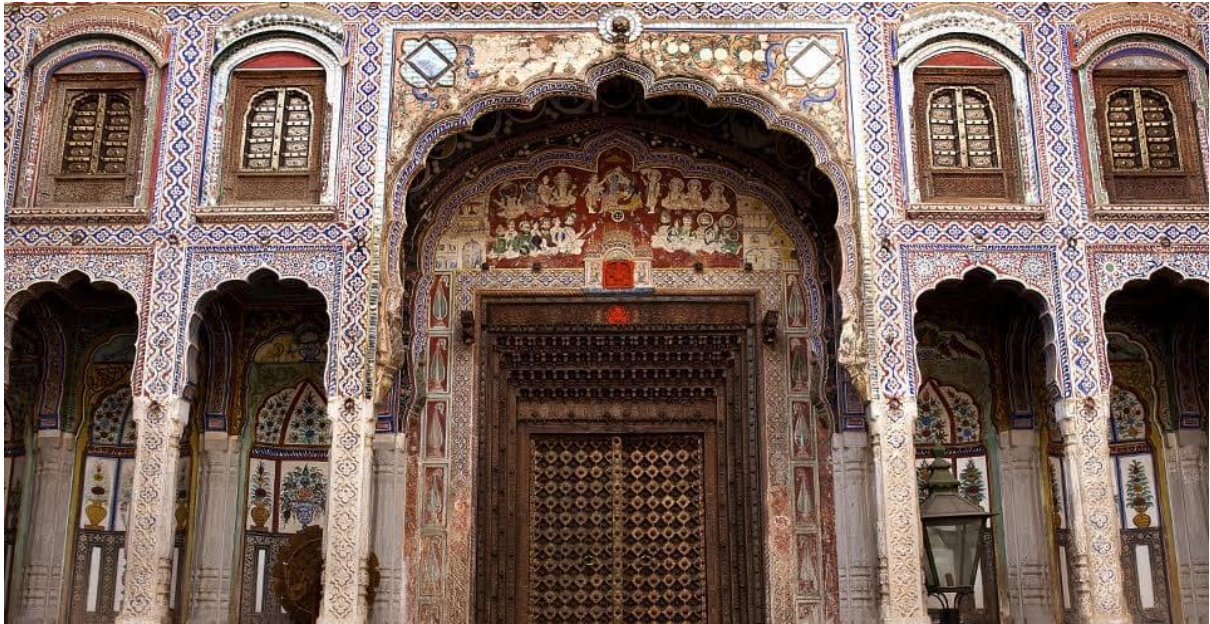


SHEKHAWATI: “THE WORLD’S LARGEST OPEN-AIR ART GALLERY” IN RAJASTHAN



The realm of lovely havelis, harking back to the yester years, epitomizes the beauty of Shekhawati – a region that comprises of Sikar, Jhunjhunu and Churu. The land has the largest collection of painted buildings anywhere in the world, laced with innumerable beautiful havelis or grand mansions. An “open-air art gallery” as it is called, it is a haven for a true connoisseur of art and architecture.

The region is not only an open-air art gallery, but also an open book on the country's business history. These havelis were built by Marwari merchants - who later became famous entrepreneurs and industrialists. You can trace the roots of just about every major business house of contemporary India to Shekhawati - the Birlas, Bangurs, Goenkas, Poddars, Morarkas, Bajajs, Sethias, Singhania, Jhunjhunuwalas, Santhalias, Ganeriwals, Tiberewals, Sekhasarias, and so on. Leading business communities among the Marwaris, such as the Agarwals, Oswals and Maheshwaris,

originated in Shekhawati. The Marwari merchants and moneylenders from Shekhawati spread all over the country, particularly to Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Hyderabad, and to Bihar and Assam.

The heritage hub

Nawalgarh has the largest number of heritage structures in the region - about 120 havelis, temples, cenotaphs, baolis, step wells and other traditional water harvesting structures. Of these, the Poddar and Morarka havelis are the best preserved. The Podar haveli has a museum with a number of interesting galleries, such as one dedicated to Rajasthani turbans. It is amazing to see that the traditional pagri can be worn in so many different styles. The haveli also has over 700 frescos that have been beautifully restored. In Mandawa, which is 28 km from Nawalgarh, you can visit Raghunath temple, Mandawa Castle and a host of other havelis and they were structured some havelis with particular theme and motifs.



All havelis follow the same conceptual design and architecture - they are closed from all sides with one large main gate, have one or two courtyards, several small jharokhas on all sides and extensive paintings and frescos depicting mythological, royal, fictional, educational and contemporary themes.

