



Experiences & Explorations

◀ INTRODUCTION ▶





Narendra Bhawan Bikaner tells the story of the last reigning Maharaja of Bikaner, His Highness Narendra Singhji. Born on the cusp of a new India, the young Prince was shaped by the influences and privileges around him. Despite a life of royal patronage, he turned his gaze away from the lifestyle of his forefathers, put aside his noble heritage along with the rich legacies of his past and established a haveli like residence which was in keeping with his new tastes and outlook.





The Bhawan in this contemporary rendition thus celebrates an individual's passage through time; from that of a royal birth to the makings of a global citizen, and from there on to an exponent of freedom who embraced the idea of a modern, democratic India. Set in an urban landscape this residence today is an independent design hotel with a one-of-a-kind legacy and a set of curated experiences that should be continued, preserved, and celebrated.



❖ IN THE PAST ❖





Bikaner's history dates back to 1488 when a young princeling from the Jodhpur dynasty broke away from his family's ancient legacy and sought to establish his own lineage. The site he chose was rather peculiarly called 'Jungladesh' and was an uncontested, barren, outcrop of land.





Rao Bika was the second son of the Jodhpur clan-leader and a true maverick. It is said that Bika had a fractious relationship with his father and brothers and in exchange for giving up his claim to the throne of Jodhpur was allowed to take the family heirlooms with him and leave his patrilineal territory forever. Vastly ambitious Rao Bika naturally didn't stay true to his word and skirmishes between the two bold Rajput principalities continued to blaze.





Perhaps because of its rocky start, Bikaner, a dynamic and self-motivated kingdom set out to prove itself. Through the centuries the city/state grew to evolve into a poster-child of competence and able governance. This was faultlessly executed through the agency of some exceptional Maharajas and their ministers who advanced an idea of welfare and development that was forward-thinking for its time. The noteworthy descendants of founding father Bika - from whose name was derived the city-state Bikaner, served India with aplomb - as sterling examples of benevolent Maharajas, as outstanding Generals in the Indian army, as politicians who steered a young and tentative India new to democracy, and as sportsmen who shone bright on international platforms.





❖ EXPERIENCES ❖





Narendra Bhawan Bikaner taps into the memories of its original resident and takes its guests on a journey through his illustrious past wherein the best moments of his life are translated into an array of curious options – some interestingly epicurean, others fantastically novel and everything always enchanting.

These are experiences that will lead you through pathways curiously interweaved, that are sure to add charm and mystique to your visit.





Sundowners



“After a long day attending to my dear guests, as well as the papers that concern both my business and philanthropic enterprises, I look forward to a gloriously gratifying drink and convivial chitchat with my friends as we head out and drive into the hinterland of my beloved Bikaner.”

As paradoxical as it may sound, deep in the heartland of the Bikaner desert, in secret enclaves between rocky escarpments are found acres of soft green pastures and lush oases, mystifying the eye and delighting the spirit. It is here that we find ourselves far away from the bustle of people in pristine settings that are almost biblical, celebrating our legendary Narendra Bhawan sundowners.





