



JAWAI LEOPARD CAMP AND SHER BAGH, PHOTOS COURTESY OF SUJAN

The Tiger (and Leopard) King of Rajasthan, India

Endangered wildlife has been one of the more urgent issues for the travel industry in this time of pandemic. Specifically, poaching: when humans are sheltering in place, who protects the animals? In Rajasthan, few can speak to this issue with more authority than Jaisal Singh. Singh's parents and uncle, some of the foremost tiger experts in the world, helped map the territory that in 1979 became Ranthambore National Park. Twenty years ago, Singh opened Sher Bagh, the first true luxury tented safari camp in this part of Rajasthan. Today his company, Suján, comprises two further camps, The Serai and Jawai, and a royal palace-turned-hotel in Jaipur (he also co-operates a camp in Kenya, Mara North Conservancy).

Suján has shown India what hospitality with conservation at its core can look like. Three signal tenets—to protect wildlife, land biodiversity, and local communities and heritage—are part of every Suján property. At Jawai Leopard Camp, his team has gathered extensive data on 55 leopards in Jawai's elusive population. But he has also managed to rewild significant land here—no small triumph in a resolutely agrarian area. By slowly amassing agrarian land (some via generous lease agreements that provide income year round to local landowners), Suján Jawai is generating contiguous wildlife corridors for many species, but especially the iconic leopard. Singh has also created a mobile healthcare unit for six villages at the perimeter of Jawai's land (much of which has been temporarily loaned to the local government in the effort to stem the spread of COVID-19 in Pali).

Ranthambore's tigers are part of Singh's personal history. He has partnered with and is the primary donor to two of the park's key anti-poaching community initiatives, TigerWatch and the Village Wildlife Volunteers Programme (VWV's). With smart phones provided to them by Suján, the 50-some VWV's monitor not just animal movements but suspicious human ones, too—potential poachers and loggers who threaten the animals or their vastly denuded habitat. It's a collaboration between private enterprise, NGOs, and a state forest ministry that's unique in India, and is becoming a model for parks across the country.