

HOUSE & GARDEN[®] DESTINATIONS

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FAY MASCHLER'S CULINARY RAJASTHAN

CRUISING THE GALAPAGOS

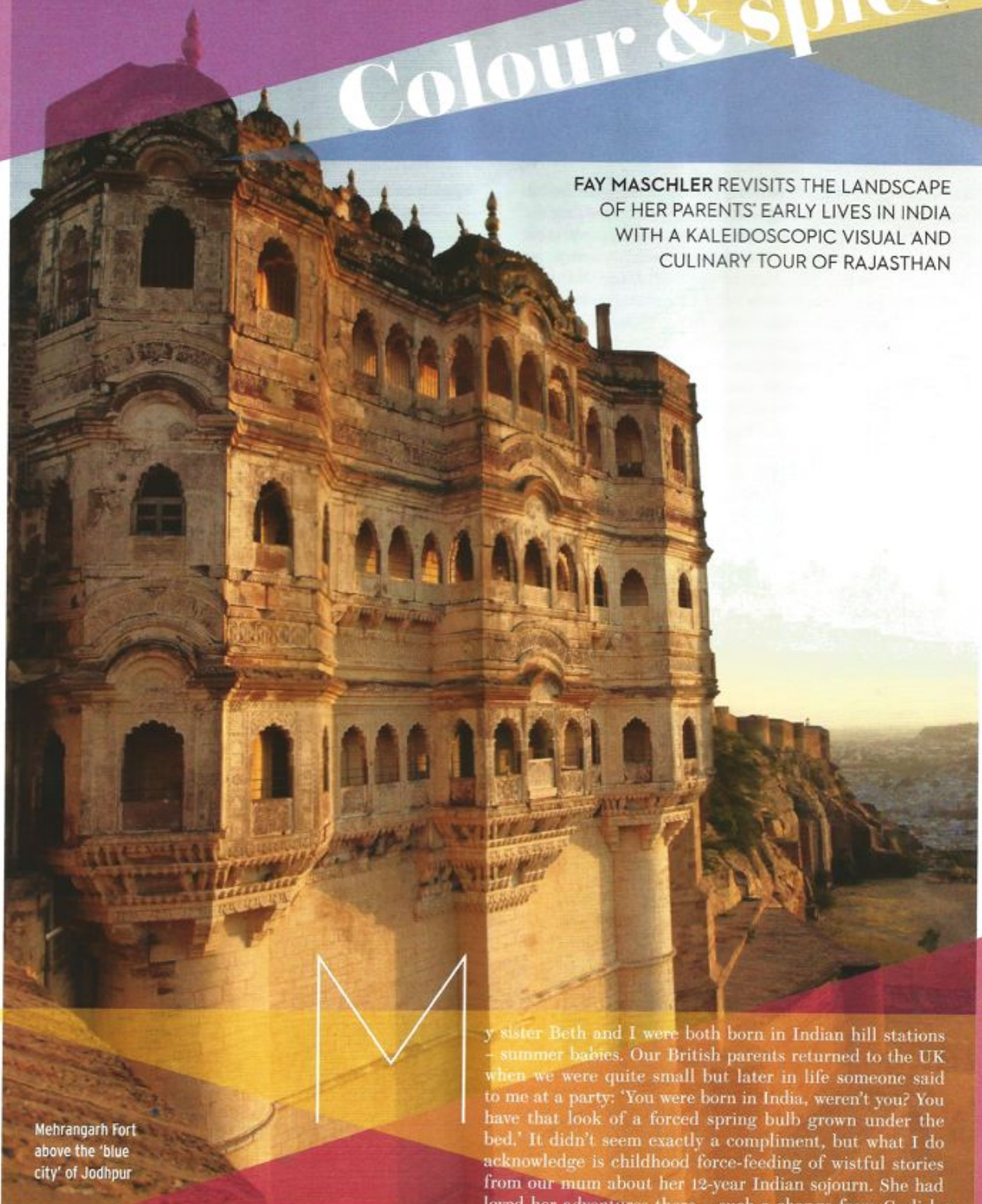
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DESTINATIONS