White Nights of the Rajputs



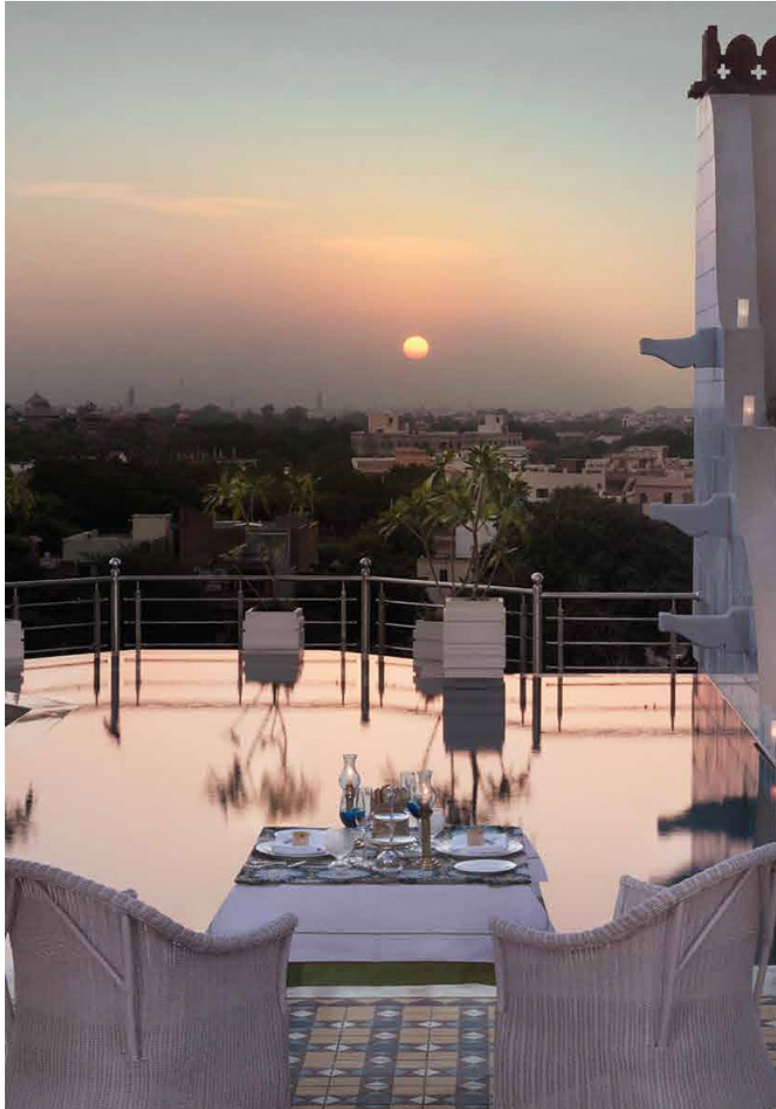
'The night sky is at its most beautiful in the desert; a firmament filled with blinking stars lighting up the darkness and this is most profound on the nights of Purnamasi - the splendour of the full moon. Celebrated since time immemorial - the white nights of the Rajputs is a renewed tradition'.

On full moon nights when the firmament is aglow with the light of the moon and the dazzling trajectories of shooting stars, a resplendent dinner is served to you at the charming oasis. In keeping with traditional banqueting from this Rajput desert kingdom, subtle delicacies and fiery flavours are intended to excite the palate as you dine a la deux or in company under a natural, unrivalled canopy lit by white blinking lights, a feast for kings.





The Crescent Grill & Dinner



'Of all my peoples my Muslim community most charmed me. It was their great sense of aesthetic sensibilities, their food, their language, their rituals every part of their society is so designed to engage and enchant.'

The deep blue infinity pool takes its colour from the bright Bikaner sky and offers great vantage views of the city; the old and the new. The space transforms at twilight and takes on a mantle of celebration with starlit skies, live grills, and party music. What better venue to savour the once Mughal cuisine of Bikaner, lovingly served in crescent shaped thalis.







Museum Dinner at the Night Room



‘... and we have heard many adepts say, with joy in their heart, “What a pleasure it is to have a good appetite, when we are certain of a good meal.’

It is with this in mind that we re-calibrate the menu at the Kings table with renditions culled from the annals of culinary history.



## LITERALLY LITERARY

This unique dining experience, especially for the book lovers at Narendra Bhawan is hosted at our all-dining restaurant – 'Pearls and Chiffons'. This concept dining experience is a magical pairing of food on your plate with excerpts from 7 literary classic books, like – 'The Bell Jar' by Sylvia Plath, 'Moby Dick' by Herman Melville, 'The Brotherhood of the Grape' by John Fante, 'The Last Chinese Chef' by Nicole Mones, 'To the Lighthouse' by Virginia Woolf, 'Le Ventre de Paris' by Émile Zola and 'Ulysses' by James Joyce. You shall be amazed at the special and distinct matching of these cuisines around the world to the tales by renowned authors. This experience becomes an unforgettable dining affair when our Chef reads out about the curated delicacies from the menu and more themselves in the waters of the lake.

