



STAY AT

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

LIFESTYLE

SPOTTED BY SITA

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The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel is actually known as Ravla Khempur, located at an hour's drive from Udaipur. This charming heritage property has 11 rooms. Each room overlooks either the garden, the temple inside its compound, the stables, the courtyard or the village. All rooms have a characteristic "gokhara" (canopied balcony) where one can relax with the rays of the sun filtering in through the coloured glass. At the moment Ravla Khempur, the way it is, may not be for everyone. Unless, of course, you loved The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, just like us and you are happy to follow in the footsteps of the cast of the movie (and have a good sense of humour to boot). We loved our 2 nights in Ravla Khempur chatting with Mohan; the caretaker; the soul of this place, listening to the many stories and future plans of Hemant, its suave owner, enjoying the delicious food of Chef Vikesh who trained under Michelin Star Chefs in Europe and our sundowners at Vadgam Lake. The villagers of Khempur are the most friendly we have ever met in Rajasthan, to the extent that we were even invited to see a new born calf, over a cup of tea.

Larousse; the company who manages Ravla Khempur told us that the garden and lawn area had to be dug up and the outer walls painted black to give a "run-down" feel to the property as per the script of movie. They also had a contractual obligation with the makers of The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel not to touch the property and leave it as it is, till the film was released. They now have major plans to spruce up the property. The renovation work is going to start anytime soon and should be over by October this year. The title "Ravla" in Rajasthan refers to the home of a village chieftain. In the earlier days, the Ravla was the focal point of the entire village. Functions such as village welfare, collection of taxes, administration of law and order and the initiation of festivals took place in the Ravla.

Stay At





Caretaker at Ravla Khempur

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Mohan; the caretaker of Ravla Khempur came to work in the village as a manual labourer 15 years ago. So how did he end up as the caretaker? “When Daata (respectful way of addressing your employer in rural Rajasthan and in this case, the father of the current owner of Ravla Khempur) would need help from the villagers, he would ask me to convey his message. The women folk were also more comfortable when I was around. Slowly it so happened, that I was spending all my time at the Ravla. I would run errands, serve food and take care of the horses. One day Daata asked me to work only for him. I began on a monthly salary of Rs 5.”

So what is a typical day like for him as the caretaker of Ravla Khempur? “I wake up at 4 in the morning. I check if any of the guests want tea or coffee. Once they have had breakfast, I take them around on a walk of the village. The villagers here are very welcoming and invite guests open-heartedly into their homes. Those of them who are adventurous try the villagers home-made tea.” It reminded us of the scene in *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, where Muriel, the racist spinster played by Maggie Smith, is taken by her doctor to the house of the woman; an untouchable from the village, who sweeps the floor of the Marigold hotel and brings her food everyday which Muriel refuses to touch (“If I can't pronounce it, I don't want to eat it”). Food lovingly cooked by her in the family kitchen (because she thinks Muriel probably finds the hotel food unpalatable) is offered. And to Muriel's horror, she is told that she would be showing disrespect to the family if she refuses to eat. That's how Muriel; surviving on hobnobs until then, ends up tasting Indian food.

In the evening Mohan accompanies guests to the Vadgam Lake; a 30 minute drive from Ravla Khempur, for a relaxed sundowner. The lake is full of birds and their chirping is just about the only sound that you can hear. We took a boat ride with our bottles of Kingfisher Beer to spot a flock of Sarus Cranes. Mohan also told us that since Ravla Khempur does not have any fixed menu, before each meal guests are given a choice of what they would like to eat. We thought it was a good idea since there is an element of surprise. “I'm the last one to go to sleep after securing the horses and locking up the gates.”

Any memorable incidents? “It was a great feeling to be in front of the camera and be a part of the movie.”

A Day in The Life Of Mohan



Mohan has a “blink and you will miss” role in *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. But is nevertheless, very proud of it. He even calls John Madden, the Director of the movie “a great human being.”

