

THE

MID DAY'S GUIDE TO WEEKEND BREAKS EVERY THURSDAY

INSIDE

18 SIGN UP FOR A TASTE OF PARISIAN STYLE SEASIDE REVELRY

18 THE SHORT CUT TO PLAYING ECO WARRIOR ON HOLIDAY

THE TRIP

SIGN UP

IF YOU HAVE 1 DAY...



CHALLENGE THE VERTICAL LIMIT

Face your fears of water and heights in one power-packed weekend. Go waterfall rappelling at the Vihi waterfalls near Kasara. The falls are about 120 feet in height. Pray the rain gods drench you, so that it adds to the thrill.

BY Yuvazhep
ON September 5
COST Rs 700 per head
CALL 9920601112 / 9920318190

SOAK IN A SUPER ADVENTURE

Tour groups are taking total advantage of the fact that the rain gods are quite pleased with us this time around. Another waterfall rappelling event is organised at Tighar in Karjat. Sign up for a 70-feet straight drop down the gushing waterfall, fantastic views of mist-laden hills, and an adrenaline pumped experience just 80 kms from Mumbai.

BY The Nomadic Quest
ON August 29
COST Rs 1,310 per head
CALL 24162488 / 9969669174

EXPLORE ANCIENT BUDDHIST CAVES

Explore the ancient Buddhist rock-cut Kondana caves at the bottom of a waterfall in Karjat. Stunning Buddhist architecture on sculptures, chaityas and stupas make these caves a must-visit.

BY YHAI Mumbai
ON August 22
COST Rs 200 per head
CALL 9869374378 / 9833115324



In this picture taken in January 2002, a tiger crosses the road in Ranthambore National Park

sides over this kingdom.

EARS TO HELP

I was one of the more than 100,000 wildlife enthusiasts from around the world that year visiting Ranthambore National Park, in search of an elusive Bengal tiger. Sitting in the open-topped gypsy I followed Subhash's instructions and kept my ears and eyes peeled. I was surprised to hear him say, "You are much more likely to find a tiger with the help of your ears, than your eyes alone. The alarm calls of our forest friends often help us to locate where a tiger is hiding." He went on to explain that the dry deciduous forests of Ranthambore make it a prime location for viewing wild tigers in their natural habitat, with the relatively open terrain making it considerably easier to spot them than in many other Indian tiger reserves. "I'm feeling lucky today; I think we will find a tiger this afternoon," he smiled.

The 392 km square core area is part of the much larger 1,314 sq. km square Ranthambore Tiger Reserve: a flagship park for Project Tiger. However, even though tigers are the modern-day rulers in this corner of eastern Rajasthan, their situation remains precarious.

The previous evening; Goverdhan Rathore, owner of the luxurious Khem Villas Camp, explained, "Severe poaching five years ago, greatly reduced our tiger population." When I asked the inevitable question of how many tigers remain in Ranthambore, he said the last camera trap census indicated around 31 tigers.

DISTRESS SIGNAL

Our vehicle had stopped and



OBAMA KIDS WILL MISS THE ROAR

US president Barack Obama's daughters will not be able to see Indian tigers, as they'd expected to this November, even as their parents are likely to visit the Taj Mahal when they come early November. The kids were looking forward to the trip and the chance to spot tigers after US ambassador Timothy Roemer's kids chatted with them about their encounter with four tigers in Ranthambore.

we were watching a family of sambar deer feed in the shallow waters of Padam Talau, when the shrill alarm calls of chital snapped us back to reality. The barks of these spotted deer instantly changed the atmosphere on the vehicle from relaxed to fever pitch. "Get going!" yelled Subash to the driver, and we took off around the lake in the direction of the distress calls. Soon, we located the anxious deer staring towards a thicket not far from a ruined hunting palace on the edge of neighbouring Raj Bagh Lake. As we sat listening to the chital alarm calls, I silently begged the tiger to emerge.

With lightning speed, a tigress broke cover and charged the startled deer. The herd exploded in every direction as the anxious chital ran

for their lives. The tiger zeroed in on two unwary rutting males and was on top of one before he even realised what had hit him. His legs hopelessly flayed the air as she went straight for the throat.

Minutes later, the deer was dead and peace returned. The tigress left the carcass and strolled into the shallow lake to slake her thirst. After noisily lapping up some water, she emerged dripping wet to reclaim her prize. Turning towards the ruined palace, she disappeared behind a stone wall and melted back into the jungle to enjoy her feast in quiet.

COOLING OFF IN A PALACE

I was ecstatic. Subhash was grinning like a Cheshire cat. Our gypsy exploded in excitement as we looked at one another's pictures and discussed how beautiful and relaxed she had been.