## MARWARI THALI

When at Narendra Bhawan, you could always ask us to fulfil your desire for experiencing the native Marwari cuisine. This comes to you in an elaborate Marwari Thali that is sure to satisfy your craving for some authentic Marwari cuisine experience. The cuisine of Marwar was influenced by many factors arising from the topography of the land and the chefs hence chose to use a minimum amount of water replacing it with clarified butter (Ghee), milk, buttermilk and local spices to create flavourful chutneys. You may enjoy this culinary feast at our tea room or the restaurant that starts with appetizers, followed by sorbets, curries and dessert. Your wish is our command!

✦ EXPLORATIONS ✦





## MERCHANT EXPLORATION

Rampuriya Haveli – Golchha Haveli – Rangri Chowk –  
Kotharion ka chowk – Daga Sitya Chowk – Punam  
Chand Haveli

‘The Bikaner of my ancestors thrived due to its prime location along the caravan routes between Western and Central Asia. Enriched by this bountiful trade the nobles and the merchants of Bikaner built palaces, havelis and temples in red sandstone that stand pristine to date.’

Let’s experience this living material heritage carved in stone. A chaperoned walk through the city is a must. Once completed, your excursion will culminate befittingly with a showcase of Marwari cuisine served at the hotel.





## ROYAL EXPLORATION - A LEGACY OF KINGS

Bikajee Ki Tekaree – Laxminath Temple – Sadul  
Museum - Lalgarh Palace – Laxmi Niwas Palace – Royal  
Cenotaphs at Devi Kund Sagar

‘Come experience a guided exploration of my beloved Bikaner with an introduction to its 500-hundred-year-old story, an abundance that is graciously transcribed in its palaces and lovingly preserved in museums. History you see, lives in every nook and corner of this ancient city.’

Take a tour of the palaces that are truly unique, and the fort that is both magnificent and fascinating. These historical storehouses are amongst the best this country has to offer.



❖ SITES TO SEE ❖



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## JUNAGARH FORT

Unlike most forts in Rajasthan and elsewhere in India, the Junagarh Fort of Bikaner is a land fort. The imposing structure is built from red sandstone and with its cluster of low-rise buildings within and armed with all possible defence apparatuses, has never been conquered, despite many battles fought. On your visit, note the moat, the twisted access and the long metal nails studded into the gates to thwart elephant attacks.

Within the complex the courtyards merit special mention. Each courtyard is different — if one courtyard is built of red sandstone, another is built with sandstone and marble, a third is almost entirely made of marble with coloured tiling, another with painted frescoes, and yet another with intricate inlay work.







The various rooms called 'Mahals' are spectacular in their craft. The 'Karan Mahal' is built with Mughal architectural influences, 'Anoop Mahal' displays dazzling gold inlay work and the delicate 'Phool Mahal' features excellent glass inlay work on stucco. The cavernous 'Durbar Hall' preserves a ceremonial 1,100-year-old sandalwood throne, but the 'mahal' that will take your breath away is 'Badal Mahal' or the palace of clouds. The longing for rain in an arid Bikaner has been captured on every inch of the rooms in the 'Badal Mahal' with blue clouds interspersed with lightning motifs painted on its walls and ceilings.





## THE JUNAGARH MUSEUM

The Fort museum is full of dazzling objects that include a silver throne, a sandalwood throne, a golden swing, palanquins and howdahs used by the royal family, and even a Haviland Plane, among hundreds of other objects. This plane, which is displayed in the Vikram Niwas Durbar Hall, was pieced together from the parts of two shot down DH-9DE Haviland aircrafts.





## PRACHINA MUSEUM

The Junagarh Fort houses a smaller private museum, the delightful Prachina, a museum that displays contemporary arts and crafts, ritual crafts, period furniture, textiles and costumes that were once used by the royal family. The many rooms display royal photographs and miniatures, among many others personal artefacts and memorabilia. There are even framed menus on display as well as delicate crockery and cutlery that was once used by the family.

This museum is a veritable treat for the eyes and gives a glimpse into the everyday life of its earlier patrons.





## LALGARH PALACE

The resplendent Lalgarh Palace was built by Maharaja Ganga Singhji in 1902. Designed by a European architect, Sir Swinton Jacob, one can visibly identify a strong overlay of Victorian architectural influences. The palace has beautiful lattice work and filigree work.