Mohan isn't like Sunny, the young owner of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, played by Dev Patel. He doesn't make lofty promises nor does he have brothers to compete with (though he kept bringing freshly made butter milk from the village as promised). Yet there are shades of Sunny in his undying optimism. Mohan tells us that he is expecting a lot of guests to Ravla Khempur once the hotel is done with its renovation. “I'm happiest when there are a lot of guests around and you can see that they are enjoying themselves.”



Lifestyle



The Horse Whisperer

Hemant; the owner of Ravla Khempur is in a very upbeat mood these days. He is just back after taking part in the [Royal Windsor Horse Show](#). It is the largest outdoor equestrian show in the UK, with over 3000 horses and ponies taking part in the event. "It was a great show despite the bad weather." Talking about his love for horses, he tells us that he wants Khempur to come first in people's mind, when they think of doing a Horse Safari in Rajasthan. "My happiest memories of childhood are here in Khempur, riding around in a Horse," says Hemant. "I was studying in Udaipur and I would visit my father in the Ravla during the summer vacations."

From the age of ten, Hemant was taught by his father to take care of horses, to control them and to become a good rider. "Another attraction for me was the animal fair in Mavli and Kawari which is close to Khempur. As a school kid I remember going to the fair on horse back enjoying the landscape and spending the night in the village with our relatives. We used to reach the fair ground early next morning. After spending the entire day admiring the horses, we would start the ride back to Khempur."

Hemant is quite your [Horse Whisperer](#), who tells us that after the Cow, it is the Horse that he considers holy. "The Horse brings good fortune to any house that it is in," says Hemant. He even tells us that Horses, just like the Hindu religion has its own caste system. We didn't know if we should believe him. But it was very interesting to hear stories about Horses who would not enter a house if there is meat being cooked in the kitchen. "They are like the Brahmins (the priestly class) of the Hindu religion," he tells us. If the coat of a Horse shines a lot after being washed it is a Shudra (lowest in the Hindu caste system) and is not that loyal it seems. While Kshatriya (the Hindu military elite) Horses; according to Hemant, have a regal way of drinking water, a Marwari Horse of Rajasthan will never desert its rider. Hemant has been featured on the cover pages of many equestrian magazines worldwide. "The best of the lot is [Cheval D Adventure](#); a French magazine which offers horse safari enthusiasts unusual route suggestions. It was a great honour to be on its cover page," he tells us.

How did Best Exotic Marigold Hotel happen? "It was sheer luck. John Madden, the director of the movie had finalized an old mansion in Udaipur. But the deal fell



apart at the last moment. Then he came to me. Although they paid well, one of the pre-requisite was that the hotel should be in a shabby state of disuse. So they sprayed the walls black and up-rooted the garden and dug up the lawn," Hemant tells us.

And what are his future plans? "To put Khempur as the No 1 Horse Safari destination in Rajasthan," says Hemant. "The property also needs to be spruced up to cater to foreign guests. A swimming pool is something we wish to have before the winter season. We are also renovating the rooms and adding amenities. A Spa would be a good idea too."

Here's Hemant's favourite Horse Safari itinerary: Untouched Ravlas - [click here](#)



Good Luck Charm

Ravla Khempur is indeed a land where Horses are both loved and revered. Sita spotted these horse shaped carvings on the entrance of most houses in the village.

Locals consider it a lucky charm and also believe that it helps ward off evil spirits.

Spotted By Sita





Khempur Fish

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Chef Vikesh Singh recommends the Khempur Fish as a must try during your stay at Ravla Khempur. “The fish is always fresh from the nearby Vadgam Lake and is marinated with tamarind which is abundantly available in Khempur village. It’s a simple dish which works brilliantly because of the freshness of the ingredients and complimenting flavours,” Vikesh tells us. We agree. It was delicious. “Meat is the predominant base for most non-vegetarian dishes in Rajasthan. So I came up with the Khempur Fish to break the monotony,” he adds.

Vikesh is the General Manager of Larousse; the company which manages Ravla Khempur and also the Chef here. He worked in Europe with Michelin Star Chefs for 6 years before returning to India.

