



## Taj Lake Palace

Udaipur, India



### History of Taj Lake Palace

The Taj Lake Palace arises majestically from the serene waters of Lake Pichola. A surreal 18th century marble vision flanked by the enchanting Aravalli mountains on one side, and lofty palaces on the other. Its corridors and courtyards, pavilions and ponds, gardens and fountains, echo with the memories, luxuries and extravagances of a bygone era.

This sonnet in stone was created from the desire of a young man to picnic under the moonlight with a beautiful maiden. Legend has it that a young Maharana Jagat Singh II of the Mewar dynasty longed to woo the beautiful ladies of his zenana on the island palace, Jag Mandir. His father expressly prohibited him from this indulgence with a stern, "Build your own palace". The moment he ascended the throne, that's exactly what the Maharana did.

On May 4, 1743, on a four-acre island near the northern shore of the lake, the foundation stone for the impossibly beautiful palace - christened Jag Niwas by and after its founder - was laid. Three years later, a lavish ceremony marked its inauguration. Every beautiful maiden in the zenana attended, and the hedonistic revelry was captured by the court bard, Nandram, in his lyrical poem, Jagatvilas. Thoroughbred horses, elephants, clothes and jewellery were showered as gifts upon the king's noblemen and court bards. The celebration, true to the extravagance of royal India, lasted for three glorious days.

But the history of the palace really begins eras earlier with the royal Sons of the Sun, the first rulers of the ancient House of Mewar, believed to be direct descendants of the legendary King Rama himself. When Chittor, the traditional capital of Mewar was overrun by the Mughals, the ruler Udai Singh was wise enough to realise his fortresses were no longer impregnable to the onslaught of modern warfare. He made a strategic decision to flee the city and look for a safer place to set up his new capital. He returned to the cradle of his ancestors, the Aravalli hills. He knew the surrounding forests, hills and lakes would afford him all the protection he needed and laid the first stones of the city he christened Udaipur after himself. For four centuries, it stood steadfast as the majestic capital of the Mewars, until it was absorbed into the state of Rajasthan in 1949.

Maharana Karan Singh, grandson of Rana Pratap, one of the most famous Mewar rulers, was the great builder who set up many of the rooms, courtyards and halls of the great City Palace. A spectacular pleasure palace, with the beautiful zenana as its centrepiece, arose from his vision. It was christened the Jag Mandir. The palace holds a special place in the annals of the family's history for a tale of immeasurable hospitality. A young Mughal prince, Khurram, rebelled against his emperor father, and sought refuge at the palace, the home of the traditional enemy of the Mughals. He was still a guest at the palace when his father died, and it was from here that he made the proclamation of his succession to the emperor's throne as Shah Jahan. Folklore has it that when Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal, he was inspired by his memories of the Jag Mandir.

We traipse forward in time once more to the vibrant Maharana Jagat Singh. Ignoring the crisis his kingdom was facing with the oppression by the Marathas, he continued to live lavishly, chasing every pleasure life had to offer. While his subjects may not have thanked him, we certainly do. For without his carefree joie de vivre, the spectacular Lake Palace would never have existed. Since it first arose from the lake in all its majesty, writers, poets and artists of all kinds have tripped over themselves in a vain effort to describe the unearthly beauty of the palace and its surroundings. Said the Vicereine Alice, Countess of Reading, "The lake looked like every tale of fairyland rolled into one, thousands of lamps, hundreds of temples, cupolas, and marble palaces, with a dark blue velvet sky overhead, bestrewn with stars... The Children of the Sun must indeed reign here for a more beautiful light I have never seen than that which bathes these palaces."

As both, royal abode and luxury hotel, The Lake Palace has captured the affection of the likes of Lord Curzon, Vivien Leigh, Queen Elizabeth and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. And it continues to steal the hearts of visitors from around the globe.