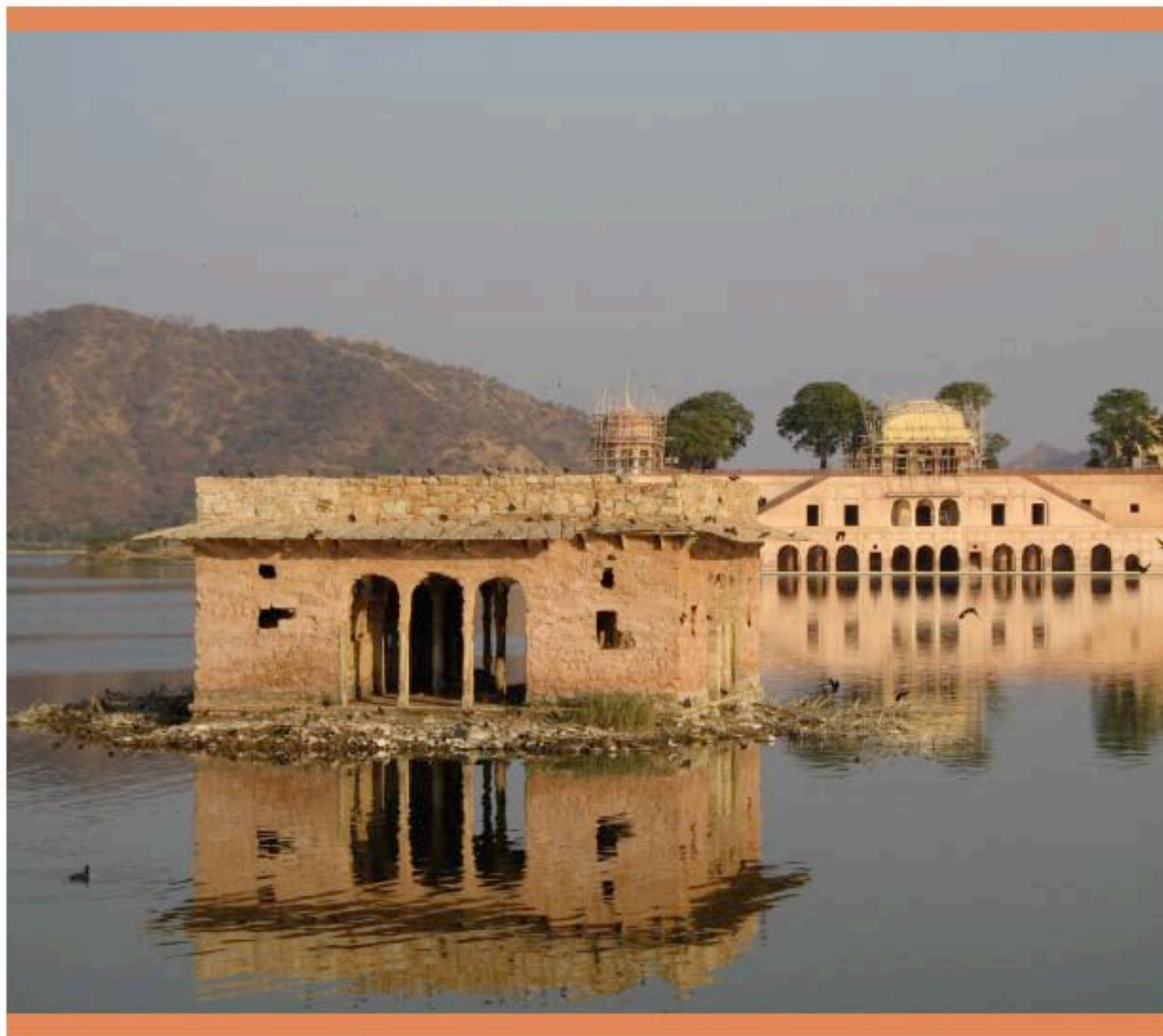


Burst that 5-Star Bubble with a Jaipur Jaunt



To your Dubai-trained eyes, Jaipur might well seem a little...shall we say, unsavory? Parts of it are smelly. Parts of it are riddled with poverty, and if we're honest, the main train station more or less doubles as a homeless shelter. But you can't live your life in the shadows and this Rajasthan capital holds more colorful surprises than an episode of *Teletubbies*. Pick up your camera, zip up a good sense of humor and prepare for an Indian adventure.

Get your Zzz's

A mid-priced option would be best in this fast-paced city – you might feel safer with a safe, and warmer with a portable heater. Samode Haveli (samode.com) is a peaceful stone's throw away from the chaos, and clusters of willing tuk tuk drivers sit (and live) outside, awaiting your directions. It's a relatively small hotel, cute and quirky, and comes furnished with antiques that make you say things like "Ooooh, I wonder if there's a genie in here..."

Taste sensations

For great food, great views of the nearby Hathroi Fort, the Pink City and the rugged hills surrounding Jaipur, head to the Hotel Pearl Palace for an early sunset dinner. The rooftop is spectacular, with chains

of fairy lights, twisted metal chairs and quirky décor with an emphasis on peacocks. The giant beers and tasty Indian dishes come cheap compared to other "tourist traps." For a slightly more authentic experience, dine on a local's rooftop as his washing flaps in the breeze at Ganesh, on Nehru Bazaar. Try homemade snacks like *dal batti churma*, a Rajasthani speciality, and *mirchi badas* – deep-fried chillies, covered in gram-flour paste. Worth noting as a thirst-quencher is the sugarcane juice you can snap up all year round from most hawkers.



Don't forget the camera

Getting around is easy, albeit rather hair-raising. Hire yourself a tuk tuk and private driver to ferry you about all day, and he'll wait patiently at each stop as you snap those obligatory pictures of passing pigs and roaming, sacred cows. Don't miss the Palace Quarter, enclosing an impressive, sprawling palace complex (the Hawa Mahal, or Palace of Winds), formal gardens and a little lake. Smile for the children (but keep your wallets safe) at Nahargarh Fort, which sits atop the somewhat dusty looking hill in the northwest-corner of the old city. If you're the nervous type, you might want to miss the infamous Monkey Temple. You can barely get five steps up the hill before you're surrounded by the little...well, monkeys. They're attracted by the locals feeding them fly-covered fruits. But, watch out – they'll eat your hats as appetizers if you let them.

Be a culture vulture

You don't have to stay your whole trip in the city. In fact, we recommend you get away from the land of roaming, belligerent bovine and hire an actual car (or local with a truck) to take you 40 kms from Jaipur to Samode Bagh. Here, you'll stay in basic, but beautiful chalets in the confines of a well-tended garden. You'll be served lunch on the lawn, as chipmunks run around you and roses bloom in the sunshine. You can join in a Bollywood sing-song by firelight as you eat your dinner on a foldable table, served by attentive, smiling men in turbans. The menu gets a bit samey after a couple of days, with roughly five or six dinner choices, including at least three curries. But it's a small price to pay for a slice of Indian paradise – a world away from the hectic city center.

Another trip worth doing, of course, is the four-hour train ride to Agra from Jaipur. Gaze up at the Taj Mahal and count yourself lucky to be viewing the shimmering, wonderful world wonder on a mini-break from Dubai. That'll make your mates jealous!

Pack and fly

The cheapest current pathway to your Indian adventure is with Air Arabia. Flights from Sharjah to Jaipur at the time of publication cost AED 968 return. 