

ANDREW HARPER'S HIDEAWAY REPORT

June, 2015

“JAWAI offers the very definition of “glamping.”

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Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report®

JUNE 2015 | OUR 37TH YEAR

AndrewHarper.com

TRAVELING THE WORLD IN SEARCH OF TRULY ENCHANTING PLACES

THIS MONTH

EXCITING INDIAN DISCOVERIES

Exotic new hotels and camps, cashmere, jewelry, polo, festivals and more

NEW YORK UPDATE

New Midtown hotels, plus Theater District restaurants, shops and museums

WEB EXCLUSIVES

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■ = additional related article
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IN THE NEWS

New Era on Cap Ferrat

FEW GRAND HOTELS are quite as grand as the **Grand-Hôtel du Cap-Ferrat**. Built in 1908, it is surrounded by 17 acres of lavender and citrus trees at the tip of a pine-scented peninsula seven miles east of Nice. Gustave Eiffel designed the lobby; Pierre-Yves Rochon presided over a 2009 renovation. History, grandeur, a celebrity clientele, a Michelin-starred restaurant, an exceptional spa and a private stretch of waterfront: The Cap-Ferrat has them all. The only criticism has been that the service is a tad old-fashioned. Now this is likely to change. In May, Four Seasons took over management of the property. Henceforth, North American hospitality can be expected to augment Gallic elegance and flair. [FOURSEASONS.COM](#)

PALACES, FORTS, BAZAARS, DESERTS AND TIGERS

India: A Journey Through Rajasthan



Tranquil garden at the glamorous new Rajmahal Palace hotel, Jaipur
PHOTO BY ANDREW HARPER

THE FAMOUSLY OPULENT PALACE HOTELS OF RAJASTHAN — PLACES SUCH AS THE Rambagh Palace in Jaipur and the Lake Palace in Udaipur — remain an irresistible draw for most first-time visitors to India. But now, a new generation of sumptuous smaller properties and luxury camps offers experienced travelers a variety of alluring alternatives.

Jaipur, like much of India, has changed enormously in recent years. Today, a metropolis of more than 3 million people encircles the 18th-century core. Fortunately, the heart of the city has lost little of its magic. Elephants and camels still mingle with the cars and tuk-tuks; the gem and textile merchants continue to ply their trades in the kaleidoscopic Johari Bazaar; and the precincts of the immense City Palace are as imposing and exotic as ever.

By Indian standards, Jaipur is not especially ancient. In 1727, at the instigation of Maharaja Jai Singh II, a new planned city was laid out on a grid, a replacement for his previous capital, Amber, seven

miles away. At the same time, the Rajmahal Palace was constructed: a serene pavilion surrounded by a pleasure garden. During the colonial period from 1821 to 1947, this became the home of the British Resident political officer. Then, after independence, the flamboyant, polo-playing Maharaja Man Singh II adopted the Rajmahal as his personal residence. It soon became a kind of guesthouse for the global elite, presided over by his dazzling wife, Gayatri Devi, author of the best-selling memoir “A Princess Remembers.” The queen of England came to stay, as did Jackie Kennedy, along with an international cast of politicians, sportsmen and socialites.



Pool terrace at Mihir Garh, Rohet
PHOTOS BY ANDREW HARPER

TIGER RESERVES

Ranthambore and Sher Bagh Camp



Bengal tiger, and our lavish tent at Sher Bagh
PHOTOS BY ANDREW HARPER

INDIA HAS 48 TIGER RESERVES, and current estimates suggest that they are now home to between 1,700 and 2,200 tigers. Although this may seem a pitifully small number, the current trend is somewhat encouraging. According to some optimistic accounts, tiger numbers have increased by 30 percent in the past five years as a result of more determined enforcement of anti-poaching laws.

India's most famous tiger reserve is Ranthambore National Park — in part because of its location, just three hours' drive from Jaipur. Otherwise, the best-known reserves are Kanha and Bandhavgarh (in both of which I recommend luxury camps). New names will soon become familiar. For example, Pench, Panna and Tadoba national parks are all attracting more visitors, and the first two already have excellent lodges — Baghavan and Pashan Garh — run by Taj Hotels. During Indian public holidays and on weekends, well-known parks can be overrun with noisy trippers.

