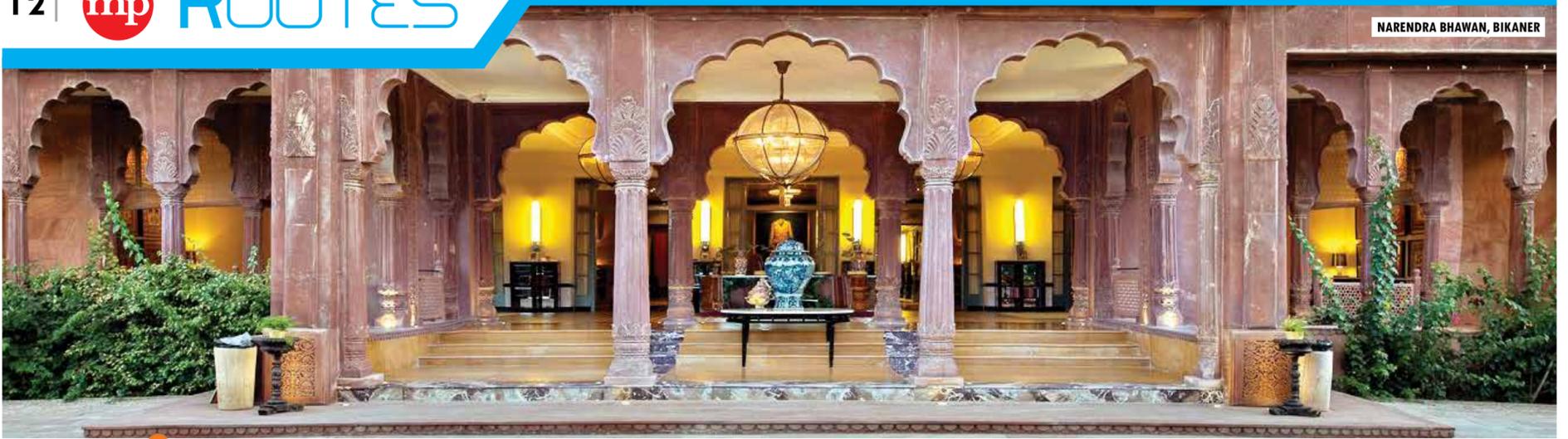


NARENDRA BHAWAN, BIKANER



# LIVING LIFE

## King Size

TEXT & PHOTOS: SNIGDHA BHOWMICK

*Rajasthan's royalty has been epochal to India's colourful history. Preserving this heritage, palaces across the state have been converted into luxurious resorts that will satiate your tingling desires of intimately experiencing the royal way of life*

The monsoons are a wonderful time to visit Rajasthan. As the barren desert comes to life, the best place to enjoy these monsoons is with the royals of Rajasthan in their centuries-old royal abodes. Most of these abodes have been converted into luxurious hotels which offer an oasis of peace away from the maddening crowd of the cities. Here, we take a trip down Rajasthan's most-illustrious familial homes.

### ROYAL HERITAGE HAVELI, JAIPUR

Tucked far and beyond the chaotic pink city, the Royal Heritage Haveli was once a royal hunting lodge which now stands in peace as a boutique property in the outskirts of Jaipur. Built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Raja Madho Singh of Jaipur, the Haveli opened its doors to the general public as a hotel after 150 years. After a successful run for more than 50 years, the Haveli, keeping its royalty intact, has also established one of the finest Ayurvedic and wellness groups, Niraamaya Retreats. The sprawling lawns and serene courtyards lend an embrace the moment one steps into the grandeur of this Rajasthani Haveli. A big old-fashioned fountain welcomes you with its tranquil sounds of water as it pours from the top and ultimately pools into the bottom. For the discerning eye, it makes for an idyllic haven of luxurious space.

Beautifully planned to hold light within, the Haveli has 12 suites each tastefully designed with traditional furniture and velvet upholstery alongside modern amenities. Each suite has its own luxurious sitting area for one's royal indulgence. The entire Haveli is embraced with Rajputana

also offers you a plethora of activities including 'cooking with the Royals' and horse riding lessons.

### FORT BARLI, AJMER

Located in the sleepy hamlet of Barli, about two hours away from Ajmer, this 17<sup>th</sup>-century fort is a throwback to the might of Rajput royalty. Built in 1675 by Raja Moti Singh from the royal family of Jodhpur, Fort Barli is now maintained by the 16<sup>th</sup> generation of the Rathod family. The fort and the village stand frozen in time as the world speeds in its own merry. The eight-room Barli Fort is a relief to overused senses – the opulence here offers you a chance to experience royalty without the complementing hassles. The thick stone walls guard stories of Rajputana valour while the collection of photographs on the walls gives you an insight into the most recent history of the family. Restored in 2010, the fort holds numerous knick-knacks from across Rajasthan – be it a collection of weapons or musical instruments.

All the eight rooms of the fort are distinct. With hardwood furniture and red and saffron hues dominating the frame, your stay here will always be vivid and colourful. You can while away time in the small library, listening to chirping parrots perched on the nearby neem tree. Or, you can spend your time chatting with Karni Singh, who is not only the owner but also doubles up as the Executive Chef of the property. He will regale you with captivating stories of Rajput history.

