



# RURAL UDAIPUR

By Piers Helsen

for Hikers & Bikers



# FATEH GARH

*(Below) A magical sight as the whole of the City Palace complex is gloriously lit up so that the entire structure appears to be actually radiating sunlight.*

*(Facing page) The bold, formidable shell of the Monsoon Palace sits high above Udaipur and the surrounding countryside. This edifice can be seen from a considerable distance. At night it is illuminated with golden floodlights imbuing it with the ethereal, almost magical beauty; as if it is floating high in the sky.*

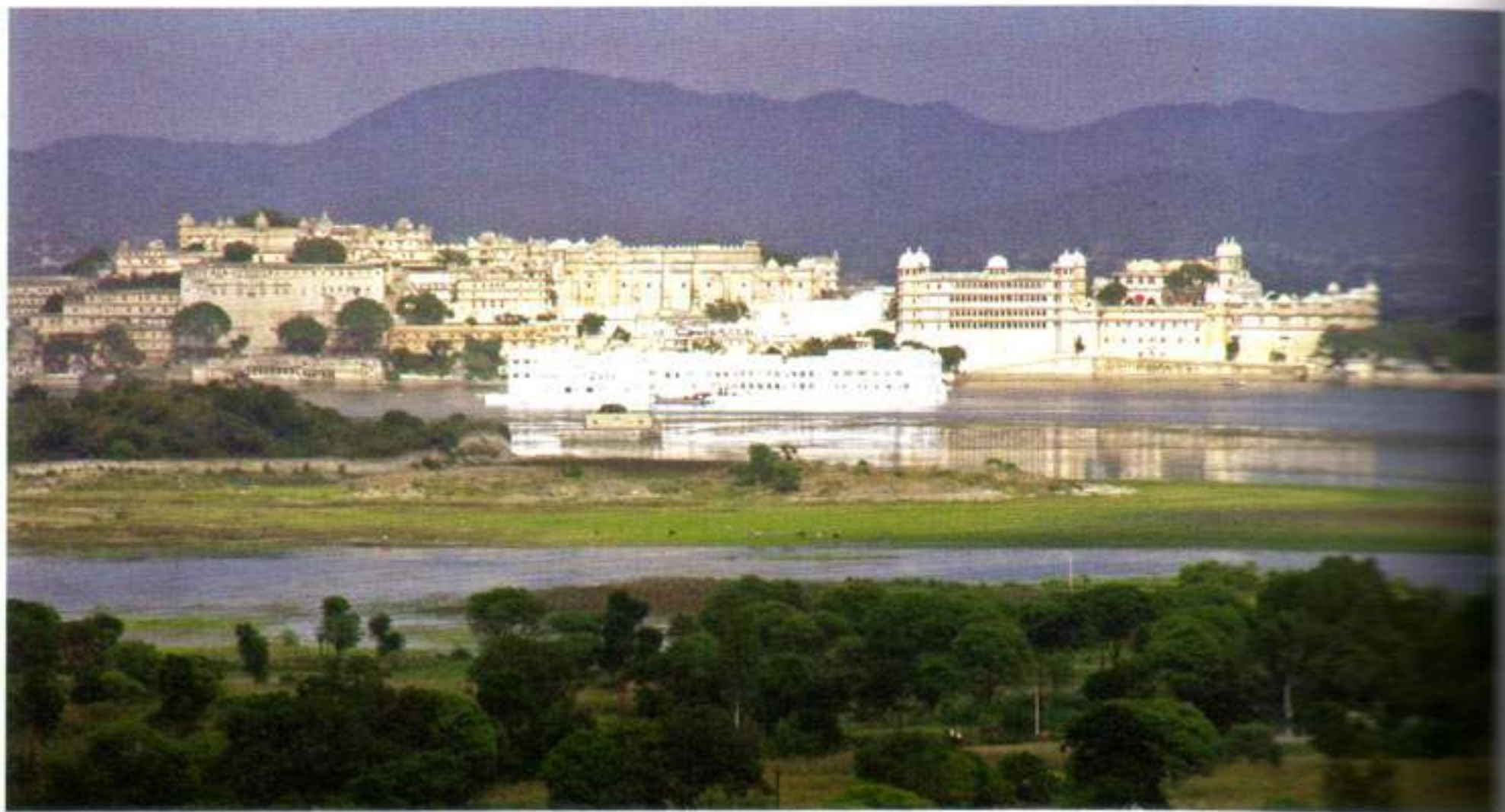
There are certain aspects of the local rural life that need to be addressed if visitors wish to enjoy all that the glorious countryside has to offer. So many people travel from city-to-city and monument to monument but there comes a time when the body yearns for peace and quiet, beauty and solitude, and thus the rural outback comes into its own. Whilst some visitors are happy to make day trips, hikes, treks or whatever along the countryside route of their choice, there will be others who would prefer to shun city life for a period and dream under the velvety starlit night, listening to the cicada orchestra rather than the din of traffic.

