

# the place

## JAIPUR

Amer Fort, outside Jaipur, dates to 967, the reign of Raja Man Singh.

BRING AN EMPTY SUITCASE to Rajasthan's famed Pink City, because you're going to want to buy everything in this creative hub.

BY RACHNA SACHASINH  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY ANKUSH MARIA

"JAIPUR IS SLOW LIFE!" my taxi driver declares. All around us, cars, pedicabs, bicycles and cattle are stuck in hardcore commuter gridlock. Horns screech, elephants trumpet, and pedestrians tumble in and out of the disorderly scrum. Young boys jog in between the cars and oxcarts hawking fresh coconuts, marigold garlands, and saris. A horse cart waits patiently next to us, the turbaned driver casting a betel-stained grin. My driver responds by pressing on the horn for an unnecessarily long time. Slow life? Sure, in the literal sense. But it definitely doesn't seem relaxing.

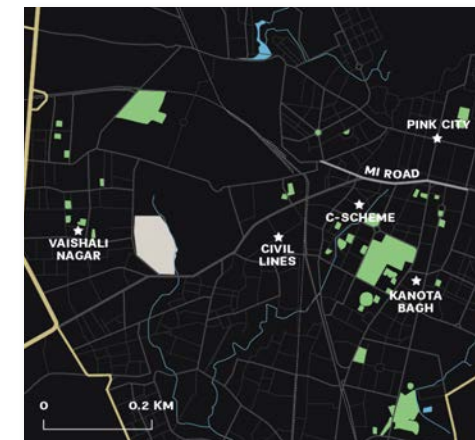
After a few days in the Rajasthani capital, however, my taxi driver's declaration begins to make sense. In spite of the log-jammed roads and dizzy markets, folks here take their time. Like the horse-cart driver who smiles in traffic, shopkeepers linger over tea and conversation, and skilled artisans work slowly and deliberately to create swoon-worthy architecture, textiles, art and jewelry that stand the tests of time. This is no accident.

Back in 1726, Maharaja Jai Singh, the city's namesake, summoned skilled craftsmen—bricklayers, stone masons, marble cutters, metal smiths, potters, weavers—from the farthest reaches of the Subcontinent to build a new capital from the ground up. City planners followed architectural blueprints detailed in Vastu Shastra, a part of the Vedas, or Hinduism's religious texts. Think of it as Vedic feng shui. Balanced aesthetics and details of

extraordinarily exquisite filigree, inlay and gilt are the cornerstones of the city's iconic structures: the old city wall, the City Palace, Jal Mahal (or Water Palace, on Man Sagar Lake), and the pink Hawa Mahal, (Wind Palace), for example.

Jai Singh launched one of modern India's first intentional artisan communities. Deep inside the dusty warrens of the walled old city, artisans—or *karighars*—turn out extraordinary objects much like they have for the past three centuries. Craftsmen chisel marble, cut gems and hand-embroider garments with solid-gold thread with casual expertise. The level of detail is staggering. More than once on my visit, I was given a magnifying glass to properly appreciate gold inlaid with precious gems, highly technical weaving techniques, and *pichwai* or *gota* embroidery, which resembles a painted tapestry.

Modern designers—native and foreign-born—still flock to Jaipur. Tapping indigenous artisans' know-how, the new kids are repurposing folksy styles into edgy, appealing fashion, furniture and practically anything else. The contemporary craft movement, in turn, gives a lifeline to the *karighars* in their continual defense against machine-made wares. We can all thank the Maharaja for inuring his subjects with an abiding appreciation for hand-hewn beauty and intricacy—an ethos of living and enjoying creative pursuits that continues to underscore the city's character. Here, the slow life is the good life.



## NEIGHBORHOODS

Zip around the Pink City's eclectic enclaves—a seamless blend of ancient and avant-garde, bustling and sleepy—via auto-rickshaw or Uber.

### OLD CITY

The Pink City got its rosy paint job in 1876, and the original walled core still blushes with glorious palaces, forts and temples. The old markets are full of treasure; it's worth elbowing your way through the mayhem to get your piece of Jaipur's magic.

### CIVIL LINES

The posh district's graceful tree-lined streets and colonial and Midcentury bungalows appeal to dignitaries and design-types.

### C-SCHEME

Teeming with youthful energy, this burb mixes cool cafés and crafty threads with the ubiquitous sidewalk *chai wallah*, or tea seller.

