

Royal Reflections

Exploring the enchanting water palaces of India!

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Tomes can be written about the architecture of India. The opulent, exquisitely designed royal palaces dotting the country can certainly give the Buckingham Palace a run for its money. Perhaps the most fascinating of these are the mysterious 'floating' palaces that were built as royal retreats, some of them during medieval times. Many of these awe-inspiring structures still stand today, a testament to the engineering skills and the architectural acumen of our ancestors. Take a journey around India and behold these extraordinary water palaces.

This page: The iconic Jal Mahal on Man Sagar Lake.

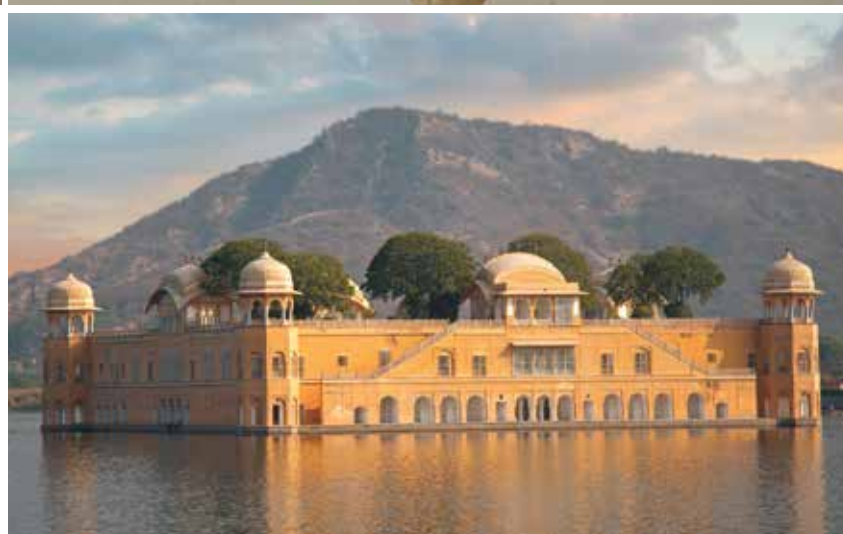


NEERMAHAL,

NEAR AGARTALA (TRIPURA)

Located in the centre of Rudrasagar Lake, 53 km from Agartala, Neermahal is a spectacular heritage palace in Tripura. It was built as the royal summer residence in 1930 by Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya. The palace is a seamless blend of various architectural styles, and reflects the king's eclectic tastes. It is a striking sight with a red brick base and white stone-and-marble body topped with numerous domes. Neermahal is divided into two parts – the Andar Mahal on the western side, which was the royal residence, and the eastern side, which was used by the staff and security personnel. The palace has 24 rooms, a beautifully landscaped garden, and an open-air amphitheatre where the royal family organised dance performances, theatre shows, and other cultural events. It has been recently refurbished to attract visitors. Since 2011, the annual Neermahal Water Festival takes place in August. For three days, you can watch cultural programmes, swimming competitions, and boat races in the lake. The palace is open for visitors through the year; you can take a ferry or boat from the banks of the lake to reach the palace.

Jet Airways operates daily flights to Silchar, Assam from Kolkata and Guwahati. Tripura can be reached in about 6 hours by road.



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JAL MAHAL,

JAIPUR (RAJASTHAN)

The iconic Jal Mahal sits pretty in the middle of Man Sagar Lake in Jaipur, as much a symbol of the city as is the Hawa Mahal. The lake was formed in the 16th century by constructing a dam, and later the palace was built in 1799 by Sawai Pratap Singh. Jal Mahal was used as a summer resort to host parties and hunting expeditions. Of the five levels of this sandstone structure, four lie beneath the surface of the lake, and only the top level, with its intricately carved archways, is visible, almost mysteriously floating on the lake. The palace is built in the Rajput and Mughal styles of architecture with four 'chhatris' on every corner of the palace. A dome with twenty carved pillars forms the cenotaph of the royal family of Maharaja Jai Singh II of Amber, and honours Pratap Singh, Madho Singh, and Jai Singh I, among others. It is a protected area; earlier you could take a boat ride to the palace, but entry to the palace is now prohibited. You can, however, see it from the edge of the lake. Try visiting twice – in the morning when it's bathed in sunlight and shimmers on the surface of the lake, and in the evening when it is lit up and looks absolutely ethereal.

