand, it was just another chance to celebrate the art of Living Grand.

It was in December 2014 when the Grand Hyatt launched the first Living Grand program, which included a global event spanning three continents and celebrations in Berlin, New York and Melbourne, Australia.

Each event was inspired by the local seasonal holidays and acted as an extension of the brand to showcase its larger-than-life identity.

The program was such a success that it

soon spread to other locations, including a series of Chinese New Year festivities in February 2015 and over-the-top events in Singapore; San Francisco; Taipei, Taiwan; and Shanghai and Guangzhou, China.

Each event delivers surprising moments and experiences of abundance and grandeur for guests while celebrating the multicultural environment where they are held.

Living Grand has become the heartbeat for the brand, where guests at any location are able to share grand moments on social media with the hashtag #LivingGrand.

Everything from images of guests sipping Champagne by the pool to photos of door-to-door limo service now floods the feed. With thousands of events hosted and traditions brought to life through the campaign, Grand Hyatt plans to continue to dream up new ways to celebrate with its guests through the Living Grand events in both big and small ways.

For more information on the various Living Grand events, visit GrandHyatt.com or follow #LivingGrand on Twitter or Instagram.