# Fateh Collection - Interview Notes

*Jitendra Singh Rathore, Udaipur*

---

***1. How did Fateh Hotels start? Are they first-time hoteliers?***

The story begins not with a hotel but with a house. Our father, Omkar Singh ji, purchased land on the outskirts of Udaipur in 1968, outside the old city, in what was then fairly open country, located well on the lakeside with fabulous views. We moved into the house built there in 1975. He named it Rampratap, after our great-grandfather Ram Singh ji, the father of our grandfather Fateh Singh ji. That name, Fateh, meaning victory, is the same name that runs through everything we have built since. It was his choice, and it turned out to be the foundation of everything.

We are first-generation hoteliers. Rampratap Palace opened in 1989 with just 6 rooms. My brother Raghvender Rathore built those initial rooms and got the hotel going. I had come into hospitality through a different path, working with Taj Hotels and then joining the HRH Group of Hotels as President Commercial. While I was at HRH, I helped with the expansion of Rampratap Palace alongside Raghvender Rathore. I left HRH in November 2000 to focus on our own work full time. From there I managed Rampratap and built Fateh Bagh in Ranakpur, which we completed in 2004 and then leased to HRH, who operate it to this day. Once Fateh Bagh was settled, work on Fateh Garh began in 2006 and it opened in 2008. Rampratap has since grown to 35 rooms.

The collection grew from there. Fateh Niwas and Fateh Safari Resort both came in 2015, Fateh Safari Suites in 2017, Fateh Vilas in 2022, and Khas Mahal Suites in 2025. We put the Fateh Collection name to it all in 2015. Today we directly operate seven properties, five in Udaipur and two in Kumbhalgarh. It has been a slow build over 35 years, and that is exactly how we wanted it.

---

***2. How do they acquire these hotels? Are they heritage properties owned by others, which they take over and manage? How does it work?***

There is no process, really. No thesis, no acquisition strategy. Different pieces of land came to us at different times. Some were bought as investments, some with a vague idea of building family homes one day. The Rampratap land our father bought in 1968 was a family home before it became a hotel. Fateh Niwas is another example. That land was acquired specifically so we could build our own houses there. Then government policy changed in a way that made it possible to build a hotel on the site instead, and that is what we did.

Between roughly 2000 and 2010 we accumulated most of the land our hotels now stand on. At the time nobody was thinking in terms of a collection. One project worked, and that funded the next. Anant Rathore made multiple trips to Kumbhalgarh to find the right land there, and eventually he did. That is how those two properties came to be.

Everything we run is built from scratch, greenfield, not conversions or takeovers. We are 100% owners and operators. Every bit of design and construction has been done by the family. It is slow, but I have genuinely loved every moment of the building process. Each project has been its own creative exercise, and that shows in the properties.

---

***3. What is their USP in a crowded market like Udaipur?***

When Fateh Garh opened in 2008 on the Aravalli hillside, it was among the first hotels built on the outskirts of Udaipur on elevated ground. The established addresses at the time were all palace hotels on the shores of Lake Pichola. We came at it from a completely different angle, hilltop, open views, a different relationship with the landscape. Conde Nast Traveller put Fateh Garh on their Hot List in 2009 and the pool featured in their list of Six Sexiest Pools in the World. That told us early on that we had found something the market did not yet have.

But the real differentiator is not the location or the architecture. It is the life inside the properties. At Fateh Garh, guests have breakfast to live classical flute music. A vintage car experience means choosing from a Chrysler Dodge, Mustang, Mercedes, Land Rover or Kaiser Jeep. The car takes you through the backroads to Bhujra village, you walk around, see how people live, and then you come back for high tea on a private terrace as the sun goes down over Udaipur. Or you meet the horses at a sundowner, the Aravallis behind you. For those who want to go further, there is a half-day trip to our family village of Kelwa. The Fateh Stud Farm and shooting range at Jodhsagar are there, guests can try clay pigeon shooting, have lunch, see the countryside, and visit the Eklingji or Nathdwara temples on the way back. That is essentially our own family weekend, and we open it up to guests.

None of this was designed as a hotel product. It is who we are. That is the USP and it is genuinely hard to copy.

---

***4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Udaipur as a travel destination?***

Udaipur's strengths are obvious to anyone who visits. The lakes, the old city, the hills, the Mewar culture, the forts and palaces. There is a layered quality to the place that very few Indian cities have. It is intimate enough to feel personal but rich enough to reward many visits.

