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EXCLUSIVE

Gwyneth Paltrow

ON STAYING
CLOSE TO CHRIS

THE
SECRET OF
A-LIST
HAIR

BY JENNIFER
ANISTON

first look

NEW SEASON

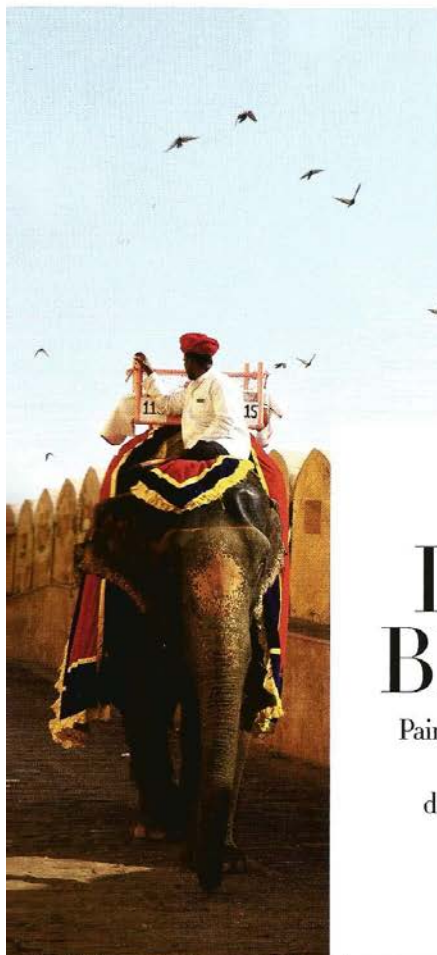
OUR VIEW FROM THE FRONT ROW

*Hollywood
surgeons*

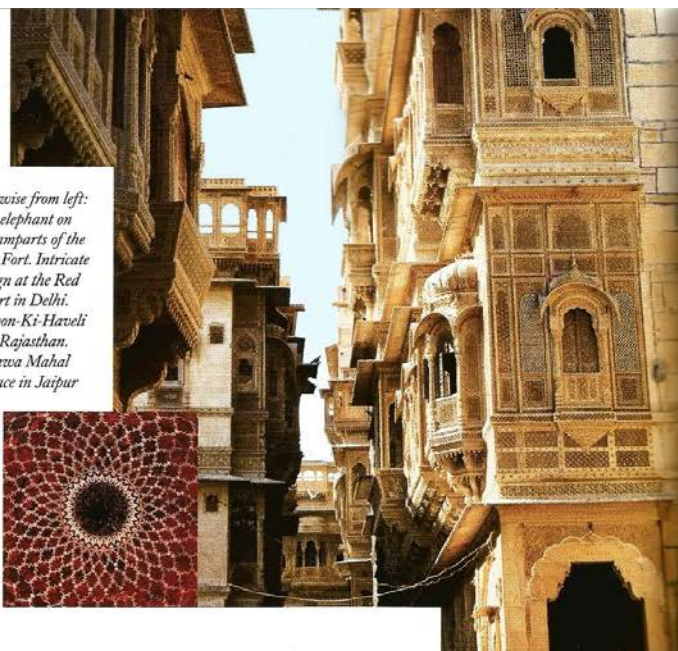
INSIDE THE
VALLEY OF
THE DOLLS



ESCAPE

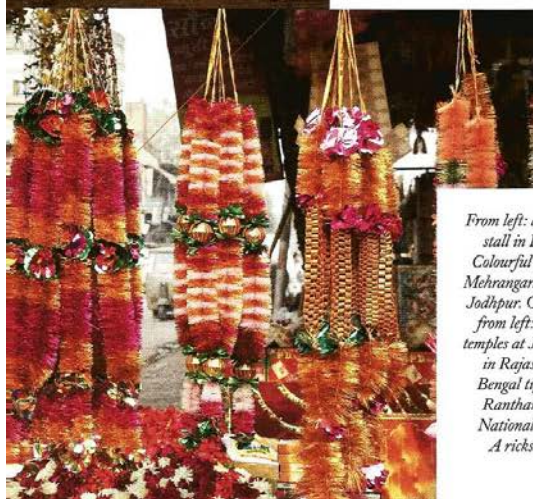


*Clockwise from left:
an elephant on
the ramparts of the
Amer Fort. Intricate
design at the Red
Fort in Delhi.
Patwon-Ki-Haveli
in Rajasthan.
Hawa Mahal
Palace in Jaipur*



