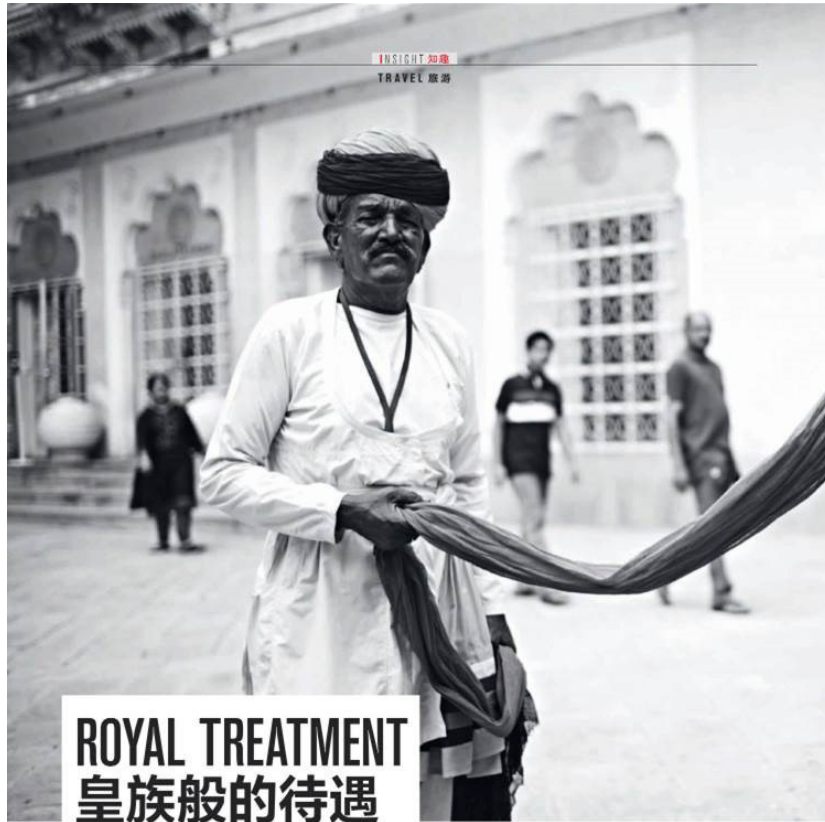


“ I found it a tremendous pleasure to return to the pampering comforts of the Palace”



ROYAL TREATMENT 皇族般的待遇

India boasts of several hotels that were converted from grand palaces of yore, melding history with luxury to spectacular effect
印度有太多脏乱的传言，但它的现代与古远、奢华与贫穷、温和与粗暴，都让人着迷。尤其是拉贾斯坦那几千年的富丽堂皇与 21 世纪的奢华结合，会让你对这个古老国度另眼相看。

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY BY NG KING KANG / 吴庆康 (USING LEICA Q & CANON D80)



There are over 1,000 types of turbans in the state of Rajasthan. Known as the safi, saaga or jaggi, the turban is an important part of the local dress and a symbol of different attributes, such as honour, respect and fraternal love. It is usually 9m long and various colours signify different things. For instance, a bright orange turban signifies bravery and the warrior spirit, while pink and red turbans are generally worn by men at a wedding. 在拉贾斯坦有超过1000种类型的头巾，是服装中的一个重要组成部分，象征着不同的属性。例如，明亮的橙色头巾象征着勇气和战士精神，而粉色和红色的头巾通常在婚礼上穿着。头巾的长度通常为9米，不同的颜色象征着不同的属性。例如，明亮的橙色头巾象征着勇气和战士精神，而粉色和红色的头巾通常在婚礼上穿着。

My eyes were drawn quickly to the turbans worn by the male staff at the Sujan Rajmahal Palace Hotel. Traditional and fashionable at the same time, the headgear sports a pink that was not only striking but also in sync with this rose-hued city.

Jaipur, the capital and the largest city of the Indian state of Rajasthan, coloured its buildings pink to welcome the Prince of Wales during his tour of India in 1876. Since then, it has been dubbed the Pink City.

Turbans of various colours have long been worn in India to denote one's status and identity. As they say, when in Rome, do as the Romans do. So before I got out to visit the local sights, I asked the hotel staff to help me put on a pink turban. Donning one, as it turned out, proved to be an art. It is more complicated than fastening a neck-tie or bow tie and even the locals sometimes need help to secure the 9m long piece of cloth on their heads.