The weaknesses are real though. The old city gets badly overcrowded during peak season and the tourist experience there can suffer for it. Beyond that, the range of activities available to visitors is still fairly limited. People exhaust the core sights quickly and then are not sure what to do next. The bigger structural issue is infrastructure. The airport is significantly underdeveloped for a city of Udaipur's tourism standing. Better flight connectivity and improved rail links would bring in meaningfully more visitors. That is a constraint on the whole destination, not just on individual hotels.

---

***5. What is their design philosophy for their hotels?***

We design all our hotels ourselves. Architects do the structural drawings but the vision and the detail are mine. The proportions, the materials, how each space connects to the landscape around it. I draw from the traditional forts and palaces of Rajasthan, particularly Mewari architecture, which has a way of being both grand and livable at the same time. The philosophy is always minimal intervention. Build on large parcels, cover as little of the land as possible, make the spaces feel bigger than they need to be, let natural light do the work.

The most significant detail in Fateh Garh is one most guests walk past without knowing what they are looking at. The stone pillars, doors, and carved elements throughout the property were salvaged from a structure near Neemuch, on the Madhya Pradesh border. That building was inaugurated by Maharana Sajjan Singh, the 72nd ruler of the Mewar dynasty, the same man who built Sajjangarh, the Monsoon Palace that looks down over Udaipur from the Aravalli hills. The cornerstone of that structure, the Shilalekh, sits at the entrance to Fateh Garh, positioned to face north, pointing directly towards Sajjangarh fort. So the stones at your feet and the fort on the horizon share the same history. That is what Heritage Renaissance means to us. Not decoration, but a genuine continuation of something. We do this with every project. Salvaged material from structures that would otherwise be lost, brought into new buildings where the story carries on.

---

***6. How did they raise funds for the hotels?***

Entirely self-funded, and we prefer to keep it that way. The base came from the marble mining business that my brothers Anant Rathore and Raghvender Rathore run. Beyond that it has been operational surpluses reinvested into the next project, with bank loans where needed. No outside investors, no private equity, and that was a deliberate choice. It has meant growing slowly, but it also means we answer to nobody but our guests. That matters to us more than speed.

---

***7. The Fateh Collection is described as being built on the Kelwa family's personal ethos — vintage automobiles, equestrian touches, art and antiquities. How intentional was that decision to make the brand an extension of family identity, and does it create limitations as you scale?***

Completely intentional. The Fateh Collection was never designed as a brand. It is just what happens when a family builds hotels around what it genuinely cares about. My passion for vintage cars and architecture, Anant Rathore's dedication to Marwari horses, Raghvender Rathore's shooting. These are not amenities someone put on a brief. They are our lives, and guests experience them because of that. The name honours our grandfather Fateh Singh ji and means victory. It is not a marketing construct.

Does it create limitations? Yes, honestly. The model depends on family being physically present and engaged at each property. That presence is the thing. You cannot replicate it by hiring a good general manager. The systems are there that could theoretically allow faster growth, but that is not where our heads are right now. We build around Udaipur so we can stay involved. The next generation is now active in the business, which gives us more range than before. But the moment family presence thins out, something essential goes with it. We know that and we have made our peace with it.

---

***8. Fateh Garh pioneered what you call "heritage renaissance" - physically transplanting heritage structures stone by stone. That's an extraordinarily capital-intensive approach. How did you justify that bet early on, and would you do it the same way today?***

People assume it must be expensive. It is actually the opposite. Salvaged stone, old doors, carved wood. These cost a fraction of commissioning new work, and nothing new can match what they bring to a space. The character is already there, built up over a century or more.

The approach started with Fateh Bagh in Ranakpur, which we built between 2002 and 2004, after I had already left HRH. That project was where we first proved the concept. It is as much a financial method as a philosophical one. The only catch is that you need to be lucky enough to find the right building, and then have the patience and passion to go through the trouble of sourcing and using salvaged items. What takes effort is not money. It is time, knowing where to look, and the commitment to see it through. Over the years we have built those networks. We carried the same approach into Fateh Garh and have continued with every project since. We would not do it any other way.