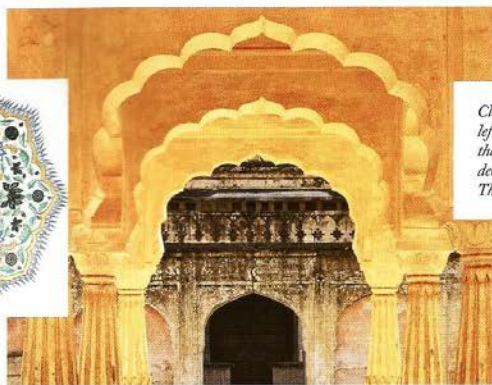
INDIA FOR BEGINNERS

Painted elephants, tiger cubs, hidden temples
and golden forts – SASHA SLATER
discovers the mystery and delights of the
subcontinent on a whirlwind tour

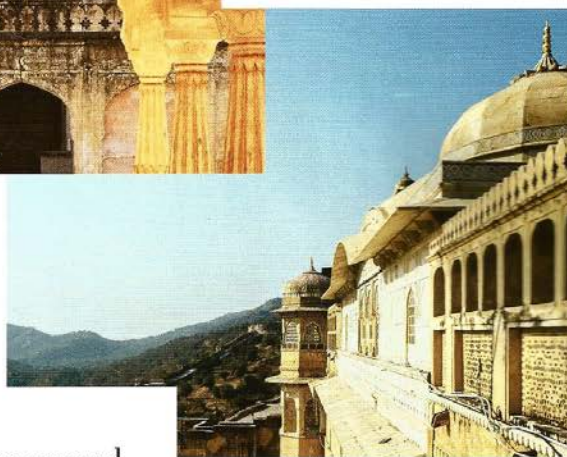


*From left: a market
stall in Delhi.
Colourful saris at
Mehrangarh Fort in
Jodhpur. Opposite,
from left: water
temples at Jaisalmer
in Rajasthan.
Bengal tigers at
Ranthambore
National Park.
A rickshaw*





Clockwise from far left: wall art at the Amer Fort. Its decorative arches. The fort's exterior



Nafees Mohammed raised an imperious hand. The Jeep screeched to a halt. There, across a dry river bed, not 30 metres away, was a tigress. And with her, three cubs. The size of Labradors, they patted her with their outsize paws as she lay blinking in the sunshine. They knew we were there, but they couldn't have cared less. Two of the cubs gambolled away to climb trees; the third cuffed his mother, stood heavily on her flank and chewed her ear. It was almost too good to be true. And then, it seemed, it was. For the tigress Krishna rose, slowly and majestically, and walked away. We feared she'd disappear into the scrub. But no, she turned back and walked towards us, her cubs following. She paused by the side of the track, looked directly at us, sitting vulnerable and awed in our open car, with her amber eyes – 26 stone, nine feet of unutterably beautiful orange-and-black-striped killer – then crossed the path right in front of the Jeep where we sat, breathlessly watching. Her family trotted after her, up and away into the trees, where we could not follow. It was what I had always dreamt of and Nafees, a naturalist of 25 years' experience and my guide for three game drives in Ranthambore National Park, had made it come true.

I had never believed I would see India. I thought I had missed the boat: so many friends had gone there to find themselves as 18-year-olds and come back confused, admittedly, but rich in baggy tie-dye trousers and stories. The place seemed so vast, so complex, so unknowable, that it took them months just to scratch the surface

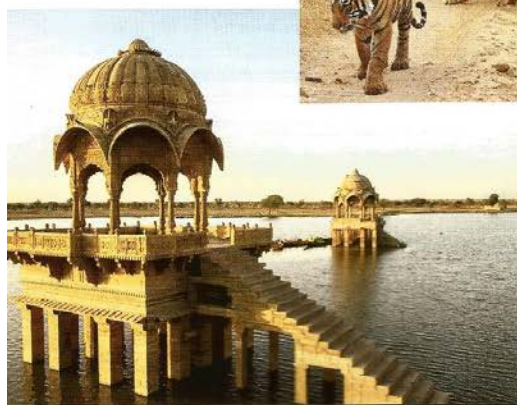
The tigress paused by the side of the track and looked directly at us, sitting awed in our open car

