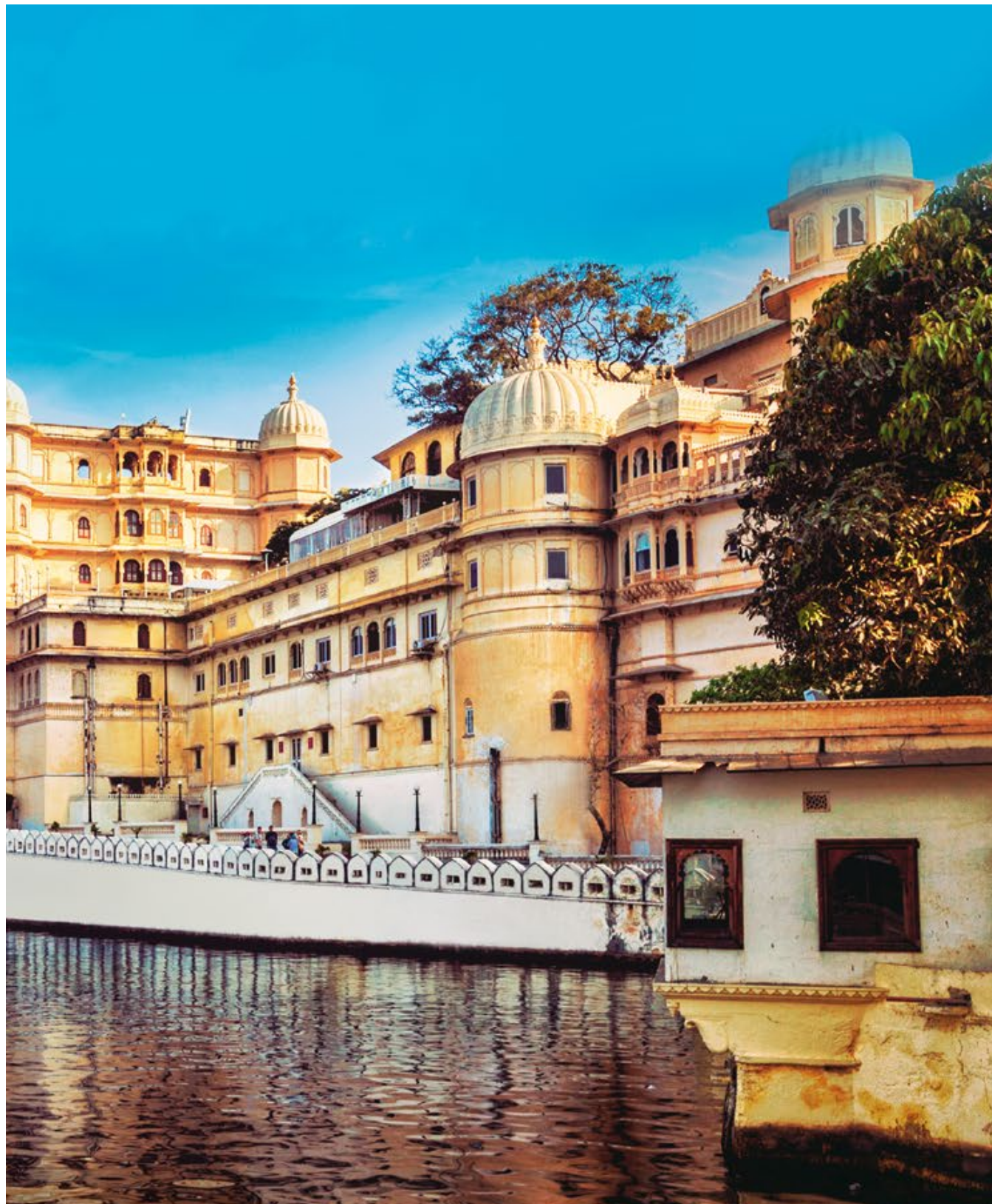




JHAROKAS, MARBLE PALACES AND A SERENE LAKE

Neeharika Satyavada goes on a heritage walk through Udaipur







Think Rajasthan and the picture that forms in your head is of undulating waves of sand shimmering golden in the sun and the bursts of colour supplied by women in their bright twirling lehengas and *odhanis*, and the turbans worn by men. But, you couldn't be more wrong when it comes to Udaipur. Touted to be India's most romantic city, it sits hidden between lush green hills stretching endlessly in every direction.

