



Eat your way through Bikaner, Rajasthan

There's something about the Indian heat that effectively drains your energy and kills your appetite. You'd rather drown in a vat of ice-cold *nimbu paani* than even consider eating. But, there's something about the smell of freshly-roasted *jeera* and sugary *chashni* that is bound to draw you to Bikaner's food scene.

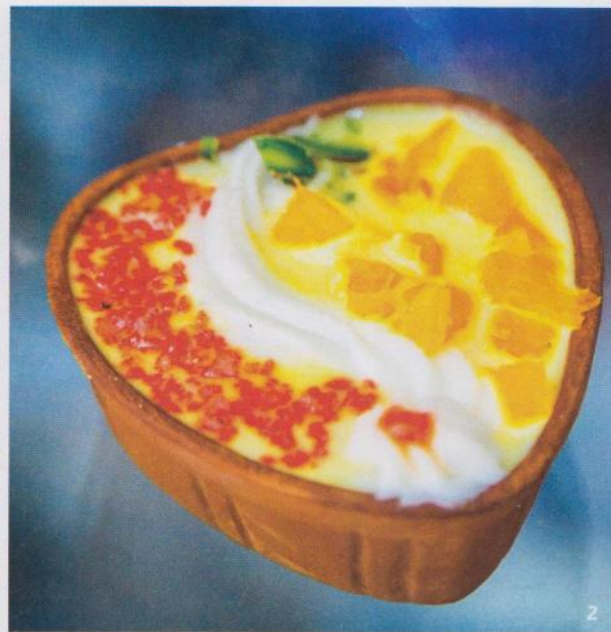
Located 334km from Jaipur, Bikaner is a curious mix of sandstone monuments, modern buildings and, of course, a large number of *havelis*. Among all this, the never-ending trail of *kachoriwalas* is sure to follow you everywhere you go. While there is constant debate over who serves the best *kachoris* in town, just follow the

crowd and you won't go wrong. If you're still unconvinced, seek a bit of divine intervention and stop by the Jain Bhandra Shah Temple, and then visit Pawan • *Kachoriwala*, located right outside. Sink your teeth into some classic, crispy golden *kachoris* or cool down with some *dahi kachori*, topped off with yoghurt, green chutney, tamarind sauce and just the right amount of chilli powder. Since this humble food cart has a massive local fan following, you're probably not going to get much to eat post noon, so be sure to pay your respects at the temple first thing in the morning and grab a bite soon after. It's highly likely that the pundit will tag along for the crispy breakfast

Chappan Bhog
will convince you
that there truly
is a *mithai* heaven

(see *Where to Eat* for details of all eateries).

Bikaner's historical monuments boast extreme grandeur, perfectly suited for you to live out your royal fantasies. The *Laxmi Niwas Palace* lets those daydreams unfold at the heritage hotel's many restaurants. The *maharaja thali*, which includes a wide range of delicacies ranging from local specialties like *Bikaneri rasgullas* to Rajasthani favourites like *laal maas*, is the perfect way to taste Bikaner. Take on this feast if you can eat like a beast. There are high chances that you'll be staring at the hotel's stunning wooden carved ceiling panels long after you're done, trying to recover from a glorious food coma.



GREAT FROM
Jaipur, New Delhi

GREAT FOR
All things sweet

GO NOW
If the heat doesn't bother you
(but crowds do).

And, if by some miracle, you find the will to move, and find an appetite for (more) dessert, head to **Manka Maharaj Rabri Wale**, located deep in the bylanes of Old Bikaner. Set in the crevice of a *haveli*,

the *rabri* here may look like mush, but the first bite will convince you that looks can be rather deceiving.

Walking around Bikaner will ensure that your hunger returns, and the endless number of *namkeen* shops on Station Road will come to the rescue. Hit up **Chappan Bhog** for some *rajbhog* and pineapple *rabri*, a pleasant change from Bikaner's standard *rabri-rasgulla* combo. If you can't handle the sugar rush, seek out **Shri Bikaner Mishthan Bhandar**, for some spicy *mirchi boda*, complete with yoghurt and green chutney. While you're here, also try the *mawa kachori*, because there's no such thing as too much dessert or too many *kachoris*.

1. There's a good chance the locals will decide what you should eat at Pawan Kachoriwala

2. Pineapple *rabri* will find a special place in your heart

3. The humble *mirchi boda* packs a real punch. Keep a water bottle at hand.

4. Words fall short to describe camel milk *kulfi* – it's a must-try!

5. Top off your *gola* with some *rabri* at Daulat Ka Chatta (see *Good to Know*)

Food in Bikaner is all about age-old classics done right, but there is an absolute wildcard that you must include on your food trail, the **ICAR – National Research Centre on Camel**. Whether or not you like those humped creatures, the centre is worth a visit because it houses a dairy with a peculiar set of offerings – camel milk products. Beat the Rajasthani heat with a camel milk *kulfi*, which tastes as weirdly wonderful as it sounds. But, if camel milk isn't your cup of tea, end your food trail in the sweetest way possible, with more *rabri*, of course!

