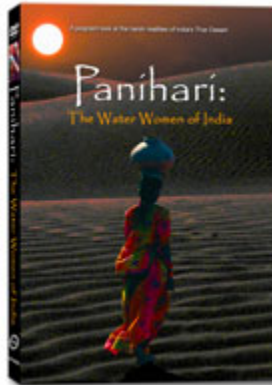




PANIHARI

THE WATER WOMEN OF INDIA

Guidebook



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Facts about Rajasthan

Statistics

- Population: 56.47 million (2001 Census, estimated at more than 58 million now)
- Cities and Towns: 222
- Major cities: Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Kota, Ajmer, Bikaner, Bhilwara, Alwar
- Roads: 61,520 km. (2,846 km National Highway)
- National highways crossing Rajasthan: Delhi-Ahmedabad, Agra-Bikaner, Jaipur-Bhopal and Bhatinda-Kandla
- Climate: Generally dry with monsoon during July-August
- Districts: 32
- Languages: English and Hindi commonly used, as well as indigenous Rajasthani languages
- Literacy: 61.03 %

Geography

The main geographic feature of Rajasthan is the Aravalli Range, which runs through the state from southwest to northeast, almost from one end to another end. Mount Abu is at the southwestern end of the range, although a series of broken ridges continues into Haryana in the direction of Delhi. About three-fifths of Rajasthan lies northwest of the Aravallis, leaving two-fifths on the east and south.

The northwestern portion of Rajasthan is generally sandy and dry, and most of the region is covered by the Thar Desert, which extends into adjoining portions of Pakistan. The Aravalli Ranges intercept the moisture-giving southwest monsoon winds off the Arabian Sea, leaving the northwestern region in a rain shadow. The Thar Desert is thinly populated, and the town of Bikaner is the largest city in the desert. The Northwestern thorn scrub forests lie in a band around the Thar Desert, between the desert and the Aravallis. This region receives less than 750 mm of rain in an average year, and summer temperatures can exceed 45° C in the summer months, and drop below freezing in the winter. The Godwar, Marwar, and Shekhawati regions lie in the thorn scrub forest zone, along with the city of Jodhpur. The Luni River and its tributaries are the major river system of Godwar and Marwar Regions, draining the western slopes of the Aravallis and emptying southwest into the great Rann of Kutch wetland in neighboring Gujarat. The Ghaggar River, which originates in Haryana, is an intermittent stream that disappears into the sands of the Thar Desert in the northern corner of the state.

The Aravalli Range and the lands to the east and southeast of the range are generally more fertile and better watered. This region is home to the Kathiarbar-Gir dry deciduous forests ecoregion, with tropical dry broadleaf forests that include teak, *Acacia*, and other trees. The hilly Vagad region lies in southernmost Rajasthan, on the border with Gujarat. With the exception of Mount Abu, Vagad is the wettest region in Rajasthan, and the most heavily forested. North of Vagad lies the Mewar region, home to the cities of Udaipur

and Chittaurgarh. The Hadoti region lies to the southeast, on the border with Madhya Pradesh. North of Hadoti and Mewar is the Dhundhar region, home to the state capital of Jaipur. Mewar, the easternmost region of Rajasthan, borders Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Eastern and southeastern Rajasthan is drained by the Banas and Chambal rivers, tributaries of the Ganges.

History

Rajasthan has a rich and colorful history making it one of the most popular tourist destinations in India. Shown here is an ancient ruin in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan.

Rajasthan was earlier called Rajputana (state of Rajputs) after the ruling class of Rajputs. *Rajput* which literally means 'son of rulers'. Rajput clans rose to prominence in the 6th century, establishing kingdoms in Rajasthan and across northern India. The Rajputs resisted Muslim incursions into India, although a number of Rajput states became tributaries to the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire during those empires' peak of expansion. As these empires weakened, the Rajputs reasserted their independence. With the decline of the Mughal Empire in the 18th century, Rajputana came under attack from the Marathas and Pindaris, and the Maratha general Sindhia captured Ajmer. The Rajput kings concluded treaties with the British in the early 19th century, accepting British sovereignty in return for local autonomy and protection from the Marathas. Ajmer became a province of British India, while the autonomous Rajput states and a few non-Rajput states (Tonk, Bharatpur, and Dholpur) were organized into the Rajputana Agency.

The Rajputs' tradition of independence preserved Rajasthan's culture and society, but many argue that it also kept the state illiterate, backward and old fashioned, leaving it less advanced in industrialisation, education, female rights, and equality.

Rajasthan's independent kingdoms created a rich architectural and cultural heritage, seen today in its numerous forts, palaces and havelis, which are complemented by exceptional examples of Muslim and Jain architecture.

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Thar Desert



A NASA satellite image of the Thar Desert, with the India-Pakistan border superimposed. The desert is at the center left of the image; the Indus River and its tributaries are to the left side of the desert, and the dark green line at the bottom center of the image is the Aravalli Range.

