

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel

reviewed by [John Petrakis](#) in the [June 13, 2012](#) issue

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, by British director John Madden (*Shakespeare in Love*), is a “hands across the water” movie flavored with large doses of “there’ll always be an England” pluck. It culminates in a warm and thoughtful look at our innate ability to rediscover unexplored strengths within ourselves even on the last few miles of life’s journey.

The story focuses on seven aging Brits who, for various reasons, are forced to leave their homeland, including its damaged retirement system, for the siren song of peace and splendor at a retirement hotel in Jaipur, India. Needless to say, instead of discovering an old-world (i.e., the days of the empire) hotel with grinning servants and white-gloved waiters pouring Darjeeling tea at all hours of the day, they come face to face with a dilapidated edifice that represents the ruin that England left behind when it granted India its independence.

At the helm of this leaky freighter is the young and eternally optimistic Sonny Kapoor (Dev Patel from *Slumdog Millionaire*), who soothes the stunned seniors’ concerns with promises of a renovated and spectacular hotel down the line. It is a pipedream worthy of Eugene O’Neill, but with so little waiting for them back home, the Exasperated Seven stick around to give Sonny a chance to prove himself.

This setup allows for a plethora of subplots involving love, romance, passion, regret, forgiveness and the ultimate realization of what is truly important in life—a lesson easily forgotten in the hubbub of modern urban life, but able to be reclaimed in the languid heat of an Indian afternoon.

Though these subplots are achingly familiar, they are delivered with such unrivaled skill by the heavy-hitting cast (including Judi Dench, Maggie Smith, Tom Wilkinson and Bill Nighy) that we almost forget that much of the setup and delivery is more *Love Boat* than Chekhov. It’s like watching an all-star team play in a game that means nothing in the standings but provides the rare pleasure of witnessing several of the very best strut their stuff. Curiously, the novel *These Foolish Things*, on which the film is based, is a much darker exercise; it exposes greater desperation and

makes stronger commentary on the way the aged are cast aside in contemporary Britain.

But screenwriter Ol Parker has decided to jettison the glum for the uplifting. It may not make for profound cinema, but judging by the sustained applause from the packed house of retirees I saw the film with, it may be the right movie at the right time.