INDIA

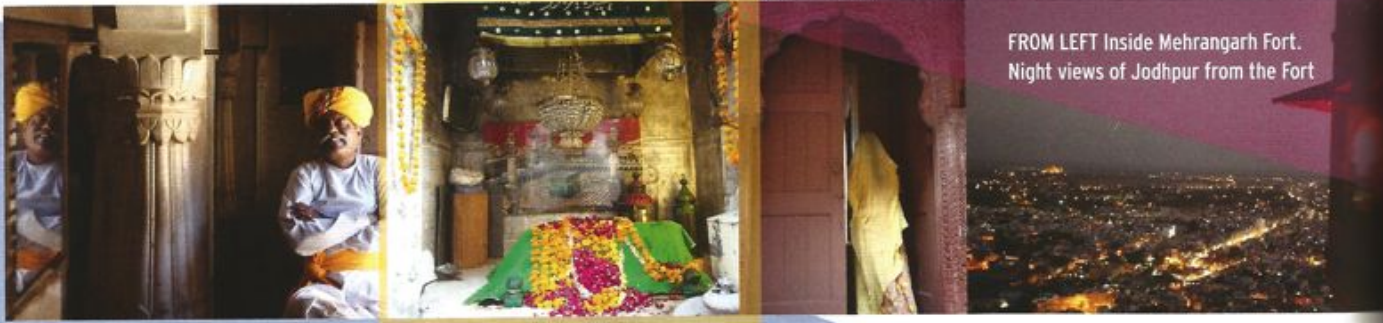
Colour & spice

FAY MASCHLER REVISITS THE LANDSCAPE OF HER PARENTS' EARLY LIVES IN INDIA WITH A KALEIDOSCOPIC VISUAL AND CULINARY TOUR OF RAJASTHAN



Mehrangarh Fort
above the 'blue
city' of Jodhpur

My sister Beth and I were both born in Indian hill stations – summer babies. Our British parents returned to the UK when we were quite small but later in life someone said to me at a party: 'You were born in India, weren't you? You have that look of a forced spring bulb grown under the bed.' It didn't seem exactly a compliment, but what I do acknowledge is childhood force-feeding of wistful stories from our mum about her 12-year Indian sojourn. She had loved her adventures there – such a change from Carlisle >



FROM LEFT Inside Mehrangarh Fort. Night views of Jodhpur from the Fort

– and had responded more creatively than the average memsahib to what was on offer; learning a bit of Hindi, accompanying the cook to the bazaar to buy food, using the sensual fabrics to great effect in many houses as she moved about the vast country.

Her anecdotes were tedious to a child's ear. An erratic use of Hindi words for certain household objects when overheard by our school friends could make us squirm. Arriving in Jodhpur, the first stop on a recent short tour of Rajasthan that Beth and I were making together – in part a pilgrimage to recollect memories of our parents – the rush of shame was revisited.

Mummy had insisted on calling those trousers with a snug fit from calf to ankle that we wore for riding lessons 'joad-purs' (following the correct local pronunciation), while Audrey, our riding teacher whom we worshipped unreservedly, called them 'jod-purs'. How callow youth can be. Now – on this visit to Rajasthan's second city where my parents had lived and about which I had heard so much – I wished I had listened to my late mother more attentively and asked lots of questions.

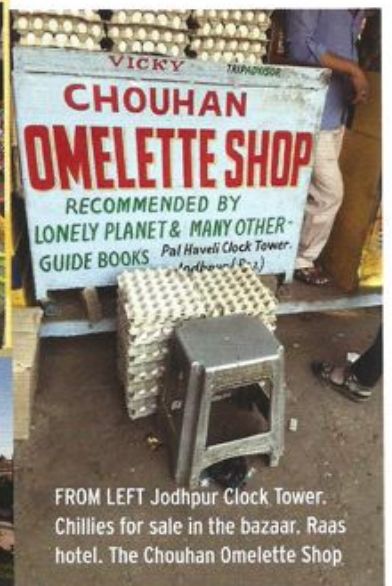
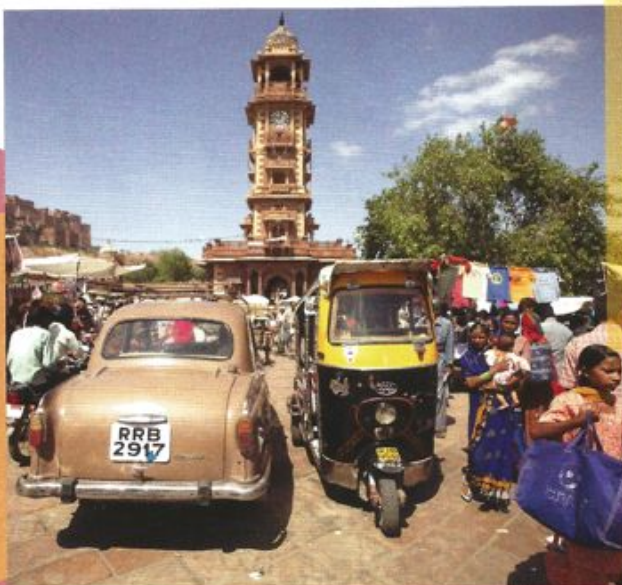
Jodhpur is an extraordinary place: its fifteenth-century Mehrangarh Fort – built, according to Kipling, by 'angels, fairies and giants' – hovers over the city and invades your consciousness. Eyes are constantly drawn up to its singular mix of fragility and intimidation, and houses on the hillside below painted Brahmin blue are like a beautiful skirt drawn decorously around.

Raas boutique hotel in the old city, once the home of a *thakur* (nobleman), where we stayed for the first three nights, has

employed the red sandstone that is the traditional building block here with a modern sensibility in graphic *jaali* screens. The pool is an oasis as you leave behind the clamour of Sardar Market and the terrace of the elevated Darikhana restaurant seems almost on a hand-holding relationship with the Fort.

