

# Incredible India

By Dr Martin Chio, Editorial Board Member

It was my first trip to India, so who best to travel with but my great team of colleagues? We were advised that late October to early November was the ideal climate to travel. As we were on the way to the World Congress in New Delhi, we decided to explore the beauty of the state of Rajasthan in the meantime. I will let the photographs do the sights justice as I would never be able to describe it as well as travel magazines do. ☺

After a red-eye flight to Indira Gandhi International Airport, a four-hour layover, and a local connection with Kingfisher Airlines, we finally arrived in the city of Udaipur, the administrative headquarters of the Udaipur district in Rajasthan. We stayed at the Devi Garh hotel, a converted 18th century fort palace. The complex is nestled in the Aravali hills, and is part of the village of Delwara which forms one of the three passes into the valley of Udaipur. This was a very comfortable base to explore the various historic palaces of the city.

The first palace we visited was Monsoon Palace (formerly known as the Sajjan Garh Palace), which was built in 1884 and provides a panoramic view of the city, Lake Pichola and the surrounding countryside. It is situated on a mountain more than 900 metres above ground level and was built basically to watch the monsoon clouds. It was also used by the then royal family as a hunting lodge. What I found most fascinating was the unique water-harvesting mechanisms that collected rainwater and channelled it into underground cisterns with a capacity of more than 195,000 litres! Trivia: the palace was used as a location for the 1983 James Bond movie *Octopussy*.





Sunset over Jodhpur



Monsoon Palace



Walls of City Palace



Rose petal welcome at Devi Garh hotel





Sunset at Mehrangarh Fort



Wall with stone lattice work at Devi Garh hotel

After a quick lunch in a restaurant on the shores of Lake Pichola, overlooking the Lake Palace (we decided to give it a miss), we proceeded to the City Palace. The City Palace was the seat of the Mewar maharanas. It was successively built and enlarged over 70 generations, and is a rich blend of Rajasthani, Mughal, medieval, European and even Chinese styles of architecture. It was bustling with local tourists as it was a weekend, which added to the festive atmosphere.

From Udaipur, we took an Air India flight to Jodhpur and stayed at the Raas, a small boutique hotel in the shadow of the Mehrangarh Fort (a *giri durg*, which means "hill or mountain fortress"). The formidable edifice is situated more than 120 metres above the city. It consists of various palaces and period rooms. Most impressive was the fort's Mehrangarh Museum, which prides itself



Entrance of Mehrangarh Fort

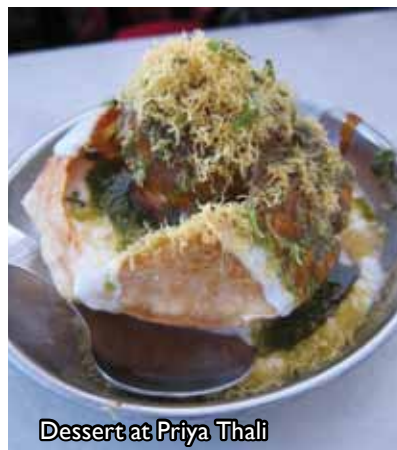




Door with anti-elephant spikes at City Palace



Vegetarian thali at Priya Thali, a restaurant in Jodhpur



Dessert at Priya Thali



Freshly made chapati at Devi Garh hotel

on being one of the most well-stocked in Rajasthan with arms, armour, costumes and paintings on display. Trivia: part of the Batman movie *The Dark Knight Rises* was filmed in the fort.

However the most memorable and enjoyable part of the trip was the flying fox zip-line tour (<http://www.flyingfox.asia/cmspage.aspx?pgid=53>) of the fort at sunrise. Those who know me are familiar with my significant fear of heights, but this just proves that on holiday we do take some (calculated) risks... The tour was an hour plus-long trek and zip around part of this UNESCO Heritage Award site, with the longest zip-line measuring 300 metres over the lake. It was an exhilarating start to the day and we thereafter still managed to hop onto a Jet Airways flight to New Delhi just in time for afternoon tea at the Taj Mahal Hotel. **SMA**



Saris at Mehrangarh Fort



Martin finds travel and food photography (taken with a simple Canon S95) a pleasurable distraction.



Live music and dancing kids at Mehrangarh Fort