



Tech Bros on The Range
Why are coders dressing like cowboys? **D3**

OFF DUTY

Spring Sequins
It's April. You need a bag. Have fun. **D4**



FASHION | FOOD | DESIGN | TRAVEL | GEAR

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ELIZABETH COETZEE/WSJ. FOOD STYLING BY KAITLIN WAYNE. PROP. STYLING BY MARINA BEVILACQUA

THE WAY THEY STACK UP High in butterfat and cultured for complexity, European-style butters remain a relative bargain compared with caviar, single-malt Scotch and other consumable luxuries.

Not long ago, supermarket butter options were fairly pedestrian. The choices have since proliferated, and the quality is off the charts. Here, a guide to the revolution in good butter—an accessible luxury, even as tariffs loom.

BY ALEKSANDRA CRAPANZANO

IN 2001, Vermont dairy farmer Diane St. Clair sent a Ziploc bag of hand-churned butter across the country to Thomas Keller at the French Laundry, his seminal restaurant in California’s Napa Valley. At the time, St. Clair was selling her flavorful, labor-intensive, European-style butter for \$4 a pound at her local market under the Animal Farm Creamery label and was about to go belly-up. “Her lush, creamy, canary-yellow butter changed the way I viewed butter permanently,” Keller said. “It was truly the most extraordinary one I had ever tasted. I ordered every ounce she had in

stock, and it has remained on my menu ever since.”

Animal Farm butter now retails for \$60 a pound. Fans of the TV series “The Bear” may recall the obsessive chef Carmy spending \$11,268 to get it for his fledgling restaurant in season 3. But the fever for European-style butter is hardly limited to top-tier chefs.

In the U.S. today, supermarket butter cases offer a giddy proliferation of options. Imports from France, Ireland, Denmark and Finland mingle with mass-produced domestic butters labeled “European-style,” and, often, local artisan butters. A butter boom has been building steadily for a couple of decades, with U.S. butter consumption jumping from 4.5 pounds per capita in 2003 to 6.5 pounds in 2023 (the most recent year for which U.S. De-

partment of Agriculture data is available). As planned tariffs threaten to spike prices, now is a great time to consider what makes a quality butter worth buying and determine how to get the most out of the investment.

In the European Style

When St. Clair began making butter in the 1990s, most U.S. supermarkets sold mass-produced “sweet cream” butter. Significantly lower in butterfat than European butters, this smooth, neutral-tasting product was machine-churned from fresh cream. St. Clair sought something with more character. “I had to buy books from the late 1800s to learn how butter had

Please turn to page D9

Inside



‘WITH THIS USED DRESS, I THEE WED’
Brides are buying vintage to find gowns that aren’t all over Instagram **D2**



TRAVEL LIKE A STINGY PRINCE
Yes, you can stay in an Indian palace without a royal budget **D6**



MAN’S BEST TILE
Commission hand-painted Delft ceramics that depict your favorite things **D7**



BACK TO BASICS
How a disillusioned cookbook author regained her love of food **D8**



MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION Rawla Narlai, a former hunting lodge, sits in the Aravalli hills, an hour’s drive from Ranakpur’s Jain temples.

Rajasthan’s Penny-Wise Palaces

On a nostalgic return to India, a traveler seeks the authentic grandeur she recalled, but—here’s the tricky part—on a budget

By SOPHY ROBERTS

IN 1992, I went back-packing for six months in India and wrote weekly letters to my father to stay in touch with home. Rereading them now, I can trace the start of my love affair with Rajasthan, a state in northwest India with a bejeweled history. When it achieved independence in 1947, India had over 560 princely states, each

more extravagant than the next with strings of polo ponies, caparisoned elephants and lavish palaces. That legacy lingers in the stops many tourists make when visiting Rajasthan for the first time: Travelers go from the “pink” city of Jaipur (painted that hue in 1876 to welcome Queen Victoria’s son) to the “blue” city of Jodhpur (the paint color used by the Brahmin caste) then on to the “lake” city of Udaipur (its

swan-white palace seemingly afloat on the water), with an occasional detour to the desert city of Jaisalmer. I did not follow this route back then and often strayed. My letters described, for instance, poking around Deeg Palace near Bharatpur, far from the popular spots. Still, I did wait for a night train with a \$6 pot of tea and sandwiches in Jodhpur’s Umaid Bhawan Palace. And there was a sojourn in Udaipur and a \$10 dinner of poached fish and profiteroles at the Lake Palace hotel. Three decades later, my credit card limit would prevent me from retracing my steps. Deeg Palace retains its charm but a room at Umaid Bhawan now goes for \$540 to \$1,370, depending on the season. Top suites at the Taj Lake Palace start at a nightly rate of \$16,200. Nor could I afford one of Rajasthan’s newly built five-star venues. Oberoi Resorts’ luxury “Vilas” palaces emulate the old ones, minus the poetic patina of past centuries. At Jaipur’s Oberoi Rajvillas, designed as a Rajput fort, rates for two people sharing begin at \$2,200. De-



