

# IN THE EYE OF THE TIGER

Seasoned adventurers embark on a safari through Ranthambore National Park, a prestigious UNESCO World Heritage Site. Here, ancient 400-year-old banyan trees and the grand Ranthambore Fort serve as a picturesque backdrop for encounters with the park's iconic inhabitant: The Majestic Tiger.

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The cool embrace of dawn caressed us as we drove into the depths of Ranthambore National Park in south-eastern Rajasthan. Slowly, the forest uncurled itself in the warmth of the rising sun; we felt its pulse and heard its song.

Our jeep bounced its way through the park's entrance, where 400-year-old banyan trees bowed in greeting and towering palms stretched skyward like ancient totem poles honouring forgotten gods. Soon, the sandstone contours of the thousand-year-old Ranthambore Fort, perched on a dry rocky outcrop in the forest, rose against a cloudless blue sky. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, its massive sandstone walls run for 7 km. (Incidentally, located in the fort is a Lord Ganesh temple, one of the most sacred Ganesh temples in India, whose presiding deity receives wedding invitations from all over the country.)





Soon, we were heading into the green nave of the park, the former hunting ground of the maharajas where the tiger reigns supreme as the ultimate celebrity. We stopped at limpid waterholes, squinted through borrowed binoculars, and watched the chital sunbathe and langurs leaping from one tree branch to another with the elegance of ballerinas. A sudden rustle in a clump of reeds caused a flurry of conjecture, only to reveal a wildfowl which clucked away with a disapproving tone.

Indeed, the dry deciduous forest of Ranthambore hums and thrums with wildlife, interspersed with tranquil water bodies, majestic chhatris, and remnants of ancient pleasure palaces. Over time, nature has reclaimed its territory and the lush jungle surrounds the weather-beaten monuments. These ruins now offer shade and solace to

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*Clockwise:  
Ranthambore  
Fort; A curious  
Sambar fawn;  
Young Sambar  
stags lock  
horns*



*Clockwise:  
Wildlife at  
Ranthambore  
National Park;  
Plum-headed  
parakeets; Jungle  
babbler; A  
feathered beauty*



the big cats that often rest there after a hunt. According to our guide, there are 80 tigers spread across the park's ten zones. They lope and prowl in the grasslands, hemmed by the Aravalli and Vindhya mountain ranges that shimmer in shades of lavender and mauve, thanks to the dhok trees that mantle their slopes.

In Ranthambore, we often felt like we were part of a National Geographic documentary – butterflies and brilliantly plumed birds, ponderous sambars and self-absorbed monkeys mingled around us in an enchanting montage. Suddenly, a woo sound, the treble alarm call

of the chital, pierced the tranquility of the forest, soon followed by the staccato bark of a sambar. “There’s something out there,” our guide muttered. Other jeeps came to a halt, and hushed discussions ensued among the drivers and guides as they tried to pinpoint the elusive feline's location!

And then, just a little further ahead, we stumbled on him – a breathtaking sight of striped magnificence almost blending into the undulating grassland, resembling a cascade of a woman's flowing tresses in the gentle breeze. As a few more jeeps rolled up to view the unfolding drama







*Clockwise: A safari vehicle at a tiger sighting; Sultan—the tiger poses at the exit to the Ranthambore Fort; The Rajasthani style facade of Bookmark Resorts Jogi Mahal*



- naturalists, wildlife buffs and photographers unfurled their long lenses and there was a flurry of clicks. Two more cubs strolled in, followed by a graceful tigress. Suddenly, all around us, jeeps were jockeying into position, engines starting and revving, disturbing the big cats who slowly vanished into the thicket.

Continuing our safari, we passed a glassy water body with the remnants of a royal pavilion. Here, chital milled around with high-stepping grace while a serpent eagle obligingly posed for our cameras. However, it was at Raj Bagh Talab that Ranthambore treated us to its most jaw-dropping cameos. As the setting sun slowly bled into the limpid waters, it softly illuminated the arches of a forgotten pavilion. A herd of sambar wallowed in the water, their magnificent antlers draped with weeds. The lake glowed with hues of red and green algae and above, birds flitted in joyful abandon. The scene resembled a painting by a divine artist.

Back at our hotel, Bookmark Resorts Jogi Mahal, the jungle theme continued with lush murals adorning the public areas and the artworks embellishing the rooms and suites. As we slumbered in our plush environs that night, we imagined Machli, the legendary tigress of Ranthambore, striding insouciantly across the lawns, and wildlife tableaux unspooling within arm's reach. ✨

Ranthambore National Park, located in the Sawai Madhopur district of Rajasthan, is approximately 145 km from the nearest airport in Jaipur. The park offers wildlife sightings and is best visited from November to March, although some zones are open during the monsoon season as well. April-May, despite being hot, presents excellent opportunities for wildlife sightings around remaining waterholes.



Visitors must book safaris in advance either in a private jeep or a canter through the park's website or by phone. Bookmark Resorts Jogi Mahal offers luxury accommodation with villas featuring private plunge pools, outdoor showers, and mountain views. Other high-end options include Sawai Madhopur Lodge, The Oberoi Vanyavilas, Sher Bagh, and Aman-i-Khas. More information can be found on the park's website.

Located in close proximity to the national park, yet enclosed in a quiet charmed space of its own, the 40 rooms (including suites) are located in a cluster of 10 villas, some come with heated private plunge pools and outdoor showers while others rope in views of the Aravallis.