

INDIA UNFOLDED · CITY EDITION

UDAIPUR

The City of Lakes

No. 03 — RAJASTHAN COLLECTION · 32 PAGES

IN 60 SECONDS

After Chittorgarh burned once too often, Maharana Udai Singh II built a capital behind lakes and hills — and Mewar's pride moved in and never left.

Udaipur is Rajasthan at its most romantic: white palaces doubled in still water, rooftop dinners, the slow theatre of ghats at dawn. It is also the seat of the house whose great boast is that it never bowed to the Mughals. Come October to March, give it two or three days, and plan your evenings around the sunsets — this city is built for them.

FOUNDED

1559

by Maharana Udai Singh II of Mewar

BEST TIME

Oct – Mar

monsoon (Aug-Sep) fills the lakes and is beautiful too

GIVE IT

2 – 3 days

plus a day for Kumbhalgarh & Ranakpur

GETTING IN

UDR

Maharana Pratap airport, 40 min out; overnight trains from Delhi & Jaipur

01 The Story, in Five Acts

I THE REFUGE · 1559

Chittorgarh, Mewar's great fort, had been besieged and sacked at terrible cost — and would be again. Udai Singh II chose a valley in the Aravalli hills, screened by ridges and water; the story goes that a hermit on the ridge blessed the spot and told him to build. In 1559 he did, and when Chittor fell a final time in 1568, the capital was already safe behind the lakes.

II THE HOUSE THAT NEVER BOWED

The Sisodias of Mewar are counted among the oldest ruling houses anywhere, and their pride is the spine of Rajput history: Maharana Pratap fought Akbar's empire at Haldighati in 1576 and kept fighting from the hills rather than submit. Mewar never gave a daughter to the Mughal court — the one boast every guide in Udaipur will make, and history largely lets them.

III THE LAKES

The romance is engineering. Pichola was dammed in the 14th century and enlarged by Udai Singh; Fateh Sagar, Swaroop Sagar and the rest followed — a chain of man-made reservoirs that turned a dry valley into a water city. Udaipur doesn't sit beside its lakes; it exists because of them.

Stand here. Look for this.

Five things almost everyone walks straight past — where to stand, and what you're actually seeing.

1 The peacock courtyard

Mor Chowk — three glass-mosaic peacocks in full display. Stand close: every feather is cut glass, set by hand.

2 The narrow stairs

Notice how low, dark and twisting every staircase is. Not poor planning — a design so no armed force could ever charge through.

3 The sun face

Find the gilded sun emblem — the dynasty's claimed solar ancestry. The telling goes that on clouded monsoon days, the Maharana worshipped it in place of the sky.

4 The garden on the roof

Badi Mahal's courtyard has full-grown trees at the palace's very top — because the palace is built AROUND a hill, and this is its summit.

5 The framed lake

Every window composes Pichola deliberately. Stand where the frame puts you, and you're seeing the lake exactly as rulers designed it to be seen.

One more thing

Arrive at opening, give it two to three unhurried hours, and finish on the upper terraces — the whole geography of Mewar's refuge resolves from up there. And check which standard is flying: the palace is still partly a royal home, and knowing it changes the visit.

01 ARRIVAL

The ghat at dawn

Gangaur Ghat · Sunrise to an hour after · 1x · landscape · 1x

Steps → still water → palace; family seated, backs to camera

02 THE PALACE

The palace from Ambrai

Ambrai Ghat · First two morning hours, before the breeze · 1x · landscape · 1x or 2x

Palace upper third, reflection lower; family at the margin

03 THE GATEWAY

Through Bara Pol

Bara Pol · Mid-morning, arch in shade · 1x · portrait · 1x

Arch as frame; family walking through

04 INSIDE THE PALACE

The peacock court

Mor Chowk · Any open hour (9:30-17:30) · 1x · portrait · 1x

Mosaic edge to edge; small figure beneath

05 THE TEMPLE

Jagdish's carved columns

Jagdish Temple · Mid-morning, in open shade · 1x · portrait · 1x

Columns edge to edge; family small beneath

06 THE VIEW

The lake from the hill

Sajjanganarh · Morning, clear air · 1x · landscape · 1x

Family at the wall → lakes → Aravalli