



Folklore of heroism and romance resound from the formidable monuments that majestically stand to tell the tale of a bygone era. The magic of vibrant Rajasthan - its rich heritage, colourful culture, exciting desert safaris, shining sand-dunes, amazing variety lush forests and varied wildlife - makes it a destination nonpareil. Rajasthan is often portrayed as one vast open-air museum, with its relics so well preserved that it delights even the most skeptical traveler.

It is an incredible destination for the outdoor-tourist - take a safari on horses, camels, elephants or even in jeeps, with the Aravalis - India's oldest mountain range as the backdrop. Feast your eyes on spectacular sand-dunes, take the tiger trail, or just watch the birds in the wetlands. You can also choose to pamper yourself in the lavish heritage properties. Rajasthan has something for everyone - one just has to choose an activity appropriate to one's temperament.





The Rajputs claim to be descendent of the Kshatriyas of the vedic period of India. Their ancestry has been divided into two main branches, the Suryavansa (race of the sun) and Induvansa (race of the moon). The former claim their descent from Lord Rama and the latter from Lord Krishna. A third branch was added later, the Agnikula or those that descended from the sacrificial fire.

Dynasties like the Sisodias of Mewar, the Kachhwahas of Ambar, the Rathores of Marwar, the Haddas of Jhalawar, Kota and Bundi, the Bhatias of Jaisalmer, the Shekhawats of Shekhawati and the Chauhans of Ajmer form part of the Rajput clan.

During the ancient period of India history the Rajputs maintained their independent status. Even the great emperors of the Mauryan period did not interfere in Rajput affairs. The Rajput came into greater prominence in the political life of India during the period of decline and disintegration of the Gupta empire.

Around 12th century Ad the Rajputs occupied vast territories including present day Jaipur, Ranthambore, Mewar, part of Bundi, Ajmer, Kishangarh, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer and even, at one time, Delhi. The Branches of the Chauhans ruled territories known as Ananta (in present day Shekhawati) and Saptasatabhumi.

These Rajput kingdoms come into conflict with Muslim invaders at different stages of their evolution some of them lost their independence while others held against the enemies. The Muslim invaders as also those who established their rule in India realized that the Rajputs, universally known for their valour, courage and martial spirit would not easily be subdued by military might alone.

The Rajputs are passionately attached to their land family and honour and are known for their indomitable courage, chivalry and utmost regard for truth. The Rajput history is replete with instances of heroism and self sacrifice both by the princes and the peasantry. There are innumerable heroes that stand out. However, some of them are legendary like Prithvi Raj Chauhan. He had succeeded to the kingdom of Delhi and Ajmer and had established a great reputation for chivalry and heroic exploits. He was attacked by Muhammad Ghori who commanded a large and powerful army. Both the armies met at the battle of

Tarain in 1191 AD. The Rajputs charged the enemy with tremendous rigour, which scattered in all directions in sheer panic. Muhammad Ghori was seriously wounded and carried off the battle field for safety of his life. The Muslim army retreated and fled. Never before had they experienced such a terrible rout. Muhammad Ghori was licking his wounds. He organized another attack in 1192 AD at the same place, with a much larger force. The Rajputs were outmanoeuvred by the superior tactics of the Muslims invaders and lost the battle. Prithvi Raj Chauhan died following his defeat.

Another shining example is of Rana Pratap of Mewar, an embodiment of courage, bravery and fortitude, who endeavoured ceaselessly to redeem the honour of his race and defied the mighty Mughal emperor, Akbar who was militarily the strongest and the richest ruler of his time. He continued to raid the Mughal territory time and again despite heavy odds and betrayal of his kith and kin, who vied with one another to enhance the glory of Mughal empire. He opposed the Mughals till his death in 1597.

His son Amar Singh succeeded in 1599, Mewar was invaded by the Mughal army under command of Prince Salim and Raja Man Singh. Amar Singh bravely led the attack but was defeated due to superior might of the Mughal army. Mewar was devastated by the imperialists.

Wise and far sighted that he was, Akbar realized the importance of support, cooperation and allegiance of the Rajputs and consequently, engineered matrimonial alliances with them in order to accomplish his objective of expanding and consolidating the empire. Akbar could not afford to ignore the brave Rajputs as these men who were capable of being formidable enemies, could also be cajoled to be his steady fast and loyal friends.

Many princely states continued to maintain their autonomy despite allegiance to a central authority at Delhi even during the British rule.



