

Chittorgarh Chronicles

We've all grown up reading about the fierce battles and sacrifices of the Rajputs of Chittorgarh in our school books. Once a powerful seat of the Mewar dynasty, until Maharaja Udai Singh II shifted the capital to Udaipur, Chittorgarh is always remembered for its 'fight-till-the-end' Rajputana spirit.

Words Edwina D'souza

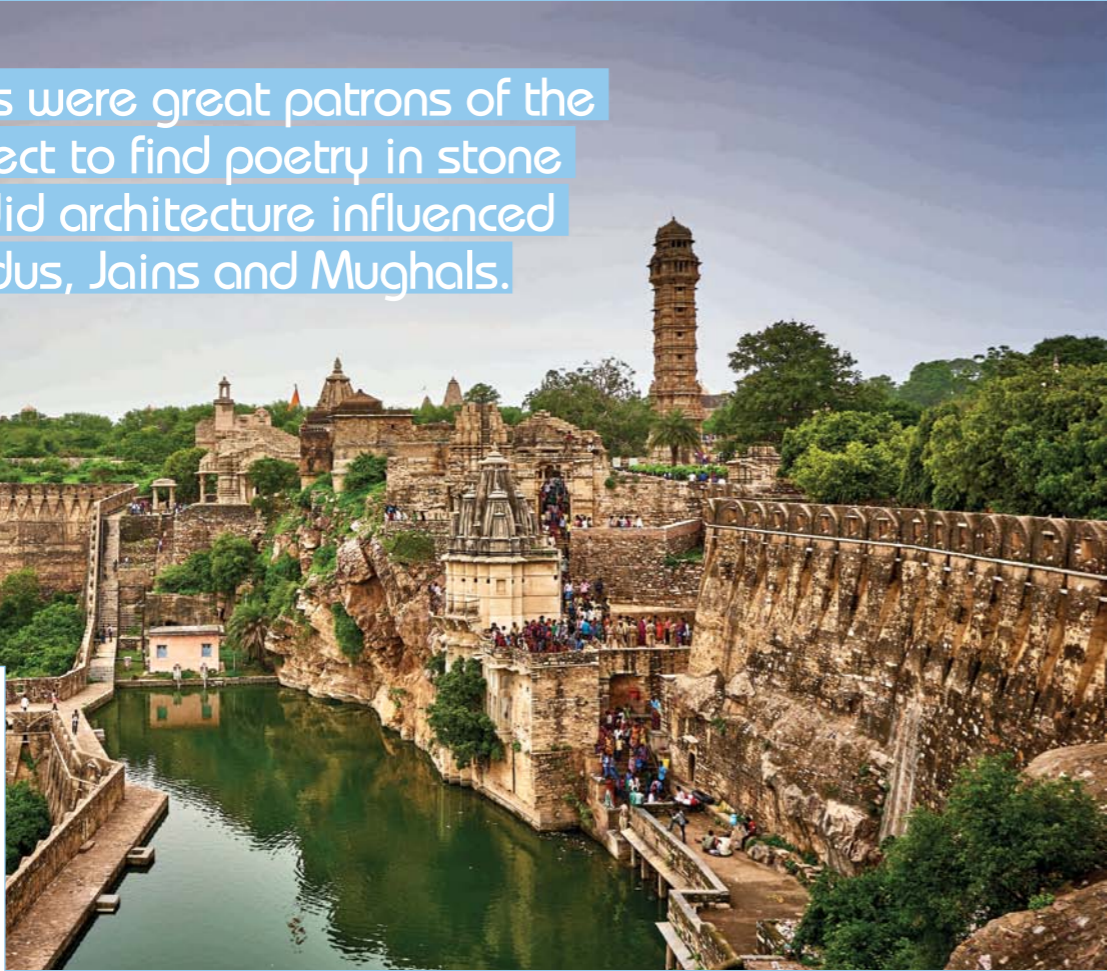
According to legends, Chittorgarh was founded by one of the Pandavas – Bhima. Historically, Chittorgarh is said to have been built during the 7th century by the Mauryan dynasty. Bappa Rawal, attributed as the founder of the Mewar dynasty, would later capture the fort around 8th century to expand his kingdom stretching up to Gujarat.

