

VIRTUOSO

THE MAGAZINE

FAR
&
AWAY



“What’s your packing style?”



Writer
Sarah Khan

New York City

“In Living Color,” page 108

“It’s embarrassing to confess this, given my line of work, but I’m definitely not a carry-on-only type. For trips longer than four or five days, I usually check a bag. I like to prepare for all possible activities and weather, and leave room for shopping.”

THE REPORT: “Jaipur’s maximalism appeals to me endlessly – the patterns, the grandeur, the bling. It all comes together so vividly at Patrika Gate, where every color and architectural motif in Rajasthan collide in flamboyant splendor.”

@bysarahkhan



Writer
J.R. Patterson

Gladstone, Canada

“A Country of the Mind,”
page 98

“Minimal, but I always pack a set of rough duds and one fine outfit. You never know who’ll show up to supper.”

THE REPORT: “Chile has some 26,000 glaciers – a significant chunk of the world’s ice. Visiting Patagonia’s Exploradores Glacier, it was possible to see climate change in real time as rocks tumbled from the melting ice into turquoise pools. The ice fields’ mass is so great, it depresses the tectonic plates beneath them, and as they thin and recede, the ground rebounds and uplifts; the stability of the region literally hangs in the balance.”

🐦JRPatterson9



Photographer
Madhumita Nandi

Berlin and Kolkata

“In Living Color,” page 108

“Light and minimalist, with multipurpose items to reduce weight, as I look forward to always enjoying what’s available locally at each location.”

THE REPORT: “With each passing day of looking at block-printed textiles, my eyes opened further, and I noticed the intricate patterns of Jaipur’s *jaalis* (mesh structures of Rajput architecture) and *jharokhas* (stone windows). Rajasthan has always reminded me that people are reflections of their landscapes. The environment plays such a significant role in block-printing techniques, not only through the motifs, but also the colors, which depend on the quality of the water and plants used to make dyes.”

@madhumitanandi



Writer
Elaine Glusac

Chicago

“Outer Limits,” page 78


“Ultralight, neutral, and never more than one packed pair of shoes. My motto is ‘Travel more freely, toting less.’ ”

THE REPORT: “On Hurtigruten, I found my people: passengers proudly living their passions for photography, birding, and science. If you missed a lecture on volcanology or auklets, you could get a pretty thorough synopsis from the passengers holding binoculars on the foredeck.”

@eglusac

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JAIPUR'S BLOCK-PRINTING TRADITIONS ARE AS VITAL AS EVER.
BY SARAH KHAN PHOTOGRAPHY BY MADHUMITA NANDI

Draped in tradition:
Block-printed fabrics
spread out to dry at Rasa
Jaipur's atelier and
(opposite) Shaivyya
Gupta's contemporary
twist on the craft.



Inspiration overhead at
Jaipur's City Palace.

IN

JAIPUR'S OLD TOWN, shoppers bargain for fabrics and jewelry while street vendors dole out piping-hot *pyaaz ki kachori* and fresh lassi beneath voluminously curved archways, behind rose-tinted facades, and beside handpainted floral murals. Spend an afternoon watching these lively quotidian scenes play out, and it's clear why Rajasthan's Pink City and its dazzling motifs and patterns have lured creatives and craftspeople for generations.

Textile designer Shaivyya Gupta remembers how struck she was by Jaipur's life and color when she moved to the city from Kolkata. "It was unbelievable how people around here embraced color in their everyday life," she says. "The men's turbans and women's skirts and shawls are a riot of prints and bright, happy colors." Jaipur's vivid palette has served Gupta well as a muse: In 2015 she opened her own Jaipur studio, Shaivyya Textiles, through which she captures the city's vibrancy by blending traditional techniques with Indian kitsch and pop-art elements to create distinctly contemporary fabrics.

At the core of her maximalist, forward-looking designs is a method rooted in history. Block printing, in which artisans dip intricately carved wood blocks in inks before applying them to materials by hand, may have been introduced to India by the Chinese, although that isn't definitively clear. Either way, over the centuries, the country has fully embraced block printing as its own. The art form has literally woven itself into the very fabric of the city.

