

## DESERT DIVERSION



**K**hichan is a little Indian village in the Thar Desert region of Rajasthan; and it has been home to migratory cranes from Mongolia since the early 1970s. These birds were named 'demoiselle cranes' by the French Queen Marie Antoinette because of their elegance and grace.

At around October each year when winter comes to their breeding grounds, around 35,000 of them fly almost 5,000 kilometres across the mighty Himalayas. Upon

reaching warmer Khichan, they make it their home for the next six months.

And their arrival awakens the impoverished villagers. As their winged visitors break the usual quietness, the locals burst into action and begin organising their daily meals that consist of 2,000 kilogrammes of cereal grains. The dirt roads suddenly get busier as bird lovers from nearby areas start pouring in to see an unmatched spectacle of avian life in action.



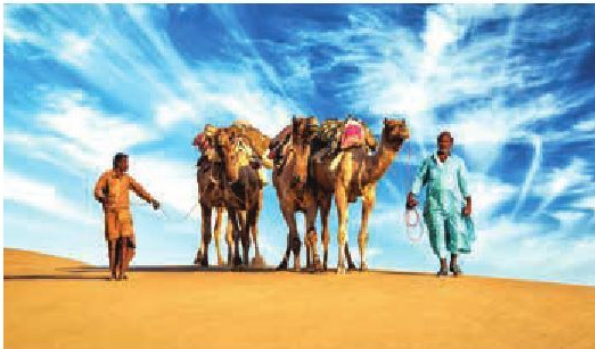


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# Birds of Khichan



**Sandip Hor** describes a village that's home to migratory cranes



So between October and March, Khichan becomes a popular day trip destination for tourists visiting well-known Rajasthan cities such as Jodhpur, Jaisalmer and Bikaner, which are less than four hours' drive from the village.

**OASIS** If a long day trip doesn't sound encouraging, an alternative is to stay at the Dera Dune, which is a world-class eco-friendly resort by The Clements Retreats in Jamba village. It's only a short drive from here to Khichan. Guests will have ample time to follow the cranes closely at various spots at different times of the day and get to know their features, as well as capture the countless movements through their camera lenses.

**LIFESTYLE** Besides the crane encounters, there are other things to do too. Resort guests have an opportunity to experience unspoiled desert life by visiting nearby villages where friendly locals welcome them to their mud huts (called *dhanis*). The villagers narrate stories about their lives and lifestyle, display handicrafts and even invite visitors to enjoy a cup of tea with them.

**SAFARI** Trekking through the sandy desert on a camel will be a highlight of staying at this resort. As these ships of the desert travel over the dunes, it's not unusual for visitors to be transported back in time to an era of camel caravans that once travelled these paths from China and Turkey to Italy and Spain since this region was once part of the Silk Road.

**ROYALTY** Rajasthan is famous for its royals and it's possible to get a taste of this by visiting the nearby princely cities of Jodhpur, Jaisalmer and Bikaner.