

Delhi Palaces Ganges

12 days | Starts/Ends: Delhi



Explore Delhi, both old and new, tour the legendary Taj Mahal in Agra as well as the beautiful Pink City of Jaipur. Continue on to the incredible architecture in Lucknow and the beautifully colourful city of Varanasi, right on the banks of the holy Ganges.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

- The Taj Mahal – discover the most iconic site in India and enjoy a guided tour at this extravagant symbol of love
- Varanasi – sail on the holy Ganges and watch the ancient tradition of religious ritual cleansing on the riverside ghats
- Lucknow - gaze at the incredible Islamic and British Raj style architecture and discover the royal splendor of this incredible city
- Delhi – tour the highlights of Old and New Delhi including Jama Masjid and the India Gate monument
- Jaipur – explore highlights of the Pink City including the City Palace and visit lofty Amber Fort
- Abhaneri – admire the impressive Chand Baori step well which climbs down 13 stories to the water's edge

- Fatehpur Sikri – walk around and explore the well-preserved former Mughal city which was abandoned 400 years ago
- Keoladeo Ghana National Park – ride on a bicycle rickshaw around this wetland reserve, home to rare bird species
- Agra – visit the lesser known but still impressive Agra Fort and explore behind its fortified walls

What's Included

- 11 breakfasts, 2 dinners
- 11 nights - 3-4 star and heritage hotels
- 1 economy class flight - Varanasi to Delhi
- Airport arrival and departure transfers on day 1 and day 12
- Touring of Delhi, Jaipur, Chand Baori Step Well, Agra, Lucknow and Varanasi
- Rickshaw ride in Delhi
- Bicycle rickshaw ride in Keoladeo Ghana National Park
- Sunrise boat cruise on the holy River Ganges - Varanasi
- All relevant transfers and transportation
- Escorted by an English-speaking Indian tour guide (for groups of 6 or more)
- Services of English-speaking Indian specialist guides at some sites

What's Not Included

- Tipping Kitty: USD\$40-50pp, paid in local currency

- Entrance Fees: USD\$95-105pp, paid in local currency
- International flights and visas
- Tip for your tour guide. We recommend you allow \$3 - 7 USD per day per traveller. Tipping your tour guide is an entirely personal gesture

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 : Delhi

Saturday. Welcome to India! On arrival in Delhi you'll be transferred from the airport to our hotel, where the rest of the day is free to relax or explore as you please. You may wish to visit Akshardham - the largest Hindu temple in the world.

Please note that from October 2019, the welcome meeting will be hosted on day one at 18:00. **Overnight - Delhi**

Day 2 : Old & New Delhi sightseeing



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After breakfast, a welcome meeting will take place, where you'll meet the rest of the group and your tour guide. Entrance fees for your tour and a tip kitty will also be collected at this time. The tip kitty will cover any tipping required throughout the tour, apart from a tip for your tour guide.

Following the welcome meeting we set off for a sightseeing tour of Old Delhi. This 17th century walled city of Shahjahanabad was the erstwhile capital of Mughal India, with city gates, narrow alleyways, bazaars, mosques and other historic monuments. Today Old Delhi is still a hive of activity, and the Chandhi Chowk bazaar is a colourful place to people watch. We will enjoy a rickshaw ride through this bustling bazaar.

Sightseeing highlights of Old Delhi include:

- Jama Masjid- The largest mosque in India and the final architectural extravagance of Shah Jahan

- Raj Ghat - on the banks of the Yamuna River lies a marble memorial marking the spot where the great leader - Mahatma Gandhi was cremated after his assassination

New Delhi, in contrast to Old Delhi is a city of wide tree-lined streets, parks, fountains and roundabouts – designed by Edward Lutyens and built as the imperial capital of India by the British. This part of the city also houses many government buildings including Rashtrapati Bhavan – the official residence of the President of India which stands at the opposite end of the Rajpath from the India Gate.

Sightseeing highlights of New Delhi include:

- Humayun's Tomb - the magnificent tomb of the Mughal Emperor Humayun

- Rajpath – an immensely broad boulevard flanked on either side by ornamental ponds. The Republic Day parade is held here every 26 January, drawing millions of people to this spectacle. It is at the eastern end of Rajpath we'll see the India Gate

- India Gate - The 42 metre high stone "Arch of Triumph", erected in memory of Indian soldiers who died in the First World War

Tonight, we enjoy a Namaste Dinner at our hotel.

Overnight - Delhi (B, D)

Days 3-4 : Jaipur & Amber Fort



Delhi - Jaipur. Today we travel by road to the UNESCO-listed Pink City of Jaipur, capital of Rajasthan. The journey takes approximately 5 - 6 hours. Upon arrival, we'll embark on some sightseeing taking in the Old City and City Palace. In 1876, Maharaja Ram Singh had the entire old city swathed in pink paint! Not as mad as it seems, as pink is a colour in India-associated with hospitality. The new paint job was completed in time for a regal visit by the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII), a tradition that has been maintained, hence Jaipur's name - the Pink City.

En route to the City Palace, we'll pass Hawa Mahal – the Palace of the Winds. Although little more than an impressive façade it is one of the city's landmarks. This 5-storey building which overlooks the main street of the bustling old city is a stunning example of Rajput architecture.

We explore the beautiful City Palace, a blend of Rajasthani and Mughal architecture. If the flag is flying, the Maharaja is in residence. A part of palace has been converted into a museum, which has an impressive collection of arts, carpets, enamel ware and weaponry.

