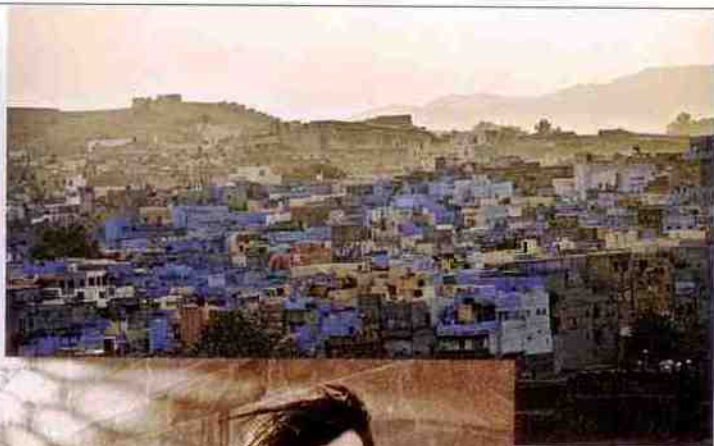


ELLE *life & style*

14 PAGES ON LIVING THE GOOD LIFE



travel notes
**OUT OF
THE BLUE**

Go to see one of the GRANDEST forts in Asia, and fall in love with a colourful, animated city. From the imposing Mehrangarh Fort to the narrow, winding lanes, JODHPUR is mesmerising



+ *The new DECOR vocabulary of The Busride, a design studio*



ELLE *travel*

SET IN STONE

Dive into the hustle and bustle and riot of COLOURS that is the old, walled city of JODHPUR. And then discover a perfect little haven of CALM in the middle of it all

By SAREE RAY

Photographer TARUN KHIWAL

Fashion Editor MAHINI BANERJI

Lycra bodysuit, ₹ 7,313,
by Shivan & Narresh
Organza skirt, ₹ 9,500,
sequined knickers,
₹ 9,950, both by Namrata
Lehmann. Leather wedges,
₹ 32,000, leather and metal
bracelet, ₹ 51,000, both
from Red's. Leather belt
with enamel detail,
₹ 8,750, by Nandini Basu

ELLE *travel*

Lycra bodysuit, ₹ 7,500, by Hemant & Nandita. Silk kaftan, ₹ 6,995, by Sanchita. Leather sandals, ₹ 38,000; shoulder bag with metal buckle, ₹ 55,000; both from Tod's. Leather belt, ₹ 2,350, from Mango



ROOM WITH A VIEW

Pick from 32 rooms and seven suites, including the Raas Suite with its private entrance and terrace. We recommend the duplex suites with a private balcony for the view



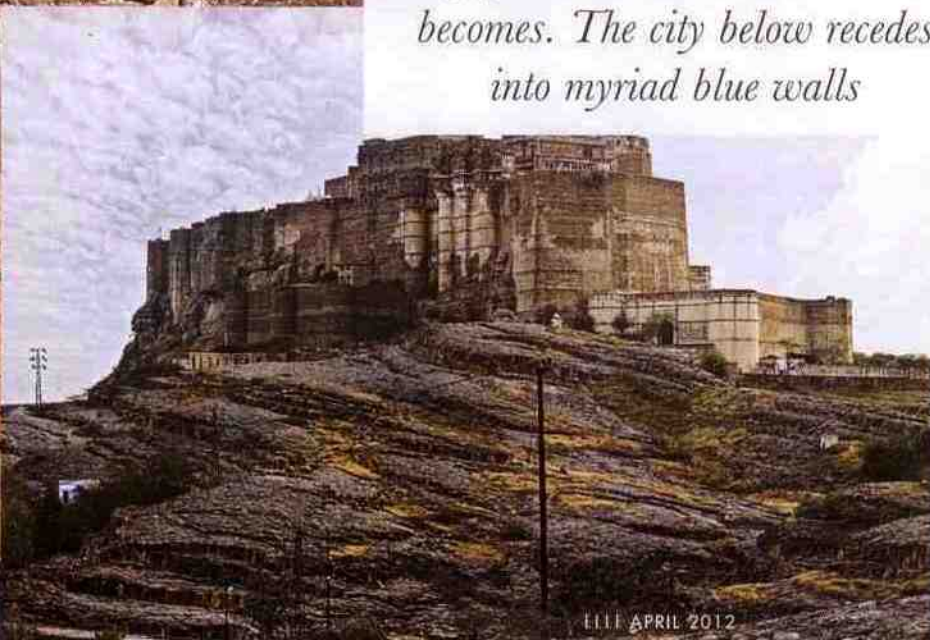
Georgette blouse, ₹ 3,950;
draped georgette skirt,
₹ 5,950, both by Nandita
Basu. Leather sandals,
₹ 38,000, from Ted's. Leather
belt, ₹ 1,050, from Mango.
Crystal choker, ₹ 18,563,
by SHIVAN & NARISHA



As the flight approaches the small air force base that also serves as the Jodhpur airport, the endless arid landscape of the Thar Desert is replaced by a sea of little roofs. Two prominent structures stand out, dominant and higher than anything else – the Mehrangarh Fort, at the foot of which the Old City of Jodhpur is built; and the Umaid Bhawan Palace in the distance, the splendid residence of the royal family. During the short drive from the airport towards the Clock Tower, the centre of the walled city, the roads gets progressively narrower and more crowded – with pedestrians, two wheelers, shops, horse carriages, auto rickshaws – till at one point it's amazing that a vehicle is even able to squeeze through the by-lanes. But this chaotic, colourful madness is inherent to Jodhpur's charm.