### TIJARA FORT PALACE, ALWAR

Established in the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Maharaja Balwant Singh, the construction of the Tijara Fort was left incomplete with the Maharaja passing away in 1845. Unsuccessful attempts by his descendants and the stifling rule of the British dragged the fort into ruins. The fort was never

restored until recent times. After the auction of the property by the government, the Fort was discovered to have three standing structures – the massive Hawa Mahal, which was a common meeting place, the bold Mardana Mahal with thick walls and a combination of Afghan and Rajput architecture and the Rani Mahal which lay unfinished. After a decade of work, the dilapidated ruins had been transformed into majestic structures.

Set atop a hill, a narrow road snakes its way through the surrounding villages to welcome you to the opulent Tijara Fort. Located around 100 km away from Delhi, Tijara is easily accessible by road. A perfect blend of old rustic charm and modern amenities sets this exotic hotel apart from others. Be prepared to experience lush green gardens, old architecture, tight stairways and some resplendent luxury. The ebullient Rani Mahal welcomes us after a long tiring journey with its architecture blending perfectly between the medieval and the modern. Huge wooden doors open into the traditional courtyard, Char Bagh, located at the centre of the Mahal with a tight winding staircase taking you to your room.

A most endearing feature of the Rani Mahal and the Mardana Mahal is that, while the former is adorned with art by a famous Indian female artist, the latter is indulged with works of male artists, designers, photographers and aesthetes. Our room on the second floor is aesthetically fulfilling. The door opens into a small seating area which further opens into the drawing room through a foldable wooden door. The living room is decked with a divan, lamps, and artwork from Jayashree Chakravathy. A small lamp built over a Barni (Pickle Jar), a rustic wooden cupboard and endless Jharokas are the small embellishments that will make you fall in love with the Mahal.

### ANURAGA PALACE, RANTHAMBORE

Ranthambore, a six hours train journey from

Delhi, is famous for its tiger reserve. Most elements here are based on tigers. The Anuraga Palace is nothing different, a huge taxidermy of a tiger adorns the reception of the hotel. Resembling a haveli, the hotel's interiors have been designed by two sisters – Archana and Rachna.

The suite on the second floor will stun you with its green and yellow colour palette. The complementing upholstery and furniture paint a cozy picture. Upon exploring the haveli, you will experience Rajasthani handicrafts ranging from mirrored walls to rustic hooks adorning walls.

### NARENDRA BHAWAN, BIKANER

A hotel that regales the life of a royal, Narendra Bhawan is filled with scintillating experiences along with a plethora of remembrances from the life of Narendra Singh. With royal dinners under the stars to blindfolded paired meals, this boutique hotel offers an experience unlike any other. Narendra Bhawan also offers a trip to the historic merchants of Bikaner.

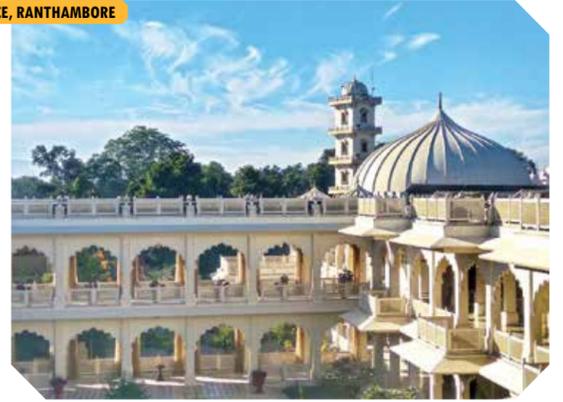
Decked in maroon and gold, there is a hint of royalty in every corner of the fort. Be it sitting in the Diwali Chowk courtyard or taking a dip in the deep blue infinity pool – there is a harmony in the Indo-Western cultural fusion. The different forms of meditation and the majestic dining spread together make for a surreal royal experience.

### ROHET GARH, JODHPUR

Rohet Garh offers the comforts of royalty with a rustic hint. Away from the frills and thrills of the city, Rohet provided a chance to unwind and connect with your inner self.

A huge mural portraying the lives of the royals decorates the entrance. A lush green lawn welcomes us along with Avijit Singh Rohet, the 15<sup>th</sup> generation of the House of Rohet. Our room is a cosy, little place on the ground floor overlooking the lawns. A beautiful baithak looks out onto the lake with ducks swimming in abandon. Rohet also offers curated horse riding lessons that include a trip to their sister fort at Mihir Garh along with a Royal Shikari lunch picnic along the way.

ANURAGA PALACE, RANTHAMBORE



ROYAL HERITAGE HAVELI, JAIPUR



CAPTIONS:  
1&2: FORT BARLI, AJMER  
3&4: NARENDRA BHAWAN, BIKANER  
5: ROHET GARH, JODHPUR



architecture and the rooms appear straight out of a period movie. With a small sitting room, it opens up into the main room with decorative divans, almirahs and lamps – the room exudes a rustic appeal with minimal modern amenities. The Haveli



TIJARA FORT PALACE, ALWAR