The shadow of the Clock Tower overlooking the bazaar is a place to consider the resilience of your digestion. The Chouhan Omelette Shop and Shri Mishrilal Hotel, manufacturers of 'World Fame Makhaniya Lassi (yogurt drink)', are endorsed by guidebooks and considered reasonably safe and, in the case of the lassi, absolutely delicious. Generally, unless it is fished from roiling, boiling oil, other street food is not advised for Westerners. Beth and I felt mildly intrepid leaving Raas to walk to Indique restaurant situated on the roof of the hotel Pal Haveli. Climbing the many steps is rewarded with a fabulous panoramic view, good food, and waiters in orange turbans entering into the idea that an evening out should be fun.

'Home is where you find the best cooking' is a truism about India that can be vexatious if you have no friends there. A rather delightful solution is a cookery lesson at a homestay, such as that offered by Chandrashekhar and Bhavna Singh in their Jodhpur house decorated with portraits of Maharajah relatives. Charming Bhavna demonstrates various dishes, and gives out recipes and a shiny metal box for spices to take home. The resulting lunch en famille concluded with halva. 'Making all Indian desserts is cumbersome,' pronounced her husband.



FROM LEFT Jodhpur Clock Tower. Chillies for sale in the bazaar. Raas hotel. The Chouhan Omelette Shop

DESTINATIONS

INDIA



FROM LEFT Samode Haveli's hand-painted dining room and exterior. Dishes from Bukhara in Delhi

Palaces owned by Maharajahs, before a democratised India withdrew their privileges and stipends, have almost invariably become hotels – a sort of natural justice. Samode Haveli in Jaipur is one, although the family still inhabit a part of it. It is a sprawling architectural assembly, reached by an elephant ramp, with a patina of life lived well. One of the sons, Yadavendra Singh, takes particular interest in food, especially the traditional recipes of Rajasthan. The elegant hand-painted dining hall is the place to try *jungle maans*, a powerful spicy mutton curry and *murgh ka soweta*, in which pounded sweetcorn and buttermilk add a singular flavour to the chicken.

A change of pace at lunchtime, maybe after an elephant ride up to the Amer Fort, can be had in the bustling vegetarian LMB restaurant – in the heart of the city since 1727 – where the thali is a wonder of culinary ingenuity. A more refined and non-vegetarian thali was served at dinner at Suján Rajmahal Palace, restored under the aegis of Rajmata Padmini Devi of Jaipur. Her determination to 'embrace the future with quiet resilience' has become a riot of flamboyant overkill; brilliant.

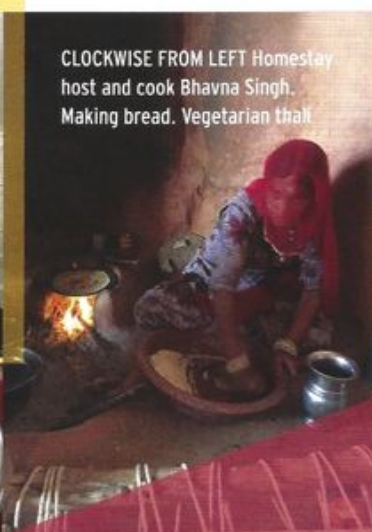
I tried to tease out of my memory tales of Delhi from my mother, where she must have marvelled at the Red Fort, the

Jama Masjid mosque and the Old Delhi Bazaar just as Beth and I did. As someone who grew up to make a career in writing about food I can with confidence say to eat the best of the city go to both Bukhara in the ITC Maurya Hotel for North-West Frontier kebabs that redefine that word and to Indian Accent at The Manor Hotel in Friends Colony, a quiet congenial place to stay. Here, chef-patron Manish Mehrotra takes Indian food in a completely new direction using subtlety and daring, wit and whimsy in a parade of extraordinary small dishes. It is a culinary way of saying that life in India will never stop evolving.®

'GENERALLY, UNLESS IT IS FISHED FROM ROILING, BOILING OIL, STREET FOOD IS NOT ADVISED FOR WESTERNERS'



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Homestay host and cook Bhavna Singh. Making bread. Vegetarian thali



ESSENTIALS

WHEN TO GO The best time to travel to India is from October until the end of March, after the summer monsoon, when the climate is mild. However, insiders go to Rajasthan at the end of August or September when the landscape is lush and green and off-peak prices are available.

HOW A seven-night journey through Rajasthan, staying at Raas in Jodhpur (raasjodhpur.com), Samode Haveli (samode.com) in Jaipur and The Manor in Delhi (themanordelhi.com), costs from £1,953pp including flights, private driver, activities and guides, with Original Travel (020-3393 4824; originaltravel.co.uk). UK passport holders need a visa to travel to India. A new e-Tourist visa is now available; apply at least four days before travel. For details, visit indianvisaonline.gov.in