

the guide

Bash dunes in Rajasthan

Who said you had to fly to Dubai to enjoy a dune safari? If winter spells outdoor adventure for you, hitch a ride for one, closer home

SUPRITA MITTER SURFS THE SAND ON PAGES 26-27

Dera Dune in Rajasthan, built on a 100 ft sand dune, is one of several resorts offering winter dune safaris



Music festivals
to attend

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PLANNER

The Indo-
Italian food
connect

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Master couple
yoga moves

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Come home to the cool winter sands

From dune safaris, zip-lining to spotting Demoiselle cranes, Rajasthan has a lot to offer this winter



ADVENTURE SPORTS IN RAJASTHAN

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IT IS that time of the year when deserts cool down and open up for fun and sports. It might be timely, we thought, to pack your bags and head to Dera Dune, an isolated resort located in the Jamba village between Jodhpur and Jaisalmer, well off the tourist trail. Opened in

November, it is amongst the first few luxury retreats to be located on top of a hundred feet high sand dune, in the heart of the Thar desert, approachable by four wheel drives only. The location of the resort makes it perfect to witness a blanket of stars or go click-happy with photos of the sunrise and sunset. Initially a group of tents set up on the dunes, popularity among international tourists made the owners consider a permanent structure.

What to do

The desert around the Jamba village is home to nomadic tribes with a rich and vibrant lifestyle. You can take a 2.5 hour-long desert safari in the dunes and halt at their homes. The village, was the birthplace of the founding saint of the Bishnoi tribe, Jambeshwar or Jambaji. The main temple dedicated to Jambaji



Demoiselle cranes at Kheechan village

is located four kms from the retreat and is famous for two desert festivals that take place here in September/October and March/April.

The Bishnois are known as eco-warriors and conservationists of the region. For them, the preservation of animal life and vegetation has been the priority from the early 15th century. The second stop of the safari is to visit the homes of the Raika tribe, known as the tradi-

tional veterinarians of the desert. They specialise in taking care of camels. The final stop allows you to visit the hutments of the carpet weavers. These visits help get an insight into their lives and maybe, even pick up a skill or two. You can also visit the village school or choose to take a camel safari to visit the salt pans, not too far away.

The desert also has its fair share of wildlife where you can see antelopes, Demoiselle cranes, pea-

cocks and birds of prey. The Kheechan village nearby offers a unique insight into human-animal relationship. Nearly 10,000 to 12,000 Demoiselle cranes congregate every morning who are fed grains by the villagers. The dunes also offer a perfect setting to light the bonfire and enjoy traditional Rajasthani music.

If you are an early riser, check with the retreat staff for the exact time of sunrise and opt for the camel safari in the morning.



Bishnoi women carrying water home



It can get pretty cold during winters. Carry warm clothes, walking shoes that help wade through the sand, hats and sunglasses. Keeping in mind the isolation of the location, the retreat needs adequate advance notice for any special dietary requirements.

You can enjoy the local culture and the activities but it is best to avoid giving money or presents to the local tribal people as it spoils the equation.

Also try



■ The zip-lining at Jodhpur. This exciting 1.5 hours activity allows you to glide over the majestic Mehrangarh fort and offers stunning views of the blue city, an aerial experience of two desert lakes and the Rao Jodha Eco Park.

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