Just over the road from the City Palace is Jantar Mantar, an observatory of astronomy built by Jai Singh in 1728. Of the five observatories he built, this is the largest and best preserved. At first glance, Jantar Mantar resembles a sculpture park, though in fact, each construction has a specific scientific purpose. Some measure the positions of stars, whilst others calculate eclipses, the lunar calendar and simply the time of day.

Even today, most of the constructions remain accurate!

Early-risers can opt for a morning hot air balloon ride over Jaipur, and sail over hilltop forts, regal palaces, sleepy villages, and stone carved temples. Then we travel beyond Jaipur to the stunning 16th century Amber Fort - a sprawling Rajput construction, perched on a hillside overlooks the dusty plains below. We'll travel up to the palace by jeep. Arriving at the top we'll tour the fort's well-preserved interior and grounds.

Before returning to Jaipur we make a short visit of about 1 hour to a cotton trading/tailor factory where we can watch a block printing and screen printing demonstration with traditional Rajasthani designs. Travelers looking for souvenirs can explore the small bazaar offering regional souvenirs and other handicrafts in addition to cotton products including saris.

Later this evening you can also opt to explore Johari Bazaar in the Old Pink City which is also great for shopping. Popular souvenirs include jootis (traditional Rajasthani curled shoes), Jaipur's famous blue pottery, textiles and handicrafts around the City Palace or Hawa Mahal. Our vehicle will be available to drop you off at the market and its easy enough to grab a rickshaw on the way back.

Overnight - Jaipur (B:2)

Day 5 : Chand Baori Step Well & Keoladeo Ghana National Park



Jaipur - Abhaneri - Bharatpur. Departing Jaipur we stop in the village of Abhaneri to see Chand Baori, which is the largest and deepest step well in the world. This incredible well has a staggering 3500 steps and is 13 stories deep. Then we gain an insight into

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local village life, visiting Adarsh Vidya Mandir local school (if open) where we operate our 'Change for Children' programme. If you have bought any educational items with you to hand out to children this would be the time to do so. You can also make a donation to the school, if you choose via our Change For Children project. Your guide will hand out envelopes to those interested.

After hotel check in at Bharatpur and time to freshen up we visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Keoladeo Ghana National Park where we'll enjoy a leisurely rickshaw ride through the park. Keoladeo's 29 sq.km of swamps and lakes constitute one of the most important breeding and migratory areas in the world, where from October - March the some 200 plus local species are joined by a further 130 species from as far afield as the Russian Steppes and Central Asia. **Overnight - Bharatpur (B, D)**

Day 6 : Agra Fort and the Taj Mahal



Bharatpur - Agra. En route to Agra we visit Fatehpur Sikri, which was once a magnificent fortified city and the capital of the Mughal Empire from 1571 until 1585, until it was abandoned due to a lack of water.

Fatehpur Sikri is well preserved and divided into four main parts: the women's quarters; the emperor's quarters; a quarter for princes and noblemen; and weapons housing. We see various temples, pavilions and public areas, gaining a fascinating insight into how life must have been for the inhabitants of this old city.

Continuing on to Agra, we embark on a short tour of the Agra Fort. Behind its colossal walls are some of the finest Mughal buildings in India. Construction of the fort was commenced during the reign of Emperor Akbar and additions were made until the rule

of his grandson Shah Jahan. During Akbar's time, it was primarily a military fort though later the focus shifted and it partially became a palace.

From the Agra Fort we make the short journey to visit the legendary Taj Mahal. Described as the most extravagant monument ever built for love, this fine example of Mughal architecture was built by Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his beloved second wife-Mumtaz Mahal, who died tragically during childbirth. Built entirely of white marble, construction began in 1631, the year in which Mumtaz died, and was not completed until 1653. A staggering total of 20,000 workers contributed their skills, in the construction of this unique mausoleum.

Overnight - Agra (B)

Day 7 : Lucknow

Agra – Lucknow. This morning we depart for Lucknow, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh. Boasting beautiful British Raj-era architecture as well as fantastic examples of Islamic art and design, Lucknow is an enigmatic city steeped in history. This afternoon we'll tour the highlights of a city which first gained importance in 1528 with its capture by Babur, the first Mughal ruler of India. Our first stop will be to the Chota Imambara, one of the most intricate and exquisite buildings in Lucknow, it was built as a congregation hall for Shia Muslims and today houses the tombs of Muhammed Ali Shah and his family. Our next stop is the Rumi Darwaza, often referred to as the Turkish Gate. This imposing gate is a busy route through the city. We finish the day at Bara Imambara, this impressive complex was built in the 1780's and houses a mosque, a step well and a maze of corridors. **Overnight - Lucknow (B)**

Day 8 : Lucknow

Today we further explore the city of Lucknow, heading first for La Martiniere college. The college was established in 1845 from instructions in the will of Major General Claude Martin, who left a large endowment for its construction and upkeep. Today, it educates upwards of 6,000 pupils at one time and the Constantia building has been described as 'perhaps the best-preserved colonial building in Lucknow'. Later we'll visit the remains of

two British Raj-era buildings, Dilkusha Palace and the British Residency, both of which were shelled during the 1857 siege of Lucknow and today lay in ruins. The rest of the day is at leisure for you to further explore Lucknow.

Overnight - Lucknow (B)

Day 9 : Varanasi



Lucknow – Varanasi. Today we drive from Lucknow to Varanasi, one of the oldest and holiest cities on Earth. The city is also an important Hindu pilgrimage site, set on the banks of the River Ganges.