### MI ROAD

Endless rows of multi-generation jewelry shops, snack stalls and sari boutiques make this iconic street a one-stop shopping (and eating) hub.

### VAISHALI NAGAR

The up-and-coming district's low rents and broad avenues lure fresh start-ups looking for space to flex their creative muscles.

### KANOTA BAGH

Not a neighborhood per se, the pretty shopping complex's bougainvillea-covered courtyards are home to trendy ateliers peddling contemporary and vintage crafts.



LEFT: Hawa Mahal. RIGHT: Block printing at Bagru village.

MAP BY AUTCHARA PANPHAI



## LIFE IN MINIATURE

India's Mughal rulers introduced miniature art (intricate painting on paper) in the 16th century, and over time Jaipur added its own iconography and motifs to the tradition. Modern studios revamp the craft with new mediums and fresh themes.

Newly opened **JAIMINI** ([fb.com/jaimini.india](https://fb.com/jaimini.india); prices from Rs7,500) commissions local miniaturist painters to focus on fresh subjects. Traditional court and battle scenes, flora and fauna are replaced with vintage cars, modern monuments and holy men from different faiths.

Painter **ROHINI SINGH** ([rohinisingh.co.in](https://rohinisingh.co.in); studio visits by appointment; prices Rs15,000–60,000) uses block prints on canvas and traditional *wasli* (layered, handmade paper), issuing a contemporary take on Jaipur's old-world visuals. Recent works are inspired by the frescoed interiors of palaces in northeastern Rajasthan's Shekhawati district.



Studio Kassa: laser-cut clutch and Cloud lamps.

Andraab: eccentric art and handwoven textile.

Rasa: block-print silk dress.

Anantaya: tchotchkes and knitting baskets.

## MODERN ATELIER

Hip and heritage, bohemian and luxe come together in the city's avant-garde ateliers and design studios.

+ **Studio Kassa's** ([studiokassa.com](https://studiokassa.com); prices Rs500–19,000) Arpan Patel and Aarushi Kumar spin old-school handiwork into "art with utility". The Chappa Chipa lighting is hand-carved wood and brass discs taking cues from wood block-print stamps. In the Cloud lighting line, tear- and waterproof natural paper are tucked and pinned with origami-like precision.

Leather bags and brogues get a techy makeover with laser tessellations. And traditional silversmiths have recast industrial metal shavings into futuristic jewelry that looks like it's molded from Saturn's rings. + At **Kannbar** ([kannbar.com](https://kannbar.com); clutches from US\$120) simple dhurries get jazzed up with metallic threads and edgy motifs that are at once tribal and

post-modern. + **Ecru's** ([ecruonline.com](https://ecruonline.com); US\$10–\$680) Nur Kaoukji partners with old city brass-, marble- and glass-masters for ethereal home accoutrements. Gem cutters etch palm fronds onto glass carafes and stemware with mind-boggling precision. And, classic block print textiles and kaftans are updated with modern motifs and rich colors.

+ **Anantaya** ([anantaya.decor.com](https://anantaya.decor.com); Rs250–40,000) draws on *kalighar* know-how in practically every medium. Eschewing woven cotton, designers Geetanjali and Ayush Kasliwal cast block prints onto ultrasoft knits, putting a timeless spin on the modern T. Indigenous *rohinda* wood is whittled into stacks of smooth nesting bowls inspired by Jain alms bowls. + **Rasa** ([rasajaipur.com](https://rasajaipur.com); silk

dresses from Rs6,950, bedding from Rs3,950) connects the hip and the historic with their silk and cotton garments, dainty ballet slippers and luxury bedding, all block-printed in abstract and geometric motifs. + Cool peeps head to **Hot Pink** ([hotpinkindia.com](https://hotpinkindia.com); Rs800–78,000) for *khadi*, or handwoven cottons, and linens in updated silhouettes and beaded velvet Rajasthani *jootis* (loafers). Co-owned by jeweler Siddharth Kasliwal of The Gem Palace, the shop is one of the few spots in town to get a Kasliwal original. + Pashmina's authentic roots are revealed at **Andraab** ([andraab.com](https://andraab.com); handwoven pieces US\$100–\$1,500, embroidered shawls US\$2,500–\$10,000). The sumptuous stoles and shawls bear classic embroidery

details, and a few are updated with playful stripes and minimalist motifs. + **O'd Gulabee** (*Kanota Bagh*; 91-141/256-8834; Rs150–9,000) peddles vintage wares dripping with royal pedigree. Despite the patina of age, the objets d'art here are impeccably hip. + For **Polo Factory** ([polofactoryonline.com](https://polofactoryonline.com); *Cavalry shirt* Rs2,650 in store), leather craftsmen fashion the country's first and only line of bespoke polo equipment. The Cavalry Shirt and *mulmul* (muslin) scarves, both block-printed with images of the indigenous Manipur polo ponies, keeps Rajput nobles playing smart and looking dapper.



