



★ QUESTS

Dares for the brave and the curious. The map marks each with a star; tick them off as you go.

★ 2

Count the 953 windows. Sit at a rooftop café across the road and count row by row. Everyone loses count by the third storey.

★ 17

Read the hour off the giant sundial. Stand by the Samrat Yantra and watch its shadow creep a hand's breadth every minute.

★ 4

Fly a kite from a rooftop in January. Buy a patang and manja in the bazaar at Makar Sankranti; ask the crew at any of our three homes which roof to fly from, and yell 'wo kaata!' when you cut one.

★ 51

Find the painted gate at Amer. Walk up to Ganesh Pol, the gate to the private palaces, and spot the mosaics. Look, don't lean.

★ 9

Drink kal from a kul-had. Finish the kul, then give the clay cup back to the earth, or the bin. It was earth to begin with.

★ 36

Spot a peacock in Sisodia Rani Bagh. Walk the terraces slowly and listen for the call before you see the tail. Palm squirrels count as a bonus.

★ 15

Climb the tower that pierces heaven. Ask a Tripolia shopkeeper for Isarfat, wind up the narrow spiral and pick out Nahargarh on the ridge.

★ 13

Watch a lac bangle being made. Find a maker heating lac over coals in the bangle lane, watch the twist, then bargain with a smile.

★ 45

Watch the grid light up from Nahargarh. Find a spot on the wall facing the city at sunset and count the lights coming on.

❄️ REACHING US

❄️ Inside the walls, near the Hawa Mahal

Zostel Jaipur (Hawa Mahal). Our home inside the walls at Chandki Tikal, opposite the Tourist Police Station, a stroll from the Hawa Mahal. Colourful common spaces; the crew runs heritage and food walks, hikes and cycle trails. Pink Line to Badi Chaurpar, then 900 m on foot.

❄️ Cricket on the terrace, off MI Road

Zostel Jaipur (MI Road). Our home off MI Road at 2B Park House Scheme, near Sindhvi Camp bus stand and the station. Cricket and board games on the terrace, a café, and a work corner in the common room. Pink Line to Sindhvi Camp, then 550 m on foot.

FOR THE EYE

2

953 windows, none of them the door

Hawa Mahal. Sawai Pratap Singh built this five-storey screen in 1799 so the royal women could watch the street unseen; its 953 jharokhas still pull breezes through. The way in is round the back, on the City Palace side. Climb the ramps, and come at first light.

6

Seven gates, all pink, none shy

The gates of the walled city. The walls were pierced by seven fortified gates, and they still frame their bazaars like stage sets: domed kiosks on fat pink arches. Sanganer Gate stands at the foot of Johari Bazaar. Tick off the gates by e-ricksaws in one early-morning loop.

15

The victory tower nobody queues for

Isarfat (Swargasul). Sawai Ishwari Singh raised this slim seven-storey tower in 1749 to mark a victory; its other name, Swargasul, means 'piercing heaven'. The entrance hides in a lane behind the Tripolia shops, so ask for 'Isarfat'. The spiral is tight; the view is enormous.

17

A sundial taller than a nine-storey building

Jantar Mantar. Jai Singh II finished these nineteen stone instruments in 1734, and the Vihart Samrat Yantra is the world's largest stone sundial; its shadow creeps a hand's breadth every minute. A UNESCO site since 2010. Hire a licensed guide, and come on a bright day.

19

The city's beloved temple, in a garden

Govind Dev Ji Temple. A Krishna temple in the Jai Niwas garden behind the City Palace, the old city's busiest place of worship. Jai Singh II brought its deities from Vrindavan. Visitors are welcome: shoes off, shoulders and knees covered, phones away during prayers. Ask before any photo.

21

Mummy, marble and the best night lights

Albert Hall Museum. The Prince of Wales, Samuel Swinton Jacob designed it, and it opened in 1887 as the state's oldest museum. Egyptian mummy included. Walk the full circle outside, then come back after dark, when it glows gold.

33

The queens' cenotaphs, minus the crowds

Maharajon Ki Chhatriyan. The memorial garden of the royal queens, just off Amer Road before Jal Mahal: rows of domed chhatris in pale stone, some never finished. One of the quietest corners on this map, and a lovely detour to Amer. Keep voices low, don't climb anything.

37

White marble under a hill-top fort

Birda Mandir. A modern temple to Lakshmi and Narayan in white marble, at the foot of Moti Dooargi and its castle-like fort. It glows at dusk and feels calm after the old city. Dress modestly, leave shoes at the counter, and take photos only outside.