With my markedly different dressing – and frankly sunglasses – I stood out among the crowd. I had people coming up and asking to take pictures with me. I grew strangely addicted to this and ended up wearing turbans of various shades as I toured the state. The interactions I gained with the locals as a result of my headgear added a unique dimension to my 12-day trip.

India is a complex country with a long and rich history. While some people stereotype the country as dirty or unsafe, my experience was the opposite. Besides a trove of World Heritage Sites, you will also find a good number of boutique hotels converted from the palaces of yore, which have witnessed much change over the ages.

This marriage between old-world majesty and 21st-century luxury creates a refreshing glimpse of India and nurtures a greater appreciation for the extraordinary attributes of this ancient civilisation.

Take the Sujan Rajmahal Palace hotel, which dates back 260 years. It was originally built by the

Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II as a private palace and garden retreat for his beloved wife. In the 19th century, the palace became the private residence of senior British officials and was used to host a number of foreign dignitaries. Subsequently, it was converted into a boutique hotel and was, at one point, part of the Taj Hotels Resorts & Palaces (THRP) group.

The hotel reopened as an independent entity in 2015 and is now lauded as the most elegant garden-palace hotel in Jaipur. True

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Singapore



Treasures abound in the Sojan Rajmahal Palace hotel. One of them is the white piano in the lobby which was a gift to the hotel from Queen Elizabeth II the year after her visit to the hotel. Countless dignitaries have stayed at the hotel, including Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. 珍宝随处可见在苏让宫殿酒店。其中之一是白色钢琴在酒店大堂，是女王伊丽莎白二世在离开酒店后一年送给酒店的礼物。无数名流曾入住过酒店，包括杰奎琳·肯尼迪·奥纳西斯。



Amber Fort (also known as Amer Fort), which the Raja Man Singh began building in 1592, took 125 years to complete. There are three ways to scale Amber Fort: hike up on foot, drive up or take an elephant ride. 1992年由拉贾曼辛格王开始建造，历时125年完工的阿梅尔堡，有三种方式可以登顶这座堡垒：徒步、驾车或乘坐大象。 1992年由拉贾曼辛格王开始建造，历时125年完工的阿梅尔堡，有三种方式可以登顶这座堡垒：徒步、驾车或乘坐大象。

to its boutique hotel branding, the hotel is home to only 13 suites.

The hotel is adorned with ornate wallpaper and every corner makes for a great selfie spot. Service here is first class too. Besides having someone help me with my turban before I set out daily, my request to have a sherwani (a high-necked long coat) made by the best tailor in town within 24 hours was also duly met. The staff were also able to recommend – and secure me a table – at Jaipur's finest restaurants.

I found it a tremendous pleasure to return to the pampering comforts of the hotel each day after touring key sights such as Amber Fort and the Hawa Mahal. As a member of the Robes & Chateaux group, the hotel's food and beverage offerings were naturally at high standards. In fact with the royal treatment, guests could choose to have their meals anywhere in the hotel, whether it was in the garden, the lobby or in their own suites.

Jaipur was my third stop in India after New Delhi and Jodhpur. I flew into and left the country from Delhi, but did not have much time to check out the sights there. However, I made it a point to spare an evening for Indian Accent, the only Indian restaurant to be listed in the Asia's 50 Best Restaurants ranking.

Located inside The Manor hotel, it offers modern cuisine made with seasonal and organic ingredients. Modern cooking techniques are fused perfectly with traditional Indian recipes. Head chef Manish Mehrotra, who has become something of a celebrity, has received countless awards and was once named by Time magazine as one of India's most influential people. According to the concierge at the Imperial Hotel where I stayed, Indian Accent is far and above any other restaurant in India.

Over in Jodhpur in Rajasthan, I found another unique hotel: the uber chic Raas Jodhpur, the city's first boutique hotel. It offers a commanding view of the city's key landmark, the majestic Mehrangarh Fort, which was built in 1489 using the same red stone found in the hill on which it stands.

Despite fierce competition from the likes of TRP's Umad Bhawan Palace and the ITC Rajputana, the Raas Jodhpur, built in the haveli (mansion) style, has managed to carve a niche for itself. Converted from an 18th-century mansion, the property occupies 1.5 acres, including the courtyards. The original compound included a large entrance gate and three structures hewn out of red stone. Apart from restoring and rehabilitating these buildings, the hotel also built three new wings for guest suites. All boast unobstructed views of the Mehrangarh Fort, making the Raas Jodhpur a garden retreat from which to admire the fort.