Top Chef Recommends





Ravla Khempur

6 Things We Liked About

Khempur - We loved Khempur for the genuine welcome showcased by its people. It was refreshingly different. It is unorthodox but if you want to experience a part of India that is fast vanishing, there is no other place like Khempur. We were invited to see a new born calf in one of the houses over a cup of tea. In the Hindu religion the birth of a calf is considered auspicious and we were touched by the gesture. Not to mention that the villagers kept on supplying freshly made butter milk throughout our stay in Khempur.

No Menus - Ravla Khempur doesn't have a menu. And we loved this idea. Chef Vikesh tells us, that this is done to maintain an element of surprise and they plan to keep it this way. The cuisine is local, made from vegetables available locally and served with genuine hospitality. We loved the Khempur Fish, that surely breaks the monotony in a Rajasthan tour.

Mohan, the Caretaker - We loved Mohan, the caretaker at Ravla Khempur, who has been working here for most of his life. He is a gem of person and very unlike the over-reaching Sunny (Dev Patel); the inn keeper at The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel. Mohan enjoys an excellent rapport with the villagers and we enjoyed our walks in the village with him immensely.

Land of Horses - If your clients are planning to go on a Horse Safari sometime soon in Rajasthan, send them to Khempur. This is a land where horses are both loved and revered. The stable at Ravla Khempur houses pedigree Marwari and Kathiawari horses. Hemant, the owner of Ravla Khempur has some fantastic itineraries. We particularly liked the one which takes clients to untouched Ravlas like Khempur; where the village chieftain himself plays host.

Sundowner at the Vadgam Lake - We loved this serene and unspoilt lake; a perfect place to end your day with a chilled Kingfisher beer. It is a 20 minute drive from Ravla Khempur. We are also told that there is impressive birdlife here during winters.

Akola Village - We loved our time at Akola Village, where we saw and interacted with the tie-dye artists at our own pace. No pushy salesman expecting you to buy anything in shops here. There are only 2 shops here, by the way. It's a 40 minutes drive from Ravla Khempur and a great place for shopping. We were told that, even brands such as Fab India get their clothes designed here.