---

***9. Udaipur is one of India's most competitive luxury hotel markets, with the Taj, Oberoi, and IHCL all present. You've carved out a boutique niche — but as of late 2024, you had four properties in the TripAdvisor top 10 out of 1,700 plus hotels. What do you think large chains simply cannot replicate from what you do?***

Cost consciousness, for one. Because the family runs everything, the frugality is genuine and it runs through the whole operation. Investing in solar to save electricity costs and reduce operating costs, converting food waste into manure, rainwater harvesting, using salvaged materials. A large chain cannot institutionalise that kind of thinking. It has to come from the owners being in the building every day.

The other thing is the staff. Around 60% of our team is local, from Bhujra, Nai and the surrounding villages. Some have been with us since Rampratap Palace, over 30 years. When you have that kind of continuity, guests feel it. The person looking after them knows the land, the culture, the history. That is not something you can train into someone from outside.

When Fateh Garh was built on the Bhujra hillside it was among the first hotels on the outskirts of Udaipur at elevation. The hills found a purpose they had not had before and land values in the area have risen considerably since. The community around us has grown alongside us. That is the kind of relationship a chain operating on a management contract simply cannot build.

---

***10. You've expanded beyond Udaipur to Kumbhalgarh. What's the acquisition or development thesis? Are you hunting for heritage structures specifically, or are there other criteria that drive where you go next?***

No formal thesis. We look for land with character. Hills, forest, something wild about it, ideally near a fort or a wildlife sanctuary. The kind of setting that does not need to be manufactured. We also stay within roughly 100 kilometres of Udaipur so the family can remain properly involved. Beyond that distance it starts to become management by remote control, which is not how we work.

We are not specifically hunting heritage structures. Good salvaged material can be brought to any site. What we cannot bring is the right landscape. Kumbhalgarh had it immediately. When Anant Rathore first went to look at those sites he knew straight away. That instinct has served us better than any spreadsheet. We grow when the right opportunity comes, not to a schedule.

---

***11. Boutique hotel groups often face a fork in the road: stay asset-heavy and owned, or shift to a management contract model to grow faster. Where does Fateh Collection stand on that question?***

We are fully asset-heavy and intend to stay that way for now. The moment you separate ownership from management, personal accountability goes out the window. Everything we do depends on the family being answerable, not to a board or a fee structure, but to our own standards and to our guests. That is not possible under a management contract model. If circumstances change significantly we would revisit it, but it would take something substantial to move us in that direction.

---

***12. Wedding and event revenue is clearly significant given the banqueting infrastructure at Fateh Vilas and Fateh Garh. What share of revenue does that represent, and is it a strength or does it sometimes work against the quiet, experiential identity you're trying to build?***

Weddings and events including corporate account for roughly 34% of our room nights across the collection. At Fateh Vilas alone, weddings represent close to 57% of room nights, which is exactly what that property was designed for. It is a genuine strength and an important part of what makes the business work commercially.

The tension is real but we have built around it deliberately. Fateh Vilas carries the events. Fateh Garh and Khas Mahal Suites, which sit in the same complex, stay quiet and experiential. The separation is by design and it works. Guests at those properties are not disturbed by what is happening next door. Events sustain the business financially. The soul of the other properties stays intact.

---

***13. What are your recommendations for the best of the destinations you are in — Udaipur and Kumbhalgarh?***

Udaipur rewards patience more than most places. Do not try to see it all in two days. Come for at least three nights, experience the lakes and the old city at different times. The light on Lake Pichola at dusk is something else entirely. Our hilltop properties give you views that most visitors simply never see. Spend time in the lanes of the old city, eat local food. If you can come during one of the festivals, even better. The Mewar culture comes fully alive then in a way that no guidebook can prepare you for.

Kumbhalgarh is a completely different experience and I think an underrated one. The fort is extraordinary and far less crowded than the more famous Rajasthan landmarks. The Aravalli landscape around it, the wildlife sanctuary, the quiet. It has a rawness that Udaipur, for all its beauty, no longer has. People who go expecting a lesser version of Udaipur come back having found something they were not expecting.

---

***14. How does the family strength play in the business now? Was it always meant to be a family business? Did his brothers hold any major roles when they started?***

Family is everything in this business. I am the youngest of three brothers and I handle the vision, the design, and the hospitality side day to day. Anant Rathore, the eldest, and Raghvender Rathore, the middle brother, were both central in the early years. Raghvender Rathore actually started Rampratap Palace before moving his focus to the mining business alongside Anant Rathore. Together they have been visionary in devising a great plan to keep the family working together, by way of a family constitution that guides how we function and make decisions collectively.