48

A giant cannon that fired exactly once

Jaigarh Fort. Jaigarh, 400 m above Amer on the Hill of Eagles, was its musketeer. Its foundry cast the Jivana in 1720, then the world's largest cannon on wheels, fired once, as a test. Find the huge rainwater tanks, and carry water: there's little shade.

51

How royal can royal get?

Amer Fort. The Kachwahs ruled from Amer for centuries before moving to Jaipur in 1727. Raja Man Singh I began this palace in 1592. Climb through Suraj Pol to the Sheesh Mahal's tiny mirrors, above Maota Lake. Part of UNESCO's Hill Forts. Arrive early, on foot.

54

The most Instagrammed gate that keeps nothing out

Patrika Gate. A newer ceremonial gateway at Jawahar Circle, near the airport, its corridor painted with Rajasthan's cities, festivals and patterns in rose, turquoise and gold. Get there early, before the pre-wedding shoots. Then walk a lap of Jawahar City park, on your arrival or departure day.

OUT AND ABOUT

22

The city's back garden, museum included

Ram Niwas Garden. Sawai Ram Singh II laid out this park in 1868, inspired by Calcutta's Eden Gardens; Albert Hall sits at its heart and Masala Chowk on its edge. Mornings belong to walkers and laughter clubs. Walk in through New Gate, and sit under a neem.

32

A palace up to its neck

Jal Mahal. Built around 1699 as a duck-hunting lodge and enlarged in the mid-1700s, this five-storey palace sits in Man Sagar Lake; when it's full, the lowest floor is underwater. You can't go in. Stroll the promenade at golden hour, and mind your phone.

34

The monkey temple in a mountain pass

Galta Ji. Pink sandstone temples squeezed into a gorge in the eastern hills, round a spring that fills a chain of sacred kundas. It's a living pilgrimage site: cover up, and don't swim. Rhesus macaques run the place, so hide your food. Walk in from Suraj Pol.

35

Sunset with the whole grid at your feet

Surya Mandir (Sun Temple). A small Sun Temple on the ridge above Galta Ji, built by Diwan Rao Kriparam of Jai Singh II's court, with the walled city at your feet. Stone steps climb from Suraj Pol. Come an hour before sunset, stay quiet at the top, and carry a torch.

38

Jaipur's lungs, with a jogging track

Central Park. The city's largest park, beside the Rambhadrachand ground, with a long jogging track, lawns and a giant national flag. It's where Jaipur works out: join the morning walkers for a lap and a chai at the gates. Tapri Central's rooftop overlooks it.

45

The final punctuation on the Aravallis

Nahargarh Fort. Built in 1734 as a retreat on the ridge, Nahargarh, the 'abode of tigers' is where Jaipur watches the sun go down and the lights come on. The queens' suites in Madhavendra Bhawan came later. Walk up; come down by road after dark.

47

A monsoon waterfall hidden behind the hills

Hathni Kund trail. A green valley in the hills between Nahargarh and Amer, with a waterfall that only really runs in the monsoon. The trail is about 3 km from near Charan Mandir, rocky and quiet. Go with a group, wear grippy shoes, carry water, and leave before dusk.

50

A staircase Escher would have loved

Panna Meena ka Kund. A stepwell behind Amer Fort with criss-crossing staircases on three sides, built to store rainwater and keep the village cool. The steps are roped off, so admire from the edge. Walk here through Amer's old lanes, early or late, then on to the Anokhi Museum.

53

Leopards living inside the city limits

Jhalana Leopard Reserve. A patch of dry Aravalli forest on the city's south-eastern edge, home to leopards, nilgai and peafowl. Safaris run in open gypsies; book on the forest department's official portal; never through tours. Sightings aren't promised: it's a forest drive with a lottery ticket.

3

Kulfi on a stick, under the Hawa Mahal

Pandit Kulfi. On Hawa Mahal Road, Pandit Kulfi freezes slow-cooked milk into dense kulfi; kesar and rabri are the favourites, and matka kulfi comes set in a little day pot. The best reward after a hot afternoon in the bazaars. Order two; one starts a fight.

7

Johari Bazaar's sweetest landmark

Laxmi Mishthan Bhandar (LMB). LMB's halwas trace their shop to the city's founding, and the LMB name to about 1950. It introduced paneer ghehar in 1961, a honeycomb disc soaked in syrup and crowned with rabri. Or sit down to the thali: dal, baati, churma, gatte. Share dessert.