Another geographical trump card of the hotel is



that it is right next to the famous Torji Ka Jhalra, an ancient step well that has been painstakingly restored. Managed by the hotel, the well is very deep and surprisingly clean. On weekend afternoons, it turns into a gathering place for children, who leap into the well from the steps. On seeing camera-toting tourists, many of them would attempt to jump into the water from the roof of the structure, then swarm around the visitors for a peek at the shots. Their unabashed joy over this simple pleasure is a happy sight.

There are other hotels in Rajasthan that offer tourist sights within the premises. But none can rival the grandeur of the new Alla Fort Bishangarh, which was converted from a 230-year-old fortress over seven years.

Located at Bishangarh Village in the Jaipur district, the luxury resort by Alla Hotels and Resorts is one of few heritage hotels converted from military structures. It sits on a granite hill and commands a 360-degree view of the rolling Rajasthan landscape dotted with havelis, as well as villages and temples.

At the foot of the hill is a local school that has been adopted by the hotel as part of its 'responsible luxury' initiative. Surrounded by 7m-thick walls and turrets, the towering fortress is embellished by beautiful arched windows and the traditional jaali lattice screen walls. Mughal and British influences intertwine, and traditional materials have been used in tandem with modern techniques in the restoration.

Conservation of the military stronghold was of paramount importance. The 59 suites feature 22 layouts to cater to its geography and each suite has been custom-designed. Windows that can be opened fully ensure that guests enjoy optimal views.

Prior to the Alla Fort Bishangarh, I had stayed at the remote Amberbagh resort in Awar in north-western Rajasthan. This was the centre of political power for various Northern Indian royal families in ancient times, and also the territory of Shah Jahan, who ordered the



India adheres to a strict caste system. The highest caste is represented by the colour blue and is believed to be closest to the gods. Thus, it used to be that someone who owns a blue house in Jodhpur belongs to the esteemed caste. Today, some locals believe the colour blue can repel mosquitoes and keep houses cooler. 印度有严格的种姓制度，最高种姓代表的颜色是蓝色。因此，在久隆浦城内拥有蓝色房子的人，被认为是种姓中最高级的人。据说蓝色还可以驱除蚊虫并让房屋更凉爽。所以把房子刷成蓝色，日子一久成为久隆浦的代表色。



Mehrangarh Fort, built using yellow sandstone in the 15th century, is one of the largest forts in India. The majestic structure stands 120m above Jodhpur, making it visible from any part of the city, including from the room of Raas Jodhpur. 梅兰加哈尔堡垒于15世纪建造，以黄色砂岩建造而成。堡垒高达120米，从城市任何地方，都能看到，包括从Raas酒店的方向。



The step well is a key water storage facility that is unique to India. In the 2nd century, thousands of step wells were built all over the country. Most have dried up due to the drop in groundwater levels in India. The Torji Ka Jhalra, managed by luxury heritage hotel Raas Jodhpur, is a smaller but well-preserved example of the step well. Here, it is common to see youngsters dive into the step well for fun. 阶梯井是印度独特的关键储水设施。公元二世纪时，成千上万的阶梯井在全国各地建成。由于长期以来越发地下水位下降，大部分阶梯井已经干涸。在久隆浦的Raas酒店管理的Torji Ka Jhalra阶梯井是个小但保存得非常好的一个，经常有许多当地年轻人喜欢跳进去玩。

ZBBZ

Singapore



The Jama Masjid, located along the busy Chawri Bazar Road in the heart of Old Delhi, is one of the world's three largest mosques. From the top of one of the mosque's minarets, you can view the cityscape of nearby Old Delhi as well as admire the historical Red Fort from afar. 位于印度德里中心的贾马清真寺，是世界上最宏伟的清真寺之一。从清真寺的尖塔顶端，你可以欣赏到德里老城的全景，以及远处的红堡。

洲闻名最珍贵的建筑群之一。关于这个地方有很多传说。它是一座整个城市和其他几座小城的几代人一夜之间建造起来的。考古学家也找不到原因。有些人猜测是地壳运动造成的。当地人认为，地震内流电力供应，但午夜时分常有光和声响传出。一些曾在午夜进入的人自述没出来过。这些当然是传说。我在白天去逛了一遍。人潮涌动，人气旺旺。一点都不觉得森。

