

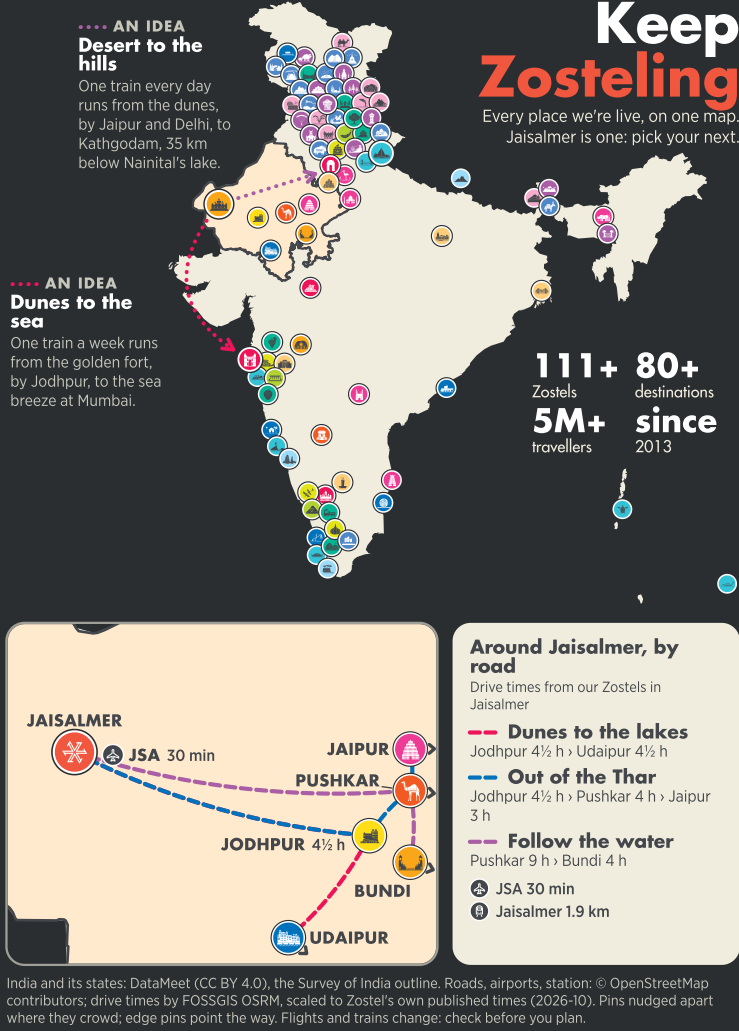
JAISALMER

a map made by Zostel
for young travellers
FREE MAP • RAJASTHAN



LIVE IT. NOW

ZOSTEL



Khamma ghani, Golden City!

Khamma ghani! We're the Jaisalmer Zbus, and our town is the colour of the sand it stands in. Rawal Jaisal set a fort on Trikuta hill in 1156, and a few thousand people still live inside its 99 bastions. Caravans paid their way through here; merchants spent it on havelis carved like lace. Walk the fort's lanes slowly and keep your showers short. Hear a kamaicha, eat ghotua from the bazaar, and watch the walls turn honey-gold as the sun goes down. Then ride out to the dunes at Sam, 40 km away, where the stars come right down to the sand. Sleep in the fort with us, or at our camp in the dunes.



Stay with us in Jaisalmer

Two Zostels: one inside the fort, about 2 km from the station and the bus stand, and one in the dunes at Sam.

Zostel Jaisalmer

Inside the fort itself, on Vyasa Pada: traditional rooms, a rooftop over the town, folk evenings and the desert night safari for Zostelers. No car reaches it: the last stretch is on foot.

Zostel Sam Desert

Tents and mudhouses in the Sam dunes, about 40 km west of town: folk music on the stage, sunsets from the machan and a sky full of stars.

Maps: © OpenStreetMap contributors (ODbL), data fetched 2026-10-13 (UTC) - Terrain: Terrain Tiles on AWS (Mapzen/Tilezen), from SRTM courtesy of NASA and the U.S. Geological Survey. Walk lines routed by FOSSGIS OSRM on OpenStreetMap. Drawings: the Zostel brand's own. Things change; check the day's timings at the gate.

Every number is a tip on the map overload, in the colour of its kind: ● Ninety-nine Bastions
● Lakes, Chhatris, Dunes ● Ker, Sangri, Ghotua
● Ballads of the Thar ● Sleep in the Fort. A drawing beside a line shows what you will find there: 🏠 🍷 🎭

Practical tips

Getting in

Trains reach Jaisalmer from Jaipur and Delhi, and buses run from Jodhpur, Bikaner, Jaipur and Ahmedabad. The station and the bus stand are both about 2 km from our fort home. The airport, about 17 km out, has flights only in the winter season, roughly October to March: check before you book. The next nearest airport is Jodhpur's, some 285 km away.

Getting around

Walk: the old town is small, and no car reaches our home inside the fort, so park outside its walls. Autos cover the station and the lakes; rent a bicycle for Bada Bagh. The lanes are narrow and the scooters fast: keep left and look twice.

When to come, and the heat

October to March is the season: warm days, cold desert nights, the Desert Festival in January or February. From April to June the heat is fierce, and the little rain falls from July to September. In any month, wear sun-block and a wide hat, drink often, and see the town early or late.

A fort people live in

Some three to four thousand people live inside the walls: these lanes are their homes. Keep your voice down at doorways, ask before you photograph anyone, and go easy on water. The desert has always counted every drop.

At the temples

The fort's Jain temples, Laxminath and every shrine in town are living places of worship. Cover knees and shoulders, and leave shoes, and at the Jain temples anything of leather, at the door. Check the day's timings at the gate.

Arriving at the station

Touts often meet trains and buses, offering hotels, rides and camel safaris. You already have a bed: say no kindly and walk on. Book the desert with a camp you've checked, never with whoever finds you first.

Riding a camel

Choose a camel that looks rested, fed and unhurt, and one rider each. Hold on as it stands up: it rises fast, with a lurch. If the animals look badly treated, walk away; the dunes are lovely on foot.

The fort and the merchants' havelis

1.8 km - about 4 hours with stops - 6 stops

From the fort's square to the Jain temples, up onto the ramparts, down through the gates to Gopa Chowk, then the havelis: Nathmal's stone elephants, Patwon's five houses in one, Salim Singh's peacock roof. Go early.



The stops

- Jaisalmer Fort (Sonar Qila)**
Look for the yellow sandstone turning from tawny to honey-gold at sunset, behind its 99 bastions
- The Jain temples of the fort**
Look for carving on every outside surface: pillars, brackets, gateways and screens
- The four gates (Akhai Pol to Hawa Pol)**
Look for each gateway set at an angle to the last, and the walls leaning over the road
- Nathmal ki Haveli**
Look for the two brothers' halves, matching at a glance, different in every window and bracket; two stone elephants at the door
- Patwon ki Haveli**
Look for jharoka balconies carved storey on storey, and screens as fine as cloth
- Salim Singh ki Haveli**
Look for the roof of arched brackets carved as peacocks, under light blue cupolas

Money and bargaining

UPI and cards work at our fort home; carry cash for autos, the bazaar and sweet shops. Bargain in the markets, with a smile. Be wary of 'silver' and 'antiques' sold in the lanes: much of it is neither.

5 minutes of history

- 1156**
A fort on Trikuta hill
Rawal Jaisal, a Bhati Rajput, leaves the old capital at Lodurva and builds a fort on Trikuta hill, after a sage's prophecy, the story goes. The town takes his name.
- 12th century onward**
A town on the caravan roads
Caravans between northern India, Central Asia, Persia and Gujarat's ports cross the Thar here. Jaisalmer grows rich on the levies it charges them.
- 1290s**
The long siege
Alauddin Khaji besieges the fort, and the BhatIs hold out for years before it falls.
- 1367**
A lake for a desert town
Rawal Gadsi Singh rebuilds the reservoir Jaisal first dug, and it takes his name: Gadisar. For centuries it is the town's water.
- 1633-1647**
Ninety-nine bastions
Of the fort's 99 round bastions, 92 are built or rebuilt in these years. The walls run some 460 metres along the hill.

- 1805**
The merchants build
Guman Chand Patwa, a trader in gold, silver and brocade, begins a haveli; it grows into five houses over some fifty years, one for each son.
- About 1815**
A prime minister's peacock
Salim Singh, the kingdom's powerful prime minister, builds a haveli with a peacock-shaped roof. The story goes that it rose above the palace, until the top floors came down.
- 1890s-1947**
The roads go quiet
Bombay's port takes trade to the sea, famine strikes from 1895 to 1900, and in 1947 Partition cuts the old caravan routes west. The town turns inward.
- 1974**
Sonar Kella
Satyajit Ray shoots his Feluda film Sonar Kella, 'the golden fortress'; in Jaisalmer, released in 1974. Travellers from Bengal start arriving, and keep coming.
- Late 1970s**
The Desert Festival
Rajasthan Tourism and the district hold the first Desert Festival, three days of music, contests and dance each winter, ending on the dunes at Sam.
- 2013**
A World Heritage fort
UNESCO lists Jaisalmer Fort among the Hill Forts of Rajasthan, one of very few forts in the world where people still live.



Talk like a local

- Khamma ghani**
Hello, the warm Marwari one; answer ghani ghani khamma
khum-maa gah-nee
- Padharo mhare des**
Welcome to my land
puh-dhaa-ro mhaa-ray days
- Tharo naam kaain hai?**
What's your name?
thaa-ro naam kaa-in hai
- Aap katta ra ho?**
Where are you from?
aap kut-taa-raa ho
- Bhai-saa**
Brother; sa adds respect
bhaa-ee saa
- Sonar Qila**
The Golden Fort, ours
so-naar ki-laa
- Pol**
A gate: Akhai Pol, Tilon ki Pol
pole
- Haveli**
A merchant's mansion round a courtyard
huh-vay-lee
- Jharokha**
A carved stone balcony over the street
jhuuh-ro-khaa
- Chhatri**
A domed pavilion; here, a memorial
chhut-ree