At its prime, Chittorgarh was not only one of the largest but also the strongest and wealthiest forts in India. Situated on the banks of the Berach River, the fortified township boasted an enviable location in the heart of the Mewar kingdom. Invaders eyed Chittorgarh for its strategic location between the Delhi Sultanate and Gujarat that had an easy access to the sea. To conquer, Chittorgarh would invariably mean to command rule over the northern and west regions; which explains why Chittorgarh had such a tumultuous past.

In 1303, the Sultan of Delhi, Alau-din Khilji defeated the Rajputs when he was supposedly besotted by Rajput Rani Padmini's beauty. The Mewars managed to reclaim Chittorgarh and re-establish their rule in 1326. Two centuries later, in 1533, Bahadur Shah, the Sultan of Gujarat captured the fort once again. But perhaps the most brutal of all sieges was in 1568, when Mughal Emperor Akbar attacked Maharana Udai Singh II and seized the fort.



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In passing

Chittorgarh Fort is a part of UNESCO World Heritage monuments under the Hill forts of Rajasthan. The remaining five forts that have been declared as UNESCO heritage are Kumbhalgarh Fort, Ranthambore Fort, Gagron Fort, Jaisalmer Fort and Amber Fort.

The Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation organises Sound and light show at the Chittorgarh Fort during evenings. Timing: 7pm to 8pm everyday.

Spread over 700 acres of land, exploring the Chittorgarh fort complex is likely to consume your entire day, but time will snap by soaking in myriad stories of the myths and legends associated with this place. The Rajputs were great patrons of the art, so expect to find poetry in stone and splendid architecture influenced by the Hindus, Jains and Mughals.

As you enter Chittor town, a road leads from the Aravalli foothills to the summit of Chittorgarh Fort passing

through seven gates or pols that were built according to Hindu Vastu. There was a time when up to 70,000 people lived inside the fort complex. Today, however, only a fraction of that number resides, and new constructions have been prohibited.

The 15th century Kumbhashyam temple commissioned by Rana Kumbha in 1449 is your first stop inside the fort. The temple is dedicated to Lord Krishna, and the inside walls are covered with panels depicting stories from Krishna's life. Right besides the temple, there's a

small shrine dedicated to queen poetess Mirabai. A Rajput princess, who married in the powerful Mewar royal family, she is believed to have lived in Chittorgarh for a brief time before moving to Dwarka to dedicate her entire life to Lord Krishna.

Rani Padmini's Palace

The palace is a major crowd puller due to the legend that surrounds the queen. Tour guides narrate her tales with an animated enthusiasm. Built in the middle of a lotus pond, the Rani Padmini palace is an 18th century reconstruction of the original. Nonetheless, one is quick to imagine the beauty of this place back in its day, surrounded by clear waters and beautiful lawns. Rani Padmini's Palace is inaccessible and can be viewed from the main palace.

The Vijaystambha

Also called the Victory Tower, it is a majestic structure built in 1440 by Rana Kumbha to commemorate the victory over Mahmud Khilji. Standing tall at 122 feet, it boasts of some exquisite carvings, both on the exteriors and interiors of the tower. A narrow spiralled stairway allows visitors to reach the top where you're rewarded with a bird's eye view of the beautiful complex. The Kirti

Stambh, or the Tower of Fame is a 12th century monument, built by a Jain merchant to pay tribute to the first Jain tirthankara - Adinath. Far smaller in scale at 72 feet, but an equally captivating sight with intricately carved sculptures of the Dighambaras adorning all sides of the tower.

One of the newer constructions inside the heritage complex, the 19th century Fateh Singh Palace, has been converted into a Government museum where visitors can view restored artefacts, Rajputana clothing, armour and paintings. (Timing: 10am to 5pm)

Don't forget to drop by the Rana Kumbha Palace, easily one of the biggest structural sites inside Chittorgarh. The crumbling ruins give away the grandeur of this once beautiful palace where the kings and queens resided. Stay back to watch the sunset from here, overlooking Chittorgarh town - a fitting end to your visit.