The higher you go, the more magnificent MEHRANGARH becomes. The city below recedes into myriad blue walls

And tucked away in the middle of the frenzied maze of alleys, like a veritable oasis of calm, sits the Raas. The traditional arched gateway (or *pol*) of Jodhpur's newest and hippest boutique hotel leads you into a leafy, stone-paved courtyard. A cute blue *tuk tuk* (auto rickshaw) sits in one corner. But it's past the unassuming little reception area that the hotel really opens out to a view that makes us wish we never had to leave: Built on the grounds of an 18th-century haveli, the Raas sits in the shade of the imposing Mehrangarh Fort. The architecture is a curious blend of the old and the new. A lot of the original structure has been ►





Cotton silk bodysuit, ₹ 16,000, by Atsu. Metal aviators, ₹ 28,200, from Tod's, at Dayal Optics.



Metal bracelet, ₹ 51,000, from Tod's.

preserved: The *Darikhana* (meaning chamber of carpets, which originally served as a guest room) and the *Baradari* (an open pavilion typically for performance arts) have been repurposed as restaurants, while the stables serve as little alcoves, perfect for lounging. To this, two contemporary structures have been added that make an attempt to blend in with pastel-blue walls and pink sandstone jalis.

The Raas is also the perfect base to explore the city. Start early and trek up to the fort through *Jayapol* (Victory Gate). The higher you go, the more magnificent Mehrangarh becomes, even as the city below recedes into myriad blue walls (the Brahmins' houses are traditionally whitewashed with a tinge of indigo, earning Jodhpur the epithet of Blue City). Mehrangarh isn't just one of the most imposing forts in India (voted 'Asia's Best Fortress' by *Time* magazine in 2008), it's also the best-maintained we've seen. No crumbling facades, broken jalis or defaced walls. In fact, the courtyards, the *jhankha* balconies, the *Sheesh Mahal* where the king apparently meditated, look as if freshly scrubbed. A modern lift, installed during the last renovation, might seem incongruous, but you'll appreciate not having to climb some 90-odd feet to the top.

Below, walk through the snaking lanes of the Old City. They're too narrow for cars anyway. You'll find an old temple at every



Satin lycra bodysuit, ₹ 7,500, by Hemant & Nandita. Cotton pleated trousers, ₹ 7,000, by Rahul Singh. Patent leather moccasins, ₹ 27,000, from Tod's.

corner, a magnificent old gate opening into a modest new house, and shops selling deep-fried snacks and ghee-drenched sweets. A trip to Jodhpur isn't complete without some shopping: Head to the Sarafa Bazar for jewellery, the Mirchi Bazar for spices, and the Clock Tower Bazar for rugs, curios and trinkets. Have your wits about you to avoid paying 'tourist rates' though.

And while Jodhpur's other must-see, the Umaid Bhawan Palace, is stunning, it's disappointing that only a small portion – the museum – is open to the public. With most of it a hotel and one part in use as the royal family's residence, you're left with a small collection of ornate clocks, miniature paintings and model airplanes with which to extrapolate your opinions of grandeur.

Back at the Raas, a visit to the spa is the perfect way to relax after a long, hot day. The hotel is even prettier by night, as the pool, the garden and the fort in the background are lit up. The calmness is punctuated momentarily by the azan from the mosque next door. But as it fades out, a holistic sense of quiet and comfort surrounds you again. Here, in the middle of Rajasthan's ever-bustling city, it's the most unlikely pleasure you can experience. ■

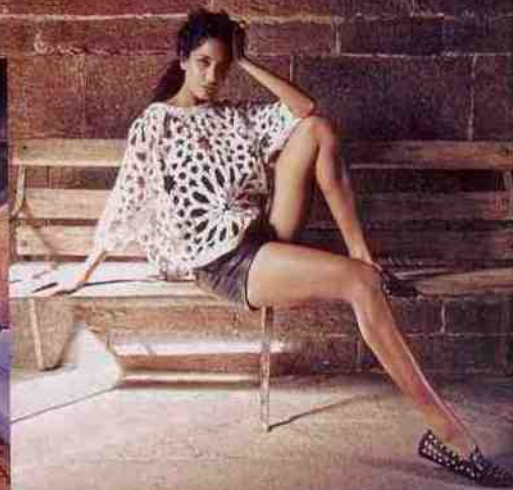
PHOTOGRAPHER TARUN KHIWAL; MAKE-UP AND HAIRSTYLIST CHRISTOPHER KOLLER (COURTESY ANIMA CREATIVE MANAGEMENT); MODEL LISA HAYDON (COURTESY ELAN CELEBRITIES AND TALENT MANAGEMENT)

FASHION EDITOR MALINI BANERJI; FASHION ASSISTANT ANUJ LALL

LOCATION COURTESY RAAS, JODHPUR. MAKRANA MOHALLA, JODHPUR 1. INQUIRIES. (0291) 2636455 FOR DETAILS, SEE ADDRESS BOOK

Silk blouse, ₹ 19,688, by Shivan & Narresh. Silk flared trousers, ₹ 2,995, by Sanchita. Leather sandals, ₹ 38,000; leather handbag, ₹ 87,000; both from Tod's

Jersey vest, ₹ 550, from Promod. Cutwork blouse, ₹ 23,500, by Parikaj & Nidhi. Leather shorts, ₹ 85,000; moccasins with metal studs, ₹ 33,000, both from Tod's



HIT REFRESH

At the spa (managed by Serene Spas), go for the Full Body Aroma Therapy Massage, or a romantic Adam & Eve Serenity Massage