说别人气，印度最旺的地点必定是阿格拉的泰姬陵。这个世人熟悉的印度地标已是不必多有笔墨形容。从未离开过入口就有长长人龙，挤得进去也心绪大受影响。要进这些人潮实在难如登天。就算入仕需乘电梯只有600米，每间客房都有泰姬陵景观的职员罗伊阿格拉阿格拉酒店。真的，能站在这一群姐妹看泰姬陵，还有什么需求？

从印度回来后很多朋友都发出同样的疑问：“该地的食物卫生吗？刷牙漱口能否得用‘矿泉水’？有没有食物中毒？她到处是垃圾牛屎臭味？”我的答案是，除了牛屎遍地之外，其他都是我们因习惯的误解。

- **The Imperial**
Jangpoh Lane Connaught Place
New Delhi 110001, India +91-11-23341234
- **Rasa Jodhpur**
Turnwar ji ka Jhals, Makrana Mahals, Jodhpur
Rajasthan 342001, India +91-29-12636455
- **Sujan Rajmahal Palace**
Sardar Patel Marg, C Scheme, Jaipur, Rajasthan
302001, India +91-11-4617200
- **Amarbagh**
District Alwar, Ajabgah, Rajasthan 301027, India
+91-14-65223333
- **Alla Fort Bishangarh**
Off MH-8 at Manoharpur, Bishangarh village
Jaipur, Bishangarh, Rajasthan 303 103, India
+91-14-222765500

Delicious India

For an unforgettable taste of India, dine at these must-try restaurants

Jaipur

Peshwari at ITC Rajputana

Peshwari is a landmark dining destination that serves a North-west Frontier meal centred on lentils, kebabs and breads. Prepared at the restaurant's display kitchen, the lavish spread includes its signature Dal Bukhara, or creamy Indian black lentil dal, that is paired with an exclusive collection of wines and other beverages.

➤ Jaipur Palace Road, Jaipur
Rajasthan 302006, India
+91-141-810-0100



Peshwari at ITC Rajputana



Suvarna Mahal at Taj Rambagh Palace

Suvarna Mahal at Taj Rambagh Palace

The top five-star restaurant in Jaipur, Suvarna Mahal serves a fine selection of royal cuisines that promises diners the best of Indian flavours. The menu is as grand as the setting. The Rambagh Palace was home to generations of royals until 1957. Suvarna Mahal occupies what was once the maharaja's royal banquet hall, which explains the lofty ceilings, gilded mirrors and Florentine frescoes.

➤ Taj Rambagh Palace
Bhawani Singh Road, Jaipur
Rajasthan 302005, India
+91-141-238-5700

Top Sights In India

Want to travel in style in India? Lightfoot Travel, a luxury tour operator with offices in Dubai, Hong Kong and Singapore, shows the way

India was one of the first destinations offered by Lightfoot Travel when the bespoke travel company started in 2009 and it remains popular with those seeking new and exciting experiences.

"India is the perfect destination for those looking to experience its fascinating and diverse cultures and to venture off the South-east Asian tourist track," said Lightfoot Travel's co-founder and director Nico Heath. The state of Rajasthan, famed for its palaces, forts and cultural festivals, is especially popular, and Heath recommends the region for

first-time visitors to India.

To allay fears about safety and hygiene, Lightfoot works closely with specialists with an intimate knowledge of India. "We work only with the best hotels, drivers and guides, ensuring that the experience is seamless from start to finish," said Heath.

"As demand for luxury travel in India grows, more heritage hotels have sprung up in the last few years. These, he noted, cater to those who seek utmost comfort as they experience authentic Indian culture."

One challenge in designing a

New Delhi

Indian Accent

Indian Accent showcases modern Indian cuisine by complementing the flavours and traditions of India with international ingredients and techniques. Chef Manish Mehrotra, lauded as the most exciting modern Indian chef today, adds his style "inventive Indian". Indian Accent has been voted the best restaurant in India at Asia's 50 Best Restaurants for three years running.

➤ 77, Friends Colony West, New Delhi, Delhi 110065, India
+91-11-4323-5151

Bukhara at ITC Maurya

Hailed as one of the finest representations of Indian cuisine, Bukhara is on the "must dine" list of gourmets around the world and has also hosted many heads of state and foreign dignitaries over the years. The restaurant at the ITC Maurya hotel has perfected the

cooking art of the traditional clay oven or tandoor, offering a delicious spread of succulent tandoor-cooked kebabs, vegetables and breads.

