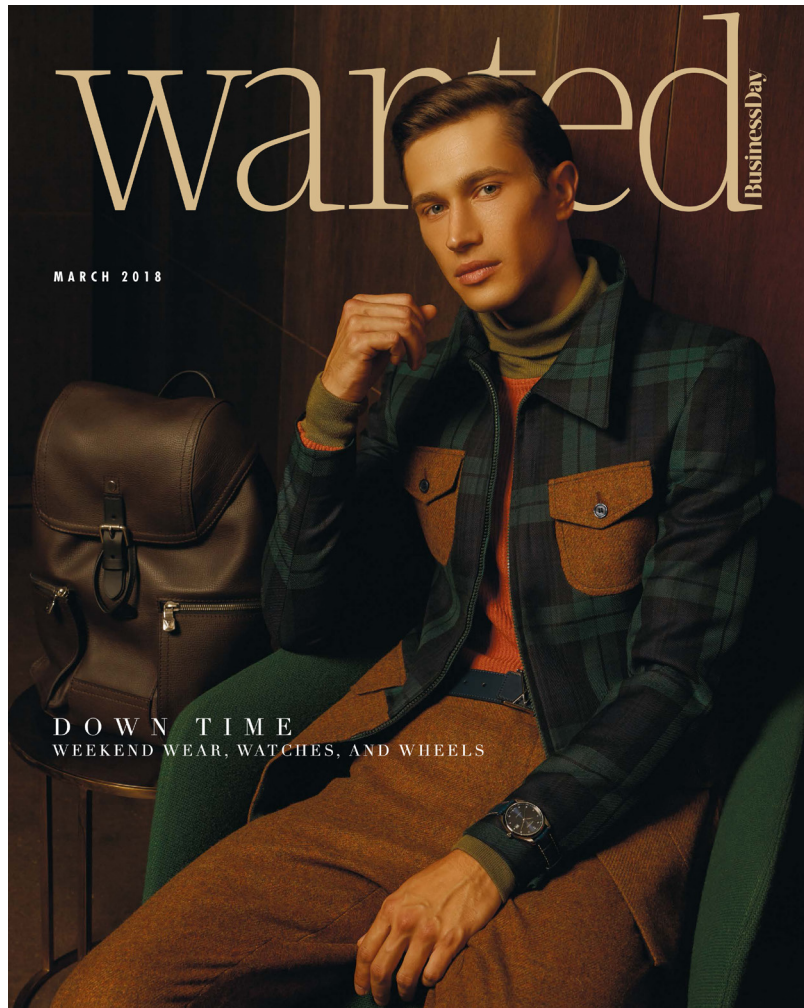


# WANTED BUSINESS DAY

March 2018

“The is an exceptional safari.”



travel



In the wilderness of Rajasthan, India, Suján Jawai provides an opulent base to explore the astounding terrain, meet local Rabari people, and search for the leopards that thrive in the hills among the people and their temples

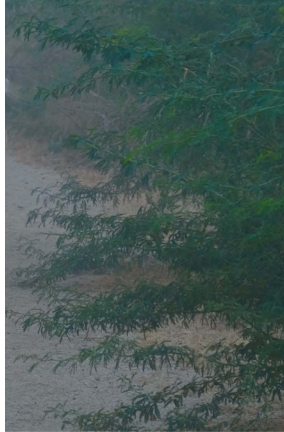
**T**HE JEEP IS AT A 45° ANGLE, pulling us up the steep granite surfaces of Jawai, between Udaipur and Jodhpur. Our driver professionally handles the 4x4 vehicle around and over various obstacles, and, after some careful manoeuvring, we crest the slope, and a spectacular scene appears. Rays of sunrise are slanting over Jawai Bandh, on the plains below us. It's a glorious panorama, with light reflecting in the water, and gigantic boulders washed with a rusty glow. Wild peacocks decorate the scene, and we spot a Great-Horned Owl asleep on a bare rock. This