★ 6

Walk the old city's gates in a day. Start at Sanganer Gate, keep the wall on one side and collect every fat pink arch. An e-ricshaw is allowed for the far ones.

20

Live the Art of Escape.

Zo Selections Jaipur. By Zostel, on MI Road at Saraf House, opposite Akashvani. Boutique rooms, a signature Jacuzzi Suite, a pool, workstations and Amaano, the house restaurant: made for great company and easy indulgence. Come with your people. Pink Line to Sindhvi Camp, then 650 m on foot.

18

The royals still live here, so knock politely

City Palace. Jai Singh II began the palace with the city in 1727, and part of it is still the royal family's home. Find Pitam Niwas Chowk's four painted gates, one for each season, and the Mubarak Mahal's costumes. Give it two unhurried hours, ideally in the morning.

46

Umbrellas made of marble

Gaitore ki Chhatriyan. The royal cenotaphs of Jaipur's rulers, in a quiet valley at the foot of the Nahargarh hills. Each chhatri is a carved pavilion on pillars; Sawai Jai Singh II's is the finest. It's a memorial ground, so walk softly. First stop on our sunset walk.

36

The royal garden the tour buses forget

Sisodia Rani Bagh. A terraced garden with fountains, pavilions and murals of Krishna stories, built by Sawai Jai Singh II for his Sisodia queen, on the Agrao road east of the city. Quieter than the forts, full of peacocks and palm squirrels. Climb to the little palace.

52

A garden valley on the Amer Road

Kanak Vrindavan. A garden valley with old temples and terraced lawns below the hills past Jal Mahal, restored as a park. It's a shady breather on the ride to Amer, and feels miles from the city. Respect the temples, keep to the paths, and enjoy the quiet.

9

Chai in the middle of the books

Sahu ki Chai. An old-city chai counter at Chaura Rasta, where students, shopkeepers and lost travellers meet over masala chai and a buttery maska bun. Stand, drink fast and watch the bazaar squeeze past. It's on our Pink City walk, a few doors from Samrat.

Jaipur

Every number is a tip around the map, in its colour. Every star is a quest.

For the Eye

Out and About

Khana-badosh

Shopping

Culture and Nights

For a True Backpacker

our two Zostels

Zo Selections Jaipur

a quest (the list is round the map)

Sheher Gulaabi, the walk (side A)

circled: don't miss it

a dot: its true place, where a number stands aside

a drawing by a number: what is there

the walled city, its gates

forts and palaces

water

parks and gardens

the hills

the railway

a station

the metro

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Khamma ghani! We're Jaipur's own Zebus. Chase the stars, taste the bazaars, then tell us everything over chai.

Mehrangarh is bigger, fine. But this ridge at sunset, with the whole grid glowing below? I'm telling no one.

Zostel Jaipur (Hawa Mahal)

Inside the walls by the Hawa Mahal, an auto from the station, 4-5 km.

Gold beats pink, usually. Then I counted the windows, lost track at two hundred, and forgave everything.

Turban museum

Subhash Chowk

Finally, something uphill. Amer's ramparts climb like a mini-trek; take water and wear real shoes.

Matka kulfi in a day pot on Hawa Mahal Road? I'm not sharing. Order two; the pot keeps it cold for the walk.

A palace floating in a lake. Cute. We have a few of those back home, but the birds here are better.

A metro where everyone gets a seat? Under a bazaar? I rode it twice just to feel things.

I bargained for juttis in my best Hindi and they laughed, then gave me the price anyway. Win.

Laughter clubs under the neem trees at dawn. Joined one by accident. Best class I've taken all year.

I came to judge. Ghewar: a honeycomb of fried batter in syrup, crowned with rabri. Now I'm taking notes.

I came to sneer at North Indian coffee. The Coffee House poured it frothy, waiters in fan turbans. I came back twice.

Pyaz kachori for breakfast. Delhi has chhole bhature; Jaipur has this. Call it a draw, then order another.

Stay with us

Zostel Jaipur (MI Road)

Off MI Road, a 500 m walk from Sindhvi Camp bus stand; Jaipur Junction 2.5 km

Zo Selections Jaipur

On MI Road opposite All India Radio; a 10-minute walk from Sindhvi Camp bus stand.

Around Jaipur

The box is the big map. Edge pins point the way (not to scale).