➤ ITC Maurya, Diplomatic Enclave, Sardar Patel Marg, New Delhi, Delhi 110021, India
+91-11-2611-2233

Jodhpur

Hanwant Mahal

Perched on a hill adjacent to the Umaid Bhawan Palace, Hanwant Mahal is part of the royal residence and offers majestic views of Jodhpur. The heritage property has been converted into a hotel complex. Dining at Hanwant Mahal offers a royal experience, where you bask in the charm of a bygone era while savouring the best of Indian cuisine straight from the royal kitchen.

➤ Circuit House Road, adjacent to Umaid Bhawan Palace, Jodhpur 342006, India
+91-98297-44417

Indique at Pal Haveli

Highly recommended by many travel guidebooks, this rooftop restaurant at the Pal Haveli boutique heritage hotel offers great views of Mehrangarh Fort and Umaid Bhawan Palace. The menu covers traditional and very delicious tandoor, biryani and North Indian curries. The Rajasthani laaf maas (meat-in curries) is also a delight.

➤ Pal Haveli, Udaib Sagar, near the clock tower, Jodhpur, Rajasthan 342001, India
+91-291-283-8344

Agra

Esphahan at The Oberoi Amarvilas

Billed as the best Indian restaurant in Agra, Esphahan is unique both in style and cuisine. The menu features recipes passed down from the kitchens of the Mughal emperors: perfectly marinated kebabs, rich Mughal curries and soft, handmade Indian flat breads served piping

hot on traditional burnished metal plates. There is also a wide range of vegetarian dishes, such as pan-fried paneers, sprouts and lentils.

➤ The Oberoi Amarvilas, Taj East Gate Road, Agra, Uttar Pradesh 202001, India
+91-562-223-1515

ITC Mughal

The luxury ITC Mughal hotel is said to offer some of Agra's top-rated dining options. Enjoy snacks and breakfast cocktails at the elegant Makhana lounge bar, tuck into a sumptuous spread of Indian and international fare at specialty buffet dining restaurant Taj Dano or sample the authentic flavours of North-west Frontier cuisine at Peshwari with baked delicacies and freshly baked Indian breads.

➤ ITC Mughal, Taj Ganj, Agra, Uttar Pradesh 202001, India
+91-56-2402-1700

bespoke itinerary in the vast country is in managing the travelling time between each stop, which can range from three to six hours. As most people prefer to visit three to four cities on a trip, this means they can spend a fair amount of time in a car.

One way around this is to schedule stops at interesting sights along the way. Heath added: "Alternatively, we recommend internal flights or train rides where possible, although one benefit of driving is that you get to see stunning landscapes and visit sights along the way that you otherwise would not."

For those with deep pockets but no time, Lightfoot would fly them by helicopter between the cities.

Here, IHealth recommends some must-visit sights in India.

Spot Tigers in Bandhavgarh National Park

Home to the highest density of tigers in India, Bandhavgarh National Park is a must for those hoping to catch a glimpse of the endangered species in its natural habitat. The park is also home to other beasts of the jungle, such as the elusive white tiger and the largest breeding population of leopards.

Cruise On A Houseboat On The Backwaters Of Kerala

Dubbed "God's own country", Kerala boasts breathtaking natural beauty and rich biodiversity. The

idyllic state is the perfect place to switch off. Discover age-old traditions at the spice plantations before cruising along the famed backwaters on your private houseboat.

Visit The Hornbill Festival In Nagaland

The spectacular 10-day Hornbill Festival, which takes place every December, is a colourful parade that showcases the heritage of Nagaland's 16 tribes. Catch dance and music performances, shop for crafts, visit traditional tribal food fairs and watch games such as chili-eating contests. To round off the experience, check into Kohima Camp, which is glamping at its best complete with butler service.



Lightfoot Travel's co-founder and director Nico Heath

Tour Tea Plantations In Darjeeling

Set up under the British as a cool summer retreat, the quintessentially colonial hill station of Darjeeling boasts one of India's prettiest and most picturesque backdrops. Besides exploring the emerald tea plantations, schedule a ride on the ornate narrow-gauge and visits to the local museums and temples.