To get a real feel of Udaipur and its old-world charm, though, a heritage walk along the winding thoroughfares of the walled city is what you need. These lanes and thoroughfares are choc-a-bloc with beautiful marble palaces, ancient temples and bright colourful *havelis* with facades of intricate *jharokas*; there is a temple at every turn and every house along the way has walls adorned with frescos in the miniature painting style of the region. Udaipur's old city is divided

into sections by huge ornate gates along the erstwhile rampart walls that are locally known as *pols*. Like *Hathi Pol* or Elephant Gate, which leads one from the main street onto the grandiose City Palace. There are boards everywhere directing you to the next point of interest on the walk, be it a ghat, a *haveli*, a palace or even a museum. Of these, the Gangaur Ghat, with its imposing gateway and stunning Jagdish Mandir, made entirely of white marble, are the most striking. We recently went on one such walk, and here's what we saw.

Bhattiyani Chouhatta

If one follows the route charted by the Udaipur Nagar Nigam, the city's municipal council, then Bhattiyani Chouhatta is the starting point. The *chouhatta* is an area within the walled city, the original fortified city from four hundred and fifty years ago. Here is where most of the *havelis*, temples and points of interest along this heritage

Taj Lake Palace on Lake Pichola



TOP AND ABOVE: The City Palace at night; and Gangaur Gate

walk are. Billboards all across the dusty crooked lanes in the old city announce backpacker-friendly budget hotels, yoga and Indian cooking classes and rooftop cafes proclaiming views of the famously beautiful Lake Pichola.

Lake Pichola

Udaipur revolves around Lake Pichola. The walk leads you through hidden alleys, past traditional Rajasthani homes and the numerous temples and out onto the banks of the Pichola. Prominent on the lake are Jag Niwas and Jag Mandir.

While the best known of these is the Taj Lake Palace or Jag Niwas—as it was called by Maharana Jagat Singh II, whose pleasure palace it was in the 1700s. It is the Jag Mandir Island Palace that stands out, with its marble courtyard and ornate elephants jutting out into the water from every corner. It was here that Shah Jahan was given refuge by the Maharana of Mewar, Raja Karan Singh in 1623.

Gangaur Ghat

This ghat is dedicated to one of the most important local festivals of Rajasthan, the Gangaur Festival, an



TOP AND ABOVE: Bagore ki Haveli

eighteen-day festival celebrated by the women of Mewar in honour of Goddess Gauri and her consort Lord Shiva (Gana). This ghat on the Lake Pichola serves as the location for the culmination of the Gangaur festivities and the end point for the procession that begins from the City Palace. Though the Gangaur Ghat sees the most crowds during this festival that celebrates women, it remains a popular landmark and is dearly loved by the locals even otherwise during the rest of the year. For it is right on the banks of the Lake Pichola and makes for a wonderful vantage point from where one can enjoy panoramic views of the lake and all the iconic sights of Udaipur from the Jag Niwas (now the Taj Lake Palace) to the Jag Mandir.

Bagore ki Haveli

Located on the other side of Gangaur Ghat, by the banks of Lake Pichola, this quirky museum was once a *haveli*. An eighteenth century *haveli* of over

a hundred rooms, it was built by the then prime minister of Mewar in the classic style of the day. Today, it houses period costumes and photographs, hosts daily folk music and dance shows intended to be an evocative display of Mewar culture. Not to be missed here are the world's largest turban and the Queens' Chambers intricately done up entirely in mirrors.

Jagdish Mandir

A lyrical work of carving in white marble, the three-storeyed Jagdish Mandir is located right in the heart of Udaipur's old city. Accessed by a steep flight of stairs, this temple, dedicated to Lord Vishnu, comes as a complete surprise once you reach its main courtyard, flanked by massive marble elephants. In spite of the buildings crowding around it, you will want to stay awhile, as you are still doing the mandated *parikrama* (circumambulation) of the temple, stopping all the while to pay homage



CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW: A stunning window, the elaborate and intricate interiors of the City Palace



GoAir
CONNECT

Udaipur is about 400 km from Jaipur airport. GoAir operates direct flights to Jaipur from Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Kolkata and convenient connections from Kochi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Goa. For more information, log on to www.GoAir.in

at the four smaller shrines dedicated to Lords Ganesha, Shiva, Surya and the Goddess Shakti. The entire temple is covered in carvings so intricate and interesting, that you will be transfixed.

City Palace

The City Palace, Rajasthan's biggest palace, is imposing in its grandeur, and is part of a series of palaces built over a period of four hundred years. As soon as you enter through the *Bari Pol* or the Great Gate, you are greeted by huge arches. This was where massive

weighing scales once stood, to measure out the ruling Maharana's weight in gold – to be given away to the citizens of Mewar – on his birthday. From these to the elephant parking bays just outside the entrance, which now serve as a lookout for idyllic views of the city set against the Aravalli ranges, everything about this palace complex is beautiful. Built in a combination of Rajput and Mughal styles of architecture typical of the era, a portion of the City Palace is open to the public and ranks number one on the list of things to see when in Udaipur.