

Thar Desert Camel Safaris of India are now one of Asia's best adventure holidays.

These include camel treks, ranging from short rides around Jaisalmer to extensive trips that remind you of Lawrence of Arabia on his epic journey across the Sahara, Marco Polo, on the historic silk route, a medieval trader leading his caravan through the hostile spice route or a royal caravan serai, heading for one of the medieval kingdoms of the Thar desert. They are a popular way to see the desert and to enjoy an adventurous holiday.

The Great Indian Desert may not have great expanses of sand dunes and incredible spaces of wilderness as large as those of the Sahara and Namibia, but it more than makes up with some glorious citadels and extremely colourful and quaint villages. Its sand dunes are more easily accessible from airports and railway stations than those of many African countries.

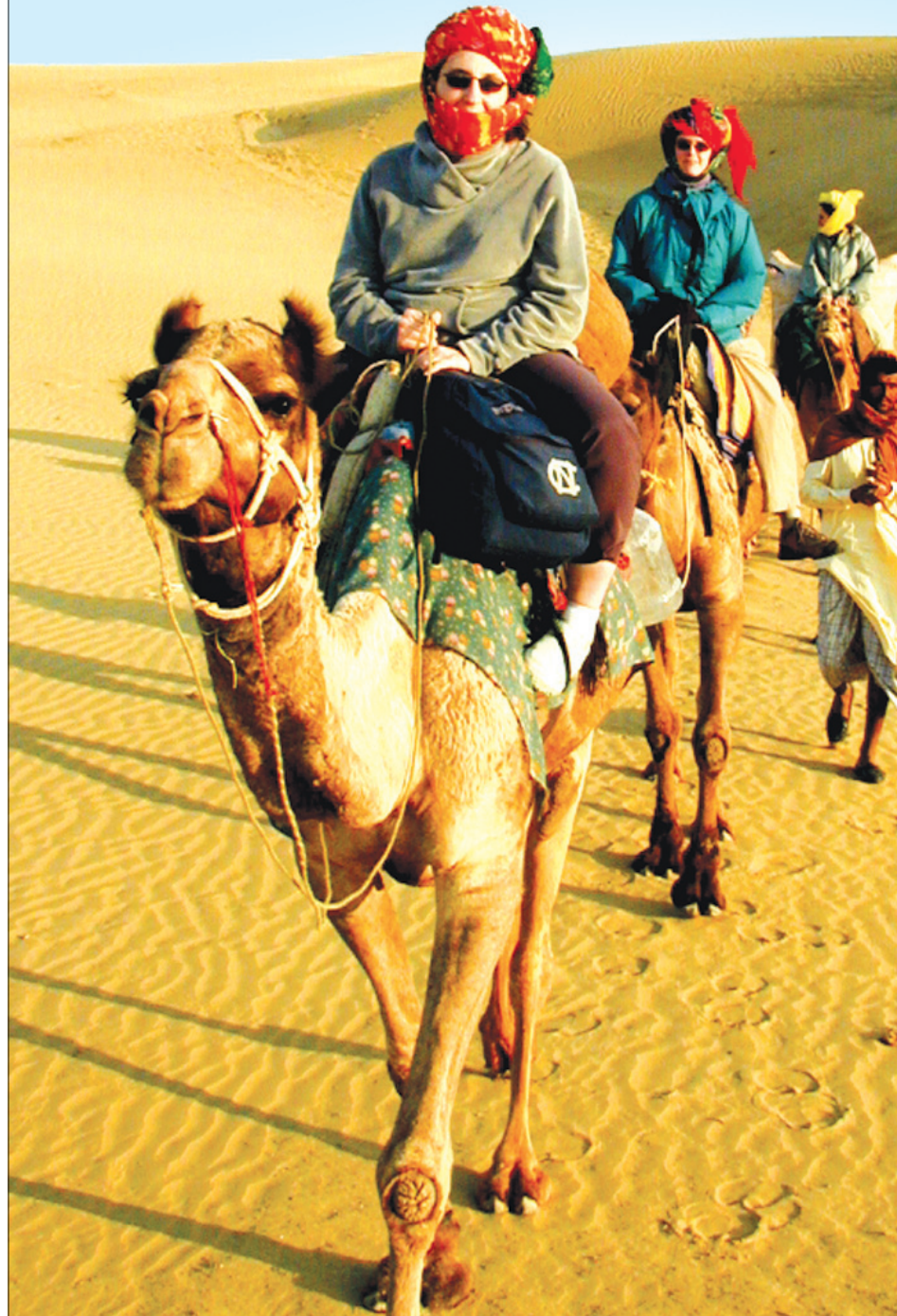
The Camel Safari Circuit in India comprises of Jaisalmer, Jodhpur and Bikaner, all in Rajasthan. They were the princely kingdoms in the desert belt of Rajasthan. Each is comparable in size to many modern nations of Europe. All the former capitals prospered from trade with the camel caravans that traveled from West Asia and Europe to Mongolia, and were impressively fortified to protect these riches. The result was a wealth of palaces built for royalty, havelis or courtyard mansions built for merchants and nobility and intricately carved temples for the subjects. Materials used were normally sandstone, which was easily available and provided a better medium to the *silavats* who specialised in making stones resembling lace!