LAMPS: SAKIA PATEL

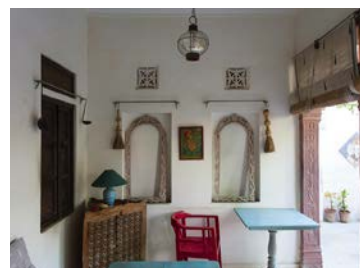
SHIRT: COURTESY OF POLO FACTORY. DRESS: COURTESY OF RASA

## SMART ROOMS

The latest boutique rooms tap into the city's deep regal roots, albeit with a refreshingly smart and modern footprint. The result? Basics done right and luxury that knows no end.



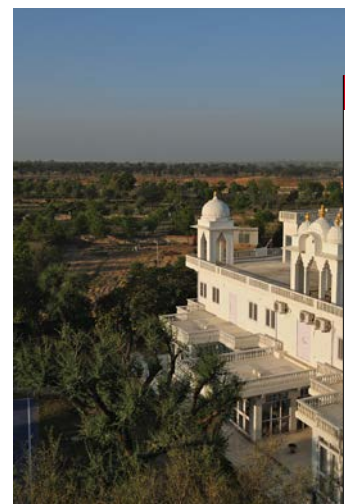
**28 Kothi** An airy, harmonious and drop-dead gorgeous Midcentury bungalow in the swanky Civil Lines enclave, built originally as a homestay for clients of the late Munnu Kasliwal, Jaipur's jeweler to the jet-set. Kasliwal's provocateur son Siddharth enlisted Lebanese interior designer Nur Kaoukji to update the pad into a slice of heaven, where the city's artisan roots take a fresh vibe. Endless cups of ayurvedic tea and homemade vegetarian dinners in the starlit garden make you never want to leave. [28kothi.com](https://28kothi.com); doubles from US\$140.



### Mosaics Guesthouse

Nestled in Amber, a tiny hamlet 15 minutes from town, featuring four minimalist rooms and bougainvillea-filled garden nooks that breathe Mughal-era grandeur. Fortunate guests may get a chance to see owner and mosaic artist Hervé Vital in action, piecing together masterpieces in his pebble-, brick- and stone-filled workshop. A rooftop veranda offers breathtaking views of nearby Amber Fort. [mosaicsguesthouse.com](https://mosaicsguesthouse.com); doubles from Rp3,800.

FROM RIGHT: COURTESY OF SAVISTA RETREAT; COURTESY OF SUJAN RAJMAHAL PALACE; COURTESY OF FORT BISHANGARH

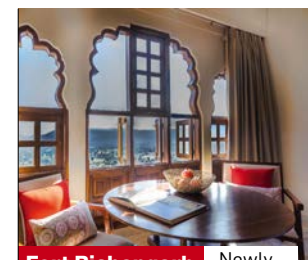
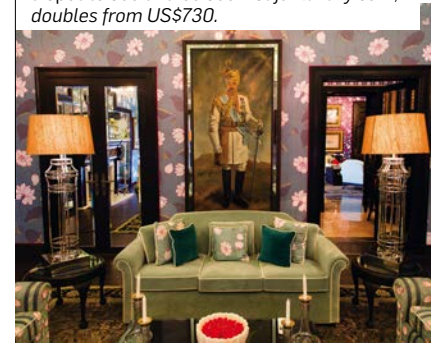


### Savista Retreat

Jaipur's best-kept secret, in the rolling farmlands just out of town. Visionary owner Bhanwar Rishyasringa resuscitated his family's country estate and hunting grounds into a green retreat with a working farm, solar panels and an ingenious water-recycling system. The 14-room white-washed *haveli* (noble house) has graceful cupolas, arched doorways and plant-filled pavilions. In the erudite art- and literature-filled library, tea service offers respite from the heat. [savista.com](https://savista.com); doubles from US\$149.

