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“The SUJÁN group has redefined our idea of luxury.”


Instants The Relax & Observe magazine

TRAVEL • CUISINE • COMMITMENTS • CONCIERGE • ON THE ROAD

TRAVEL • JOANN PAI • THE MAJESTY OF RAJASTHAN



The majesty of Rajasthan

Joann Pai leads us to discover the riches of India. Its first stopover is the Suján Sher Bagh, nestled in the heart of the Ranthambhore Nature Reserve in Rajasthan. It is the ideal place to meet tigers and experience the luxury camping of the 1920s.

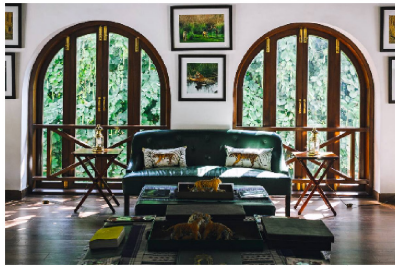
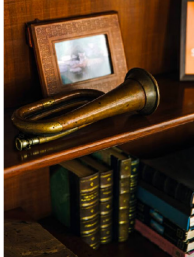



JOANN PAI — Joann Pai is a food & travel photographer in Paris. She has journeyed all over the world working on lifestyle shoots and editorial assignments. Her work has been featured in esteemed publications such as Vogue, Condé Nast Traveler, and The New York Times... Follow her on Instagram: @joannpai






India has been a dream destination of mine: the colors, textures, and, of course, the food! I couldn't have been more excited to embark on my first trip through the majestic region of Rajasthan, visiting three very different Relais & Châteaux properties: a luxury safari camp, a royal palace, and a estate in the sand dunes.

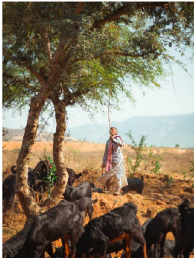


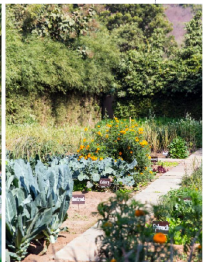

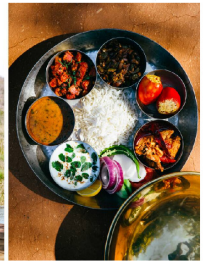
One of our 1920s inspirations, the Sher Dey's safari camps in Ranthambhore National Park, one of the best places to see tigers in the wild. The camp is a luxury safari camp, a royal palace, and a estate in the sand dunes.

We were greeted by Piyush, the resident ranger, who gave us a tour of the camp. The design is reminiscent of 1920s safari quarters. It consists of 10 hand-stitched canvas tents and two suites, equipped with a private Jacuzzi and pool, library, spa, and beautiful outdoor areas where you can relax and connect with nature. We were delighted to hear chirping birds and see monkeys running around the property! Piyush advised us to always walk around in pairs, as tigers are known to pay a visit now and then. He was excited to show us photos of animals caught by their surveillance cameras.

Inside our tent, everything was tastefully decorated and we felt as if we'd stepped back in time. After using the elegant, brass-fitted rainshower in the bathroom, I realized that "camping" would never be the same again. The room was also thoughtfully accessorized with items for our comfort and enjoyment – a fleece throw and shawl for cool evenings, lanterns, a discreet "bottle" button for service, and guidebooks on local wildlife. Everything was designed to ensure we had the finest experience.

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We found their dedication to quality also shines in their cuisine. The property has a farm where they raise cows, chickens, goats, and an organic herb and vegetable garden. Although there is a designated indoor dining area on the property, the staff also arranges various outdoor dining spots to give their guests the pleasure of a different experience each time. They surprised us with a table by the pool boasting a gorgeous view of the national park. The menu included a mix of western and Indian dishes. Everything we had was delicious! After we filled our bellies, we headed out with Piyush for a bird-watching walk followed by my first safari drive.



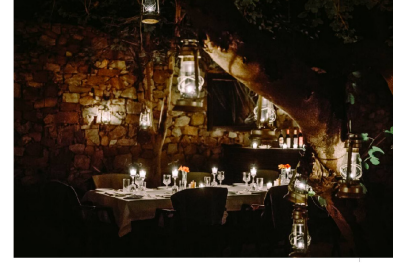
There are over 350 different species of birds in this region. Piyush took the time to point them out to us, and even explained their fascinating making rituals! As we entered the park in the Jeep, my eyes widened with excitement as I saw the surrounding wildlife. We quickly spotted monkeys, deer, crocodiles, crocodiles, and oaks. Our wildlife guide, who seemed to have a sixth sense about animals, spotted a Bengal tiger from afar, napping under a tree. While we waited patiently for her to come out, our lovely guide and driver offered us chai tea, cookies, and cake.



After a while, we were convinced the tiger had gone down for a long nap, so we carried on with our drive to see if we could spot other animals. Shortly after leaving, we received a radio call that the tiger had awakened and was out and about! We rushed back toward the original site and, after a quick turn, spotted the tiger strolling proudly across the river. It was exhilarating! A big thank you to Piyush for letting me borrow his camera for a closer shot of the tiger! The enthusiasm and knowledge of the two guides and driver made this experience unforgettable.



When the sun started to set, we returned to the camp as the staff began setting up lanterns and candles around the property. It looked absolutely magical. Each evening, they set up a bonfire, where guests can enjoy an aperitif before dinner. For us, it was a great way to connect with other guests and exchange stories about our safari adventures. We watched as the chef started preparing our food on the outdoor grill and tandoori oven. We even took the time to give us a cooking lesson on making eggplant Bharta. After our culinary education, delectable appetizers like tandoori chicken, homemade meatballs, mini samosas, and roasted cauliflower with mint sauce started making the rounds around the fire.



Once we were ready for dinner, they led us to our table, surrounded by lanterns and the pots set under the stars. A six-item Indian meal was served, consisting of chicken with red chilies and garlic in ghee, cheese-stuffed tomatoes, okra, carrots, lentil dal, and yogurt, all over rice. Different types of freshly baked naan were served throughout meal. The naan was so crispy, unlike anything we'd ever tasted back home. The chef explained that they even mill their own flour here. The dinner was incredible – the ingredients were of top quality and cooked to perfection. I was in food heaven. The meal ended with a warm lentil pudding with nuts and spices.

We retired to our tent to discover that they had warmed up our beds with hot-water bottles. It was yet another thoughtful touch. Our experience at Sher Bagh was exceptional: the warmth of the staff, our knowledgeable safari guides, the cuisine, and the comfortable design of the camp site. The Sher Bagh group has redefined our idea of luxury.

