



IT'S TRUE THAT UDAIPUR IS "THE VENICE OF INDIA". Mararana Udai Singh II founded the city in 1559 and enlarged the lake to encompass several extraordinary palaces, many with walls and ceilings inlaid with gold and silver. The opulence was overwhelming. The Lake Palace floats like a decadent wedding cake on its own island. Once the royal summer palace, it is now a luxury hotel surrounded by lotus ponds. Visitors can take the gondola style boats out to Lake Palace.

Our guide books noted that the restaurant at our hotel was exceptional and we were not disappointed that first night in Udaipur. Our meal was prepared by a former chef to the Indian royal family. We indulged in a wonderful spicy fish curry accompanied by cheese "nan." Nan is a homemade traditional bread, served freshly baked, and resembles a combination of pita bread and chapatti, only much tastier. The cooked eggplant and cauliflower was also superb, and the service left us feeling like royalty. We slept peacefully that night.

At daybreak we decided to tour the hilly city and were amazed by the elephants roaming past us. Udaipur is a friendly place with an artistic atmosphere. We discovered a jeweler who helped us create our own necklaces using semi precious stones. The strong contrast between the rich and poor was ever present, especially in this city. That evening, when we took a boat across the water to the stately Lake Palace, we were transported to another world, far from the dusty streets lined with beggars and livestock. We were seated at a table with snowy white linen, and sampled many dishes from the extravagant buffet. We experienced true decadence, and felt our most satisfied since first arriving in India.

We departed the next morning for "The Blue City," Jodhpur. This yielded new experiences. When we visited the historic fort, the workers who lived nearby came to invite us into their homes. We discovered that cave-like dwellings with mud floors and no running water are commonplace in these parts. These people were proud to show us their humble homes and their meager possessions. Our digital camera was like magic to them and I delighted in showing them their images, watching their faces light up in surprise.

Onward we went, toward the desert town of Jaisaimer. The road opened to beautiful countryside, with crops of mustard, chilies, and assorted vegetables, all growing in fields filled with women farmers. They tended the goats and bulls and carried various supplies on top of their heads. Cars were not evident in these villages and we saw only camel carts for transport.