

# CONDÉ NAST TRAVELER

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## “How to Spot a Tiger in the Wild: Tips and Tales from Actual Animal Trackers”



How to spot...



Tigers in Rajasthan, India

### Tigers in Rajasthan, India

"It was in the winter of 1979 that I first came to Ranthambhore National Park. I was just eight weeks or so at that time, so I don't remember anything of that visit, but I'm told that I did see my first tiger. My jungle education began as a toddler. I learned animal tracking and bushcraft skills under the tutelage of my father Tejbir, the late Fateh Singh Rathore, and my Uncle Valmik Thapar—regarded as India's leading wildlife experts and conservationists. My family has a 50-year legacy of working with wildlife through filming, monitoring, researching, and creating awareness about tigers in Ranthambhore for generations.

"I had the privilege of spending my growing up years in the forest of Ranthambhore, learning the ways of the jungle. From as far back as I can remember, I was tiger obsessed! My uncle and father trained me to be fearless in the forest at night, often daring me to walk into the tall grass where a tiger had recently been seen. From an early age I developed a keen sense of smell that helped me identify the presence of tigers in the vicinity.

"Using all your senses is key to tracking a tiger in the wild. Sound, smell, sight. And over time, instinct. Stop, pause, and listen; let the jungle talk to you. Pawprints are one of the key things to look out for, and for that you need to be the first in the jungle at the crack of dawn. They'll give you a fair idea of when the tiger was there, and predict where it might be headed next.

"Listen to the jungle. Many animals, both small and large, fauna and avifauna, will call when they see a tiger. These sounds, from the smallest cheeping bird, to the booming bark-like call of a Sambar deer, help in finding this most magnificent of big cats. The frequency, distance, and direction of the alarm calls are all important.

"Constantly keeping your eyes peeled, scanning the undergrowth for any unusual shape, movement—a flick of a tail, the twitch of an ear. When you know the forest, as well, you instantly recognize if a tree or rock seems to have taken a new form.

"Smell can also help in tracking big cats. The tigers mark their territories or presence by spray marking, and rubbing trees and bushes. The smell is somewhat likened to buttery popcorn or freshly boiled rice.

"There's really nothing quite thrilling as tracking tigers in the wild." —Jaisal Singh, founder, owner and conservationist, SUJÁN Sher Bagh