Despite the crowds, Ranthambore remains a park of extraordinary beauty, with lakes, forests, meadows and the romantic ruins of a 10th-century fort surrounded by ridges of hazy hills. On this occasion, I opted to stay at SUJÁN's **Sher Bagh**, a peaceful camp of 12 air-conditioned white-canvas tents. Each is appointed with a large double bed, sisal matting, hunting prints and dark wood-and-leather Edwardian “campaign” furniture. The en suite bath seems more suited to a luxury hotel than to a tent, with a stone floor, marble surfaces and a powerful walk-in shower. Public areas include a congenial library/bar (where Wi-Fi is available) and are decorated with large black-and-white photographs of tigers, taken in Ranthambore over the past 40 years. Western-style lunches are followed by traditional Indian dinners cooked using clay ovens. Overall, Sher Bagh feels less like a resort and more like an authentic safari camp, therefore, it is likely to appeal to travelers who have a deep and longstanding interest in wildlife.

■ Read more about India's tiger reserves and our visit to Sher Bagh online.

architect walked out, and he and his wife were obliged to design and construct the new building themselves, with the help of around 100 local laborers and craftsmen.

Our suite proved to be spacious, colorful and supremely comfortable, with hand-stenciled walls, an ornate fireplace, inlaid furniture, bright local fabrics and carpets, and intricate wrought iron. Double doors opened onto a small terrace with a plunge pool. The outside bath came with twin vanities, a walk-in shower and a soaking tub adjacent to windows with a view of the desert. The public areas at Mihir Garh are similarly expansive and have a wonderful sense of place, thanks to traditional textiles, paintings and artifacts. Everything about the property is distinctive. Meals are taken outside next to the horizon pool, and there, we enjoyed refined Indian cuisine, accompanied at dinner by local musicians.

Activities include Jeep excursions to nearby villages, especially those inhabited by the Bishnoi, a group whose belief system not only precludes the taking of animal life, but also the felling of trees. In addition to the blackbuck and nilgai, birdlife in the region is prolific, and I was able to renew my acquaintance with the demoiselle cranes. The property also has around 15 Marwari horses — a breed once favored by Rajasthan's Rajput warrior caste — and it is possible to ride out into the desert for picnics, or even to spend the night in a fly camp.

Mihir Garh is comparatively remote, and the pace of life there is leisurely. It will not appeal to everyone, but if you want to unwind in an unusual and evocative setting, the property has much to recommend it. Thakur Sidharth Rohet Singh is a solicitous host, and his staff are similarly charming.

JAWAI BANDH

Seventy miles south of Rohet, the flat, sandy landscape of the Thar Desert is replaced by plains punctuated by enigmatic granite outcrops, some up to 1,500 feet high, overlooked by the hills of the Aravalli Range. Set in front of two such outcrops near the remote village of Jawai Bandh, **JAWAI** camp enjoys a setting that seems almost primeval. Another new SUJÁN property, it opened in December 2013 and comprises 10 spacious air-conditioned tents, plus dining and library tents, a small spa and a plunge pool. Decorated in white, black and red, the accommodations have an exceptionally imaginative aesthetic that successfully combines traditional

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and modern design elements. Comfortable and convenient baths provide twin vanities and large, walk-in rainfall showers, while an exterior deck is furnished with a writing desk and two small sofas. In short, JAWAI offers the very definition of "glamping."

The principal reason for JAWAI's existence is the sizeable local leopard population. Around 50 of the big cats inhabit the surrounding rocky outcrops in startlingly close proximity to the local villages. The reasons given for this are chiefly speculative, though the camp now has a resident wildlife scientist who may in time be able to provide definite answers. One factor may be that some of the leopard live in abandoned Hindu temples and have acquired an aura of sanctity as a result. (In fact, it may be the reverse: Cows are sacred in India, and Hindus do not eat beef, so bulls have no value — unless they happen to be killed by a leopard.)

