

**TIG****with Agra, Jaipur & Varanasi****15 days**

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**Day 1      *Arrival in Delhi***

Arrive in Delhi. Transfer to our hotel.

The name Delhi, Dehali or Dilli is derived from Dhillika, the name of the first medieval township of Delhi, located on the southwestern border of the present Union Territory of Delhi, in Mehrauli. This was the first in the series of seven medieval cities, also known as Yoginipura, the fortress of the Yoginis (female divinities).

Overnight in Delhi.

**Day 2      *Delhi - Jaipur: City Tour***

This morning we travel by road (air-conditioned bus) to Jaipur (265 km). Upon arrival we check in to the hotel.

Jaipur has been dubbed the "Pink City" because of the many buildings inside the old city walls that are painted pink. Scattered throughout the north-east section of the town are palaces and temples designed in a variety of styles; the city lies snugly on a bed of a long-dry lake.

We have an afternoon tour of Jaipur, one of the best-planned cities in India, built of rose-pink sandstone by the great astronomer-king Jai Singh II in 1727. The City Palace stands in the centre of the city, part of which is still the Maharaja's residence. The complex has been developed into a museum containing rare manuscripts, fine specimens of Rajput and Mughal paintings, royal apparel, and an armoury. Hawa Mahal (Palace of Winds) is the landmark of Jaipur, a curious building, elaborate and fanciful, built of pink sandstone with a delicate honeycomb design. Rising five storeys high, it is composed of semi-octagonal overhanging windows, each with its perforated screen, which allowed the ladies of the court to look onto the main street without being seen.

Overnight in Jaipur. Mandawa Haveli (or similar).

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

**Day 3      *Jaipur - Amber - Ranthambore***

Today our tour takes us to Amber, once the ancient state capital but now deserted. Located on the crest of a rocky hill behind Maota Lake, 11 km (7 miles) north of Jaipur, the Rajput stronghold was the capital of the Kuchhawa Rajputs from 1037 until 1728. Rising on the slopes of a steep hill is the Amber fortress with its imposing facade. The interior presents a galaxy of art including the world's best Chamber of Mirrors.

This afternoon we drive to Ranthambore (160km /3.5 Hrs). Ranthambore offers beautiful hilly scenery with varied vegetation, lakes, and rivers as well as maybe the best opportunity in India for encountering the Royal Bengal Tiger. Once the Maharaja of Jaipur's private tiger reserve, Ranthambore came under the Project Tiger conservation scheme in 1972. Approximately 40 tigers currently roam Ranthambore. Although the best season for tiger viewing is October through April, a tiger sighting cannot be guaranteed. Our game drives may also expose you to leopards, spotted deer, wild boar, sambar, sloth bear, caracal, jackal, crocodile, hyena, and diverse birdlife. We'll also visit the well-preserved Ranthambore Fort, built in the 10th century.

Overnight at Ranthambore. Ranthambore Safari Lodge.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

**Day 4      *Ranthambhore***

Today we have two game drives within the park.

Ranthambore has an area of 158 square km. Originally the private game preserve of the rulers of the former princely state of Gwalior, the park was established as Madhya Bharat National Park in 1955. It received its present name in 1959. Located about 70 miles (110 km) south of Gwalior town on the main Bombay--Agra road, it consists of hills and valleys in the Vindhya Range. The park's vegetation includes mixed forests of sal (Shorea), teak, and khair (Acacia) interspersed with grassland. Tiger, leopard, langur, jackal, mouse deer, wild pig, four-horned antelope, jungle fowl, quail, and bustard inhabit the park. Lake Sakhya, or Candpatha, a man-made lake with a circumference of 7 miles (11 km), is provided with canoes and picnic sites. Tigers in the park can be photographed from protected "shooting boxes."

Overnight at Ranthambore. Ranthambore Safari Lodge.

Meal Plan: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

**Day 5      *Ranthambhore - Agra***

After breakfast drive to Agra (280km). Upon arrival we check in to our hotel.

Agra continues to be medieval in structure: narrow, crowded streets and lanes, full of colourful shops sell that all kind of goods, especially local handicrafts, including gold and silver embroidery, imitation Mughal inlay on marble, and fine leather goods. Agra Fort lies on the bend of the River Yamuna, almost in the heart of the town. It was built by Akbar as his citadel over the years 1565 to 1573 in the finest architectural style. It has imposing gates and walls of red sandstone and a moat. The fort was successively occupied by three great Mughals--Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jehan, each of whom made significant structural contributions to this complex.

