

*When it comes to shopping in India, insiders head straight to Jaipur, a place where traditional crafts and design get remade in unexpected and stylish ways. Hanya Yanagihara, a Jaipur diehard and avid gem fan, gives us the ultimate shopping itinerary.*

# The Painted Desert

Photographs by Roland Bello





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ERE AT *Condé Nast Traveler*, everyone has his or her own particular obsession: One person thinks only of places to forage and eat mushrooms; another, France and flea markets. And according to my colleagues, I'm interested—solely interested—in three things: high-quality

gemstones, high-luxury hotels, and tribal textiles.

There are a few other subjects I'm passionate about as well, though in truth I don't have much to say in my defense. But one of the great joys of travel is realizing that the things which motivate us to leave home and go elsewhere are as varied and, often, as specific as the places themselves. And I'd argue that there's a singular frisson in experiencing a place through its markets, shops, and bazaars; it's there, after all, that you get the truest picture of a country's or region's economy, aesthetics, history, palette, and people.

There are few places this is more true of than Jaipur. The city, with its population of 3.3 million and pleasant though not spectacular pink terra-cotta architecture, is by no means India's largest, grandest, or oldest; indeed, it inspires few superlatives. But it *is* one of the greatest places in the world to shop.

This isn't a coincidence. Founded in 1727 by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II and today the capital of the state of Rajasthan, Jaipur was always intended as a place where commerce was meant to flourish, where leathersmiths, weavers, furniture builders,

and jewelers created custom pieces for the rich merchants—and richer royals—who passed through town on their way to other outposts in the Mogul empire. Today, the city remains a site of pilgrimage for anyone even vaguely interested in shopping and, more important, discovering India's inimitable material culture. India is almost unique in the world for the number and diversity of things that it still makes by hand—artisanry is a fact of daily life here, rather than an exception to it—and in Jaipur, one often experiences the distinct thrill, increasingly rare as the century wears on, of realizing that not only can anything be made for you within days, or even hours, but that you can actually speak to the person who's going to make it for you. It's why I go every other year; it's why the sense of excitement it generates never diminishes, even after multiple visits.

Best of all, the city can be seen—or conquered, if that's your preference—in just two days, tacked on as a reward for a business trip to Mumbai or Delhi. Here's how to do it.

**DAY 1:** You can't visit Jaipur and not go jewelry shopping (well, you *could*, but what would be the point?). For years, the city was the world's gemstone capital, and today, although its lapidary workshops are being challenged by competitors in Bangkok and Hong Kong, hundreds of pounds of precious stones still pass through the workshops here every year to be examined, cleaned, and cut.

You won't be able to say you've really seen jewelry until you've been to the **Gem Palace**, the city's—and perhaps the world's—oldest (its owners, the

**Previous page, from left:** A custom-made trunk lined in robin's egg-blue suede at Trunks Company; the brilliant new Bar Palladio. **Below, from left:** Necessities at Teatro Dhora; the street scene in downtown Jaipur. **Right:** The drawing room of the fabulously wallpapered Suján Rajmahal Palace.



## STAY

**Oberoï Rajvilas**  
GONER RD.;  
from \$896.

**Samode Haveli**  
GANGAPOLE;  
from \$350.

**Suján Rajmahal Palace**  
SADAR PATEL MARG;  
from \$558.

**Taj Rambagh Palace**  
BHAWANI SINGH RD.;  
from \$672.

## EAT

**Bar Palladio**  
KANOTA BAGH,  
NARAIN SINGH RD.

**The Kitchen**  
51 SARDAR PATEL  
MARG, DHULESHWAR  
GARDEN, C-SCHEME.

**The Verandah**  
BHAWANI SINGH RD.

## HOW TO

For the best insider access, we trust Bertie and Victoria Dyer of India Beat. They offer a Jaipur shopping tour that includes access to Munnu: The Gem Palace ([indiabeat.co.uk](http://indiabeat.co.uk); \$250).





## SHOP

### Aashka

HOTEL NARAIN  
NIWAS PALACE,  
KANOTA BAGH,  
NARAIN SINGH RD.

### Andraab

38 GUPTA GARDEN  
(NEAR THE AMER  
CITY HERITAGE  
HOTEL), AMER RD.

### Gem Palace

SHOP NO. 348,  
M.I. RD.

### Hot Pink

HOTEL NARAIN  
NIWAS PALACE,  
KANOTA BAGH,  
NARAIN SINGH RD.

### Idli

KANOTA BAGH,  
NARAIN SINGH RD.

### Satayam

SHOP NO. 65,  
MSB KA RASTA.

