

the daily spectacle of ritual devotion. An hour-long ride in a rowboat along the bank of the Ganges reveals many hundreds of pilgrims gathered along the stone steps, or ghats, which lead down to the river. Devout Hindus stand waist-deep in the holy Ganges to offer prayers to the rising sun.

Corpses are rinsed in the river before being cremated along on the river bank. This is a sight never to be forgotten. While it is unusual to witness a corpse floating down the Ganges, in fact, several categories of Hindus are thrown directly into the river rather than being cremated. Those not cremated include pregnant women, lepers and those who have died of snake bites!

Incidentally, Benares, the city's former name, was an Anglicization of a Mughal corruption of Varanasi. The name Varanasi itself is a combination of the names of two nearby rivers, Varuna and Asi.

Varanasi is 415 km northeast of Khajuraho and 710 km southeast Delhi.

UDAIPUR

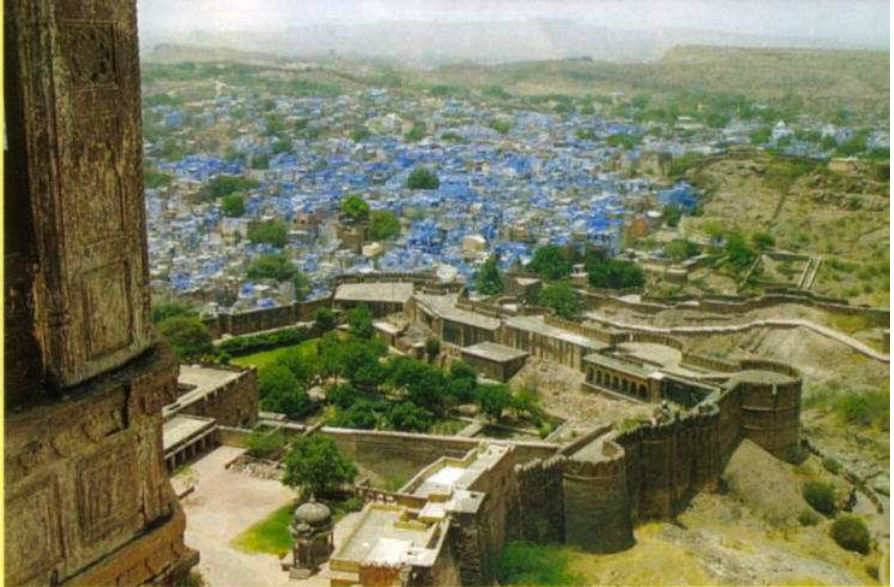
Udaipur, Rajasthan's "sunrise city," was established in 1567; and a 10-km-long wall was built around it. Of the original eleven gates, five still survive. The most spectacular sight is the City Palace, the largest palace complex in Rajasthan. Half of the palace is still used today by the royal family. Built over a period of 400 years, the City Palace sits on a 1.5-km-long rock formation overlooking Lake Pichola. Dating back to the fourteenth century, the lake covers a maximum of 8 square km. But, fed only by rainfall, it is often much smaller. Udaipur has been subject to draught for the past six years, so today the size of Lake Pichola is very much reduced.



Tourists typically take a rowboat ride along the bank of the Ganges River at Varanasi in order to witness the many Hindu pilgrims who come there for ritual purification.



Four Buddhist monks pose by the roadside near Leh in the Ladakh area of India's state of Jammu and Kashmir. The author gave these monks a lift from their near monastery to this barren place, where they disembarked. It is unclear where they were heading in this desolate region.



From a balcony on Jodhpur's Mehrangarh Fort, founded in 1459, there are vistas over the city's many blue buildings. While originally only Brahmins painted their houses blue, the use of blue house paint spread as the indigo in it apparently serves to repel mosquitoes.

Udaipur is also famous for its luxurious marble Lake Palace Hotel, which was created in 1962 from a former palace on an island in Lake Pichola. This magnificent hotel property features beautiful interior courtyards and terraces as well as a small marble swimming pool. In fact, the James Bond movie *Octopussy* was filmed there.

Udaipur is 407 km southwest of Jaipur and 670 km southwest of Delhi.

JODHPUR

Prior to the arrival in India of the British with their merchant ships, Jodhpur thrived as a staging post for camel caravans traversing the route between the Middle East and China. The city traded in silk, coffee, sandalwood, spices and opium, which is still grown in Rajasthan today.

Towering Mehrangarh Fort, founded in 1459 and 5 km from the city center,

contains one of the most dramatic of Rajasthan's edifices. The palace, completed in 1853, offers superb views over the blue city. Traditionally just Jodhpur's Brahmin homes were painted blue. But the use of blue house paint has spread further as the indigo in the paint serves as an insect repellent.

A masterpiece of medieval defense engineering, Rudyard Kipling once wrote that the Mehrangarh Fort and its palace were created by "angels, fairies and giants."

Jodhpur is 275 km northwest of Udaipur, 343 km southwest of Jaipur and 599 km southwest of Delhi.

LEH

A final, unusual suggestion for a second trip to India is Leh in Ladakh, the "Land of Passes." This region of Kashmir, primarily Buddhist, is culturally similar to Tibet. Leh, the ancient capital of Ladakh, lies on a 3,555-meter-high plateau in the Indus Valley. From afar, Leh's Khar Palace, the former royal residence overlooking the city, looks similar to (but smaller than) the fabulous Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet.

Ladakh's population was swelled by refugees who fled their native land when China invaded Tibet in 1959. Because India only opened Ladakh to tourism in 1974, the region still retains much of its Tibetan character today.

Sightseeing in the vicinity of Leh involves visiting various hilltop monasteries called gompas, which were built as places of worship and meditation. In addition, gompas serve as religious schools for young monks. Hemis Gompa, 40 km from Leh, is the largest and wealthiest monastery in Ladakh.