Given the ubiquity of these prints in the Rajasthani wardrobe as well as its collective consciousness, it's no surprise that visitors are curious about the craft. "We have a number of guests who take a day out of their touring and spend it in a studio with the designer and artisans, learning the art and also creating some wonderful souvenirs for themselves," says Shanti Kohli, managing director of India-based Amber Tours. "It's a fun activity, but also a very precise art form."

Kohli often takes travelers to workshops in the villages of Sanganer and Bagru, the country's biggest remaining block-printing hubs. There, guests quickly discover that patience is very much a virtue when it comes to this kind of work: A single yard of cloth typically contains 150 to 200 individual stamps. And block carving is an art in its own right. Master carvers typically fashion blocks from local woods such as roheda (a deciduous desert tree) and sheesham (Indian rosewood); intricate blocks can take as long as two weeks to shape.

FYI

"Don't miss the Gyan Museum. It houses more than 2,500 treasured pieces, including textiles, paintings, antique jewelry, vintage spectacles, rare inscriptions, and objets d'art from around the world, some dating back more than 3,000 years."

— Phoebe Weinberg,
Virtuoso agency
executive, Grosse Pointe
Farms, Michigan

AS WITH SO MANY TRADITIONS in Rajasthan – the state's name itself means "land of the kings" – there is a royal pedigree at play here: Jaipur's ruling families have been patrons of the block-printing form for nearly 300 years. "The maharaja invited skilled artisans of all kinds, from far-flung regions, to settle here," says Rachel Bracken-Singh, design director at Anokhi, one of India's most widely loved clothing and housewares brands, known for airy caftans, quilts, and accessories in lively floral block prints.

But as is the case with so many long-lived traditions, the centuries haven't always been kind, with the introduction of mechanized printing and the reluctance of younger generations to learn the trades of their forebears. The late and beloved maharani – the consummately stylish Rajmata Gayatri Devi – was particularly

An artisan carves a wood block at the Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing, and (far right) Shaivyya Gupta creates new design samples at her workshop.

FYI

"No trip to Jaipur is complete without a visit to one of the city's famed gem houses, such as The Gem Palace, for a look at the exquisite artisanship of fine jewelry."

— Isla Steinberg, *Virtuoso* travel advisor, Toronto

passionate about reviving and championing Jaipur's block printers in the 1950s. Her legacy remains evident in the discipline's contemporary resurgence. Today, Princess Diya Kumari carries that tradition forward: The PDKF (for Princess Diya Kumari Foundation) Store, which opened inside the City Palace's hallowed walls in 2021, gives Jaipur's female artisans a chic showcase for their work.

Following in the Rajmata's footsteps, Bracken-Singh and other craft crusaders are committed to preventing block printing from dying out. Apart from her role at Anokhi, which has a six-decade history and 27 outposts across the country, she is also the cofounder and director of the Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing, which she launched after years of fielding requests from the public to visit the brand's workshops. The three-year restoration of the museum's atmospheric sixteenth-century Rajput *haveli*, or mansion, garnered a UNESCO award for cultural heritage conservation.

Block-printed textiles look deceptively simple, with delicate floral motifs and geometric patterns, but each design tells a much deeper story, says Madhulika Singh Tibrewal. She founded the textile atelier Rasa Jaipur with her husband, Manish, shortly after they arrived in the city in 1998. While Rajasthan may be synonymous with the technique today, block printing takes different forms across the subcontinent, with patterns and shades shifting as you make your way from north to south. "Most traditional block designs have a context and a name, and color has played a very important role, especially with the lack of it in nature in Rajasthan, a desert state," she says.

Block printing's popularity has spread across the world as well. Brands such as the Los Angeles-based Block Shop and the UK's Molly Mahon and Pink City Prints were all inspired or bolstered by their founders' exposure to block printing in Jaipur. Kuwait-based lifestyle brand Ecrú (currently collaborating with Shaivyya Gupta) recently opened a candy-colored boutique in Jaipur.







In the Badal Mahal inside Jaipur's City Palace, women artisans are trained in traditional art forms to craft pieces for the PDKF Store (opposite).



An early adopter, Andrée Pouliot arrived in Jaipur from Ottawa in 1978 and immediately fell in love – with the city and with block printing. “I spent many days and months at the printing workshops, scouring the museums and libraries for reference,” she says. “I pestered printers for details and kept notes.” This led to the launch of the brand Soma Blockprints in 1984. The operation, which began with a lone tailor hunched over a solitary sewing machine, has grown to encompass five outlets across the country. Today, Pouliot divides her time between Canada and India.