Overnight in Agra. Pushp Villa Hotel (or similar).

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

**Day 6      *Agra: Taj Mahal & Red Fort***

After breakfast we have a city tour of Agra visiting the Taj Mahal, built by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in 1660 AD in memory of his beloved queen Mumtaz Mahal who died while giving birth to his 14th child. This architectural marvel took 17 years to complete and is perfectly proportioned and fashioned from raw white marble--testimony to the skill of 20,000 craftsmen brought from Persia, Turkey, France, and Italy. We will also visit the Red Fort, situated on the banks of river Yamuna. This crescent-like fort was designed and built by Mughal Emperor Akbar in 1565 AD. It houses the beautiful Pearl Mosque and numerous palaces including the Jahangiri Mahal, Khas Mahal, Diwan-e-khas, Diwan-e-aam, Machihi Bhawan and Moti Masjid.

Overnight in Agra.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

**Day 7      *Agra - Orcha***

This morning we travel by air-conditioned train to the town of Jhansi from where we drive a short distance to Orcha to visit Orcha's magnificent temples dating back to the 17th century. The soaring spires of Ram Raja Temple and the well-preserved murals of the Lakshmi Naraya Temple are especially worthwhile. Fourteen beautiful Chhatris (cenotaphs) are lined up on the Kanchana Glut of the River Betwa.

Overnight in Orcha.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 8 Orcha - Khajuraho**

This morning we drive to Khajuraho (175 km). Renowned the world over for its fine temples. Built between AD 950 and 1050, these temples are among the most creative examples of Indian architecture, of which only 22 of the original 85 temples survive. Khajuraho has achieved

fame for the sensual appeal of the erotic sculptures, but these form only a small part of the wealth of the site. Taken in totality, the sculptures of Khajuraho depict the everyday life of the people and the court in the 10th and 11th centuries.

This morning we visit the Eastern and Western group of temples. The Lakshmana Temple is dedicated to Vishnu and is one of the earliest, dating from AD 930-950. It is also one of the best preserved, with a full five-part floor plan and four subsidiary shrines. We also visit the eastern group of temples. These can be subdivided into two groups: a complex of Jain temples in the walled enclosure, and a group of four temples scattered through the small village of Khajuraho.

Parsvanath is the largest of the Jain temples and also the finest in Khajuraho, noted for the exceptional skill and precision of its construction and for the beauty of its sculptures. The Adinath Temple has fine carvings on its three bands of sculptures. The Shanti Nath Temple is a relatively modern one, built about a century ago, but it contains many components from older temples around Khajuraho.

Later we drive to Bandhavgarh (260km) and check in to our hotel. The park is located within the district of Sahdol in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. This forest nestled among the Vindhya hills came into existence in 1968 when the Maharaja of Rewa handed over the area to the government for its formation. At the time when it was handed over to the government, the fauna was not faring too well due to the difficulty in the control of poaching. Once this became a protected area, the animal population took a drastic turn and began to flourish.

Overnight in Khajuraho.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 9 Khajuraho - Bandhavgarh National Park**

This morning we drive from Khajuraho to Bandhavgarh which is blessed with a large variety of residents, both in terms of animals and birds. In the category of animals, it is possible to sight tigers, leopards, gaur (Indian Bison-although some say this is no longer seen), chital (spotted deer), Sambar deer, Dhols, nilgais, wild boars, chinkaras, sloth bears, rhesus macaques, black faced langurs, jungle cats, hyenas, porcupines, jackals, foxes, wild dogs, chausinghas and ratels, among others. It is the density of its big cat population that has made Bandhavgarh really famous across the globe.

We two full days to enjoy this park via game drives from our lodge base. The density of the tiger population at Bandhavgarh is relatively high. The possibility of spotting Sloth Bear, Wild Boar, Leopard and Tiger is very good. The park is also densely populated with animals like the Chital (Spotted Deer), Sambhar, Barking Deer, Nilgai (Blue Bull), Chowsingha (Four Horned Antelope) and is rich in bird life. The terrain is rocky, rising sharply from the swampy and densely forested valley. The finest of these hills is Bandhavgarh which is bounded by great cliffs and eroded rocks. The Bandhavgarh Fort, believed to be 2000 years old, stands at the highest point.