A camel safari is a great way to see the desert — visiting the villages, seeing wildlife, and riding across the open desert sands. Typical camel safaris organised around Jaisalmer take in the architectural ruins of Lodurva, which was the former capital of the Bhatti Rajput desert kingdom before the founding of Jaisalmer, the Anasagar oasis, the sand dunes of Samm and the water source of Moolsagar, where village women gather with pitchers at dusk. Night halts on basic safaris are in villages on the way or temporary bivouac camps in the desert scrub where camels are hobbled and let out to graze.

The climate is extreme in the afternoons. Night temperatures may drop below zero on the dunes. It is essential to stock both woolen and cotton clothing. Shorts and skirts are comfortable wear for camel safaris but some of the offbeat routes visit villages that aren't used to seeing bare ankles.

Sun hats with large rims or cotton caps that can be dipped in water when it gets too hot around midday, are essential, preferably with a balaclava or scarf for covering the neck and forehead. At

On the camel trail...



Jodhpur you can buy umbrellas that are quite convenient for camel safaris. Sunscreen lotion, moisturisers and lip salves are a must.

A water bottle can be comfortably slung on the camel saddle and it is advisable to carry tangerines as even on a deluxe safari it may not be practical to dismount each time to drink from the carted water supply.

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS

JAISALMER-LUDHARVA: Start by camel from Jaisalmer for Badabagh: The site of the royal cenotaphs of the Bhatti Rajput Kings (the then rulers of Jaisalmer). Then Ludharva via Roopsi. A village with mud and stick houses with traditional decorative paintings and mirror works. Ludharva was the ancient capital of the Bhatti Rajput kings.

LUDHARVA-SAND DUNES: Travel to Peerawal for lunch. Peerawal is the

oasis and there are beautiful agriculture fields. After lunch you can reach the dunes via Kanoi. A typical carpenters village, Kanoi is known for beautifully carved wooden items.

SAND DUNES-KULDHARA: Start for Damodara via Beri of Kanoi. A place known for water wells, you can see how village women, kitted out in amazingly colourful clothes and ornaments, walk proudly bearing several water pots all at once on their head. Later you can travel to Kuldhara, apparently abandoned by the Paliwal Brahmins in the space of a night.

Built in 1291 with a great sense of geometry and urban planning, Kuldhara was the biggest of the 84 villages of the Paliwal Brahmins of Jaisalmer.

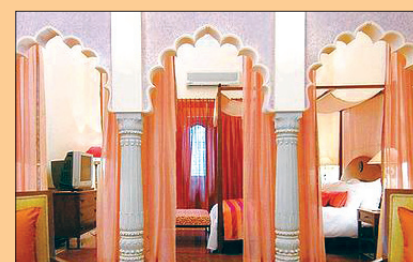
The villagers following persecution by the local dewan. But what they left behind for future visitors were magnificent remains of a once industrious and prosperous community.

Blue Mountain Heritage Train turns 100



The Nilgiri's Queen, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has recently completed 100 years of service. On its centenary run, the Nilgiri Mountain Railway (NMR), also called the Nilgiri's Queen, the lone rack and pinion railway in India, ran on a steam engine for the first time after 14 years. One of the oldest mountain railways in the country, the NMR, traversing a 46-km-long metre gauge stretch and scaling an elevation of up to 2,203 metres, was first proposed in 1854 and completed in 1908. Three years ago, NMR was accorded the world heritage status by UNESCO. Its oldest locomotive engine is over 80 years old, its youngest at least 50, and its rolling stocks date back to the 1960s

Taj Hotels Resorts & Palaces on an award winning spree



Taj Hotels Resorts & Palaces has won accolades at this year's 'Business Traveller Awards' as well as the Tatler Spa Guide 2008.

Taj Hotels Resorts and Places has been ranked No. 1 in the Best Hotel Chain in India category at the recent Business Traveller Awards 2008.

In addition, the spas at the Usha Kiran Palace, Gwalior and the Rambagh Palace, Jaipur have been included among The 101 Best Spas in The World compiled by Tatler Spa Guide 2008.

Business Traveller is a leading magazine for the frequent global business travellers.

The awards are selected on the basis of voting by its readers.

There is no pre-selection by anyone at the magazine, and all the data provided are analysed by a market-research company for the final selection of the winners.

The *Tatler Spa Guide* is published by *Tatler* magazine of the Condé Nast Publications. *Tatler* is Britain's leading entertaining magazine.

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