Game drives in comfortable open-topped Jeeps leave JAWAI shortly after dawn and late each afternoon. After one drive of around 20 minutes, we parked beneath an outcrop, where a female leopard had been spotted that morning. We settled down to wait, scanning the boulders with binoculars. About an hour later, the leopard duly emerged from a cave where she had been resting during the heat of the day and strolled across to an open plateau. There, she was soon joined by three large cubs. Although the family was clearly visible through binoculars, the leopard were beyond the effective range of most normal camera lenses. Still, it was certainly a memorable and worthwhile wildlife encounter. Other activities include walks with the local semi-nomadic Rabari herders and bird-watching on a nearby lake where, in winter, you may spot sarus cranes, the world's tallest flying bird, which stand at a height of up to 5 feet, 11 inches. The spectacular UNESCO World Heritage site of Kumbhalgarh Fort is a 20-minute drive away. (Its 15th-century perimeter walls are 22 miles around, second in length only to the Great Wall of China.) I am told that equestrian activities are planned for the near future.

This is a stylish and well-run camp that is a destination in its own right. It also has the added advantage of being located about halfway between Jodhpur and Udaipur. I highly recommend a two-night stay. JAWAI is also emblematic of the new opportunities that India increasingly offers to sophisticated American travelers. **HR**



Tent interior and bath at JAWAI leopard camp

PHOTOS BY ANDREW HARPER



HOTELS AT A GLANCE

SUJAN Rajmahal Palace 96

LIKE Magnificent accommodations, ambience of a grand private residence, charming staff, tranquil atmosphere. **DISLIKE** The unheated pool. Wi-Fi that works only in the public areas. **GOOD TO KNOW** The spa will soon be expanded. THE RESIDENT'S SUITE, \$980. THE KENNEDY SUITE, \$1,200. SADAR PATEL MARG, JAIPUR. TEL. (91) 141-414-3000. SUJANLUXURY.COM

Lakshman Sagar 88

LIKE Colorful and authentic Rajasthani décor in spacious cottages. **DISLIKE** Isolated lodgings; lack of a sophisticated program of activities. **GOOD TO KNOW** A large road is being constructed between the hotel and Raipur, which may well impact the atmosphere of the property. SUPERIOR ROOM (LAKE VIEW), \$195. RAIPUR. DIST. PALI. TEL. (91) 11-2649-4531. SEWARA.COM

RAAS 95

LIKE Spectacular location; delicious food; exceptionally stylish public areas; attractive spa. **DISLIKE** Smallish Garden Rooms and Luxury Rooms. **GOOD TO KNOW** The swimming pool is heated, which is a nice change in Rajasthan. LUXURY ROOM, \$340. DUPLEX SUITE, \$420. HERITAGE SUITE, \$465. TUNWARIJI KA JHALARA, MAKRAANA MOHALLA, JOODHPUR. TEL. (91) 291-263-6455. RAASJOODHPUR.COM

The Serai 94

LIKE Glamorous tents; spacious public areas; imaginative interior design; friendly and helpful staff. **DISLIKE** Disappointing excursions to Jasaimar and into the Thar Desert. **GOOD TO KNOW** The property is self-contained and is a lovely place in which to relax. LUXURY TENTED SUITE, \$705. BHERWA VILLAGE, JASAIMAR. TEL. (91) 11-4617-2700. SUJANLUXURY.COM

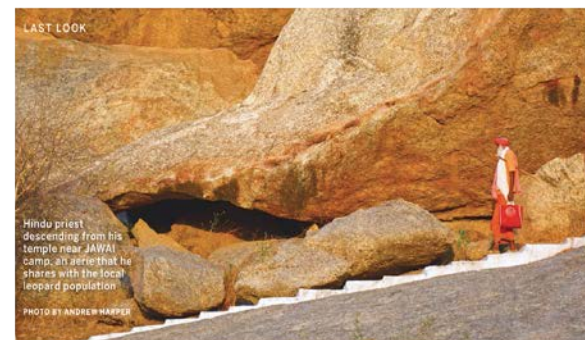
Mihir Garh 94

LIKE Wonderfully expansive suites; inspired interior design; charming owner and staff. **DISLIKE** Litter-strewn and unappealing Rohet village. **GOOD TO KNOW** Equestrian excursions to wilderness camps can be highlights of a stay. ALISHAN SUITE, \$505. MEALS INCLUDED. C/O ROHET HOUSE, DIST. PALI. TEL. (91) 291-243-1161. MIHIRGARH.COM

JAWAI 94

LIKE Highly imaginative design; beauty of the landscape; feeling of seclusion. **DISLIKE** Leopard sightings that are difficult to photograph. **GOOD TO KNOW** The huge fortress of Kumbhalgarh is only 75 minutes away and is a very worthwhile excursion. LUXURY TENT, \$800. MEALS AND GAME DRIVES INCLUDED. JAWAI BANDH, DIST. PALI. TEL. (91) 11-4617-2700. SUJANLUXURY.COM

★ preceding a rating, denotes an officially recommended hotel. Visit AndrewHarper.com for more information on these and nine more recommendations in Rajasthan.