Varanasi is perhaps the holiest city in India, known as Benares or the city of Shiva, it is also one of the oldest cities on earth. Sitting on the banks of the holy River Ganges, Varanasi has been a centre of learning for more than 2000 years and it's an important Hindu pilgrimage site. **Overnight - Varanasi (B)**

Day 10 : Boat ride on the Ganges

Early this morning we take a boat trip along the holy Ganges River. Hindu pilgrims come to bathe in the holy waters of the Ganges at the ghats (river side steps), a ritual which washes away all of their sins. There are a long string of ghats that line the Western bank of the river and although most are used for bathing and cleansing the soul, there are several dedicated to cremation. Bodies are cremated at 'burning' ghats and the ashes are scattered into the water of the holy Ganges. Hindus believe that dying here ensures release from the cycle of rebirths and an instant admission to heaven. On our boat trip we'll see the ritual bathing and a host of other fascinating scenes, from people performing yoga, offering blessings and selling flowers, to people playing cricket and getting a shave.

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Then we embark on a tour of India's spiritual city. At sunset consider re-visiting the ghats for the evening pilgrimage, which is different from the dawn ritual. **Overnight - Varanasi (B)**

Day 11 : Return to Delhi

Varanasi - Delhi. Spend our final morning in Varanasi at leisure, before we fly to Delhi this afternoon. Your final evening in India is then free to spend as you wish. Perhaps visit the stunning Red Fort and attend its famous Sound and Light show after dark. **Overnight - Delhi (B)**

Day 12 : Delhi

Wednesday. Our Indian adventure comes to an end today with an included transfer to the airport.(B)

HOTELS

Highlighted below are some of the hotels which we frequently use on this tour, though we reserve the right to substitute these hotels to ones of a similar standard.

Please refer to your Tour Voucher for your confirmed arrival hotel and further arrival information.

Vivanta by Taj Dwarka

Vivanta by Taj Dwarka is a modern, luxury hotel located in Dwarka, on the outskirts of New Delhi, just a 15-minute drive from the airport. Spread over 7 acres, this striking hotel has a unique angular design and offers 250 luxurious rooms and suites. All tastes are catered for at the hotel's multi-cuisine restaurant, while the Indus Express restaurant serves mouth-watering Punjabi cuisine. Head to the popular Tipple bar for a delicious array of heady cocktails or relax by the poolside with a refreshing smoothie from the Celsius Pool Bar. The nearby Sector 21 Metro station provides direct access to the heart of the city and after a day of sightseeing you can cool off with a refreshing dip in the outdoor pool or relax in the sauna and massage parlour.



Hotel Jivitesh

The Jivitesh Hotel is centrally located in the heart of Karol Bagh, a popular neighbourhood of Delhi renowned for its excellent shops and vibrant street markets. The Jivitesh offers comfortable and spacious guest rooms, with modern amenities such as free WiFi, and you can be assured of a warm welcome and excellent customer service from the hotel staff. Enjoy authentic Indian vegetarian cuisine at the hotel's restaurant and take a refreshing dip in the outdoor swimming pool after a day of sightseeing in the capital.



Jaypee Siddharth Hotel

The luxurious Jaypee Siddharth is a stunning property located just five kilometres from the New Delhi Railway Station. Guestrooms are exquisitely decorated with a blend of cream and brown tones and benefit from air conditioning and complimentary WiFi. If you have free time, guests can indulge in one of the rejuvenating treatments available at the spa, take a dip in the outdoor pool or work up an appetite in the gym. A range of cuisines are served in the various restaurants found within the hotel complex.



Crowne Plaza New Delhi Rohini

Located just footsteps from the nearest metro station, the Crowne Plaza New Delhi offers a beautiful blend of contemporary facilities and warm Indian hospitality. Each en-suite guestroom features traditional wood furnishings and a minibar, free WiFi and a flat screen TV. Guests can unwind in the Adya Spa which features a mix of Asian and European therapies or take a swim in the outdoor pool to escape the heat. The hotel prides itself on its range of dining options including the Spice Art restaurant, which serves delicious North Indian cuisine, and Moasic, where you'll find a range of international dishes.



Mandawa Haveli

Made of pink and red sandstone, the beautiful heritage-style Mandawa Haveli is a fine example of typical Rajasthani architecture. All rooms are well appointed with intricately carved wooden beds and king-size royal portraits, with modern amenities such as free WiFi and ensuite bathrooms. Spend an evening dining on continental, Indian or Rajasthani cuisine on the outdoor terrace or request a private, candlelit dinner on the rooftop under a star-studded sky. Well located in the heart of Jaipur city on Sansar Chandra Road, this hotel is just a few minute's drive from the Palace of the Winds.



Udai Vilas Palace

Set amongst 2 acres of landscaped gardens, the Udai Vilas Palace is a traditional hotel located right in the heart of Bharatpur city. Guest rooms are spacious and well equipped with comfortable beds and

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large windows. The hotel is famous for its barbecue nights and Rajasthani folklore evenings, where you will be enthralled by traditional music and dance performances. Keoladeo National Park, one of the most well-known bird sanctuaries in India, is also just a five-minute drive away.



Seven Hills Tower

The modern and stylish Seven Hills Tower hotel boasts a range of facilities and services designed to ensure the quality of each traveller's stay. The spacious guestrooms are elegantly decorated with neutral colours and fabrics covered with traditional patterns and all have excellent ensuite facilities. Guests can enjoy a dip in the rooftop pool or laze on the sun loungers before heading to the equally lofty restaurant for some mouth-watering Mughlai cuisine. The al fresco dining area offers beautiful views of the Taj Mahal, perfect for enjoying a sunset drink.