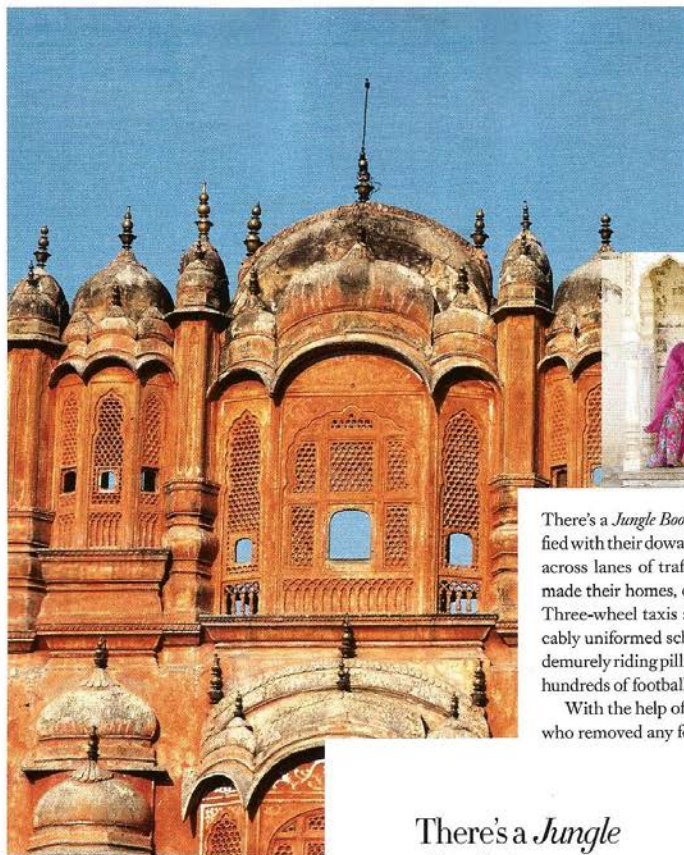
– and recover from the inevitable tummy upsets. They were going for what MM Kaye describes in *The Far Pavilions* as 'that other India: that mixture of glamour and tawdriness, viciousness and nobility. A land full of gods and gold and famine. Ugly as a rotting corpse and beautiful beyond belief...' I wasn't sure I had the stomach – or the time – for such an adventure. What I did want to do was plunge into a world of colour and

catch a glimpse of a rich and sophisticated culture that was wholly different from my own, and relax for 10 days. And then return to my life, refreshed but not changed, and certainly without catching any untoward bugs. And I discovered that it was possible to do just that. I landed in Delhi at night and dived into the noisy, polluted, hooting chaos of the motorways. It was almost Diwali, the Hindu festival of light, and bashed-up trucks, motorised three-wheeled taxis and sleek Mercedes were decorated with garlands and tinsel. We negotiated the slow, congested roads around the airport and then emerged into the wide boulevards and parks leading to the Oberoi, New Delhi. The hotel celebrates its 50th birthday this year and its cool, sleek, modernist efficiency is a contrast to the excitement of the city beyond its manicured garden and pool loungers. For a

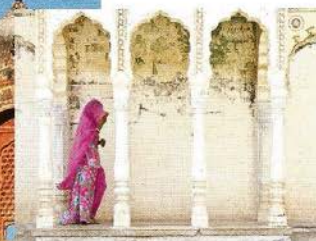
start, looking out from the windows of my skyscraper room, I saw eagles and kites swooping above what looked like virgin jungle.

The impression of peace and grandeur that Edwin Lutyens gave the mansions and government buildings of New Delhi a century ago is in stark contradiction to the bustle of Old Delhi, a short drive away. The drama of the roads is a tourist attraction in itself.





Left: Jaipur's
Hawa Mahal
Palace. Below:
decorative columns
at Humayun's tomb



There's a *Jungle Book* charm to streets in which sacred cows, dignified with their dowager's humps and liquid eyes, wander unmolested across lanes of traffic. In other streets, red-faced macaques have made their homes, coexisting with striped squirrels and stray dogs. Three-wheel taxis are everywhere: I saw one carrying six impeccably uniformed schoolgirls. Motorbikes zip by with sari'd women demurely riding pillion side-saddle; others phut past, piled high with hundreds of footballs or bundles of sugar cane wrapped in tarpaulin.