High up on a hilltop between the village of Bujra and the smaller settlement of Kalaroi, the Kelwa family have created Fateh Garh; a hotel-cum-sanctuary. Fateh Garh can be considered a role-model of sustainable development and certainly many aspects of its concept are lessons in eco-friendly planning.

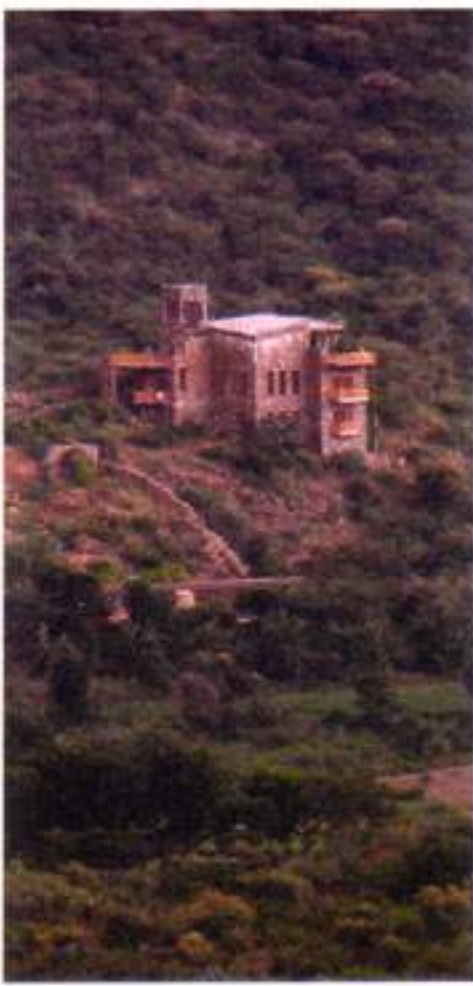
Fateh Garh stands as a bastion of stone at the crown of twenty-five acres of wild, rugged hillock: much of the surrounding slopes of scrub and low to medium-height trees are being planted out with thousands of 'the correct' species of indigenous trees in a huge effort to improve the climate, attract rainfall, reverse soil erosion and, well, enhance the cosmetic beauty. Some have been reintroduced to form denser patches of woodland. Babul, Arjun, Neem, Mango, Teak, Peepul, Jacaranda, Amaltas, Gulmor, Shisham, Mahuwa, Kachnar, Champa and various other hardwoods are growing where long ago they used to be.

The wildlife should also be happy about this. Many of the birds and animals of the region are gradually realising that this protected hill provides a safe habitat for them; such places are helping to redress the environmental disasters of the past that have, in extreme cases caused the decimation, even extinction of certain species.

The nearby Sajjangarh Sanctuary is home to several species of flora and fauna and to a certain extent the land surrounding Fateh Garh will act as an unofficial extension to the sanctuary.







*(Above) My home in Sisarma, as seen from Fateh Garh.*



*(Right) A patchwork of fields and the rocky bed of Amarjok Nadi present an interesting view below Fateh Garh.*

*(Below) Fateh Garh blends subtly with the surrounding wilderness.*

There are strong indications that there is a niche market aimed at those people who do not want a hurried, hassled sightseeing rush around the monuments of Rajasthan, but who prefer a far more laid-back and varied holiday.

There are many heritage properties around the state; old forts, palaces and mansions that have been renovated and now serve as hotels though very few within an easy distance of Udaipur. However, people coming to Udaipur do want to see this lovely city, so Fateh Garh is now able to provide a perfect combination of easy access to Udaipur with the blissful tranquility of accommodation in the countryside.







To the west I looked over chain upon chain of virgin mountains until the farthest ones were so pale as to almost disappear. That western terrain abounds with natural loveliness and is truly a trekker's paradise.