### Teatro Dhora

9 YASHWANT PL.,  
AJMER RD.

### Trunks Company

44 LANE NO. 4,  
KARTARPURA  
INDUSTRIAL AREA,  
22 GODOWN.

**Left:** At Idli, clothes and home items in bright dip-dyed silks—all made in Jaipur.

Kasliwals, are ninth-generation jewelers), most famous, and most captivating jewelry store. The word *store*, though, may be underselling what the Gem Palace is; on the second floor of the mustard-colored building it occupies in the center of old Jaipur, you'll find its workshop, where dozens of craftsmen sit cross-legged on the floor at their stations, polishing, cutting, and soldering. Of the many unforgettable moments you'll find here, one is realizing that those lumps of cloudy, algae-colored rock as large as ostrich eggs are in fact raw emeralds. Upstairs, you'll also find **Munnu: The Gem Palace**, the glittering atelier of the late Munnu Kasliwal. Munnu was one of the Gem Palace's co-owners and was responsible for some of its most inventive, opulent designs; today, his charming son, Siddharth, continues his legacy. (Atelier visits are by invitation only, but Victoria and Bertie Dyer of the Jaipur-based *India Beat* can get you in.) Downstairs, you'll find more-affordable (but still fabulous) pieces: rose-cut diamond studs, silver tribal bangles, semi-precious swivel rings.

Jaipur is blissfully easy to navigate (no Mumbai-like traffic here), which means it's only a ten-minute drive to Jaipur Modern for lunch. Like the wares on offer—oversaturated indigo comforters, women's floaty separates in sherbet-colored linen—the adjoining restaurant, **The Kitchen**, takes ancient techniques and remixes them into something new. The zigzagged black-and-white marble tabletops were made in neighboring Agra (famous for its marble-work ever since local craftsmen built a little shrine called the Taj Mahal), and the walls are covered with a mosaic of brick-size pieces of wood. This is one of the few places in Jaipur where you can have a fresh salad, so order some greens and finish with the house-made mango sorbet.

You have two more stops today. The first, **Teatro Dhora**, is run by a group of young friends and calls itself a concept shop—a term so indiscriminately applied that it's lost any cachet it once had. But at Dhora, there really *is* a concept: to gather in one place the clothes, jewelry, accessories, and housewares from some of the country's emerging designers. The things to buy here are the lightweight cotton pants and blouses, made from fabrics block-printed with traditional motifs but cut in contemporary, slightly fashion-forward patterns. After this, head off to **Trunks Company**, which is located in an industrial part of town, on the second floor of a dingy building that offers no clue as to what's inside: a moodily lit, windowless room in which various dramatically backlit trunks are arranged like mannequins. The trunks, crafted locally of Italian leather and lined in brilliant-hued suede, can be made in practically any dimensions you choose, to store whatever you feel is most in need of protection—be it watches, jewelry, or turbans.

By this time, you'll be ready for a drink (Jaipur is actually fairly temperate from November through

March, but be aware of the sun: There's very little tree cover here, and it's easier to overheat than the temperature might lead you to assume). For such a small city (for India, that is), Jaipur has more than its share of excellent and memorable hotels. In town, there's **Samode Haveli**, a restored nineteenth-century nobleman's house whose charm lies in its slightly faded elegance, as well as the **Taj Rambagh Palace**, located in what was the residence of the final Maharaja of Jaipur, who died in 1970. Here, Raj-era India lives on, from the Polo Bar (adorned with trophies and polo memorabilia) to the wide lawn that seems to call out for a game of croquet. Or you can drive 25 minutes out of town to the **Oberoi Rajvillas**, a Mogul-inspired dream complete with roving peacocks, flowering trees, and a lobby covered with a king's ransom of marble.

I've stayed in all of these hotels, and they're all beautiful. But my latest obsession is the just-opened **Suján Rajmahal**. Before it was converted into a hotel in the 1970s, the eighteenth-century Rajmahal was the Jaipur royal family's guesthouse, a place for visiting dignitaries and friends to stay (Jackie Kennedy, Lord Mountbatten, and Queen Elizabeth among them). A just-completed renovation has transformed the structure—which had been left to languish for years—into a chic 30-room hotel with a carved-marble staircase, velveteen-upholstered sofas and chairs in colors like bottle green and kingfisher blue, and, best of all, 48 different, wildly colorful wallpapers. And if you book the Maharani's Apartment—which has its own pool and is decorated with the last Maharani's gorgeous 1930s Art Deco furniture—you'll literally get to sleep like a royal. How could you possibly resist?

**DAY 2:** Today, you'll continue your tour through Jaipur's shops, which, different as they are, share a single, essential quality—an embrace of the new (be it in style or technique) that still manages to celebrate the pleasures and rigors of the traditional.

This aesthetic is on particularly lovely display at **Satayam**, a store on the grounds of the City Palace complex, which houses both an excellent museum containing the royal family's collections of paintings, weaponry, and textiles, as well as, in a separate wing, the royal family itself. At Satayam, you'll find shawls in cotton so fine you can see through them, all block-printed in Mogul designs (paisleys, tulips) in real gold or silver leaf: a combination at once humble and deeply luxurious.

Anyone who's been to India knows that it's near impossible to leave the country without being converted into a dedicated collector of scarves and shawls (not quite the same as a dedicated *wearer* of scarves and shawls, mind you). At **Andraab**, which is run by three brothers from Kashmir, you'll find lofty scarves and shawls aplenty (as well as bedcovers), all woven from the softest cashmere

on the market. They're pricey—embroidered pieces can run into the thousands—but top quality.

After lunch at the outdoor **Verandah** restaurant at the Taj Rambagh Palace (be sure to order the ginger lemonade, which is both biting and sweet), it's a very brief drive to yet another former palace turned hotel, the twentieth-century Narain Niwas. You, however, are here to visit the three boutiques and restaurant housed on the complex's grounds. Your first stop, **Hot Pink**, founded by the Parisian jeweler Marie-Hélène de Taillac, may well be one of the most beautiful shops in the world. Here, in a sunlit, marble-floored space, racks of women's clothes—dresses in patterned cotton lawn, and silk tunics in candy-bright hues, most of them by Indian or French designers—are arranged by color; an antechamber is stocked with embroidered silk pillows and throws. Then go right next door—just past the large, water-filled stone dish, its surface filmed with fuchsia rose petals—to **Aashka**. There are clothes here as well (mostly tunics and kurtas), but the things to covet are the fabulous Thikaria furniture: wooden tables and chests of drawers slathered with a layer of plaster of paris and decorated with chips of mirrors in crisp geometric designs. There's also a good selection of equestrian accessories—polo has been a big deal in Jaipur (and across Rajasthan) since the time of the British Raj. Finally, stroll around the corner to **Idli**. One might see Idli—founded by a French interior and fashion designer named Thierry Journo, a member of the city's significant European expat community, who worked with both Thierry Mugler and Andrée Putman—as

a celebration of all things color: The women's shop is dominated by a raspberry-pink silk sofa; the men's, acid-green and marigold-yellow silk lanterns shaped like neoclassical vases. Journo has designed all of these, along with the textiles (cushions, bedding, and fabric by the meter) and clothes (light-weight silk dresses for women, button-downs for men), each of which is made locally.

After such athletic shopping, you'll need what comes next: a drink and dinner at **Bar Palladio**. This peacock-blue restaurant (which doubles as a bar and triples as a performance space) is a sumptuous, gorgeously realized fantasy whose tented ceilings and custom-printed floral banquettes evoke Mogul-era splendor, and whose languorous, lounge-all-day tenor pays homage to the prewar European café (and indeed, the restaurant's Swiss-Italian owner, Barbara Miolini, used to work for Villa Cipriani before she moved to Jaipur a decade ago to open an embroidery factory). But more than just a fantastically picturesque place to have a Pimm's Cup (made here with mango and pineapple) and a decent *fettuccine ai funghi*, it's also a sort of glamorous public living room, a place where locals, expats, and visitors can smoke and drink the afternoon (and evening) away. It's the kind of restaurant that might inspire your own fantasies of moving to Jaipur—or, at the very least, of coming back, again and again. ♦

For more photos of Jaipur, download our digital edition. And for more of Yanagihara's insider shopping tips, visit us on Facebook.

**Below, from left:** Color is a fact of life in Jaipur; an elaborate door at the City Palace museum. **Right:** Bar Palladio pays homage to both the Mogul era and old European cafés.

## CNT INSIDER

We asked **Siddharth Kasliwal**, owner and designer of Munnū: The Gem Palace, for his favorite places to eat in his hometown.

### 1135 AD

"Located at Amer Fort, it has spectacular views and is one of my favorite spots to take friends and clients from overseas. It transports you back to the time of the maharajas—it's also a great place to book private dinners. The cuisine is authentic Rajasthani." AMBER CITY.

### Anokhi Cafe

"Great healthy organic food. Come for lunch." KK SQUARE, SECOND FL., C-11, PRITHVIRAJ RD., C-SCHEME.

### Niros

"One of the oldest restaurants in town and a favorite of both mine and my father's. I order in and eat dinner on the Gem Palace rooftop." M.I. RD.

### OTH

"One of the only places that serves American-style breakfast and burgers, it's very popular among local youngsters and expats." E-145, RAMESH MARG, BEHIND TALWALKARS, C-SCHEME.

### Peshawri

"Famous for its lamb and black lentil curry; the Afghani naan bread here is an experience in itself." PALACE RD.



