

# Zippering over Rajasthan

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS STEPHEN CUNLIFFE

**You have marvelled at the forts and fairs of Rajasthan. Now go fly over the palaces and discover how the villages look from the sky.**

**A** mere two-hour drive from the capital, Neemrana is the perfect Delhi getaway. For decades, the Neemrana Fort Palace has lured weary urbanites away from the hustle-bustle of the city and transported them to the peaceful Aravalli Hills of Rajasthan. In recent times however, a new Neemrana attraction has burst onto the scene, drawing adventurous souls from Delhi and beyond, with the promise of an innovative and

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exciting way to experience India's natural and cultural beauty.

Flying Fox Asia opened the nation's first zip-line tour here in January 2009, providing intrepid visitors with a unique and exhilarating chance to take to the skies and soar above the stunning landscape. It was this rare opportunity to 'fly' over old Rajasthani palaces and ancient hill-forts that enticed my wife and me to escape Delhi and sign up to 'fly the fox' at Neemrana.

#### ON YOUR MARK

We arrived at Neemrana on a warm Saturday morning not really knowing what to expect from India's newest adventure activity. Upon arrival, we were met by one of Flying Fox's directors, Richard McCallum, who immediately set to explain the basic philosophy behind 'zipping'. "A zip-line course consists of a series of inclined cables stretched between points situated at different elevations. Participants wear a harness that attaches to a free-moving pulley, which, in turn, clips onto the cables. Once you are securely hooked up to the wire, you simply step off the platform and gravity propels you swiftly through the air to the next



landing. It's that easy, but don't worry you'll get a more comprehensive safety briefing and a chance on the training zip before you set off on your aerial adventure," he assured us.

After receiving an entertaining and reassuring safety talk from Raj, we moved onto a short practice zip-line where we fine-tuned our zipping skills under the watchful eye of two expert instructors. Upon graduation from the 'baby' trial zip, we set off, brimming with confidence and enthusiasm, ready to tackle the real thing.

As we began the twenty-minute climb up the hill behind Neemrana Fort Palace, I turned to Richard once again and put him on the spot regarding Flying Fox's safety standards. "Our zip tour course has been designed and installed by Switzerland's leading zip-line engineers and it is subject to daily safety checks before use. The cables were imported from Europe, while Petzl of France, one of the world's leading climbing brands, makes all our harnesses and protective equipment. Both the

## Adventure

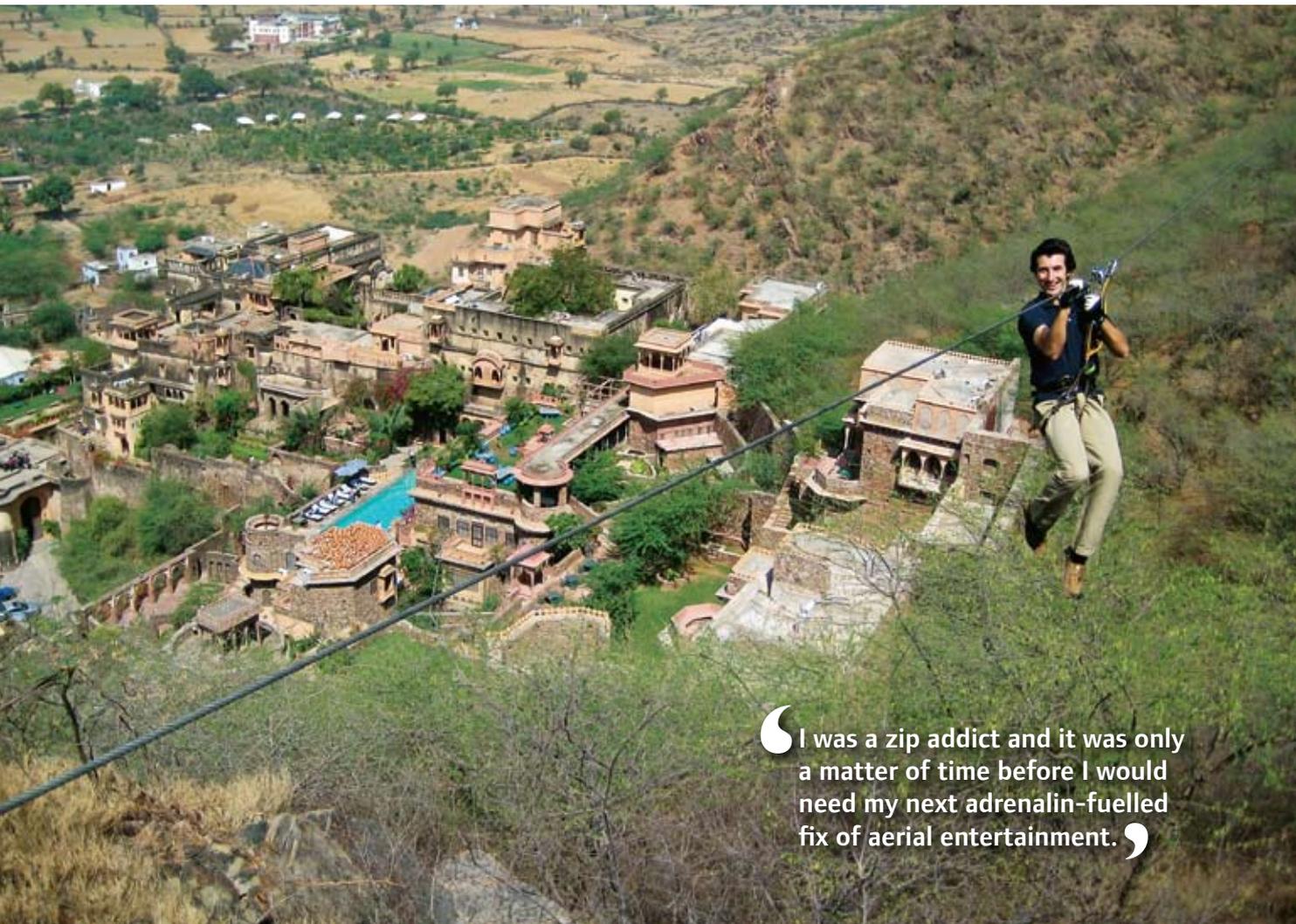
construction and operation of our zip-line tours conform to all the latest European safety standards for high rope adventure courses." Flying Fox's impressive safety resume instantly put my mind at ease and I found myself pondering whether Flying Fox zip tours might possibly be the safest tourist activity on offer in all of India!

### GET, SET, GO!

Standing on the first mountaintop platform overlooking Neemrana Fort Palace, my heart involuntarily skipped a beat. As Raj gave me final instructions, clipped me onto the first cable and double-checked the pulley attachments, my heart started to make up for lost time, pumping a healthy dose of adrenalin through my excited and anxious body. As soon as I stepped off the platform and took off on the first zip, a feeling of

pure excitement washed over me. An incredible aerial journey over ridge tops and battlements had begun. Securely attached by the harness and pulley, I quickly relaxed and revelled in the breathtaking views as I 'flew' along the ultra-strong steel wires. The zips were fast enough to get the heart thumping, but also gentle enough to allow first-timers like myself the opportunity to absorb the spellbinding scenery unfolding beneath us. For an hour and a half, we soared like eagles over the Aravalli Hills and Rajasthani countryside as we glided down the mountainside towards the Neemrana Fort Palace below.

Two Flying Fox instructors accompanied us throughout our zip adventure to ensure our safety, but it was the easy-going and entertaining manner with which they imparted their local historical and



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cultural knowledge that added real value to the tour and greatly enhanced our fun-filled zipping experience.

When I unclipped my pulley at the end of the final zip-line, I felt like Tom Cruise walking off a *Mission Impossible* movie set. Back at the fort-palace, we immediately set out in search of a cold beer to celebrate the successful completion of our airborne adventure. As I sipped my lager, I was struck by the sudden realisation that I was a zip addict and it was only a matter of time before I would need my next adrenalin-fuelled fix of aerial entertainment.

### FLYING IN JODHPUR

A few months later I got my wish when I had the opportunity once again to take to the skies with Flying Fox at the Mehrangarh Fort in Jodhpur. In contrast to the steep mountainous course at Neemrana, the Mehrangarh zip tour requires no initial hill climbing. Comprising six intelligently laid out zip-lines boasting unparalleled views of Mehrangarh Fort, a small lake and distant Jodhpur city, the course offers unique and impressive fort views from angles that are only accessible to adventurous zip addicts.

The first wire took us from within the fort, soaring over ancient battlements and drifting across the arid terrain behind the monument. My pulse quickened as the ground suddenly gave way and, once again, I felt the unadulterated thrill of defying gravity and gliding effortlessly across the sky. Dangling – suspended in mid-air – from a wire cable with the wind rushing through my hair, I revelled in the highly addictive experience of ‘flying’ past the old fortifications, while our enthusiastic instructors imparted local lore bringing the history of the ancient fort to life.

Zippering is without doubt, the ultimate Indian joyride and thrill-seekers will be hard-pressed to find an adventure activity that provides anywhere near the same amount of adrenalin-spiced excitement and action-packed entertainment as this incredible aerial adventure.

### QUICK FACTS

#### GETTING THERE

Jet Airways has daily flights to Jaipur and Jodhpur from Mumbai. From Delhi, there are daily flights to Jodhpur and regular flights to Jaipur. Neemrana is a further two-hour drive from either city.

#### HOW ZIPPING WORKS

Zip tours last roughly two hours and are limited to a maximum of 12 people per slot. Tours depart hourly between 9 am and 4 pm, daily. Advance bookings are strongly recommended.

#### WHO CAN DO IT

Anyone aged 10 years or above, over 1.4m high and under 127 kg can ‘fly the fox’. Children between 10 and 15 years require adult supervision. The oldest flyer to date was an 82-year-old man who did the zip twice!

#### WHAT IT COSTS

Book online to receive discounted prices. Rates vary between the courses and depending upon the season, but budget R1,250 to 1,495 per adult and R999 to R1,195 per child or student (with ID card).

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Log on to [www.flyingfox.asia](http://www.flyingfox.asia)