



World Egg Day

World Egg Day is celebrated every year to highlight the importance of eggs in our diet and daily lives. Eggs are a rich source of high-quality protein, vitamins, minerals, and healthy fats. They are affordable, easy to cook, and enjoyed by people in many different cultures. This special day also spreads awareness about the nutritional benefits of eggs and their role in supporting healthy growth and development. World Egg Day encourages people to include eggs as part of a balanced diet. It also appreciates farmers and poultry workers who help provide eggs to millions of people around the world.



The Wonder Of Travel

At some point, it becomes clear that this is not really about the food at all. Nor, for that matter, about the setting, though both are exceptional. It is about the feeling, increasingly rare in today's version of luxury travel, of being somewhere that has not been staged or constructed for effect. Fort Barli does not try to impress. It simply endures, lived in, cared for, and quietly shared.



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brating my birthday at a rather indulgent beachfront resort in Goa. This year, the plan was very different: a long drive out of Gurgaon into the quieter, lesser-travelled heart of Rajasthan.

Rajasthan, of course, has a way of setting expectations. Over time, one gets used to a certain kind of spectacle, forts that rise dramatically from hilltops, palaces that cascade down in terraces, and heritage hotels that present history with a well-rehearsed sense of theatre. Fort Barli is not that kind of place.

Set about ninety minutes south of Ajmer in what can only be

described as proper rural Rajasthan, it appears at first glance almost disarmingly modest, more ancestral home than luxury hotel. But step through its gates, and the distinction becomes immediately clear. This is not a place that has been restored for guests. It is a home that has simply chosen to include them.

We are greeted by the current generation who run the place. Divyraj and Nityasree, along with their delightful baby daughter. Add to that Sky, an overenthusiastic retriever cross, and Blue, a French bulldog with a mind of his own, and the tone is set almost immediately.

At most heritage hotels, hospitality tends to feel polished and pro-



fessional. Here, it feels instinctive, less like service, more like being folded into someone's everyday life, with Divyraj himself often taking the lead in showing guests around his home.

After the long drive and a welcome cooling drink, we are shown to our quarters in the Darbar Mahal. The fort has only ten rooms, and ours is among the largest, so expansive that it requires two air-conditioners to keep it comfortable. The furnishings are unmistakably rural, with elaborate zardozi and salma embroidery on raw silk lending the space an understated but unmistakable sense of royalty.

The next morning brings with it one of those moments that quietly define a place. I am awakened by a flute. Drawn by the sound, I find Rajendraj seated cross-legged beneath a lone neem tree in the mardana, playing to no audience in particular. It is a simple scene, almost incidental, and yet deeply evocative. That, in many ways, is Fort Barli: unassuming, and all the more powerful for it.

After breakfast in the Diwan Khana, where ancestral portraits

look down with quiet authority, Divyraj leads us through the fort, up narrow staircases into the zenana. Each room tells its own story through its size, layout, and murals, some painstakingly restored, others deliberately left untouched, creating a striking contrast between past and present. Beyond the walls, the village stretches out in the bright sunlight, leading to a tranquil water body fringed with banyan trees from which Barli derives its name.

Lunch is a classic Rajasthani affair: dal baati churma, rich, hearty, and steeped in history. As Kesar, who looks after us during the meal, explains, these simple dough balls once sustained Rajput warriors on long campaigns, baked under the desert sun. It is the kind of detail that adds depth to the experience, though here, it is offered without ceremony, as part of a larger, lived-in narrative.

As Divyraj puts it, the idea of Fort Barli is refreshingly simple: to



#FORT BARLI



slow down and not feel compelled to do very much at all. After the sensory overload of cities like Jaipur or Jodhpur, this feels less like inactivity than recovery. And so, for a while, that is exactly what I do, floating in the small pool set on one of the bastions, gazing up at an uninterrupted blue sky occasionally marked by the fading trails of aircraft high above. Time seems to loosen its grip ever so slightly.

