

ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

SHOPPING TRIP

A Jaipurfect Spree

Where a textiles superstar goes to find the best and the brightest fabrics and jewels in India's Pink City



IN THE PINK Palace of Winds in downtown Jaipur.

BY JOHN ROBshaw

FOR THE PAST 15 years, I have been making a biannual trip to Jaipur in search of ideas for my block-print textile company. I plan my escape from the comparatively mild chaos of New York to the mosh pit of India when I'm in need of stumbling across the color combinations that it seems only the artisans in my favorite Indian city dream up. I'll find inspiration at a market stall tipping over with jeans embroidered with crazy patterns, or at a chic boutique that sells cotton twill in soft, bleedy colors that I have not encountered before.

Jaipur is known as the Pink City because its downtown was painted to resemble red sandstone for the 1853 visit of Prince Albert. As you drive through the old gates into town, the buildings before you are a dusty, sun-bleached hue that's more of a not-quite pink. If you squint at sunset, the sky itself looks like a rosy bruise. The metropolis is lousy with artisans—everyone from bangle makers to marble carvers to block printers, all involved in making something lovely, handmade and unique.

It's a big city, yet easy to zip among workshops by cab. Many of my favorite shops line M. I. Road, one of Jaipur's major avenues. I often use Jaipur Taxi to secure a trusty driver with some English skills, at a rate of around \$25 for eight hours. Your hotel can line up a driver, but be wary of the shops they recommend. It's far better to have an itinerary in hand.

Cab secured, my first stop is Lassiwala—a beverage stand where the best lassi I've ever tasted is served in earthenware cups. (Lassi is a yogurt drink, sort of like a lighter, tangier milkshake.) Try the one with rosewater



PITTER-PATTERN Clockwise from above: The writer at a coffee shop in Jaipur, jewels at Jaipur Jewels, outdoor seating area at Rambagh Palace Hotel, a taxi in a John Robshaw patchwork slipcover.

and honey. When you're done, smash your clay cup on the ground, a key step in the Lassiwala ritual.

Near Lassiwala is the Khadi Ghar shop—an emporium of handcrafted goods where you'll find kurtas (tunics) made of beautiful hand-woven cottons. The shop brims with stacks of lovely fabrics in all sorts of odd, vat-dyed colors you've never seen before. I grab two- to three-yard woven pieces in a dozen colors to take to a tailor to make into shirts.

Nearby is RASA, a store that showcases the hand-block-printed fashion line of Madhulika and Manish "Tibbs" Tibrewal, a charming and talented couple whose collections' inspiration and style veer from India to Japan. Their colorful scarves make perfect and per-

fectly unbulky gifts.

Just down the street awaits Himalaya, an ayurvedic company from southern India. I go in for lots of different pills, including neem products for my skin, which gets beat up in India's pollution; and coconut oil to achieve that Bollywood gangster hair. They recommend leaving in the oil overnight. Once you see the lovely Indian hair, you will listen.

Jewelry is everywhere in Jaipur. I especially like the work of Prem Maheshwari,

who sells his wares at Jaipur Jewels Art inside Iorawar Gate. His rough-cut necklaces made of semi-precious stones look as if they had been left out in the road for a few weeks—in a good way, of course. I like my gems the way I like my prints—loud, colorful and rough around the edges. To that end, this place never fails to please.

A favorite for antiques is Silver Mountain. You enter a fort-like stone house, take off your shoes and proceed down to a

basement lair decorated with old carpet, bad lighting and ceiling fans whirling the dust in the air. In front of you lies trunk after trunk filled with all sorts of silver oddities, from cigarette cases to bangles. It's fun to sit on the floor and watch the traders bargain with the shop owner.

Anokhi is the next stop along the way. The restaurant serves delicious organic salads, fresh pomegranate juice and excellent carrot cake. After a light meal, I wander next door to the connecting shop for block-printed kids' clothes and thin voile shirts for men.

Next, I head to a fun old hotel, Narain Niwas Palace. As soon as I drive through the front gate, I park and run into the white-washed bungalow of Hot Pink, a must-stop for Indian fashion. The shop has finally added a men's line, and the last time I was there I picked up a linen vest and

linen shirt finely cut to size.

Then I stop in at AKFD, a great design boutique near the hotel that has a mind-boggling assortment of products designed by Ayush Kasliwal and others curated by his wife, Gitanjali. I am planning on ordering some of their leather semi-modern chairs and maybe some large Noguchi lanterns for my country house.

Finally, I head to Fab India, one of the first shops I found in Jaipur. Started by an American in the 1960s, it focuses on hand-woven clothing. Their wares do shrink, so ignore the salespeople and buy on the large side. I love their loose linen shirts, but they also have a slim cut available.

Itinerary followed, return to your hotel and find a bellhop to help you lug all your shopping bags up to your room. Then relax in the garden with a late afternoon chai and plot your next day's excursions.



THE LOWDOWN JAIPUR SHOPPING ITINERARY

Clothing

RASA

S-55 Ashok Marg, C-Scheme, www.rasajaipur.com
A pink-doored emporium of clothing and bedding in hand-blocked prints.

Anokhi

2nd Floor, KK Square, C-11 Prithviraj Road, C-Scheme, anokhi.com
Tunics and dresses in bold, colorful prints.

Jewelry

Jaipur Jewels

H-30-A, Kissan Marg, Tonk Road, jewelsarts.com
A shop that specializes in silver jewelry. Great cuff bracelets.

Silver Mountain

Shop No. 141, M. I. Road, silvermountaininc.com
Run by two brothers, the company carries silver, gold and gemstones.

Home Design

AKFD

B-6/A1, Prithviraj Road, C-Scheme, akfdstudio.com
Traditional crafts infused with

modern design at Ayush Kasliwal's artisanal furniture store.

Hot Pink

Kanotha Bagh, Narain Singh Road, hotpinkindia.com



A poppy interior-design shop that carries textiles by a handful of designers from India and elsewhere.

Other Fun Stuff

Himalaya

57, Goodluck Mansion, Paanch Batti, M.I. Road, himalaya-healthcare.com
A chain that sells ayurvedic products including a hair-loss cream and baby wash containing chickpea and fenugreek.

Fab India

MGF Mall, Shop # 11-12, 2nd Floor, MGF
fabindia.com
A popular Indian chain that sells clothing, beauty products and housewares.