Anant Rathore's great passion is the Marwari horse. This is a breed with an extraordinary history, developed by the Rathore dynasty itself over centuries, bred for desert endurance, loyalty, and courage in battle. The distinctive inward-curving ears, the deep bond with the rider, the breed's near extinction under British rule when European horses were favoured, the conservation effort that began seriously only in the late 20th century. Anant Rathore is deeply committed to all of that. The Fateh Stud Farm in our family village of Kelwa is his work, and it is serious work, not just a hotel amenity.

Raghvender Rathore is a national-level clay pigeon shooter and the range at Jodhsagar in Kelwa is his. Guests who visit Kelwa for a half day get to shoot on that range, see the stud farm, have lunch, experience some genuine rural Mewar, and often visit the Eklingji or Nathdwara temples on the way. That is our family's weekend, and we share it.

The next generation is now actively running operations across our hotels and the mining business. It was always going to be a family enterprise, that was never in question. The name Fateh Collection honours our grandfather Fateh Singh ji, and Rampratap Palace honours his father Ram Singh ji, through our father Omkar Singh ji who bought that land in 1968 and started all of this. My own passions are vintage cars, the Chrysler Dodges, Mustangs, Mercedes, Land Rovers and Kaiser Jeeps guests ride in, the architecture, the art collecting. These run through everything we have built.

---

***15. Can we talk about revenues? Where do you stand and what is the goal in terms of tapping into new categories of travellers - domestic (FITs and weddings), international? Can be answered in percentages if not absolute figures.***

We do not share revenue numbers but I can give you a real picture of the mix across our seven properties for the last financial year.

Weddings, events and corporate are roughly 34% of room nights. Fateh Vilas is almost entirely weddings, 57% of its room nights. Fateh Garh sits at around 36%. That segment is large and deliberate.

Domestic leisure, direct bookings, OTAs, domestic travel agents, is close to 47% of room nights across the collection. That has grown strongly and continues to hold. Our Kumbhalgarh properties are predominantly domestic. Indian travellers today are more willing to seek out something real, something with heritage and story behind it. That works in our favour.

Inbound through travel agents is around 19% of room nights. It has not recovered to where it was before the pandemic, and I will come back to that. Fateh Niwas draws strongly from inbound, roughly 45% of its room nights come through agents. Khas Mahal Suites only opened in February 2025 but has picked up well with both inbound and domestic FIT travellers from the start. Growing the inbound share is an ambition, but not at the cost of the domestic foundation we have built.

---

***16. How does a family run hotel business structure itself into a boutique offering with multiple projects? How do you approach hiring and nurturing talent? The competition is fierce - we are looking for differentiation factors.***

We run it like an extended family, because that is what it is. Deep owner involvement at every level, values passed down through the organisation rather than enforced through process. Most of our staff come from Bhujra, Nai, and the villages around our properties. They know the land, the culture, the history. All of that comes naturally. With some training and the right values, they become part of what makes these places work. We are not importing talent from city hotel schools and trying to teach them what Mewar means. The people we hire already know.

The retention speaks for itself. Some of our team have been with us since the early days of Rampratap Palace, over 30 years. That kind of continuity is something no chain can manufacture. It takes time and genuine care, and the family being present every day makes both possible.

---

***17. Inbound travel has dropped significantly since Covid and hasn't bounced back to original levels. How do you fill this gap now?***

Inbound has not recovered and we are realistic about that. India received around 9.66 million foreign tourists in 2024, still roughly 12% below 2019. With the current geopolitical situation, ongoing conflicts, shifting travel patterns, I do not expect a quick return to the old levels. If anything we are preparing for more disruption.

We stopped waiting for inbound to come back and focused on the domestic market instead. That has been the right call. The domestic traveller has changed considerably since the pandemic. More willing to spend, more interested in something authentic and rooted rather than a five-star anywhere. What we offer has never been more relevant to that audience. Direct bookings, experiential packages around the horses and the heritage and the outdoors, the Kelwa day trip. All of this resonates strongly with domestic guests today.

Inbound will come back. When it does we are well positioned. Until then, the domestic base we have built is something we are genuinely proud of.

---