Surya Hotel

Originally built in 1818 as an ancient Nepali King's Palace, the Surya Hotel has been beautifully restored to its former glory. Guestrooms are classically furnished with excellent amenities and beautiful European-style bathrooms. Meals are served in the Canton Royale Restaurant which serves up a delicious array of Indian and International cuisine. Those wanting a refreshing drink should head to the Sol Bar for cocktails, beers and other beverages. The hotel also offers traditional Henna tattoos and Indian handicrafts to purchase.



September 2019 Re-route

If travelling in September, our itinerary differs slightly from the itinerary currently advertised on our website including an overnight stay in Orchha & Khajuraho.

Day 1 to Day 6: No changes, itinerary as web.

Day 7: Agra - Orchha. Morning express train from Agra to Jhansi and onward drive to Orchha, arriving at approx 11:30. Orchha sightseeing and time for lunch. Overnight in Orchha.

Day 8: Orchha – Khajuraho. Morning drive to Khajuraho, arriving at approx. 13:00 in time for lunch. Afternoon Khajuraho sightseeing. Overnight in Khajuraho.

Day 9: Khajuraho – Varanasi. Early morning drive to Varanasi arriving at approx. 17:00. Overnight Varanasi

Day 10 – 12: No changes, itinerary as per web.

Confirming Your Trip

At time of booking please provide us with YOUR FULL NAME and DOB, 120 days prior to departure to secure train tickets. If booking less than 120 days, every effort will be made to secure seats in the same carriage as the others in your tour group, though this may not be possible.

Guides & Groups

Our longest group tour in India is our Highway to Himalayas – 16 day tour. All other group tours that we offer are sectors of this larger tour. Some travelling on your trip may only travel with you for a week or more and others may continue on to complete the full 16 days. It also might be that you end your holiday part way through the longest tour and others in the group continue on. Whenever there is 6 persons or more on your holiday you will have a tour guide escorting/ travelling along with you. Your guide will conduct the sightseeing

arrangements, or accompany you where the local law dictates that a local guide must conduct the sightseeing in this region. Where the group number is less than 6 persons you will travel from place to place with a driver and meet a local guide at each new destination that will conduct your sightseeing arrangements in this location.

25 October 2019 - Diwali, the Festival of Light

Of all the festivals celebrated in India, Diwali is by far the most important. The five day celebration commemorates the return of Lord Rama, along with Sita and Lakshmana, from his fourteen years of exile and the vanquishing of the demon King Ravana. The people of Ayodhya, the Capital of Rama, overwhelmed with joy, illuminated the kingdom with earthen oil lamps and set firecrackers ablaze to welcome the return of their king

Nowadays Diwali involves the lighting of small clay lamps filled with oil, signifying the triumph of good over evil. During Diwali, all the celebrants wear new clothes and share sweets and snacks with family members and friends. Believing in good luck and good fortune associated with the events, most Indian business communities choose to begin the financial year on the first day of Diwali.

If travelling on our tour departing 25th October 2019, we offer slightly varied touring arrangements in Jaipur to celebrate Diwali.

Arrangements are as follows:

Day 3 - Diwali, the Festival of Light!

Delhi - Jaipur. This morning we drive from Delhi to Jaipur. Upon arrival to Jaipur the remainder of the afternoon offers free time before we head out this evening to celebrate Diwali. Our first stop this evening is the highly regarded Birla temple. Located at the foot of Moti Doongri fortress, this beautiful temple is made up of three marble domes representing the three major religions of the country and adorned with intricate marble carvings of historic and religious figures. While the main idols of the temple are Lord Vishnu and his consort Goddess Lakshmi, it does house

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many other small shrines devoted to various Hindu Gods and Goddesses. During Diwali the gardens surrounding the temple are lit up and decorated in garlands and flowers, and locals flock to the temple to give their offerings to the deities. While the temple does get very crowded during the festivities, this is all part of experiencing a truly authentic Diwali celebration with the locals.

Leaving the temple grounds we'll make our way to a restaurant in the city that specialises in classic Indian cuisine for a special Diwali Dinner. As firecrackers light the balmy, autumn night sky we'll continue to celebrate Diwali alongside the locals.

Overnight - Jaipur (B, D)

Day 4 - The Pink City of Jaipur

Very early this morning there is the opportunity to sail over the lofty hilltop forts and regal palaces of Jaipur in a hot air balloon, on our Balloon Over Jaipur Add-on. We then travel beyond Jaipur to the stunning 16th century Amber Fort, reaching its summit by jeep, where we enjoy a tour of the fort's well-preserved interior and grounds. Later we visit a cotton weaving house to see a demonstration of fabric dyeing and block printing before touring the City Palace and Jantar Mantar - an old yet cleverly designed space observatory.

06 March 2020 - Holi - Festival of Colour tour

Celebrated all over India since ancient times, Holi is an annual festival celebrated on the day after the full moon in the Hindu month of Phalgun. Originally Holi was an agricultural festival celebrating the arrival of spring. Today the central ritual of Holi incorporates the throwing of coloured water and powders on friends and family which gives the holiday its modern name 'the Festival of Colour'. This ritual is also believed to be based on events in Hindu mythology and is associated with Krishna's playful splashing of the maids with water, but most of all it celebrates the coming of spring and the vibrancy of colour that the season brings.

Holi - the festival of colour, will be celebrated nationwide on Tuesday, 10 March 2020 and our arrangements for day 5, 6 and 7 are as follows:

Days 1 - 4: Arrangements as per normal Delhi Palaces Ganges itinerary.