### Sujan Rajmahal Palace

Mixes heritage and hip as precociously as it did when Maharaja Jai Singh built the palace for his favorite Queen 250 years ago. Forty-nine wallpapers and a mesmerizing catalogue worthy of a modern art gallery grace the interiors. Individually designed royal suites and apartments have seduced dignitaries and Bollywood types for ages. The cheeky **51 Shades of Pink** dishes superb breakfast and brunch. **The Polo Bar**, with well-curated gin and aperitif menus, is a tap room for the city's polo-playing gentry, a spot to see and be seen. [sujanluxury.com](https://sujanluxury.com); doubles from US\$730.



### Fort Bishangarh

Newly opened heritage hotel standing sentry on a ridge over the Rajasthani countryside. The 230-year-old fort-turned-luxury settlement is full of old-world and modern fittings from near and far, with strong Middle Eastern and Mediterranean overtures. [alilahotels.com](https://alilahotels.com); doubles from Rs26,000.



# WHAT TO EAT

Rajasthan is the birthplace of *kachori*, a power meal of fried pastry stuffed with onions, potatoes or spicy lentils that fueled warriors and tradesmen on long marches. Today, lighter fare balances the penchant for sweet and spice.



Caffé Palladio: sublime saffron setting.



eating hall with artfully designed spaces. *meraaki kitchen.com*; dinner for two Rs1,500.

**Caffé Panchranga** At this Italian-inspired spot with lovely garden seating, expect wood-fired pizzas, home-made pastas, fusion sliders and great wines. Veggies come from Sujan Rajmahal hotel's organic gardens. *fb.com/*

**Tapri** The standard Indian teahouse is moving on up—to this roof lounge serving brews in handsome copper kettles to a broad audience. Rajasthani teahouse fare is on the menu, with portions large enough for two. *tapri.net*; lunch or dinner for two with chai Rs800.

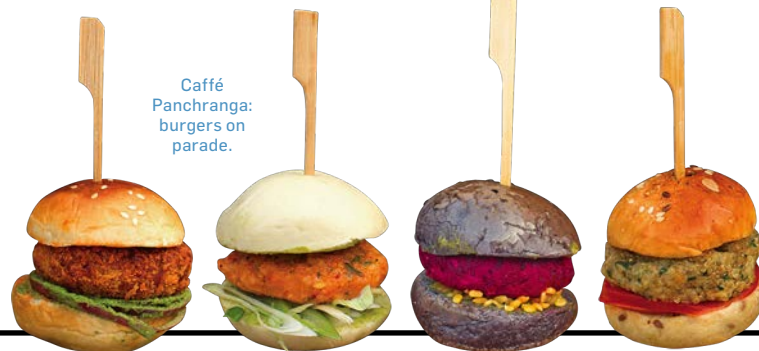
**Meraaki Kitchen** Fusion vegetarian bites in an industrial chic

*caffepanchranga; lunch for two Rs4,000.*

**Caffé Palladio** Your sublime repast in these gardens or saffron-hued pavilion may include lime- and mint-infused couscous or pomegranate tabbouleh. A deli is stocked with fresh bread, sweets and cool ceramics. The Caffé follows on heels of last year's nightlife-revving **Bar Palladio**, with its

Italian frescos and outdoor fire pits. *bar-palladio.com*; lunch for two Rs1,500.

**The Kitchen at Jaipur Modern** Its updated menu stars farm-to-table quinoa options. Savory quinoa maki rolls and jaggery-sweetened coconut *laddoos* (a local confection) beg for seconds. *jaipurmodern.com*; lunch for two Rs1,500–1,800.



## DIY

Crafting, eating and riding: three different ways to dive headfirst into Jaipur.

+ Practice block printing and create your own masterpiece in Bagru, a village dedicated to the craft. India Beat's **Block Print Workshop** (*indiabeat.co.uk*; US\$100 per person) offers half-day excursions with a master craftsman learning woodblock-printing and *dabu*, or mud-printing. + **Chillies Walk The Town** (*mita.kapur@gmail.com*; Rs8,500 per person) dishes a deep-fried tryst with Rajasthani street food, taking intrepid eaters through the old city haunts, sampling *kachoris* stuffed with lentil and spice, refreshing *neera*, water from the bark of the date tree, and *prasad*, or holy food, presumably blessed by Lord Krishna. + Jaipur's polo heritage is legendary, and Rajput noblemen still pony up competitively for the winter season. **Polo Factory's** (*polofactoryonline.com*; clinics from Rs8,000 per day, or US\$500 for a week including lodging) day- and week-long clinics will get you riding and playing *chukkas* like a pro.