From My Notebook

Ireland by Luxury Train

Belmond — formerly Orient Express — is adding to its extensive train portfolio. Modeled on the Belmond Royal Scotsman, the new **Belmond Grand Hibernian** will enter service in August 2016. The train comprises 20 en suite cabins (for a maximum of 40 passengers) decorated with a combination of contemporary and traditional Irish designs. Two dining cars will offer authentic Irish cuisine, including smoked fish and artisanal cheeses. Waterford crystal and Irish tweed will further enhance the sense of place. Planned journeys range from two to six nights. The six-night "Grand Tour of Ireland" will follow an itinerary beginning and ending in Dublin, visiting Cork, Killarney, Galway, Westport, Portrush (for the Giant's Causeway) and Belfast.

London Classic Reopens

Overlooking Hyde Park Corner, **The Lanesborough** has always enjoyed one of the best locations in London. The grand Regency building was constructed as a hospital in 1827. After a lengthy conversion, it opened as a Rosewood hotel in 1991; 10 years later, it became a St. Regis. Now, after a two-year renovation, it has reopened as part of the impressive Oetker portfolio that includes Le Bristol in Paris. The grand interior has been completely redesigned, following plans drawn up by the late Alberto Pinto. Reservations are being accepted from July 1. With Claridge's, The Connaught and The Berkeley having recently been acquired by Qatar Holding, the grand hotel scene in London seems to be evolving at considerable speed.

St. Regis Comes to Venice

The 15-acre Isola di San Clemente lies in the Venetian lagoon 10 minutes by boat from San Marco. Traditionally it was known as the "Gateway to Venice," where the doge would greet distinguished visitors. Over the centuries, the island has been home to crusaders, soldiers, monks and the insane. The grand monastery buildings were converted into a hotel in 2003. When I last visited, the property had obvious potential, but seemed a little down-at-the-heels. It has now reopened as **The St. Regis Venice San Clemente Palace**. I suspect that the Hotel Cipriani may face some unexpectedly stiff competition. Incidentally, the island's 15th-century Church of San Clemente must be one of the more glamorous places in the world to get married.



Collection Updates

JUNE BRINGS two more of my personal guides: **Mexico & Caribbean** and **Central & South America**. Updates feature our latest discoveries, regional notebooks, touring maps, restaurants and, of course, my recommended hotels. The Harper Collection books are now available for individual purchase at AndrewHarper.com/store/harper-collection. They are also mailed bimonthly to Premier subscribers. To upgrade your subscription, contact clientrelations@andrewharper.com.

LAST WORD

Reader Survey 2015

TIME FLIES when you're having fun, they say. And so, after 12 months of hectic but infinitely rewarding travel, I find, to my amazement, that it is time once again to announce our annual Reader Survey. No editor can ever know enough about his readers. Obviously I hope to provide the kind of news that is most relevant to your interests. I want to learn about your favorite hideaways, but I am also keen to find out more about your best loved city hotels, spas and family resorts, as well as your favorite cruises and safari lodges. Which discovery in the past year gave you the greatest thrill? And what stay proved the saddest disappointment? Which recent story have you found the most useful? Which countries would you like to read more about? And where in the world do you dream about visiting next? As an inducement, I am offering a sweepstakes prize of a two-night stay at The St. Regis Aspen. To participate in the survey and to learn more about the sweepstakes, go to andrewharper.com/reader-survey

A. Harper

Treasures of India by Private Jet

OUR TRAVEL OFFICE is now accepting reservations for this remarkable Harper Journey, set for October 21-November 3. The 14-day itinerary is an introduction to some of the most famous sights in India, including the Taj Mahal. Participants will also attend exclusive events. To learn more, contact Erica Dooze at (800) 375-4685, or edooze@andrewharper.com.

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