Day 5: Tuesday 10 March 2020. Jaipur - Bharatpur. It's an early start today as the festivities of Holi bring thousands of people out onto the streets in a dazzling display of colour and good cheer. Celebrated every year in February or March, the ancient Hindu festival of Holi originated as a celebration of the end of winter and beginning of spring in honour of Prahlada, who was protected from the flames by Vishnu when he was tricked to his near death by his father King Hiranyakashipu.

Today Holi is a time when Indians across the nation gather together with family, friends and neighbours to throw powder bombs, fire water pistols and splash coloured water as they run through the streets. Shops and businesses close for the day, and on the eve of the celebrations a bonfire is held to remember the story of Prahlada and Vishnu.

While this is the mostly believed story, the myths and legends that surround Holi differ around the country, but the basic principle remains the same. Holi is meant to symbolise the triumph of good over evil, the importance of love and of happiness, and supports the formation of new friendships.

Leaving our hotel, we'll drive to Bharatpur. Arriving to our hotel in Bharatpur, you can pull up a chair and watch the Holi celebrations that will take place out on the lawn. For those wanting to get involved we'll be providing white kurta pyjamas for you to wear and organic colours for you to throw. In this game of cat and mouse, stealth and the art of surprise will serve you well. Note: The festivities will take place between members of our groups, guides and some hotel staff, not the general public. We do not celebrate Holi out on the streets with locals as the assault set upon non-locals can be overwhelming and the chemicals/colours used for making coloured powder in unknown.

After a bombardment of powder bombs and shower of water in every imaginable colour, there is time for lunch before visiting the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Keoladeo Ghana National Park where we'll enjoy a leisurely rickshaw ride through the park. Keoladeo's 29 sq.km of swamps and lakes constitute one of the most important breeding and migratory areas in the world, where from October - March the some 200 plus local species are joined by a further 130 species from as far afield as the Russian Steppes and Central Asia. Note: This departure does not include a visit to Abhaneri Village School and it's unlikely that we will be able to reach the Chand Baori step well. Overnight - Bharatpur

Day 6: Wednesday 11 March 2020. En route to Agra we visit Fatehpur Sikri, which was once a magnificent fortified city and the capital of the Mughal Empire from 1571 until 1585, until it was abandoned due to a lack of water.

Fatehpur Sikri is well preserved and divided into four main parts: the women's quarters; the emperor's quarters; a quarter for princes and noblemen; and weapons housing. We see various temples, pavilions and public areas, gaining a fascinating insight into how life must have been for the inhabitants of this old city.

Continuing to Agra, we embark on a short tour of the Agra Fort. Behind its colossal walls are some of the finest Mughal buildings in India. Construction of the fort was commenced during the reign of Emperor Akbar and additions were made until the rule of his grandson Shah Jahan. During Akbar's time, it was primarily a military fort though later the focus shifted and it partially became a palace.

Our final stop for the day is the legendary Taj Mahal. Built by Emperor Shah Jahan in loving memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz, who tragically died in childbirth in 1631, the Taj Mahal is described as the most extravagant monument ever built for love and remains one of India's most enduring symbols. Overnight - Agra

Day 7: Thursday 12 March 2020. Agra - Lucknow. Onwards, arrangements as per normal Delhi Palaces Ganges itinerary.

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KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Entrance Fees

On our India group tours, selected entry fees are included, however all others must be budgeted for by you. The total cost of the entrance fees which need to be paid locally, as noted under 'Exclusions' on the first page of this document. Entrance fee amounts can change and as such upon arrival to India your tour leader will highlight the exact total entrance fee cost for your tour. PLEASE NOTE: Entrance fees are to be paid in INDIAN RUPEES (INR) and they will be collected on day 2 of your tour.

If travelling on our Railways of the Raj tour, entrance fees will not be collected and are payable by you at each site. If travelling to Sri Lanka on our Delhi to Colombo tour, entrance fees for that section of your tour will be collected by your guide in Sri Lanka and payable in Sri Lankan Rupees (LKR).

Language

While English is not the first language in India, it is the most important language for national, political, and commercial communication. Hindi is the national language and primary tongue of 30% of the people and there are 22 official languages in addition to Hindi, including: Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Malayalam, Kannada, Oriya, Punjabi, Assamese, Kashmiri, Sindhi, Sanskrit, Dogri, Santali, Bodo, Maithali, Manipuri, Nepali and Konkani. Hindustani is a popular variant of Hindi/Urdu spoken widely throughout northern India but is not an official language.

Taxis & Rickshaws

Taxis are cheap and readily available in most of the bigger towns in India. Most of them possess metres, although taxi drivers who use their metre are rare! Try and get an idea of the likely fare before you leave your hotel. The front desk staff or your tour guide should be able to assist you. Then negotiate with the driver before departure.

Motorised three-wheel rickshaws are available for hire throughout the country. Powered by a 2-stroke motorcycle engine

with a driver upfront and seating for 2 - 3 at the rear, with no doors and a canvas roof, these rickshaws weave their way speedily through oncoming traffic. The ride will be fast, efficient and certainly an experience! Always negotiate the price you want to pay before setting off. Offering around 50% of the asking price is the general rule of thumb, though you'll always pay more than the going rate for a local!

A cycle rickshaw is a 3-wheeler bicycle with a seat for passengers behind the rider. Although not often seen in big cities, you'll find them in Old Delhi and all the smaller towns, where they are a common mode of transport. Again, negotiate the fare before departure.