is wild, remote Rajasthan, where leopards roam freely in the hills. We don't linger, as we are searching for the renowned leopards that exist side by side with the local Rabari people on their remote sesame or wheat farmlands and around their Hindu and Jain temples. The leopards are respected by the Rabari community, and viewed as the guardians of these sacred hills. The Rabari men — clad in characteristic crimson turbans — tend their cattle and goats during the day. While herding them to shelters before nightfall along the dusty tracks, "Gau Dhull" — the dust of the cows — refracts the slanting evening rays of the sun. The leopards sometimes hunt stray dogs, but,

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should livestock be taken, the herders may apply to a government compensation fund. During our game drive, we watch groups of Rabari women, clad in brightly coloured saris, as they carry threshing tools or bundles of cow fodder on their heads.

This arid area — with Indian Spurge trees and hardy, low growing Anogeissus scrub — is not a National Park, but is home to plenty of game and birds. Plum-headed parakeets screech as they fly overhead. Red-vented bulbuls add a flash of colour to the Flame of the Forest trees, which are green now, but burst into a riotous red flower in March, when they have no leaves. In a sandy riverbed, we see a Grey Mongoose, then a rare Jungle Cat. Grey langur monkeys cavort in a field where sesame and wheat crops are grown. The highlight is a

ADDITIONAL IMAGES: KEVIN MAZUR AND WILHELM SPINER

sighting of a female leopard lying on a rock, with three cubs frolicking around her. We observe this soul-stirring scene, until the mother leaps down, out of sight, with the youngsters following her.

Away from the leopards and closer to the Jawai Dam, I jump from the vehicle to do some spontaneous yoga — a Surya Namaskar (salute to the sun) on the flat rock surface — while my driver and naturalist set up for an elegant morning tea.

Back at Suján Jawai, Rabari staff wearing their traditional clothing — white sarongs tied up to create baggy trousers, white tribal shirts, and intricately tied turbans — offer us hand towels and a drink of rose-petal cordial. My tent has a sublime view of the hills, so I laze on the covered private verandah on a leather chair, simply gazing at the scene. The 10 white canvas tents have been individually crafted and tastefully decorated in a chic theme of black and white with touches of scarlet to break the monochrome. Behind the king-sized bed is a black-and-white image of a Jawai leopard on the Aravali rocks. My writing desk looks out onto the wilderness. The en-suite bathroom is elegant, with wrapped soaps and luxurious amenities. Subtle opulence is evident in the designer candleholders and lamps.

I leave my tent when I am hungry, and take a stroll to the open-sided, canvas-covered dining area that looks out over a swimming pool. Meal times are flexible, depending on when you have returned from your game drive or excursion, or simply on when you feel like eating. Suján Java is part of the Relais and Châteaux hotel group, and meals are tasty, creatively presented, and memorable. Salads are available at lunchtime, with ingredients grown in the kitchen garden or sourced from nearby farmers. Local fishermen procure fresh fish. The kitchen behind the dining area is open-sided, and guests who would like to watch food preparation are welcome. The wine list is small, but carefully curated. I selected the Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand to accompany my homemade pasta.

Private dining is available where romantic settings, superb cuisine — much of it Indian — and the sounds and scents of nature make for unforgettable moments. The lanterns, canvas chairs, steel tables with wooden tops, and the careful details of the meal are exquisite.

After travelling for many weeks, I was particularly pleased with a treatment at the camp spa. My therapist was a gentle, soft-spoken man from Nagaland in Northeastern India, who transformed my feet from hard to pretty.

This is an exceptional safari, and a rare opportunity to see man and nature in astonishing harmony. It was a spiritual encounter for me to experience the boulder-strewn landscape, engage with the Rabari people, visit the local temples, and be pampered in stylish elegance. ☺

[beyondthetaj.com](http://beyondthetaj.com); [ethiopianairlines.com](http://ethiopianairlines.com)

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