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Nahargarh Fort and views from fort at sunrise, Jaipur, Rajasthan

Travel

A First-Timer's Guide to Rajasthan, India's Most Beautiful, Fascinating, Delicious Region

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Advice from chef Maneet Chauhan on where to go, where to shop, and what to eat.

Most first-time India goers have their hearts set on a cosmopolitan city, like Bombay, or a beachside locale, like Goa. But according to chef and restaurateur (and India native) **Maneet Chauhan**, if you really want to see the best that the country has to offer, there are few regions more fascinating and multi-faceted than Rajasthan.

"I still remember my first trip there, driving from Delhi to Jaipur," says Chauhan. "As soon as you enter Rajasthan, you are hit with colors. It's such a sensory experience. You see women in bright pink and yellow saris, camels pulling carts, historic forts—history on each and every corner." And the food? "Indian dishes like you've never tasted in your life," she says, with plenty of hearty stews, garlic-slicked breads, and spicy snacks.

Jaipur

"Jaipur is the capital of Rajasthan, and in my opinion the best place to visit. It is an amazing hub of history. It's called the Pink City because all the architecture has a hint of pink in the stones used. It's an amazing stop for all kinds of food but also for history and shopping. It has a little bit of everything."

Spanning much of northeast India, Rajasthan is enormous—and impossible to fully cover even on a long trip. That said, after decades of exploring the region, Chauhan offered up her ideal itinerary—the cities to hit, the dishes to eat, the shopping to shop, and the sights to see. Here's her guide to India's most colorful region.

Where to start



Raj Mahal Palace, Jaipur, Rajasthan



City Palace and views, Jaipur, Rajasthan

Udaipur

"This is the most picturesque part of Rajasthan—it has actually been called the Venice of the East because of all the lakes and palaces. People think Rajasthan is in the middle of the desert, but to see all this water is pretty incredible. The marketplaces here are also fantastic. It's just a very distinct culture, from the clothes to the food."

Pushkar

"I love Pushkar because of the Pushkar Fair, which happens every fall—it's this camel festival, with ornately-dressed camels, camel races. But the reason I truly love this city is the Hindu mythology behind it. It is located on the shores of Pushkar Lake, and they say that Pushkar Lake was created by the tears of Lord Shiva, making it one of the oldest cities."

What to Instagram do

In Jaipur, the historic architecture is a big highlight. Chauhan recommends Amer Fort: "It is absolutely gorgeous, and you can take an elephant ride." Also, the Hava Mahal, a palace located right in the heart of the city, is one of the region's most impressive architectural marvels—built with no foundation and many windows to allow the breeze to flow through and keep the palace cool. "What I love about it is that it is not secluded," Chauhan says. "You step out of the castle and the chaos of the city is around you. You feel like you are a part of everything."

In Udaipur, the main attractions are the palaces, each surrounded by tranquil, manmade lakes. The most famous of all (and Chauhan's favorite) is Lake Palace, one of the filming sites for the iconic Bond film, *Octopussy*—it's now a *luxury hotel*, but you can still walk around the beautiful and very well preserved white edifice. For a "quintessential, historic Indian temple," check out Jagdish Temple.