Begging

With more than 350 million people in India living on less than USD\$2 per day, inevitably you will come across many people begging for money. Begging has a legitimate place in Indian society. Even poor people give to beggars or charities to earn religious merit. The Indian government, however, would like to regulate begging more stringently. Though begging is common, you are not under obligation to give money. If you choose to give money to beggars, we advise you to do this from the vehicle and not on the street. Alternatively, consider donating pencils, pens or modest educational supplies to village schools.

Religion

More than 80% of the country practice Hinduism. The remaining 20% comprise followers of Islam (12%), Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism and other minority beliefs.

System of Government

India is a constitutional democracy. There are 29 states and 7 union territories. Parliament is bicameral; the lower house is known as the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and the upper house is known as the Rajya Sabha (Council of States).

Not like Home

Travelling to far-flung corners of the earth often involves encountering lifestyles and conditions that are very different from what you are used to back home. As

such it is important to come prepared for unusual situations, local inadequacies and unpredictable events as and when they occur. Foreign travel is definitely not suitable for people who expect or demand everything to go exactly as planned, as things can and do change in foreign countries.

The people, customs, creed and languages of India are different from one region to the next. It is as vast as it is crowded, and as opulent as it is squalid. India is exciting, intense and diverse - an all-embracing experience, a veritable assault on the senses. Sometimes the poverty will get you down, Indian bureaucracy can test your patience and facing another traffic jam will seem almost too much to bear. Yet, it's all worthwhile. While India is far from the easiest country in the world to travel around, On The Go will try their best to make your tour as seamless as possible. Our holidays combine comfortable transportation, comprehensive sightseeing and good hotels, allowing you to concentrate on getting the most out of your stay.

India is a country of unparalleled contrasts, a destination where you'll be afforded plenty of unique encounters, and if you can travel with an open mind you will have a wonderful time here. In return, please remember to demonstrate sensitivity and respect for local customs.

Tipping Kitty

Tipping is not a natural part of many Western cultures and many of us feel uncomfortable, or unsure about when or how much to tip. However, in India tipping makes up a significant part of many people's wages so it's important that we get it right. For this reason, we've developed a very simple system to take all the hassle out of tipping.

With our 'tipping made easy' policy, a nominal pre-determined amount is collected from all group tour participants to cover tips en route. This then saves you the hassle of when and how much to tip bellhops, luggage handlers, local guides and other support staff through the tour. The tipping kitty amount is noted under 'Exclusions' on the first page of these Trip Notes. PLEASE NOTE: The tipping kitty is

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to be paid in INDIAN RUPEES (INR) and it will be collected on day 2 of your tour.

If travelling onto Sri Lanka on our Delhi to Colombo tour, the tipping kitty for that section of your tour will be collected by your guide in Sri Lanka and payable in Sri Lankan Rupees (SLR). If travelling on our Railways of the Raj tour, a tip kitty will not be collected and we ask that you independently manage tipping along the way.

Our 'Tip Kitty' doesn't include a tip for your group tour guide, where we suggest an amount of approx USD\$3 - 7 per day multiplied by the duration of your tour. Naturally though, the amount is up to you. The tip for your guide is an entirely personal gesture.

If travelling on a group tour with less than 6 participants or on a tailor-made holiday, in place of 'tipping made easy' we recommend the following amounts per person per day be allocated to cover tips paid directly by you to - bellhops, luggage handlers, your driver and local guides - USD \$9 if the day includes a local guide & sightseeing and USD \$4 if the day excludes a local guide and sightseeing.

Visas

All foreign nationals must obtain a visa for a visit to India and it is essential the visa be procured prior to travel.

UK, Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and USA passport holders can take advantage of India's online visa service (subject to eligibility). Information about the e-Tourist Visa (eTV) process can be found at: <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html>

The online application should be submitted a minimum of 4 working days and a maximum of 120 days in advance of proposed date of arrival. Entry to India must be within 120 days of the eTV approval date and the visa is valid for 60 days from arrival. Please visit the website noted above for more info.

The e-Tourist Visas are 60 day, double-entry visas. You cannot obtain an e-Tourist Visa if you plan to stay in India for more than 60 days or if you require more than 2 entries. A

six month multiple entry visa can be obtained from the embassy in advance of travel.

If you're a resident of the UK and would like someone to handle your visa application for you then we recommend CIBTvisas. Please visit <http://www.cibtvisas.co.uk/onthego> for more details on how to start your visa application with them.

Visa requirements are subject to change and that visa procurement prior to departure is solely the responsibility of the traveller and not of On The Go Tours. Please also ensure that your passport is valid for at least 6 months from your planned date of return from India.

Currency

The currency of India is the Indian Rupee.

Pound Sterling, US Dollars or other major currencies can be exchanged only in India, as the Rupee is presently exchangeable only in destination. The Rupee is non-exportable, so spend it all before you leave! Exchange facilities are available at major airports and bureau de changes and to a lesser degree, ATMs/cash machines exist in larger towns. It's advisable to request bank notes in smaller denominations, as it can sometimes be hard to get change from large notes and smaller notes are handy for smaller purchases and gratuities. Traveller's Cheques are not recommended as they're often difficult to exchange and incur high fees.

Domestic Flights - Baggage Allowance

If your tour includes a domestic flight or you have independently booked domestic flights separate to that of your international flights, please be mindful that that free baggage allowance for **Economy Class travel on flights within India is near always 15kg, with 5 - 7kg for hand luggage**. Additional weight is charged per kilo and is payable by you directly to the airline at check-in. If you will be travelling with more than 15kg on a flight included within our tour, please contact us so we can confirm the exact luggage allowance for your flight and give you the per kilo cost for any additional weight.