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TURN OVER FOR ALL YOU NEED TO GET THERE



FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: New Delhi (496km)

Closest city: Jaipur (334km)

Closest airport: Jaipur International Airport (347 km). IndiGo, SpiceJet, Air India and Jet Airways fly to Jaipur from all major metros (return fares from ₹ 3,000).

Closest railhead: Bikaner Junction (BKN). Take the 12457 BKN Dee SF Express (leaves Delhi [DEE] 11.35pm, arrives BKN 7.00am; ₹ 770 Third AC)

and return by the 12458 BKN Dee SF Express (leaves BKN 10.30pm, arrives DEE 6am; ₹ 770 Third AC).

GETTING AROUND

Local transport like rickshaws is available, but hiring a private car is your best bet, keeping the heat in mind. We used and liked the services of **Kaustubh Holidays** (00-91-141-2351310; ₹ 2,700/ day).

WHERE TO STAY

Narendra Bhawan: Located in a residential area, Narendra Bhawan pays tribute to the last reigning Maharaja of Bikaner, Narendra Singhji. Expect it to be nothing short of grand (00-91-151-515-1500; www.narendrabhawan.com, reservations@narendrabhawan.com; Karni Nagar, Gandhi Colony; from ₹ 5,000 with breakfast and wifi).

Maharaja Ganga Mahal: This former palace is warm, cosy and inviting. The vintage cars at the entrance make for a great photo-op (00-91-151-252-1074; www.maharajagangamahal.in, reservation@maharajagangamahal.in; Ganga Niwas Public Park, Rathkhana; from ₹ 6,000 with breakfast and wifi).

Hotel Lallgarh Palace: This heritage hotel comes with high-ceilinged rooms, a billiards room and an indoor pool straight out of a Wes Anderson movie (00-91-151-254-0201; www.

lallgarhpalace.com, info@lallgarhpalace.com; Lallgarh Palace; rooms from ₹ 7,000).

WHERE TO EAT

* **Pawan Kachoriwalla:** Indulge in some simple no-fuss kachoris, while getting to know the chatty locals (Jain Bhandra Shah Temple, Old Bikaner, kachoris from ₹ 20).

* **Laxmi Niwas Palace restaurants:** The maharaja thali is fit for a king; if you're in the mood for some vegetarian goodness, try the maharani thali (00-91-151-220-0088; www.laxminiwaspalace.com; Dr Karni Singhji Rd; veg thali: ₹ 1,620; non-veg thali: ₹ 1,890).

* **Manka Maharaj Rabri Wale:** The constant crowd here is proof that this is the best place to try the Bikaneri staple: mushy, delectable

Above: The maharaja thali is laced with ghee, like all good things in life should be
Below: By the end of the trip, you'll be able to tell a jeera kachori from a kanda kachori without batting an eye



rabri (near Hanuman Mandir, Mohta Chowk, ₹ 30/ plate).

* **Chappan Bhog:** With a range of sweet and savoury options, Chappan Bhog is the perfect place for your evening snack and to replenish your stock of namkeen back home (00-91-151-220-2717; Rani Bazar, near Railway Station; 7am – 10.30pm hing kachoris from ₹ 5; sponge rasgulla: ₹ 10/ piece, rajbhog: ₹ 20/ piece).

* **Shri Bikaner Mishthan Bhandar:** Mirchi boda and mawa kachori is the ultimate combination you didn't know you needed in life (00-91-151-222-0810, Railway Station Rd; 7 am – 11pm; mirchi boda: ₹ 12/ piece, mawa kachori: ₹ 30/ piece).

* **ICAR – National Research Centre on Camel:** From camel milk kulfi to camel tea and just raw camel milk, expect the unexpected here (00-91-151-223-0183; nrccamel.icar.gov.in; 07, Jorbeer; camel milk kulfi: ₹ 30).

WHAT TO PACK

Cotton clothes, comfortable shoes, sunglasses, sunblock.. Throw in a pair of pants with an elastic waistband, and thank us later.

SAFETY

Bikaner is a relatively safe city and the locals are friendly. However, avoid Old Bikaner in the evening since the alleys are like a maze and it's easy to get lost.

MEDICAL AID

Kothari Medical & Research Institute is a well-equipped private facility (00-91-151-221-0151; www.kotharihospital.com; Kothari Hospital Marg, NH-15 Bangla Nagar, Jaisalmer Rd).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

While there is not much for kids to do, Bikaner's endless supply of sweets is sure to keep them happy. Keep your young ones close while exploring Old Bikaner.

GOOD TO KNOW

* **Station Road** is your best bet to sample good ol' Bikaneri food. There is a large number of sweet and namkeen shops; feel free to stop by any to grab a bite. Head to **Daulat ka Chatra** to try the weirdly wonderful combination of gola topped with rabri (00-91-90429-08229).

* Be sure to carry bottled water with you at all times.