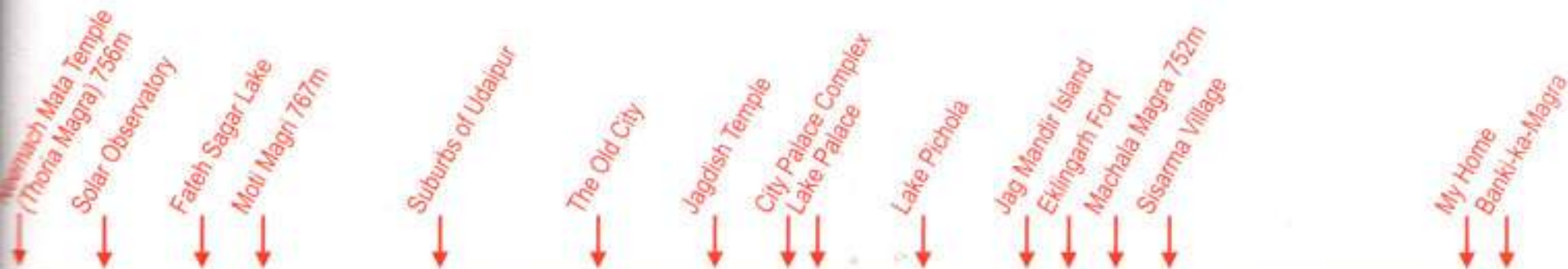
The view to the north is particularly mountainous, with the rough, jagged peaks that stand sentinel over Bari Lake. However the view is dominated by the towering Bansdara Mountain, topped by the formidable edifice of the Monsoon Palace surrounded by its afforested slopes that are home to a wildlife sanctuary. At night the Monsoon Palace is floodlit in a golden glow that makes it appear as though it is floating in the sky.

Udaipur spreads out to the east; the little Neemach Mata temple atop Thoria Mountain near Fateh Sagar (lake), Fateh Sagar itself and even it's island observatory are visible, Moti Magri, Ambavgarh Hill, then the Old City, the pale, creamy stone of the palaces and the expanse of Lake Pichola, backed by the hump of Machala Magra. The right edge of this view is closed by the massif of Banki-ka-Magra.

I watched transfixed as the sun poked out between heavy clouds. A ray of light beamed down on a small housing colony to the edge of the city, then picked out the golden domes of the Udai Vilas Hotel. The clouds scudded on. The sun's rays disappeared for a moment then all of a sudden it was as if stage lights had been switched off and the centre spot turned on to highlight the star.

A magical sight lay ahead as the entire City Palace complex lit up dramatically and gloriously so that the entire structure appeared to be actually radiating sunlight. The lake twinkled and sparkled it's creamy reflection and then the sun disappeared again. The show was over and the moment had gone.

(Above) The group of peaks that rise majestically to the north-west of Fateh Garh.





(Right) Sunset over Bujra.

(Below) Some of the relics of reclaimed architecture that have found a new home in Fateh Bagh.

(Bottom) The sweep of the north-west to south-east panorama from Fateh Garh includes a fascinating view of Udaipur - in the daytime one can clearly see the details and every night various monuments glow under flood-lamps whilst the waters of Lake Pichola twinkle with a million stars of reflected light. The south-east to north-west view is one of absolute rural beauty. Indeed, Fateh Garh seems to stand between two worlds.



Fateh Garh goes much further along the 'eco-friendly' route: a substantial part of their electricity needs are produced through alternative means such as through solar and wind power. Biodegradable waste material is used as a source of bio-energy. There is a comprehensive water-recycling system as well as rainwater harvesting system as well as a strict prohibition on plastics and harmful chemicals.

An interesting concept that Jitendra Singh Kelwa has employed previously with great success is the utilisation of old building materials in the Fateh Garh's structure. Virtually all the timber employed is recycled. To a large extent the pieces of architectural antiques that he has acquired have played a part in shaping the design: old columns, exquisitely-carved arches, plinths, statues, inscribed tablets, jharokhas and statuary have actually dictated the overall style, if not in some cases, the layout. And they certainly go a long way to creating ambience and interest.

Leaving behind the environmental side of things, the view from up there is simply amazing. Funnily enough it doesn't actually look that high from a distance, but that is misleading. I gasped at the uninterrupted panorama that spread out all around - to the south I looked down to the Amarjok Nadi (river) and the village of Bujra and gazed beyond along the broad sweep of the valley, with hulking massif of Banki-ka-Magra to the left and the long ridge of Bujra Mountain to the right.

I was pleased to be able to spot my own house in the mid-ground though in common with Fateh Garh, it is built of rustic local stone and blends well into the scenery.



Darara-ka-Magra 892m

Bani-ka-Magra 913m

Bani Lake

Monsoon Palace  
Bansdara Mtn. 936m