In Jaipur’s Old Town, the 225-year-old Samode Haveli townhouse has mirror-work walls.

scribed as a “reincarnation of the royal mahals,” the Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts’ Jaipur property features a ballroom and lawn ideal for an opulent wedding. The parties there are sparkling (I’ve been to one), the service exceptional, but I have to wonder: Is big-brand inflation and the desire for luxury and amenities diminishing the soul of the Rajasthan palace experience? When I booked a return trip to Rajasthan in January, my goal was clear: I wanted to hunt down that textured authenticity I remembered, places that were charmingly imperfect, yet quintessentially regal. And not too extravagantly priced. I first considered Jaipur’s Samode Haveli (“haveli”

means mansion). Descendants of the former royal family of Samode still own and run the 225-year-old townhouse, but good luck booking one of its 50 rooms in high season (December to February) when doubles

discovery: a newly loved architectural masterpiece and former home of Sikar’s last Maharajah. When I arrived, it fulfilled my imperfect-perfect criterion. There were moments when I did my best to hide

I wanted to hunt down that textured authenticity of India, a place charmingly imperfect yet quintessentially regal

start at \$515. Its decor has been refined, but its spirit remains in details like its glass-mirrored “Sheesh Mahal” walls. Samode Haveli makes no attempt to escape its context, the hum and chaos of Jaipur’s Old Town. Unable to ensconce myself there, I pondered a return to Ranvas in Nagaur, where I’d visited in 2017; doubles now start at \$295 (see “More ‘Royal’ Hotels with a Soul”). Owned by Jodhpur’s former royal family, it is out of the way, en route from Jaipur to Bikaner, but worth a detour.

I was all set until I spoke with Alice Daunt, a British travel agent, who tipped me off about Deeppura Garh, an over 200-year-old royal haveli about a three-hour drive from Jaipur with doubles starting at \$340. In 2005, when Italian jewelry designer Maria Grazia Baldan first came across Deeppura Garh, it was abandoned: crumbling courtyards, frescoes almost lost, a camel grazing under the neem tree. Baldan bought it 10 years later. Following five years of renovations by Rajasthani craftspeople, she opened it as a 10-room hotel in 2020, but was forced to close it a month later because of the Covid-19 pandemic. This back story made Deeppura Garh feel like a

from a loquacious waiter and, on the first night, a village wedding rocked the haveli’s very foundations. The overprotective peacocks strutting its ramparts gave me a fright when they swooped onto the lawns. And yet? I was utterly enchanted, watching rural life from the rooftop, wandering the grounds’ fruit and flower beds thick with bees and marigolds, observing the owner overseeing the pruning of the poolside frangipani trees. I felt at peace in the saffron-colored meditation room, the writing room hand-painted with the scenes of an Indian jungle and the “secret garden” I found on day two. My room, with its white lime plaster “araish” floors and walls, was cool and welcoming. The pillared veranda became my reading space. When evening fell, I ate in front of an open fire: home-made Italian pastas, roasted garden vegetables and delicious Indian curries. Since the thoughtful meals require slow cooking, orders are placed at breakfast. On my last night, a crescent moon half-hung in an indigo sky, I felt like I’d gone back to those Jaisalmer ramparts of 30 years ago. So I wrote an email to my father, suggesting he should book it for next winter.



The author’s pick: Deeppura Garh, a royal haveli outside Jaipur.

More ‘Royal’ Hotels With a Soul

For historic digs full of character, try these former lavish residences that lie outside the typical Rajasthan route

Rawla Narlai is in the Aravalli Hills, a magical area between Jaipur and Udaipur that is under an hour’s drive from Ranakpur’s Jain temples. Owned by an offshoot of the Jodhpur royals, this former hunting lodge immerses you in village life and organizes dining “experiences”—on a rooftop, by a campfire or in a lakeside tent. Doubles from \$235.

Ranvas, Nagaur is a wonderfully atmospheric maze of 10 havelis (originally the inner sanctum for the women of the royal household), each of which contains up to four rooms and a courtyard. Set inside Ahichatragarh Fort, the palace-garden complex is under restoration with help from London’s Courtauld Institute of Art and the Getty Foundation. Each February, for the Sufi Festival, the hotel sets up an encampment of royal shikar hunting tents. Doubles from \$295.

Ahilya Fort, which rises up dramatically from the Narmada River, is owned and run by Richard Holkar, the son of the last Maharajah of Indore. The 18th-century fort holds 19 rooms set in six buildings in Madhya Pradesh, a 2½-hour drive from the Indore airport. There is no restaurant, but guests can order from the daily “fixed menu” and have food served in a scenic area on site. Full board from \$350 per person per night.



An elegant room at Ranvas, Nagaur



Tasty offerings at Ahilya Fort

The Rajbari Bawali is a 300-year-old Bengali palace that is a 90-minute drive south of Kolkata. Interiors have been refurbished with traditional bricks, wooden shutters and recycled Burmese teak from antique furniture, and the plaster walls retain the building’s nostalgic character. Two rooms overlook a pond; roomier bungalows accommodate a family of four. Doubles from \$150.