

PHALTAN RAJWADA: UN Sung GEM

Phaltan Rajwada did not overawe us with its girth and over-the-top splendour. This lovely little palace in the ancient capital of Phaltan, 59 km northeast of the city of Satara, Maharashtra, turned out to be an unsung gem. Its pale blue façade, adorned with elaborate stucco work and trellised balconies, gave it an air of a stately manor rather than that of a palace of a former princely state.

Once past the simple but imposing entrance and the pillared Ram Mandir with its pendulous chandelier, the 19th century palace unfolded like a fairytale. Airy rooms opened onto spacious courtyards. And though we got to see only a part of the three-wing palace, we were thoroughly charmed and intrigued. Indeed, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's first wife, Maharani Sai Bai, hailed from Phaltan and their eldest son, Sambhaji Maharaj, spent much of his childhood in the palace.

We strolled slack-jawed through the royal residence, admiring the polished, hand-carved wood furniture in the

Durbar Hall and its stuccoed ceiling and private meeting rooms that shone under the muted glow of massive chandeliers. Corridors of arched and carved teak wood pillars had windows that opened onto spacious courtyards, making the vast rooms sunlit and breezy. The palace even has a room with elegant silver furniture, including an elaborately carved silver swing; the Gulabi Room with rich red drapes and upholstery; and a vast dining room with an elegantly set dining table. The walls sported gilded portraits of the good-looking royals.

Incidentally, the palace is not open to the general public as it is a private residence but Jakson Inns, a three-star, eco-friendly hotel, located 11 km away, has an arrangement for its guests to visit the palace. Want to feel like a maharaja and maharani for a fleeting span of time? Jakson Inns, the only star quality hotel in the region, can even set up a royal breakfast in the palace with prior permission.

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Clockwise: Outer view of the palace; inner courtyard; the Ram Mandir; a royal chamber