You don’t have to be a designer to fall under block printing’s spell. Its vivid colors and intricate patterns give Indian fashion and home goods an instantly recognizable, eye-popping look that runs much more than skin deep. Visiting the workshops gives travelers a chance to connect with not only the practice, but also the people and history behind it. After all, a suitcase filled with block-printed souvenirs also carries the continuation of a beautiful tradition.

GET TO KNOW JAIPUR

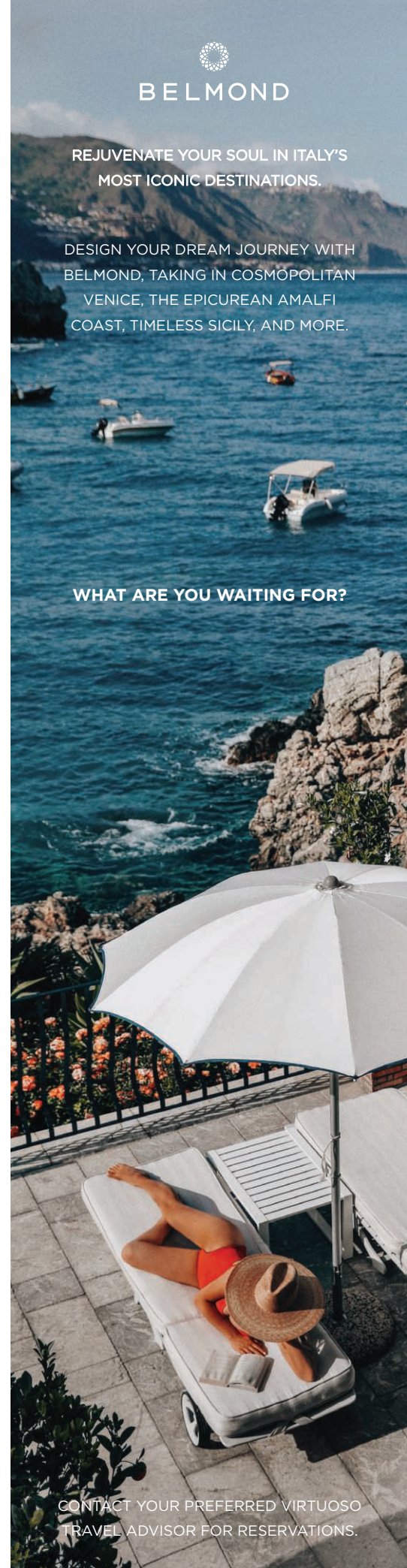
GO Virtuoso travel advisors can arrange for visitors to spend two weeks celebrating Indian crafts with on-site connection **Amber Tours**. Begin in Delhi, with a visit to the National Crafts Museum and meetings with private collectors in their homes, before spending four days in Jaipur exploring the city’s historic block-printing ateliers as well as its trendy contemporary shopping and nightlife scene. Then it’s on to Gujarat to discover different forms of block printing: *thappa chappai* in the city of Ahmedabad and

ajrak in the desert villages of Kutch. End the trip in Mumbai, the country’s financial and entertainment capital. *Departures: Any day through 2023; from \$9,693, including accommodations at hotels such as The Imperial New Delhi, Jaipur’s Taj Rambagh Palace, and The Taj Mahal Palace in Mumbai.*

STAY Peacocks meander across the 32 manicured acres of fortlike **Oberoï Rajvilas**, where 71 rooms (including 13 tented rooms and one Royal Tent) overlook a tranquil courtyard and its fountains. *Doubles from*

\$430, including breakfast daily and one lunch or dinner for two.

A nineteenth-century edifice that Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II and Maharani Gayatri Devi once called home, **Taj Rambagh Palace** is now an alluring 78-room retreat. After dinner in the gilded *Suvarna Mahal* restaurant, set in an erstwhile ballroom, pop into the Polo Bar for a drink surrounded by memorabilia (polo is a popular royal pastime in Jaipur). *Doubles from \$680, including breakfast daily and one lunch or dinner for two.* ♡



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