

A Royal Resonance



With its strong sense of history, the persistent pull of legacy, and a service philosophy that's rare to come by, Rambagh Palace, Jaipur is an experience ripe for memories.

Left: Rajmata Gayatri Devi's presence looms over every aspect of Rambagh;
Below: Rambagh Palace Exterior;
Facing page: Gold-leaf frescoes and opulent accents grace the regal decadence of the Sukh Niwas Grand Presidential Suite

If there really were such a thing as “too much of a good thing”, would that adage pertain to travel as well? Would a prolific travel calendar end up resulting in a flurry of non-descript hotel rooms, a time-lapsed collection of places and faces and address, and a perspective of the world that comes viewed through an Instagram filtered prism?

As a writer, and as someone admittedly addicted to the rush of new horizons, I try and combat this potential malaise by slowing things down deliberately; by relishing, savouring and reminiscing; by happily throwing myself down off-the-beaten-paths and addresses brimming with a little thing called magic. Sometimes though, I don't have to try at all.

Here in the grand lobby of the Rambagh Palace, Jaipur, something special hovers in the air. I've just been garlanded and had holy vermilion streaked onto my forehead by way of a traditional Rajasthani welcome. Around me, a pervasive sense of white lends an unhurried air to the proceedings. If a rare dose of bliss was what I had in mind, I know I've come to the right place.

From its birth in 1835, Rambagh Palace has taken on many guises in its fabled life thus far: home to the queen's chosen handmaidens; a four-room hunting lodge; a royal guesthouse; and most pertinently, the residence of Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II and his queen, Maharani Gayatri Devi. To take these continually evolving royal transitions forward, it seems fitting that the mantle would pass on to The Taj Group.

In the hands of one of the world's great hospitality brands, Rambagh has blossomed into a treasure, its 78 gorgeously restored grand luxury rooms and suites (that were the chambers of the former Maharaja) sparkling with both rich opulence and dignified elegance.



As I stroll through the Palace's long hallways, across its vast gardens brimming with monsoon, and into its Royal Suites in a bid to select my temporary home, the one word that lingers is 'surreal'.

I've had the full luxury hospitality treatment whispered, curated, cooked, and slathered extravagantly onto me at various points in time. But somehow, Rambagh occupies a place of its own. This storied palace occupying a special place in the annals of Jaipur royalty merges history and luxury like no other.

The monsoon keeps step with my explorations and indulgences, peppering Rambagh's inch-perfect greenery with dappled romance. I begin to dip into its royal suites and apartments, motivated as much by the thought of hidden stories and legacies as by the warmth of a temporary home. I pass through a corridor lined with hand-painted frescoes, each gaze frozen in time. I enter the Rang Niwas Suite. What catches my attention immediately is the fluffed-up sofa overlooking the fountains and Mughal Gardens—I would happily spend entire afternoons in here with a good book and some wine. I take a peek inside the Italian marbled, Forest Essentials-scented bathroom with its Jacuzzi—another fine resting spot.

In the Badal Mahal Suite, the diwan sofa nestles snugly within the inviting alcove that looks out onto the Mughal Gardens. I think I may have found another perfect reading spot. But then in the Pothikhana Suite, where I am now, I know there's no other argument:





The Royal Standard

Predictably, Rambagh Palace's best is saved for the Historical and Royal Family Suites. While the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh Suite is a fascinating embodiment of the Maharaja's passions, with polo and army laurels occupying pride of place and the rich silk-clad jharokha marking itself out as one of the most Instagramable seats in the world, it is the Rajmata Gayatri Devi Suite that casts the deepest spell.

Here, in a residence that carries her unmistakable aura, myth, mystery and beauty merge into an experience destined to remain. The suite's subtle charms flow through works of art, old-world European furniture bathed in yellow and soft gold, and a bed laced with serpentine carvings where laying down almost feels like an intrusion. In case there are any misgivings about the suite's royal credentials, a Louis XV bureau plat desk with cabriole legs and the oval bathroom crafted through white Makrana marble serve as regal reminders. •

Left: Sukh Niwas,
Grand Presidential Suite;
Below: Elephant Polo,
Recreational facility at the palace

this 'House of Books' suite's antique teak walls, Raj-era opulence, and Savonnerie French carpets have all been assembled keeping classic libraries in mind.

Each residence at Rambagh is true testament to the term luxury, imbuing the swirling aura of its past residents, the profound weight of history and legacy, and a richly-assembled collection of treasures, artefacts, photographs and paintings, all within sumptuously designed spaces that would fit neatly under the tag of a 'museum'.



This is all very Merchant-Ivory. On each stroll of mine, my eyes are distracted by the extravagant splendour and the minute details: hand-carved marble latticework, sandstone balustrades, et al. It's this same level of attention that's evident at the Jiva Grande Spa—where a signature Nawab-e-Khaas treatment inspired by the Nizams of Hyderabad helps me sink into my private sanctuary of pampered royalty.

"Through its painstaking renovation by the team—many of whom are Taj veterans, and through devotion to old-world charm, we make sure that Rambagh's legacy is kept flourishing," Ram Rathore, Director of Sales & Marketing, tells me as we settle in for a meal at Rajput Room. The property houses some of Jaipur's most coveted dining addresses—after all, who can resist a royal feast? While Rajput Room is a perfectly-draped yet sober option, all restraint goes out of the window with Suvarna Mahal—a former palace ballroom that dazzles with its 18th century French accent, crystal chandeliers set to shimmer, and Florentine frescoes that recall the Sistine Chapel. "The princely states of Rajasthan, Awadh, Punjab and Hyderabad are what's on the menu here," Rathore tells me.

We amble through the Polo Bar, where polo trophies and rare single malts make for the perfect nostalgia trip. I linger for a while at the Verandah Café, with the rains create music over the palace's endless greens. A fitting finale, I think, to what has been the perfect symphony. **S**