Learn to ride at Polo Factory.

## INSIDERS' TIPS

The power couple behind the city's modern craft revival likes their together-time old-school. "We start off with *dasas* (potato-stuffed crepes) and chai at **Old India Coffee House** (*indiancoffeehouse.com*; dinner for two Rs300); nibble on fresh *gajak* (sesame flour ghee and raw jaggery baked into crisp sheets) at **Ishwar Ji Gajak Wale** (279 Chaura Rasta; Rs300 per kilogram); chew on paan (digestive herbs and spices wrapped in betel leaf) at **Special Paan Ki Dukkan** (Chaura Rasta opposite Ishwarji; one paan Rs30) and drive up to **Suriya Mandir** to view the city lights. This was our first date, and it never gets old."



DATE NIGHT  
**GEETANJALI & AYUSH KASLIWAL**  
Founders of Anantaya & AKFD Studio



SHOPPING FOR SPARKLES  
**SIDDHARTH KASLIWAL**  
Co-owner of The Gem Palace

From the glitterati to the imminently wed, the city is a gem bank. Kasliwal pays homage to his famous jeweler father, Munnu, and his clan's prior eight generations of goldsmiths, with coveted handmade pieces at **his atelier** (*munnuhthegempalace.com*; 91-982/901-0858 for private appointment) and these tips for shopping in Jaipur: "Don't buy rubies and sapphires without certificates. Don't let a taxi driver or a guide persuade you to go to a particular shop. And don't get seduced by healers and astrologers suggesting you buy random stones for your safety."

Before the Jaipur Literary Festival consecrated the city as a belletristic hub, Kapur says, Jaipur was already peddling stories and ideas with a vibrant *kavi sammelan*, oral tradition of storytelling—think poetry slam meets stand-up comic. "For those of us who grew up in the 1970s, the dark and crammed **Book Corner** (81 Mizra Ismail Rd., opposite Niro's Restaurant) was a royal mess but a godsend. These days, **Rajat Book Corner** (*rajatbookcorner.com*) and **Bookwise** (110 Mizra Ismail Rd.; 91-141/236-4755) make for a better browsing experience."



BOOK CLUB  
**MITA KAPUR**  
Founder of Siyahi Literary Agency



MARKET HOPPING  
**NUR KAOUKJI**  
Founder & Creative Director at Ecu

When not fashioning her glamorous line of kaftans and homeware, Kaoukji hits the city's colorful markets in the old city. "I am constantly going to the bazaar in search of inspiration and raw materials. At **Badi Chaupad** (intersection of Tripolia Bazar and Ramganj Bazar Rd, Old City) and **Johari Bazar** (along Johari Bazar Rd, Old City), you can see artisans working on Zardori and Gota embroidery. The **Museum of Indology** (24 Gangal Park, near Albert Hall Museum; entry Rs100) was started by the world's biggest hoarder, I think. A bit distressing, but an incredible library of objects."



Lessons with a block-printing master.

## GREAT GUIDES

**INDIA BEAT** An agency that fashions bespoke itineraries based on interest and budget. The charming, knowledgeable guides rattle off local lore and crack jokes. Tap them for hard-to-find and appointment-only access to the likes of famous textile designer Brigitte Singh, and private lessons with block-printing masters in Bagru village. *indiabeat.co.uk*.

**THINGS TO DO** This online portal curates cool happenings, activities and bespoke experiences, including cycling tours, jeep safaris, arts and craft lessons, golfing, festival hopping, cooking classes and private excursions to hidden spots. Peruse and book their selections directly. *thingstodoinjaipur.com*.

**SANGHMITRA VOYAGES** The Welcome Ambassador, a hand-painted vintage Hindustan Ambassador that cruises the sun-streaked countryside, is the city's best-looking ride. Be chauffeured in it to the Aravali Hills for a morning trek followed by serviced breakfast, private yoga in a historic courtyard, or sundowners at Nahargarh Fort. *sanghmitra.in*; full-day sightseeing Rs4,500.



Jeep safaris.

BURGERS: COURTESY OF CAFFÉ PANCHRANGA. RIDING: COURTESY OF POLO FACTORY

FROM TOP: ANKUSH MARIA; COURTESY OF SIDDHARTH KASLIWAL; COURTESY OF MITA KAPUR; COURTESY OF NUR KAOUKJI. SIDEBAR FROM TOP: COURTESY OF INDIA BEAT; COURTESY OF THINGS TO DO