ATMs & Credit Cards

Exchange facilities are available at various bureau de changes, banks and at most hotels. Bring clean, unmarked cash in US Dollars (not USD 100 bills as these are hard to change), Euro or Pound Sterling. Commission charges vary from place to place and bank to bank. ATMs are available in all major towns and cities. We recommend you take a mixture of cash and credit/debit cards (for ATM usage). Please avoid bringing Travellers Cheques as they can sometimes be difficult to change. Credit cards are an acceptable means of payment in most major tourist centres, including larger shops and businesses.

TOP TIP: Before leaving home inform your bank that you will be travelling to India, as otherwise your bank may think that your transaction made in India is fraudulent and withhold funds until you contact them.

Train Travel In India

Travelling by train in India is an unforgettable local experience where you will get to meet Indian people and experience daily life as they do. The Indian Railway system is the world's second largest, with over 108,706 km of track, connecting more than 7000 stations. Every day, more than 7000 trains run, carrying some 14 million passengers, including us. Several of our group tours and add-ons include train journeys, some by day and others overnight. If your tour does include train travel, we have noted within the itinerary the coach/class of travel that will be booked. Below is some further information that may assist you in planning for your journey.

AC CHAIR CAR

If travelling on a daytime journey, you will travel in an air-conditioned seated carriage (called AC chair car), similar to that of a standard city trains in most western countries. When travelling to loftier destinations where the weather is cooler, air-conditioning may not be provided.

2nd AC COACH/SLEEPER

If travelling overnight, we accommodate passengers in the 2nd class sleeper air-conditioned category (unless otherwise indicated at a higher level). 2nd class sleeper

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air-conditioned cabins consist of 2 upper and 2 lower bunks, plus a double-decker set of bunk beds on the opposite side of the cabin shared by you and other Indian travellers. You can sit up on your bench seat during the day and simply lie down once you are ready to go to sleep.

All cabins are mixed sex. Your cabin is not self-contained as such. 'Cabins' are separated from the carriage corridor by curtains, serving as an artificial barrier that can be drawn at night. Luggage, including hand luggage should be locked (as you would do when travelling on any overnight train anywhere in the world) and can be stored underneath the lower bunks or on the floor. The carriage is manned by an attendant who will distribute linen, free of charge. Dependent upon the service, a variety of snacks and drinks or full dinner service can be ordered at an additional cost (except for the Shatabdi Express and Rajdhani Express where meals are included within your fare). Food aboard the Shatabdi Express train is most often exceptionally good, though on many other train services it is probably best to buy snacks, fresh fruit that can be peeled or meals prior to the start of your journey. In addition, there are WC facilities (European and 'squat-style') at each end of the carriage. Cleanliness varies, so be prepared and take your own anti-bacterial hand wipes and toilet paper.

1st AC COACH/ SLEEPER

All Indian trains offer 2nd and 3rd AC coaches, but only a handful of trains offer 1st AC coaches, which can accommodate a tiny total of 18 people. 1st AC coach/ sleepers only have berths on one side of the train hence making the cabin more spacious. The cabin may have 2 berths or 4 which seat/sleep 2 or 4 persons. You can sit up on a bench seat during the day, which is folded into bunk beds at night. The 1st AC coach also has a door making it fully closed and lockable for 2 or 4 persons. Beds are a tad wider and mattresses more cushioned. Each cabin has a 'bell' switch, which when pressed summons the attendant of the coach.

3rd AC COACH/ SLEEPER

We do not include 3rd AC coach travel within any of our tours, though if you were

considering it for personal arrangements a description can be given as follows. 3rd AC coach is very similar to 2nd AC coach with the only difference being that there is a middle berth ie not just a 2 bunk bed but a triple bunk bed, hence making it possible for 6 people to be accommodated within the space. Like the 2nd AC coach there is also another set of bunk beds on the opposite side ie running parallel with the length of the train. Like 2nd AC, there's no door just curtains and again you sit up on your bunk bed during the day and lie down to sleep.

Health Requirements

You should seek medical advice before travelling to India from your local health practitioner and ensure that you receive all the appropriate vaccinations. As a guide Tetanus, Typhoid, Hepatitis A and Polio are strongly recommended. You are also advised to take anti-Malarial medication.

Water

As tap water is not safe to drink in India, only drink bottled mineral water which is readily available in hotels, shops and restaurants. You should also avoid salads which may be washed in unhygienic water.

Climate

India has a three-season year known as the hot, the wet and the cool. The best time to visit is between September and April when temperatures are cooler and therefore ideal for sightseeing. In the summer months of May to July it is less crowded and conditions are perfect for sightseeing and photography, although parts of India are extremely hot. July signals the start of the monsoon or wet season that continues until early September. Although the weather is humid, the days are punctuated by intermittent rainfall and the monsoon in India is actually quite spectacular and refreshing.

Time & Voltage

India is 5 hours 30 mins ahead of GMT. Standard voltage is 230-240V (usually 240V). Pack a universal travel adaptor that will allow you to use a hairdryer, electric shaver, charge a mobile phone and other electrical items. Take care with your choice of adaptor. Be sure

that it is suitable for India, as Indian sockets accept round 3 pin plugs that are similar but not identical to European plugs.