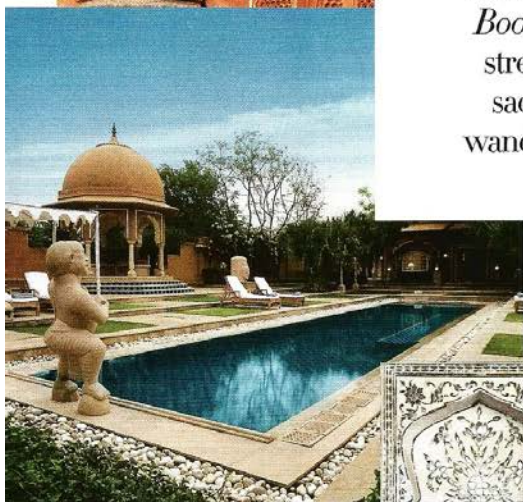
With the help of a guide and a driver supplied by Greaves India, who removed any fear and retained all the wonder, I explored only

a tantalising few of the delights of the city, from the huge and grand mosque Jama Masjid to the upmarket shopping at Khan Market, where Grover Cloth House, which has supplied Chelsea Clinton, expertly copied me a favourite summer dress in the blink of an eye. I loved the Qutub complex of temples and mosques, a huge and tumbled mass of picturesque ruins dating back to the 12th century; the following morning, I explored the tomb of the 16th-century Mughal emperor Humayun. He was a literary chap who died toppling down the steps of his library with his arms full of

books. His tomb, a precursor to the Taj Mahal, was built by his widow and is spectacular, though I preferred another, more ruined tomb and mosque on the same site but hidden away, overgrown by trees and peopled only by acid-green parakeets.

All too soon, I was off on a train for the five-hour ride west into Rajasthan and the 150-square-mile tiger haven. Here, dream-like, in the heat of dusk, I was ushered through the gates of the Oberoi Vanyavilas, while an unseen hand sprinkled marigold petals onto my head. The hotel is organised around game drives and tiger-spotting, but even if the elusive felines decline to appear, there are the hotel's two elephants, Mala and Lakshmi, to ride. Black langur monkeys hang from the trees, and deer run through the forest – the tigers' lunch. Rooms at Vanyavilas are called 'tents' and, indeed, they have canvas roofs, but they are tents that no boy scout would recognise, with tiny gilt tigers and trees patterned over them, and glorious wooden bathrooms with standalone baths. As in every Oberoi I visited, the service is equally outstanding; for no matter how