The interior walls of the palace are adorned with vintage etchings, hunting trophies and old portraits.





## LAXMI NIWAS PALACE

Built between 1898 and 1902, Laxmi Niwas Palace was commissioned by Maharaja Sir Ganga Singhji to serve as his royal residence. Designed by Sir Samuel Swinton Jacob, the Palace is constructed in an Indo-Saracenic style, an architectural movement popularized in the 19th century in British India.

Used exclusively as the private residence for the Royal family and their guests, Laxmi Niwas Palace presided over Bikaner in all its opulence. With a flair for hospitality, the Maharaja hosted numerous luminaries and dignitaries, including King George V and Queen Mary, the King of Greece, Viceroys, fellow Maharajas, and renowned statesmen.





## CAMEL RESEARCH CENTRE

The National Research Centre for Camel Welfare is located 10 km from Bikaner city. The Centre has the responsibility to conduct basic and applied research for the improvement of the camel and over the years it has developed excellent laboratory facilities. An elite herd of Bikaneri, Jaisalmeri and Kachchhi breed of camel are maintained by the Centre.





## NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE ON EQUINES

The Rajputs swiftest horses were bred in Mewar, Marwar and Kathiwar and still maintain their reputation of superiority. These horses were considered a central military supply and the noble animals have played an important role in Rajput history.

Rajasthan is a wonderful surprise for horse-loving adventurers. A handful of commercial horse safaris take travellers far beyond the cities into the fascinating rural regions, where urban madness is tempered by timeless traditions and a peaceful way of life.

The primary objective of this research outfit is to improve and conserve the legendary desert breed Marwari Horse. Tonga (Horse Carriage) and horse riding is available at the centre.





## GAJNER PALACE & WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Approximately 30 kms outside the city of Bikaner is the Gajner Palace with its vast compounds stretching out across 6000 acres. A rare jewel in the Thar Desert, the Palace was built by H.H. Maharaja Sir Ganga Singhji of Bikaner on the edge of a lake. The property was converted into a heritage hotel in 1976. Gajner Palace was primarily a hunting resort and attracted several eminent dignitaries who would visit during the shooting season. The Prince of Wales in 1905, The Governor General Lord Elgin, Lord Mountbatten when he was Viceroy of India, and Lord Erwin (1927) were some of the more prominent invitees. Today, the Palace is surrounded by a private wildlife sanctuary, and is home to endangered antelope like the chinkara, black buck, nelgai as well as other unusual animals. The sanctuary and lake attract more than a hundred species of migratory birds during the winter months including the Imperial Sandgrouse.





### KOLAYAT TEMPLE

Kolayat is an old pilgrimage centre where Kapil, a celebrated hermit from Vedic lore is believed to have attained enlightenment under a peepul tree. This sacred space has a series of beguiling marble temples, sandstone pavilions and 32 ghats (bathing places) built around a huge artificial lake. It is especially important during the month of Kartik when pilgrims come from near and far to sanctify and cleanse themselves in the waters of the lake.

### KARNI MATA TEMPLE

The 600-year-old Karni Mata Temple at Deshnoke, 30 km from Bikaner is dedicated to the household goddess of the ruling family of Bikaner. The temple, amongst the strangest in India, is not for the squeamish as it is famous for the legions of rats that are feted and worshipped here. Devotees tread warily to reach the inner recesses of the temple for injury to a rat is deemed sacrilegious.

### BHANDASAR JAIN TEMPLE

This 15th century temple is the oldest and most distinct monument in all of Bikaner and is dedicated to the 5th Tirthankar of the Jain faith. The temple is decorated with rich mirror work, frescoes, and gold leaf paintings. It is said that pure ghee (butter oil) and coconuts were used to strengthen the edifice when the foundation was laid. Carved in red sandstone and white marble – it is famous for its etchings and wall paintings.

### GANGA GOLDEN JUBILEE MUSEUM

An excellent little museum, its reputation has been enhanced by its rare collection of terracotta ware, weapons, miniature paintings from the Bikaner school and coins.

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