The **Thar Desert**, also known as the **Great Indian Desert**, is a desert located in western India and southeastern Pakistan. It lies mostly in the Indian state of Rajasthan, and extends into the southern portion of Haryana and Punjab states and into northern Gujarat state. In Pakistan, the desert covers eastern Sind province and the southeastern portion of Pakistan's Punjab province. In Pakistan's Punjab province it is known as the Cholistan Desert. The Thar Desert is bounded on the northwest by the Sutlej River, on the east by the Aravalli Range, on the south by the salt marsh known as the Rann of Kutch, and on the west by the Indus River.

About 10% of the desert consists of shifting sand dunes. The remaining 90% includes fixed dunes, interdunal areas, rock outcrops, and salt pans. Most of the dunes, rock outcrops, and salt pans are completely devoid of vegetation. Areas where vegetation exists are generally covered with sparse grasslands and shrublands. A thorn scrub region, known as the Northwestern thorn scrub forests, forms a broad belt around the desert.

Area and extent

Definitions of the desert's area and extent differ somewhat, depending on how much of the transitional thorn scrub forest zone is included. According to the World Wildlife Fund, the desert covers an area of 238,700 square kilometers (92,200 square miles), and the Northwestern thorn scrub forests cover another 488,300 square kilometres (188,500 square miles).

Another source give the area of the Thar Desert as 446,000 km² extending 805 km (about 500 mi) long and about 485 km (about 300 mi) wide, with 208,110 square kilometres in India. Of the Indian portion, 61% falls in Rajasthan, 20% in Gujarat and 9% in Punjab

and Haryana combined. The greater portion lies in Rajasthan, covering about three-fifths of the total geographical area of the state.

The Indian Desert is said to be extending at a rate of $\frac{1}{2}$ km per year towards Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh.

Origin of the Thar Desert

The origin of the Thar Desert is a controversial subject. Some consider it to be 4000 to 10,000 years old, whereas others state that aridity started in this region much earlier. Another theory states that area turned to desert relatively recently: perhaps around 2000 - 1500 BCE. Around this time the Ghaggar ceased to be a major river. It now terminates in the desert. It has been observed through remote sensing techniques that Late Quaternary climatic changes and neotectonics have played a significant role in modifying the drainage courses in this part and a large number of palaeochannels exist.

Most of the studies share the opinion that the palaeochannels of the Sarasvati coincide with the bed of present day Ghaggar and believe that the Sutlej along with the Yamuna once flowed into the present Ghaggar riverbed. It has been postulated that the Sutlej was the main tributary of the Ghaggar and that subsequently the tectonic movements might have forced the Sutlej westwards, the Yamuna eastwards and thus dried up the Ghaggar.

Physiography and geology

There are three principal landforms in the desert region i.e.

- The predominantly sand covered Thar
- Plains with hills including the central dune free country
- Hills

It is a desolate country where sand is piled up into huge wind blown dunes. The sand dunes are of three types viz., longitudinal parabolic, transverse and barchans. The first type, running NNE-SSW, i.e. parallel to the prevailing winds, occurs to the south and west of the Thar. The transverse dunes, aligned across the wind direction, to the east and north of Thar and barchans, with the concave sides facing the wind in the interior, predominant in Central Thar. On the whole the Thar Desert slopes imperceptibly towards the Indus Plain and surface unevenness is mainly due to sand dunes. The dunes in the south are higher, rising sometimes to 152 m whereas in the north they are lower and rise to 16 m above the ground level. The Aravalli ranges form the main landmark to the south-east of Thar Desert. The more humid conditions that prevail near the Aravallis prevent the extension of Thar Desert towards the east and the Ganges Valley. In the heart of the sand covered area, the bare, dune free country of Barmer, Jaisalmer and Bikaner present an anomaly.

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Discussion Questions/Research Topics/Class Activity:

- 1. What role do the myths and folktales of the Panihari play in current Indian society? Do these stories reinforce traditional stereotypes of women or do they enrich the culture? Ask students to research Indian folktales and how they still apply to today's modern India.**
- 2. Women's economic collectives are becoming more common in Southeast Asia. Have students research their origins and how they work. What resistance do they face in terms of helping women become more independent financially and socially? Discuss ways this economic model can be applied to western societies. Discuss how it could work in the students' own community.**
- 3. Marital abuse is a major obstacle to Paru in the film. Discuss how women's rights are viewed in India. Have students research the growth of such rights in the country.**
- 4. Water resources are a major issue in India. Some areas get too much rain during the year and other areas, like Rajasthan, have had a severe drought for many years. Have students trace the origins of the drought in the Thar Desert. What efforts have been made to alleviate the economic and social impact on the region?**
- 5. Activity: Have students organize into small groups with the purpose of setting up their own economic collective. Each student will request a loan and explain what the loan will be used for and how they intend to pay it back. After each student presents their case, the group will then determine which student deserves the loan.**