Festivals

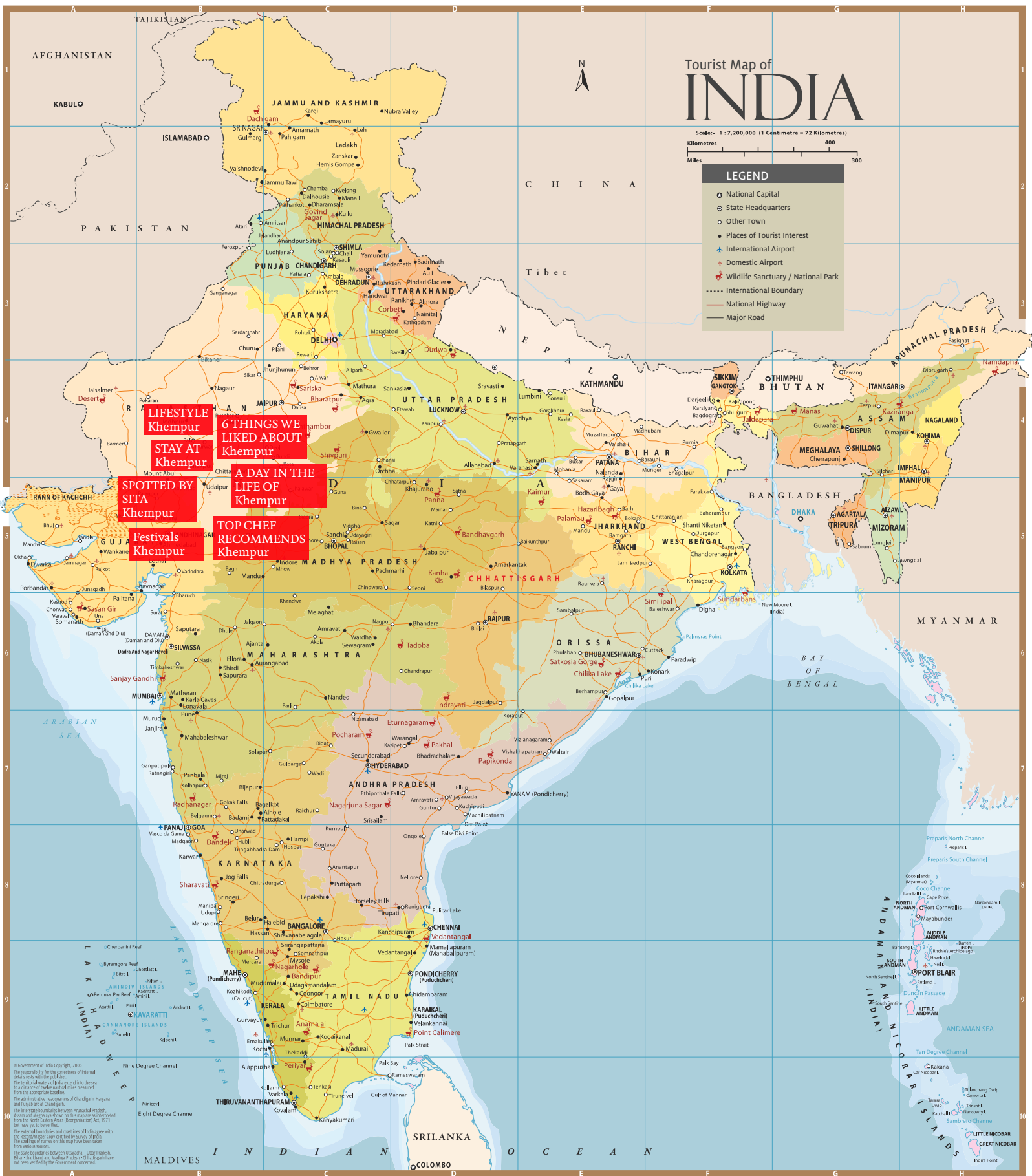


Mavli Animal Fair & Navratri, 16th - 24th October 2012

Mohan, the caretaker at Ravla Khempur tells us that the Animal Fair at Mavli, which coincides with the Navratri Festival, is not to be missed. The word Navratri literally means nine nights in Sanskrit, where Nava means nine and Ratri means nights. During these ten days and nine nights of the festival, nine forms of Shakti - the mother goddess of the Hindu religion is worshipped.

Mavli is a small village near Khempur which comes alive every year during the Navratri festival. "Guests can take a horse ride after breakfast and spend time enjoying the lively fair," Mohan tells us. "People come here from all parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat to sell and buy animals like horses, cows, buffaloes, ox, camels and sheep." Another attraction are the Lohars (blacksmiths) who sell knives, swords and iron cupboards. Hand printed Rajasthani fabrics are also on display. "Villagers love to watch the death defying stunts at the 'Well of Death,' yet another crowd puller," Mohan smiles. Popularly known as "Maut Ka Kuan"(Well of Death); performers drive cars and motorbikes, simultaneously along the walls of a deep wooden well.







Meet us at the Upcoming Trade Shows

If you wish to schedule a meeting, do e-mail us at
info@sita.in

Trade Shows	Booth No.	Whom to Meet
Top Resa Paris 18th -21st September	Awaited	Philip Thomas & Valerie Chalopet
OTDYKH Leisure Fair Moscow 19th -22nd September	Awaited	Ernest Dias & Deepak Sharma
FITA Mexico 20th -23rd September	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt
Kerala Travel Mart Cochin 27th -30th September	Hall No 5, Booth No. 79 & 80	Neeraj Bhatt & Philip Thomas
Deluxe Travel Mart Ukraine 2nd October	Sita Desk	Deepak Sharma
Luxe Travel Show Baku Azerbaijan 16th October	Sita Desk	Deepak Sharma
TTG Rimini 18th -20th October	Awaited	Matteo Pennacchi & Philip Thomas
ABAV Rio de Janeiro 24th -26th October	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt
TOUR Salon Poland 24th -27th October	Trade Visitor	Deepak Sharma
WTM London 5th -8th November	Hall No S10, Booth No IN300	Neeraj Bhatt
ILTM Cannes 3rd -6th December	F 130	Dipak Deva & Philip Thomas
USTOA Hawaii 6th -8th December	Awaited	Neeraj Bhatt

Trade Shows