At the time of independence on 15th August 1947, Rajasthan was known as Rajputana (region of Rajputs). It comprised of 18 princely States, two chieftains and a British administered province of Ajmer-Merwara besides a few pockets and territories outside its main boundaries.

It took seven stages to form Rajasthan as it is defined today. In March 1948, the Matsya Union comprising Alwar, Bharatpur, Dholpur and Karauli was formed. Banswara, Bundi, Dungarpur, Jhalawar, Kishangarh, Kota, Pratapgarh, Shahpura and Tonk also joined the Indian union in March 1948, and formed part of Rajasthan. In April of the same year, Udaipur joined the State and the Maharana of Udaipur was made Rajpramukh. Thus, in 1948 the merger of south and southeastern States was almost complete. Still retaining their independence were Jaipur and the desert kingdoms of Bikaner, Jodhpur and

Jaisalmer. From security point of view, it was vital to the Indian Union to ensure that the desert kingdoms were integrated into the new nation. The princes finally agreed to sign the Instrument of Accession, and the kingdoms of Bikaner, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer and Jaipur were merged in March 1949. This time, the Maharaja of Jaipur, Sawai Man Singh II, was made the Rajpramukh of the State and Jaipur became its capital. Later in 1949, the United State of Matsya, comprising the former kingdoms of Bharatpur, Alwar, Karauli and Dholpur, was incorporated into Rajasthan. On January 26, 1950, 18 states of united Rajasthan merged with Sirohi to form the State leaving Abu and Delwara to remain a part of Greater Bombay and now Gujarat.

In November 1956 under the States Re-organisation Act, the erstwhile part 'C' State of Ajmer - Abu Road Taluka, former part of princely State, Sirohi (which were merged in former Bombay State) and Sunel Tappa region of the former Madhya Bharat merged with Rajasthan. Today with further reorganisation of the States of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, Rajasthan has become territorially the largest State of the Indian Republic.

The princes of the former kingdoms were constitutionally granted handsome remuneration in the form of privy purses and privileges to assist them in the discharge of their financial obligations. In 1970, Indira Gandhi, who was the then Prime Minister of India, commenced proceedings to discontinue the privy purses, which were abolished in 1971. Many of the former princes still continue to use the title of Maharaja, but the title is merely symbolic holding no regal significance. Many of the Maharajas still retain their palaces but some have converted them into profitable hotels while some others have made good in politics. The democratically elected Government runs the State with a Chief Minister as its executive head and the Governor, as the head of the State.

bikaner

Bikaner is one of the three main destinations in Desert circuit and a royal fortified city with a timeless appeal of the royal aura



Lying in the north of the desert State, the city is dotted with scores of sand dunes. Bikaner retains the medieval grandeur that permeates the city's lifestyle. More readily called the camel country, the city is distinguished for the best riding camels in the world and hence boasts of having one of the largest Camel Research and Breeding farms in the world. The ship of the desert is an inseparable part of life here. A camel besides being a mode of transport, also works on wells. These are built on high plinths with slender minarets on each of the four corners and can be noticed even from a distance.

The history of Bikaner dates back to 1486 when a Rathore prince, Rao Bikaji founded his kingdom. Bikaji



was one the five sons of Rao Jodhaji the illustrious founder of Jodhpur. But Rao Bikaji was the most adventurous of them. It is said that an insensitive remark from his father about his whispering in the Durbar provoked Bikaji to set up his own kingdom towards the north of Jodhpur. The barren wilderness called Jangladesh became his focal point and he transformed it into an impressive city. He accomplished this task with 100 cavalry horses and 500 soldiers, and established his kingdom on 84 villages abandoned by the 'Shankhla'. When Bikaji died in 1504 his rule had extended to over 3000 villages.

Junagarh Fort - Junagarh Fort is situated in the city of Bikaner, Rajasthan. The fort was originally called Chintamani and was renamed Junagarh in the early 20th century when the ruling family moved to Lalgarh. Some places of interest inside the fort are Anupmahal, Ganga Niwas and Rang Mahal or place of pleasure. Har Mandir in a majestic chapel where the Royal family worshipped their gods and Goddesses. Chandra Mahal or moon place has exquisite painting on its lime plaster walls and Phool Mahal or the 'Flower place' is decorated with inset mirror work. Towering columns, arches and graceful screen adorn these places. Durbar hall, Gaj Mandir, Sheesh Mahal and Karan Mahal are some other buildings worth seeing



Lalgarh Palace complex and Sadul Museum –

Lalgarh place was build between 1902 and 1926 according to Rajput, Mugal and European Architectural style.