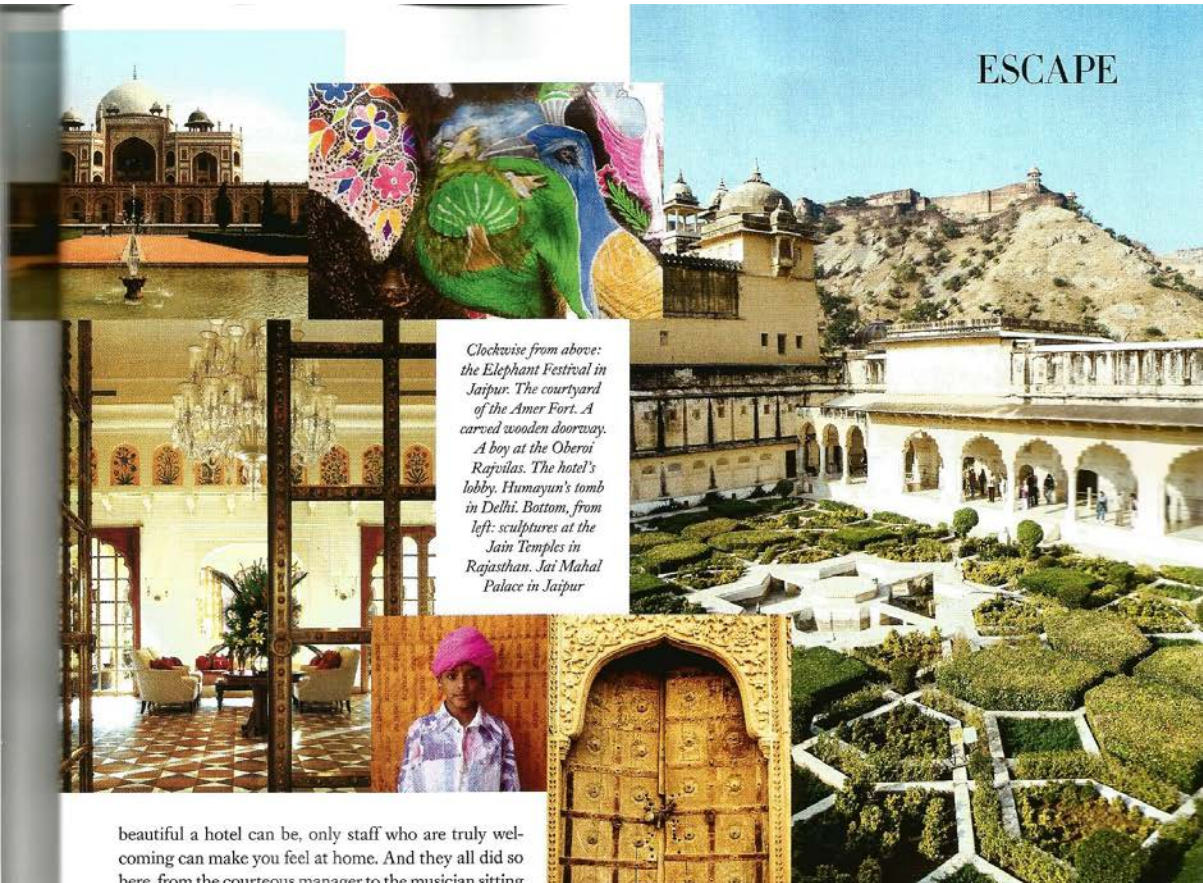
There's a *Jungle Book* charm to streets where sacred cows wander in traffic



Above: the private pool at a villa in the Oberoi Rajvillas, Jaipur. Right: a wall mural at the Amer Fort



ESCAPE



Clockwise from above: the Elephant Festival in Jaipur. The courtyard of the Amer Fort. A carved wooden doorway. A boy at the Oberoi Rajvillas. The hotel's lobby. Humayun's tomb in Delhi. Bottom, from left: sculptures at the Jain Temples in Rajasthan. Jai Mahal Palace in Jaipur

beautiful a hotel can be, only staff who are truly welcoming can make you feel at home. And they all did so here, from the courteous manager to the musician sitting cross-legged in scarlet robes and a turban, playing a sarangi in the outside courtyard as I feasted on venison curry.

Finally I came to Jaipur. This, the capital of Rajasthan, is known principally for two of my favourite things: palaces and jewels. No wonder I immediately felt at home. The Water Palace, set in a lake, is exquisite, as is the Amer Fort's Saffron Garden, a terraced pleasure-ground built on water below the castle. Access to the hilltop fort itself is by elephant, complete with scarlet accoutrements and painted decorations. Mine, another Lakshmi, had incredibly long eyelashes. The fort, built at the end of the 16th century and a short drive from the centre of Jaipur, is rich in marble pillars and extravagant decoration, and the paint on its ceilings is made from ground-up malachite, onyx, amethyst and gold. There was more gold on display in the jewellery shops and my guide here, most refreshingly, was a stylish thirtysomething woman called Neeta Parmar, who was just as keen as I was on glitter and sparkle, and agreed to barter on my behalf when I got overexcited in sari shops – and I can't think of a finer place to succumb to temptation. Better still, during Diwali, shopkeepers traditionally offer extra discounts. I took full advantage. The Oberoi Rajvillas, about 20 minutes outside town, was a blissful place to cool down after the heat, colour and friendly mayhem of the town. Here I lay next to a stone elephant spouting water into the cool

pool as peacocks patrolled the lawn and spotted doves fluttered to roost in the date-palms above me.

I didn't begin to understand India... and nor did I buy any tie-dye. But what I do want is to get back there as soon as possible and explore it some more. □

A seven-night tailor-made tour of India costs from £2,499 a person B&B, including British Airways World Traveller-class flights, transfers, sightseeing, excursions and stays at the Oberoi, New Delhi, the Oberoi Vanyavilas, Ranthambore, and the Oberoi Rajvillas, Jaipur, with Greaves India (020 7487 9111; www.greavesindia.co.uk).

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