For those inclined to explore, the village lies just beyond the fort gates. A walk through its narrow lanes reveals potters at work, cenotaphs with fading frescoes, and stepwells that speak of another era. Guests can also opt for a leisurely bullock cart ride through the village, or even a private picnic set up under ancient trees, experiences that extend the fort's unhurried rhythm into the surrounding landscape.

One feature on the horizon keeps drawing the eye, a solitary

hillock rising from the otherwise flat landscape. We head there one evening towards Shikrani Doongar, and after a short scramble to the top, find a small, weathered temple and a sweeping view of the village below, the water catching the last of the fading light. It is a quiet, unhurried sunset, less dramatic than most, but entirely in keeping with the gentle rhythm of the place.

An early morning visit to a nearby lake with our guide, Chumnilal, brings a different kind of stillness. Lapwings skim the surface with sharp, restless calls, a solitary stork stands motionless in the shallows, and a flash of electric blue, the kingfisher, cuts across the water before disappearing just as quickly. It is a quiet, unforged experience, revealing itself only if you are willing to slow down and pay attention.

But what lingers most are the interactions back at the fort. Divyraj and Nityasree join us for meals, their easy conversation adding a layer of warmth that no amount of formal service can replicate. By the end of our stay, it feels less like we have been

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looked after, and more like we have been included. It becomes increasingly clear that this is Fort Barli's true distinction. Where many heritage hotels impress through scale or design, this one works more quietly, through presence, memory, and an intimacy that cannot be manufactured. For the grand finale on my birthday, the head chef, Ranjeet, prepares what can only be described as a feast fit for a king. A procession of Rajasthani classics arrives on gleaming silver thalis, jeera rice, palak chicken, urad ki dal, dahi baingan, methi papad ki sabzi, ker sangri, each dish rich, robust, and unapologetically indulgent, followed, inevitably, by more

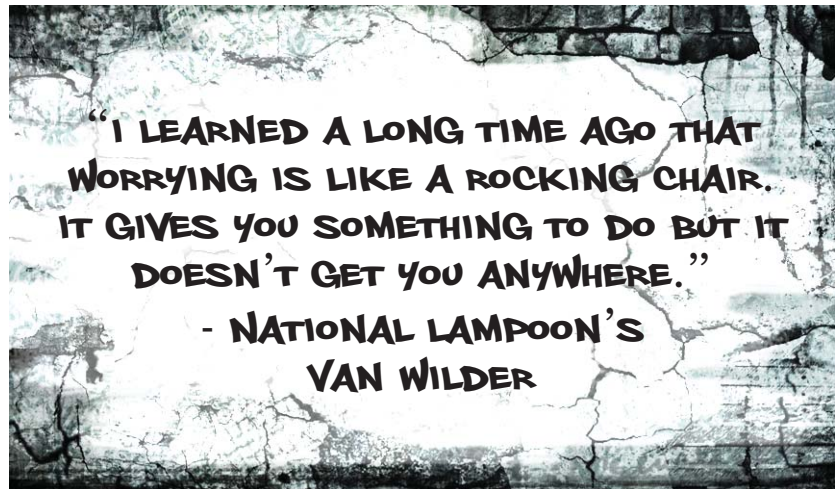
desserts than one has any business attempting. Ordinarily, such private dining experiences are set up in the beautifully painted Rani Mahal, its walls alive with vivid frescoes of deities, parrots and peacocks, creating an atmosphere that feels almost ceremonially regal. But the night is too perfect to be spent indoors. We choose instead to dine in the open courtyard, under a sky thick with stars, the fort walls flickering in candlelight as attentive and unobtrusive service ensures that nothing is ever missing. At some point, it becomes clear

that this is not really about the food at all. Nor, for that matter, about the setting, though both are exceptional. It is about the feeling, increasingly rare in today's version of luxury travel, of being somewhere that has not been staged or constructed for effect. Fort Barli does not try to impress. It simply endures, lived in, cared for, and quietly shared. And as birthdays go, I can think of few better ways to mark the passage of time than in a place that seems, in its own unassuming way, to stand gently outside it.

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THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS

