

# HINDUSTAN TIMES

January 2018

## hindustantimes

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### How Jaipur has morphed itself into India's capital of cool...

The capital of Rajasthan is now the Hipistan of India

BRUNCH Updated: Jan 13, 2018 23:13 IST

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A decorated gateway at the Amber fort in Jaipur brings alive the history of the royals (Shutterstock)

In his brilliant piece for the John Adams Institute on what makes a city cool, Ross Tilchin draws one's attention to Amsterdam. He writes, "Amsterdam has a strategy worthy of your attention. Since 2000, the city has administered a robust set of policies aimed at supporting artist studio spaces and creative incubators. A municipal government agency known as the Bureau Broedplaatsen helps groups of artists transform abandoned or underutilised spaces into places for creative work. The agency provides subsidies, credit guarantees, project management expertise, and legal assistance to get the incubators off the ground, and then the spaces are run as independent organisations. With a 15-year budget of only €48 million, the city has created over 60 incubators housing over 170,000 square metres of highly affordable creative space. Thousands upon thousands of artists have benefitted."

**Tapri is no jaded café. It is run by two men who are showing their middle fingers to convention**

I see Jaipur headed in the same direction. I have always maintained that over the past few years, it has swiftly morphed into the cool capital of the country. There is a subtle sass in its stride. A silent swag. And it is all under the radar. Very few cities in the world carry the weight of tradition with the gait of cool. Jaipur does that. It plays effortlessly on the seesaw of the then and the now.

Old & new



The Rajmahal Palace is old-world in architecture yet hip in the chemistry it exudes

I always stay at The Sujai Rajmahal Palace. It is crushingly cool. The hotel is old-world in its architecture yet hip in the chemistry it exudes. There is a vivacity in its calm. Where else will you find ultra-violet cushions resting on teal-coloured sofas? Or a bottle of 4711 Eau De Cologne in the washroom? They have a guy who walks around the central garden waving a flag to keep the pigeons away. And because Jaipur is rather windy, the ashtrays have little stones. Sand has this habit of flying in the wind.

Detail is the presiding deity at Rajmahal. And the food has its own flourish. The Rajmahal Café is now the dining table of the discerning in Jaipur. I had the La Maas Sliders – a brilliant fusion. There's the Coniglio Kaachar Pizza – rabbit meat cooked the Rajasthani way. There is a surprise in every serving, a wink in every course.

Rajmahal serves as the perfect preface to the poshness of Jaipur.

Tapri is another hipster hangout. Tea with Parle-G biscuits. Maggi Noodles with tadka. The Kala Chana Chaat is playful, as is the Kachumber Khakra. Tapri is no jaded café. It is wit in wheat, satire in sevaivan. It is run by two men who are showing their middle fingers to convention.

No visit to Jaipur is complete without a visit to Teatro Dhora, in my estimation, the finest store in this country. People don't come to find things at Teatro Dhora. They come to lose themselves amidst the nuggets that nudge you at every corner of the store. You can find a copy of 'Cereal Magazine'. I spotted an issue of 'Kinsfolk'. I only know of one other store in this country that stocks these cutting edge magazines. I jumped into hoodies by Pero. Clothes by Shorshie. Expectedly, lots of Naushad Ali, the coolest casual shirt maker in the country. On one shelf, I found wheat and cardamom biscuits. On another, Code Deco fragrances. It is emphatically eclectic.

Culture of chill

The other cauldron of cool is Jaipur Modern. The Banaras candle by No.3 Clive Road is something I have lost my soul to. It also has perfumes by Jaipur Fragrances. Their Zephyr concentrated perfume is just magnificent.

**Jaipur is one of the first planned cities in India. It was planned according to the Indian Vastu Shastra**

Jaipur also has stores like Hot Pink and Idli. But frankly I have moved on from the elephant pocket squares of Hot Pink and the neon madness of Idli.



Rajmahal Palace serves great dishes like the egg dumplings to suit the discerning palate

If you love books, you must visit the CMYK store at Amer Fort. It is a labour of love by Priya Kapoor. It is aesthetically evolved, graceful, yet with a firm view of the hip. The Jodha Bai collection is poetically pretty. The paper and ceramic stationery is beautiful. The CMYK stores marries Taschen with tashan. Once again, so Jaipur.

Not far from Amer Fort is Nahargarh Fort. Within it is the Madhavendra Bhavan, home to India's first Sculpture Park, the result of a public-private partnership between the Government of Rajasthan and the Saath-Saath Foundation run by Aparajita Jain. Many months ago, Peter Nagy of Nature Morte mooted the idea of contemporary art being showcased in a setting replete with traditional architecture. The idea immediately resonated with the fiery Mala Singh who advises the Chief Minister on art and culture. And on December 10, 2017, The Sculpture Park opened. It is a staggering show of talent and will. It has fifty pieces of art created by the greatest names in India and beyond: Bharti Kher, Subodh Gupta, Thukral & Tagra, Ravinder Reddy, Stephen Cox and James Brown, amongst others. The scale is enormous.

I am privy to the intentions of the government. It is hell-bent on showcasing the audaciousness of its ambitions.

Unknown to most, Jaipur is one of the first planned cities in India. It was planned according to the Indian Vastu Shastra by a Bengali architect, Vidyadhar Bhattacharya in 1727.

It worked to a plan then.

It is working to a plan now.

The plan is called Hipistan.