Jet Airways operates daily flights to Jaipur from Mumbai and New Delhi. Jal Mahal is just 5 km from Jaipur on the way to Amer Fort.



Indiapicture

LAKE PALACE, UDAIPUR (RAJASTHAN)

On the serene Lake Pichola in Udaipur, stands what is perhaps the most romantic palace-hotel in the world. Maharana Jagat Singh II of Udaipur built this stunning white marble structure in 1746 as a pleasure palace for his moonlight assignations with the ladies of the zenana. Lake Palace or Jag Niwas is today a luxury hotel operated by the Taj Group. Successive rulers used the property as a summer resort when it was particularly pleasant thanks to its landscaped gardens, multitudinous fountains, and pillared terraces.

By the latter half of the 19th century, Lake Palace fell into disuse till the 1960s, when it was converted into a luxury hotel. The Taj Group took over in 1971, renaming it to Taj Lake Palace, and since then it has been a favourite haunt of the rich and the famous. It has also been used as a filming location, most notably in the James Bond film, *Octopussy*. The hotel's 83 rooms and suites all offer gorgeous views of the lake and the surrounding Aravalli Hills. Visiting the palace is off-limits unless you're a guest at the hotel.

Jet Airways operates daily flights to Udaipur from Mumbai and New Delhi.



Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces



DEEG PALACE,

NEAR BHARATPUR (RAJASTHAN)

Built in mid-18th century by Raja Badan Singh (and later revamped by his son Raja Suraj Mal), Deeg Palace was the luxurious summer residence of the Jat kings who ruled Bharatpur. The palace was built between two lakes, Gopal Sagar and Rup Sagar. When Suraj Mal refurbished it, he used materials and valuables plundered from the Red Fort in New Delhi. The Jat rulers were heavily influenced by Mughal architecture, which can be seen in the domes, filigreed gates, marble jaalis, and landscaped gardens of Deeg Palace. There is even a beautiful marble swing overlooking the garden, which is said to have belonged to Noor Jahan, and which was brought to Deeg as a war trophy from the Mughal court. The palace is divided into several bhavans or mansions, the largest of which is the Gopal Bhavan with its majestic arches, imposing pillars, and a large reception hall. It also contains a black marble throne-platform brought from the imperial palaces of New Delhi as spoils of war. Deeg Palace is open through the week (except Fridays) and there's a nominal entrance fee.

Jet Airways operates regular flights to Jaipur from major Indian cities. Deeg is located at a distance of 202 km and can be reached by road in 3 hours.

LAKHOTA PALACE,

JAMNAGAR (GUJARAT)

Lakhota Palace stands on a small island in Lakhota Lake in the centre of Jamnagar. It was built in the mid-19th century by Jam Ranmal, the king of Navanagar. The Lakhota tower was built for drought relief, and the palace-fort was then constructed to fend off any attack, with the lake acting as a moat. The palace is connected to the mainland by a stone bridge. It now houses a museum that displays the personal belongings of the royal family as well as antique artefacts and sculptures from the 9th to 18th century sourced from nearby villages. The walls of the museum are adorned with frescoes that depict fierce battles fought by the Jadeja Rajputs. There is a large arsenal of swords, muskets, and other weaponry, which is displayed in the Kotha Bastion of the fort. The palace complex also holds an old well, which has an ingenious method for drawing water by blowing into a small hole on the floor. The palace and museum are open through the week (except Wednesdays) and there's a nominal entrance fee.

Jet Airways operates daily flights to Rajkot from Mumbai. From here you can reach Jamnagar in just under two hours by road.



Jet Airways flies daily to major cities in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Tripura from many Indian cities.