

“The 21 Suites are the last word in desert luxury”



Desert dreams

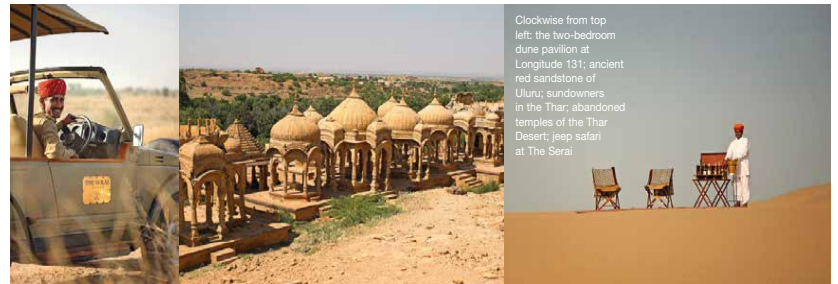
Arid, isolated and sparsely populated, the world's deserts are the last great bastions of pastoral life. As Imogen Leperre discovers, they make a fine base for adventure

THAR DESERT, INDIA

The monsoon whips through Rajasthan from July through to September, but the Thar is so remote the plains and mountains which surround it syphon off the moisture long before it reaches the desert. All that is left are hot, strong winds which keep the sand dunes in a state of perpetual motion. To outsiders, it's a formidable place to venture because the topography can be unrecognisable within the space of a few hours; each shift is a photo opportunity. Only four-wheel drives with GPS and native Marwari horses, which have been bred here since the 12th century, can find their way reliably. Hire them with Mandawa Safaris and hack through the dazzling scenery to Pushkar, which hosts one of the biggest camel fairs in the world every autumn. The Silk Road once ran through the centre of the desert and you can retrace it on camel back, following in the footsteps of spice traders and silver merchants. The area around Jaisalmer is particularly rich with memories,

including the deserted town of Kuldhara and several romantic forts. Jaisalmer itself is an amber dream of a city, dominated by a medieval citadel that looks like a giant sandcastle from the outside, and is a warren of streets swaddled by tapestries and perfumed by wafts of incense within. **TOP TOUR** Far and Ride combines riding safaris in the bed of the Luni river with visits to local villages and desert camping. The trip culminates with three days at the Balotra horse fair, which sees 7,000 steeds and their owners gather in south-west Rajasthan. From £3,484pp including seven nights' full-board accommodation, horse hire and a guide. farandride.com **HOTTEST HOTEL** Sujan The Serai is set on an 40-hectare estate ensuring a sense of utter seclusion. The 21 tented suites are the last word in desert luxury, while activities include everything from jeep safaris to campfire performances by Manganiar folk singers. Doubles from £494. sujanluxury.com

Photos by Julian Keenan and Sujan The Serai



Clockwise from top left: the two-bedroom dune pavilion at Longitude 131; ancient red sandstone of Uluru; sundowners in the Thar; abandoned temples of the Thar Desert; jeep safari at The Serai