5.4 km

8.8 km

9.4 km

3.6 km

8.1 km

7.5 km

4.2 km

12

Black pepper in the samosa

Samrat. An old-city breakfast classic on Chaura Rasta, frying pyaz kachori for decades, with samosas spiced with black pepper instead of red chilli. Order with tamarind and coriander chutneys and eat standing in the lane. Go early, when the first batches come out.

20

Every street-food star in one courtyard

Masala Chowk. An open-air food court in Ram Niwas Garden that gathers the city's street food in one courtyard: kachori, chaat, dosa, golgappe, kulfi. Perfect for a group that can't agree on dinner. Walk the loop before ordering, then see Albert Hall lit up.

26

A sundae parlour from another decade

Jal Mahal Ice Cream Parlour. An old-school parlour on MI Road with sundae, shakes and cream piled high in tall glasses, and a family queue most evenings. Order the house sundae and enjoy how little has changed. It's two doors from Lassiwalla: plan on dessert twice.

27

The no-fuss vegetarian thali stop

Natraj, MI Road. A long-running vegetarian restaurant on MI Road near Panch Batti, best known for its Rajasthan thali: dal, baati and the rest of the state's kitchen in small bowls on one plate. Ask for less chilli if you're new, then walk on to Lassiwalla.

28

Lassi so thick it needs a spoon

Lassiwalla, MI Road. Jaipur's first lassi shop opened on MI Road in 1944; the lassi is still curd and ice, no water, in a clay kulhad under mala. Rivals nearby share the name, so look for the original. Go in the morning, before it sells out.

39

Chai with a view of the park

Tapri Central. A tea house whose rooftop looks over Central Park, loved by students and young Jaipur for cutting chai in many flavours, Maggi and long chats. More café than stall, with the chai spirit intact. Come for a slow breakfast or a sunset table.

40

Lael maas, smoked the old way

Spice Court. A family-run Rajasthani restaurant in Achrol House, Civil Lines, known for lael maas: mutton slow-cooked in yoghurt and fiery red chillies, done the smoky dhungar way. Vegetarians get a thali with gatte ki sabzi. Ask how hot today's batch is.

41

Chai with a fan club

Gulab Ji Chai. Chai has poured here since 1946, first from a mobile stall, now from Ganapati Plaza's parking lane on MI Road. It's strong, milky and sweet, for a crowd that never leaves. Dunk a bun maska, pay first, then shout politely for your cup.

43

The pyaz kachori that started a thousand queues

Rawat Mishthan Bhandar. Opposite the old Polivictory cinema on Station Road, Rawat has made Jaipur queue for pyaz kachori for decades: flaky pastry, spiced onion, tangy chutney, eaten standing. The syrupy mawa kachori is dessert. Order at the counter; go when the batches are hot.

5

Where the jewels live

Johari Bazaar. Jaipur is one of the world's great gemcutting cities, and Johari Bazaar is its showroom: pink arcades of jewellers, silversmiths and sari shops from Sanganer Gate to Badi Chaurpar. Window-shopping is free. Never agree to carry gems abroad for a profit.

8

Juttis, leheriya and the art of patience

Bapu Bazaar. The busiest market for travellers, along the inside of the south wall from Sanganer Gate to New Gate: embroidered juttis, leheriya dupattas, bed covers and souvenirs. Prices start high, so smile, offer less and walk on if it isn't right. Try juttis with socks.

10

Bapu Bazaar's twin

Nehru Bazaar. Bapu Bazaar's neighbour along the south wall, from New Gate to Ajmeri Gate: juttis, textiles and everyday clothes for a more local crowd. Compare prices with Bapu first. Look for hand-embroidered toes and soft leather soles; plastic soles are cheaper for a reason.

11

The book bazaar

Chaura Rasta. The 'wide road' from Tripolia to New Gate is the book bazaar: booksellers, stations and textbook shops, full of students in term time. Hunt for second-hand paperbacks, Hindi comics, maps and notebooks. Come after breakfast; the best finds hide at the back.

13

The lane that makes lac bangles

Maniharon Ka Rasta. Turn off Tripolia into the bangle-makers' lane and watch lac heated over coals, twisted round a rod and studded with glass stones. Here the workshop is the shop. Ask before photographing anyone, and buy direct: bangles are light, and better than plastic souvenirs.