The building was commissioned by Maharaja Ganga Singh (1889-1925) in memory of his father Maharaja Lall Singh and was designed by the British architect, Sir Swinton Jacob. It is coated in red sand stone and has several grand hall , lounges, cupolas and Pavilions, the building features magnificent pillars, elaborate fireplaces, Italian colonnades and intricate latticework and filigree work. The palace houses the Shri Sadul Museum as well as a large and important collection of Sanskrit manuscripts, the Anup Sanskrit Library. Though the Bikaner Royal family still live in the palace, part of the building has been converted into a Heritage hotel operated by the Royal family of Bikaner.



Gajner Palace and Wild life sanctuary

The strategic location of Bikaner on the ancient caravan routes that came from West/Central Asia made it a prime trade centre in those times. Bikaner stands on a slightly raised ground and is circumscribed by a seven km long embattled wall with five gates. The magnificent forts and palaces, created with delicacy in reddish-pink sandstone, bear testimony to its rich historical and architectural legacy. Surging lanes, colourful bazaars with bright and cheerful folks make Bikaner an interesting experience.

Modern Bikaner is the result of the foresight of its most eminent ruler Maharaja Ganga Singh (1887-1943) whose reformative zeal set the pace for Bikaner transformation from a principality to a premier princely state.

(32 KMs from Bikaner)- The wild life sanctuary, amidst lush green surroundings on the road of Jaisalmer, is a haven for chinkara, black buck, Nilgai, Wild boar and imperial sandgrouse and many birds and waterfowls which flock here in large numbers.



The hotel's compound stretches over 6000 acres. the palace was primarily a hunting resort during the days of the British Raj and attracted several dignitaries, including the prince of Wales in 1905, Governor General Lord Elgin, Lord Erwin in 1927 and Lord Mountbatten when he was Viceroy of India. The Palace complex also has the remnants of a historic railway station. This hunting resort was connected to Bikaner by rail in 1922. Christmas season was often celebrated with prearranged duck and Imperial sand grouse shoots. The palace turned grand Heritage hotel holds a world record of being largest (in terms of area) hotel in the world

Camel Festival

Every year in the month of January the Camel Festival is organized by the Rajasthan Tourism, in Bikaner at Ladera village which is 50 Km. away from Bikaner.



It attracts tourists from India and abroad in large number. Camels, the stalwarts of the desert, put up an unmatched performance during the festival bringing the desert town to life with their spellbinding display of graceful parades and stunning feats. The festival sways to the sound of melodious music created by the folk for performers. Various Camel contests are also held during the festival. Contests for foreigner and Indian tourists are also held in the camel festival.

Kolayat Ji -

Kolayat is a Railway station on Lalgah - Phalodi section of Bikaner division where famous Kolayat Ji lake is situated and is a place of pilgrimages for Hindus. In older time, it was called Kapilayatan as the mythological belief is that kapil Muni, the profounder of the Sankhya system of the Hindu philosophy, while journeying towards north west was bewitched by natural beauty of this place and choose it to perform tapasya for redemption of the world.



There are several marble temples, pavilions and 52 bathing ghats here and a dip in the waters, especially during Kartik Purnima is considered to be most auspicious.

Deshnoke - Karni Mata Temple:



On way to Jodhpur 30 Km away from Bikaner there exist unique temple of karni Mata. The rats called 'Kaba's' in local language are venerated here and the shrine is a sanctuary for them. Karni Mata was a Charan (A caste in Rajsthan) woman who is said to have possessed spiritual powers. It is believed that these Kabas carry souls of future Charans (Deepawats) who inhabit the region. Held sacred, they roam freely in the temple precincts. It is considered highly auspicious to sight a white Kaba.

Bhandeshwar Jain Temple -

This 15th century temple is the oldest existing monument of Bikaner, dedicated to Sumati Nath Ji, the 5th Tirthankara of the Jain religion. The temple was built by a Jain Merchant Bhandu Shah.



It is believed that the temple was made with 40,000 kilograms of pure ghee instead of mortar which seeps through the walls on hot days. Another tradition assumes that the foundation of the temple building was filled with pure ghee and dry coconuts. The temple is mainly famous for wall painting and Golden Usta art. One can see the skyline of Bikaner by climbing to the topmost floor of this temple.

Shiv Bari Temple (6 kms from Bikaner)

Fortified by a high wall the temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva. Maharaja Doongar Singh constructed it in the ninth century in the memory of his father Maharaj Lal Singhji. The temple has a beautiful wall painting of Nandi Bull facing the Shiva Lingam. This is located on the way to the camel town.