Overnight at Bandhavgarh.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 10 Bandhavgarh National Park**

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Today we have morning and afternoon safaris in the National Park.

Overnight at Bandhavgarh.

Meal Plan: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

#### **Day 11      *Bandhavgarh - Varanasi***

Today we travel by road to Varanasi (390km).

With more than 2000 temples and shrines Varanasi has been the religious capital of the Hindu faith since its beginning. No one knows how old it really is--when Buddha came here in 550 BC it was already a flourishing ancient settlement. The town is a maze of small streets and alleyways, hiding no fewer than 2000 temples and shrines. Domes, pinnacles, towers and derelict 18th-century palaces dominate the left bank of the Ganges River.

The antiquity of Varanasi can be traced back to at least the middle of first millennium BC. Since time immemorial, it has served not merely as holy center of pilgrimage, but also as a great seat of traditional Hindu learning and culture.

Overnight in Varanasi.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

#### **Day 12      *Varanasi: Town Tour***

Early this morning we take a boat ride on the sacred Ganges. Hindus regard the Ganges as the elixir of life bringing purity to the living and salvation to the dead. At dawn, thousands stand waist-deep in water praying to the rising sun. At dusk, hymns and prayers are uttered by the faithful in the light of hundreds of lighted lamps. The bathing ghats, over three miles in length, lead down from a steep bank to the river. Manikarnika burning ghat is the chief cremation centre of Varanasi.

We walk back to the hotel through the narrow streets of Varanasi.

Overnight in Varanasi.

Meal Plan: Breakfast

#### **Day 13      *Varanasi - Sarnath - Varanasi: Overnight train to Delhi***

This morning we take a short journey to the buried city of Sarnath. After attaining enlightenment at Bodh Gaya the Buddha went to Sarnath; and it was here that he preached his first discourse in the deer park to set in motion the 'Wheel of the Dharma'. It is one of the most holy sites as in this place the stream of the Buddha's teaching first flowed. The Dhamekh Stupa, Dharmarajika Stupa (the Main shrine where the Buddha sat in meditation), the sacred promenade from where he preached, and the Ashoka Pillar are monuments that still stand today.

We return to Varanasi in time to catch our a/c overnight sleeper train to Delhi.

Overnight train.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

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**Day 14      *Delhi: City Tour***

Today we have a full-day tour of Delhi. We start with a drive north into Old Delhi, passing along the Rajpath (King's Way) and stopping for photos at the India Gate. The 42m high India Gate, an "Arc-de'Triomphe" like archway in the middle of a crossroad, commemorates the Indian soldiers who lost their lives fighting for the British Army during WWI. This landmark also bears the names of British and Indian soldiers killed in the Northwestern Frontier in the Afghan war of 1919.

Next we will make a visit to the Jamma Mosque. Located in the heart of Old Delhi, the largest mosque in India can accommodate as many as twenty-thousand worshippers. This imposing architectural monument, with it's three gateways and two minarets, took fourteen years to complete (1644-58).

From here we board our cycle rickshaws for a tour of Chandni Chowk (Silver Street). Here we are given a glimpse into an old world lifestyle slowly fading from Delhi. The hustle and bustle of everyday life can be felt in the Chandi Chowk's narrow lanes. Our rickshaw ride takes us past the Red Fort (photo stop), and we disembark at the Raj Ghat, set within a beautiful park. This national monument is where the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, was cremated.

After a stop for lunch we will continue with our sightseeing this afternoon. We will visit Humayan's Tomb, an excellent example of Mughal architecture, predating the Taj Mahal by almost 100 years. Persian in style, this is a beautiful red sandstone building inlaid with black and white marble. From here we will drive on to visit a recent architectural marvel, the Delhi Bahai Temple. Shaped like a half-opened lotus flower, this temple is mostly made of marble, and represents the youngest of the world's independant religions.

We will finish our day with a visit to the Qutub Minar. Few other monuments are as closely identified with Delhi as the Qutub Minar. This first monument of Muslim rule in India heralded the beginning of a new style of art and architecture which came to be know as the Indo-Islamic style.

Overnight in Delhi.

Meal Plan: Breakfast and Dinner

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**Day 15      *Departure***

Departure from Delhi.

BON VOYAGE!!

Meal Plan: Breakfast