

The Telegraph

#MYSPLACE

For years, SUJAN's camps have been the playgrounds of the posh. They have also been a carefully kept secret. Last year, my wife and I had the good fortune of visiting the Jawai Leopard Camp. It was stunning. As were the sightings.

Recently, I was at The Serai, their charming camp skirting the city of Jaisalmer.

Jaisalmer does not have direct flight connections. So I flew to Jodhpur, where there was a car to pick me up and Ganur Paul (of SUJAN), who made the four-hour drive from there to The Serai, look like a breeze. And the roads in Rajasthan are by far the finest in the country.

SWAPAN'S SOMETHINGS
En route, we stopped at a hotel-cum-restaurant called Manvar. Order their dal, also gohl and Jungle Chicken. It is simply fantastic.

The first thing that strikes you about The Serai is the sheer expanse. Twenty-one tents spread over 100 acres of indigenous desert scrub. The vastness of the camp is matched by that of its tents. They are huge. With a sit-out, a study, a massive bedroom, a huge loo and



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The next morning, it was time to visit The Serai's farm. It had all the wonderful herbs that make meals at The Serai, magical

even a jacuzzi in its backyard. Upon reaching, I wasted no time in exploring the imposing dunes that are a few minutes away from The Serai. I was driven in a 4x4, custom-made for SUJAN. As we drove up to the dunes, I was stunned by the bar that was set up for a sundowner. A Sangiovese amidst the sand dunes! I thought I saw The Serai wink at me.

Over the years, I have ceased to look at menus. It takes away the joys of discovery. As luck would have it, Chef Rajiv, the executive chef of SUJAN, was at The Serai. I asked to meet him and the other chefs in the team. I was told that all the chefs at The Serai were from one particular village: Sanwala. Interesting, I told them to make me whatever they felt like for dinner.

Dinner that night was unreal. Rabodi, moong and moth dal, khumbi, gwarfalli aur kaachar, chicken curry and lehsuni chutney.



SWAPAN SETH IS AT A LOSS FOR WORDS AFTER EXPERIENCING THE VOCABULARY OF SUJAN THE SERAI IN JAISALMER

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Breakfast was poached eggs with avocado on toast. Delicious. I followed that up with some mirchi ka polone. Fiery yet fantastic.

Mornings are best spent in the Lounge of The Serai. It has some outstanding books.

At lunch, Chef Rajiv brought endless twists to the table. Small plates replaced the conventional menu. The preface was a chilled carrot, ginger and cumin soup. Astonishing.

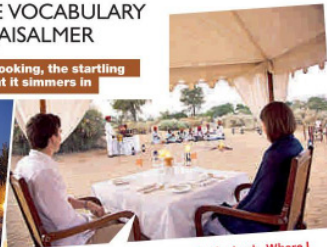
Then came the entire ensemble: Fish Fingers with a terrific tartar sauce. Prosciutto and pepperoni quiche. Mutton mince filo cigars. Chicken rice paper rolls. Parmesan and rosemary chizzel. With salmon steak being the main course. It was one masterful medley.

After such a meal it is important to submit oneself to the hands of Kalpesh and Lakshmi. I got Kalpesh to do my shoulders and Lakshmi to do my feet. It was an exquisitely invigorating massage.

Dinner was set up in the bush. Where I had the most awe-inspiring evening with a choir of Manganiyar singers singing for us. How they watered our souls.

Two nights at The Serai are more than adequate. It gives you adequate time to notice the niceties that dot its landscape. Details are the presiding deities at The Serai. What else can explain ashtrays filled with sand. Lavender soaps handmade and custom-made for The Serai by the venerable Gulab Singh Johrimal in Old Delhi. Seeds of local plants and flowers packed for me to take back. Excruciating attention is paid to every nook.

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leave. But the thrill continued. And took me to a great restaurant in Jodhpur — Gypsy, where I had the most delicious Rajasthan thali.

A trip to The Serai is steeped in the sincerity of the cooking, the startling surprises that it throws up and the sophistication that it simmers in.

Anjali Singh, who is the creative conscience behind The Serai, told me that "the vocabulary of The Serai changes with the seasons".

Ironic that she chose a word like vocabulary about a place that leaves you at a loss for words.

Copywriter, author, art collector, wine collector, son, brother, husband, father... Swapan lives in Gurgaon. His heart, however, is in Calcutta

To book a getaway to SUJAN The Serai, log on to www.sujanresort.com