14

Fabric by the metre, dyed in waves

Kishanpol Bazaar. Jaipur's textile street, from Choti Chaurpar to Ajmeri Gate: leheriya, the wave-patterned tie-dye that's the city's signature, plus bandhani, block prints and cloth by the metre. Bring a shirt and you're home; a tailor nearby will copy it in a couple of days.

16

Brass, bangles and the palace's front door

Tripolia Bazaar. The wide bazaar between Badi and Choti Chaurpar, under the palace's Tripolia Gate: lac bangles, brass and steel kitchenware and textiles, sold mostly to locals. The Gangaur and Teej processions pass this way. Look up: the Isarfat tower rises behind the shopfronts.

23

Fixed prices, no haggling, real crafts

Rajasthali emporium. The state government's fixed-price handicraft emporium, opposite Ajmeri Gate on MI Road. Learn what blue pottery, block print, lac and puppets should cost before you bargain in the bazaars. Blue pottery is quartz, not clay, and chips easily: hand-carry it home.

29

Chisels, dust and marble gods

The marble carvers off Chandpole. In the lanes south of Chandpole Bazaar, workshops carve marble into statues, temple pieces and bowls, the floors white with dust. Watch from the doorway; most carvers happily show a stone. Small pieces travel well; for big ones, get the shipping in writing.

31

Marble, metal and the old city's quieter half

Chandpole Bazaar. The western end of the main street, from Choti Chaurpar to Chandpole Gate: lac bangles, marble, brass, tools and wedding gear, with a working-market feel and the sculptors' lanes off it. Ride the metro to Chandpole, then walk east to Badi Chaurpar.

4

Front-row seats to the façade

The rooftop cafés facing Hawa Mahal. Across the road from the Hawa Mahal, a few cafés have climbed to their rooftops for an eye-level view of the 953 windows. Order a chai, sit by the railing and watch the façade turn amber at sunset. It's a buy-something seat, and that's fair.

25

Not a movie, an event

Raj Mandir Cinema. Opened in 1976 with the film Charas, this meringue-shaped single screen treats every Bollywood show like a festival: pink foyer, swirling ceiling, lights that change as the curtain rises. No Hindi needed, just whistle at the hero. Book weekends ahead; sit upstairs.

49

Block printing, explained by its printers

Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing. In a restored haveli in Amer village, this small museum tells the story of hand block printing: carved blocks, natural dyes and the printers who use them. There's often a live demo where you can try a block. Check its weekly closing day.

55

The world's writers, in Jaipur, every January

Jaipur Literature Festival. Founded in 2006, the Jaipur Literature Festival grew from Digi Palas's barns into one of the world's biggest book festivals, held at Hotel Kesar Amer since 2022. Expect talks, morning music and long queues for famous names. Register early on the official site.

56

The arts centre built as a cosmic map

Jawahar Kala Kendra. Charles Correa designed this arts centre on a nine-square plan echoing the city's own grid and the nine planets. Inside: galleries, theatre, music, a library and an open-air amphitheatre where festivals land. Check the

FOR A TRUE BACKPACKER

1

Under the bazaar in air-con

Badi Chaurpar metro. The Pink Line ends here, under the old city's main square, and runs west via Choti Chaurpar, Chandpole, Sindhvi Camp and the Railway Station to Mansarovar. Clean, air-conditioned, and the easy link between our three homes. Keep your token for the exit gate.

24

Filter coffee and dosa, unchanged for ages

Indian Coffee House, MI Road. Run by a workers' cooperative, the Indian Coffee House chain has served filter coffee, dosas and cutlets for decades, with waiters in fan-shaped turbans. The MI Road branch is the most honest breakfast on the map. Read the paper; nobody will hurry you.

30

The western door to the Pink City

Chandpole Gate. Chandpole, the Moon Gate, is the walled city's western door, with a metro stop beneath it. Walk east along Chandpole and Tripolia bazaars to Badi Chaurpar: about 2.5 km in a straight line through the old city, and the grid will make sense.

42

Where most of you will arrive

Jaipur Junction. The main railway station, west of MI Road, with trains to Delhi, Agra, Ajmer for Pushkar, Jodhpur and Udaipur. Ignore anyone who says your hostel is closed. Take the prepaid auto booth, a ride app or the metro: all three of our homes are a short ride.

44

Bus everywhere, and thalis next door

Sindhvi Camp bus stand. The main state bus stand, with buses across Rajasthan and to Delhi and Agra, including the day trips to Chand Bani, Bhanganagar and Sambhar. Book government services online or at the counter, ask which bay, and ignore pavement 'direct bus' sellers.