Essential Packing

- A small daypack for your day-to-day needs
- A photocopy of your passport data pages
- The voltage in India is 230-240V. Most outlets in India accept round 3 pin plugs (not a UK, European or USA plugs). You should pack a Universal Adaptor and check that it is suitable for India
- Insect repellent to guard against mosquitos
- Spare camera batteries/memory card
- Consider packing some pencils, pens or modest educational supplies that can be given to village schools or street children
- Buy some Indian Rupees at the airport on arrival
- Keep a supply of small notes for local transactions

Arrival Transfers

If your tour or short stay includes an airport arrival transfer (as indicated in the 'Inclusions' section of these Trip Notes) from Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, our arrival procedure is as follows:

Arrive to Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, where after you have attended to customs and immigration formalities, please proceed to the arrival hall. Please have your tour voucher handy and make it available to our representative who will be waiting for you in the arrivals hall, holding a prominent On The Go Tours logo signboard, ready to escort you to our awaiting transportation and onward to your start hotel.

If, for any reason you have trouble locating our representative (after waiting 20 minutes in the arrival hall) or your flight to India is delayed please call the emergency contact number as stated on your tour voucher. Please do not leave the airport or go to the hotel on your own. Call our emergency contact number and follow the advice given by our local team.

If travelling on our Captivating Kerala tour (with arrival via Kochi Airport), Railways of the Raj tour (with arrival via Kolkata) or one of our 'Short Stays' where an airport arrival transfer is included in your holiday, the procedure for

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meeting you at the airport is the same as those detailed above.

Pre-Tour Accommodation

If arriving on day 1 of a holiday that includes an airport arrival transfer (as indicated in the 'Inclusions' section of these Trip Notes) we will be at the airport, ready to transfer you to your hotel. Further if you are booking pre-tour accommodation with us an airport arrival transfer will also be provided. If arriving prior to 9am on day 1 (essentially on a flight that arrives very, very early in the morning) consider purchasing a night of pre-tour accommodation to save you waiting until hotel check in time, which is generally 2pm.

Shopping

India is a virtual Aladdin's Cave. At the many bazaars known as 'chowks', the cardinal rule is to bargain hard. State run craft emporiums that stock the best of what a state has to offer can give you a reasonable idea of what is acceptable in terms of price and quality. You'll find carpets of quality equal to those of Persian origin, Rajasthani pottery and metalwork, embellished slippers known as jootis, jewellery in breathtaking designs. Likewise, leatherwork, silks and saris in spectacularly colourful designs, paintings and clothing make excellent souvenirs.

IMPORTANT: Set your budget and don't be swayed, remember the caveat – 'Let the buyer beware'. Any purchases made whilst on holiday with us, irrespective of whether the store is recommended by us or other, are at your own discretion. Please make sure that you are completely happy with the product you are purchasing and the delivery arrangements (we would recommend you take away with you any purchases rather than rely on shipping services). On The Go cannot be held responsible or accountable for items bought in country or shipping arrangements. We will not become involved later in your holiday or once you return home should your purchase not live up to your expectations. Proceed with caution.

Fabulous food!

India's vast range of climates, cultures and peoples has produced a very diverse culinary

repertoire. Curry is the word that springs to mind when people think of Indian food. Believe it or not, there is no such thing as 'curry' in India. It's an English invention, an all-purpose term to cover the whole gamut of Indian spicing. Although all Indian food is certainly not curry, this is the basis of Indian cuisine. For the most part Indian food is very, very aromatic, since the spices used by Indian chefs and cooks in India don't arrive in the cooking pot via a pre-packed tub of spice. Indian chefs and cooks have about 25 spices on their regular list and it is from these that they produce the curry flavour. Normally spices are freshly ground with a pestle and mortar, and blended in certain combinations to produce varying flavours and heat. It is the freshness of the spices that transform the dish. Curries can be vegetable, meat, lamb, mutton or chicken in content, though never beef. The cow is sacred to the Hindu people and India in general, so it is extremely rare to see beef on any menu across the country. Lamb also substitutes beef at McDonalds in India. Ask for a Maharajah Mac!

Street Food

Street food, although tasty and fabulous looking, cannot always be relied upon to have been safely and hygienically prepared, so to this end, we suggest you sample 'street style' food from an established restaurant or from somewhere recommended by your tour leader.

Western Food

If Indian food becomes too much and you wish to escape to something familiar, Western-style food is available. Many menus in hotels and restaurants will feature dishes loosely based on Western recipes with perhaps just a hint of curry flavouring or spice. Indians like to experiment with other cuisine as well. Chinese cuisine in India is often very good. In the bigger cities, you'll find restaurants specialising in international cuisine, not to mention American fast food chains.

Change For Children

On many of our Group Tours we stop at one of two Village Schools where we operate our 'Change for Children' programme. If travelling via Karauli you will meet the children at

Nishabd local school (supporting deaf and blind children), and if via Bharatpur, Adarsh Vidya Mandir local school. If you have bought any educational items with you to hand out to children, this would be the time to do so. You can also make a donation to the school if you choose via our Change For Children Project. Your guide will hand out envelopes to those interested.

All schools are closed from mid May through till the start of July for the Summer Vacation and then in December for Winter Vacation. Additionally, they may be closed throughout the year during festival weeks such as Holi, Diwali and others - including teacher training days which only tend to be announced a day or two prior. Accordingly, it will not be possible to visit the school during these times and should you have bought along items for the school, your guide will be happy to pass them on to the school when it re-opens on your behalf.

Some suggestions of what you may like to bring are:

- Wall charts – map of the world, numbers, letters, multiplication tables.
- Any visual teaching resources, coloured cardboard, junior scissors, rulers, sharpeners, lead pencils
- Reading books – suitable for any age between 4 – 12 yrs
- Sporting equipment – cricket bat, tennis balls, soft balls, skipping ropes, elastics
- Toothbrushes, toothpaste, liquid soap for washrooms

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