It is difficult to eloquently capture in words the powerful emotion stirred by such a savagely beautiful encounter with India's super-predator. A fellow guest, ecstatic after his first-ever tiger-sighting, gushed, "My first ever wild tiger!"

I found it especially ironic that, in a bizarre twist of fate, the hunting palace in the heart of Ranthambore's zone 3 has, in time, become the popular haunt of tigers. As Subhash elaborated, "During the hot summer months, tigers come here nearly every day to sleep on the cool stone floors of the old palace." That the tigers had reclaimed control of their rightful domain, was encouraging.

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LOCATION

Ranthambore, along with the gateway town of Sawai Madhopur, lies on the eastern edge of Rajasthan, 440 km to the southwest of Delhi, and 190 km southeast of Jaipur.

WHERE TO STAY

There are quite literally hundreds of accommodation options in and around Sawai Madhopur; however, the outstanding Khem Villas Luxury Jungle Camp (www.khemvillas.com), located in a tranquil natural setting on the periphery of the park, is undoubtedly Ranthambore's best-kept secret. Another recommended option is the Ranthambore Bagh (www.ranthamborebagh.com)

WHAT TO DO

Ranthambore is one of India's most famous wildlife havens and the primary reason people visit the park is on a quest to find a tiger. Twice-daily, drives provide an opportunity to view a diverse range of animals, including tiger, leopard, sloth bear, antelope and deer, along with the park's prolific birdlife. A maximum of 20 gypsies and 20 canters are allowed to enter the park's five zones, so it is essential to book well in advance. A trip to explore Ranthambore Fort is another highly worthwhile activity.

HOW TO REACH

BY TRAIN The closest airport is in Jaipur, a 3.5 hour drive away. However, the easiest way is to get to Ranthambore by train. Sawai Madhopur Railway Station is conveniently located on the main Mumbai-Delhi train route and has excellent train connections with most parts of India. Trains are cheaper, faster and more comfortable than the long drive.

HOT DEALS



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TRIP



GONE IN 60 SECONDS

THE THRILL OF THE PATIENT WAIT AS YOU DRIVE AROUND IN SILENCE BEFORE A TIGER LEAPS OUT OF NOWHERE TO GO STRAIGHT FOR A STRAY DEER'S THROAT — STEPHEN CUNLIFFE TELLS THE OBAMA DAUGHTERS WHAT THEY ARE GOING TO MISS

Our six-seater gypsy bounced and rattled along a narrow track as we rapidly closed in on our designated zone within the park. Passing under the ancient battlements of Ranthambore Fort, I craned my neck skywards and glimpsed the ancient fortifications on a hilltop high above. Passing through Misradhara Gate, was like escaping into another world. I felt as if I had been hijacked and thrust onto an Indiana Jones movie set.

Ancient ruins, many over a thousand years old, lay overgrown and scattered throughout the park. Forts, temples and hunting palaces rubbed shoulders with a pristine natural landscape of lakes and rolling hills to produce an environment like none I had ever encountered. It was a truly captivating scene that thrust me back to a bygone era when the Chauhan kings had constructed the magnificent Fort around 900 AD.

A NEW SET OF KINGS

Our naturalist guide Subhash explained that Ranthambore National Park took its name from this impressive 10th century fort. The fort, dominating an entire hilltop at the heart of the park, is named after the two adjoining hills of Rann and Thambhore. Seven kilometres of imposing

DEAR FATEH, THANK YOU FOR THE WONDERFUL TOUR OF RANTHAMBHORE YESTERDAY... AND FOR YOUR STRUGGLE TO SAVE THE TIGER. I WILL DO WHAT I CAN TO HELP.

— Former US president Bill Clinton's letter to Fateh Singh Rathore, former field director of the Ranthambore Tiger Reserve



US President Bill Clinton and daughter Chelsea tour Ranthambore National Park with field directors GV Reddy and Fateh Singh in March 2000 during Clinton's six-day trip to South Asia. Clinton saw two tigers on his two-hour safari at the park. PICS/AFP PHOTO

stonewalled fortifications encompass a hilltop fortress that boasts an impregnable location with breathtaking views over the park.

Legend has it that, after successfully resisting a siege by Emperor Akbar's army during the 12th century, King

Hamir was betrayed by some of his most trusted soldiers, and a mass suicide followed. The fort was abandoned soon after this catastrophe. However, a thousand years on, the fort still dominates the scene; only the kings are gone, and the tiger now pre-

Mahakaleshwar (Ujjain)



THIS HOLY SHRAVAN VISIT THE LAND OF WORSHIP.

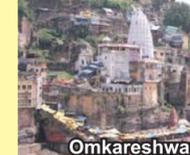


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