

## Foothills & Faiths

**Country(ies):** India

**Tour type:** Small Group

**Transport:** A/C minivan/minibus

**Group size:** Min: 2 | Max: 12

**Days:** 12 Days

**Start location:** Amritsar, India

**End location:** Delhi, India

**Departs On:** Saturday

**Meals:** Breakfasts - 11, Lunches - 1, Dinners - 1

**Highlights:** Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar, Wagah Border ceremony, Buddhist sites at Dharamsala, Pragpur and Garli heritage villages, Toy train to Shimla, Himalayan Foothills, Hindu pilgrimage site of Haridwar, River Ganges at Rishikesh, Delh

**Places Visited:** Amritsar, Dharamsala, Pragpur, Shimla, Haridwar, Rishikesh and Delhi



# Itinerary

## Day 1: Your Indian adventure begins in Amritsar, airport to hotel transfer included

After touching down in the holy city of Amritsar, you'll be greeted by one of our staff members at the airport, who will transport you to your hotel. Once you've settled in, we'll explain what you can expect to experience on this India tour over the next few days, before arranging a time to collect you in the morning.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Amritsar

**MEALS:** None

**EXTRAS:** Single Room Supplement (INSGFF) || Extra day in Amritsar - pre-tour

## Day 2: A visit to the Golden Temple

Today we'll make our way to the Golden Temple, which is the holiest shrine of the Sikh religion.

When you get there, have a look at its roof glistening in the sun. The entire top of the Golden Temple has been crafted out of pure gold, with its interior laden with jewels and gold leaf. Once you're inside, you'll feel the calming atmosphere of this holy place - regardless of your religious beliefs.

While you're here, you'll spend an hour at the temple's free community kitchen which feeds up to 100,000 people every day. You'll have a meal here, before spending some time doing Langar Seva - where you will help to serve and prepare food as well as clear and wash up - a small gift of our time and effort in thanks and support.

This afternoon, we'll make our way through the farmlands of Punjab, stopping to see the fresh produce before watching the daily Wagah Border ceremony at sunset, a military practice which the Indian and Pakistan security forces have done since 1959. They perform colourful, rapid dance-like manoeuvres, which signifies the brotherhood and cooperation between the two countries.

You'll travel back to Amritsar and you have the option to either go back to your hotel, have supper at a restaurant or go back to the Golden Temple to witness the Palki Sahib Ceremony, where the Holy Book - the Guru Granth Saab - is taken from the main shrine in the Hari Mandir to the sanctum, its resting place until the ceremony starts again in the morning. It also gives you a golden opportunity to explore the inside of the Golden Temple, which may have been busy with pilgrims earlier in the day.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Amritsar

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 3: Leisure time in McLeod Ganj

Today we'll head to the base of the towering Himalayas to Dharamshala and McLeod Ganj. You have the day free to explore McLeodganj's Buddhist monasteries, museums, temples, waterfalls, lakes, and Tibetan settlements. It's also the home of the Tibetan Government in Exile and the Dalai Lama's residence. Take in the stunning scenery and explore the local markets which sell exotic sculptures, souvenirs and Thangka paintings.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in McLeod Ganj

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 4: Exploring the Dalai Lama Monastery

After a free day exploring McLeod Ganj, your day starts with a tour of the Dalai Lama Monastery, where you'll attend a puja - a prayer session, that includes chanting mantras, bowing and making offerings. We'll offer lamps and Khagat religious cloth, made of silk and worn around our necks as a show of respect.

Afterwards, we'll make our way to the Bhagsunag Waterfall and Shiva Temple. The Temple is about one kilometre away from the main waterfall, which is flanked by cliffs and trees, providing you with spectacular views. If you'd like, you can even take a swim in its icy waters.

Once you're at the temple, be sure to visit the freshwater spring, which is believed to have healing powers. Its waters are channeled into large tanks and devotees bathe in it to cleanse their ailments.

Your final stop is a visit to the Naddi View Point, which breathtaking views of the Dhauladhar mountain ranges and the pristine Dal Lake below.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in McLeod Ganj

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 5: Exploring the Heritage Villages of Pragpur & Garli

Your day begins with a tour of the Norbulingka Institute, which preserves the literary and artistic forms of the Tibetan culture, before visiting the Pragpur Heritage Village, which was founded in the 16th century by the Kuthiala Soods in memory of Princess Prag Dei of the Jaswan royal family.

You'll also visit the Dada Siba Temple, known for its murals and miniature wall paintings. After lunch, you explore the village a little more, before travelling to Garli - another heritage village in the Kangra Valley which boasts colonial style architecture, evident in its mansions, temples and sarais. We'll check in at our hotel, before a local guide walks us through the village and providing valuable insight into their history.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Garli

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Dinner

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 6: A toy train ride to Shimla

You'll head to Dharampur Himanchal to board the 'toy' train to Shimla, the capital city of Himachal Pradesh, situated at the foothills of the Himalayas. Shimla used to be the summer capital of British India, and it remains the terminus of the Kalka-Shimla Railway, completed in 1903. Its narrow gauge railway is one of the world's most famous train journeys, and has since been named as a UNESCO World Heritage Site - a highlight of the tour.

Watch how the train steams its way up the hills, passing hundreds of bridges and tunnels along the way, every turn providing you with more breathtaking views.

You'll catch the Himalayan Queen service, missing the lowest section from Kalka, which shortens your journey quite a bit, but shows you the best scenery. The train stops regularly, so you can jump off and buy some snacks from one of the local vendors on the platforms.

You'll arrive in Shimla in the afternoon and have time to settle in and look around. Shimla is also known for its craft shops, a pedestrian avenue, as well as the Lakkar Bazaar, a market specializing in wooden toys and crafts.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Shimla

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 7: Exploring Shimla

Feel free to explore Shimla this morning or you have an option to trek towards the Tara Devi Temple, located amongst a thick forest of oak and rhododendron and offers scenic views of the lofty Himalayas surrounding the town.

As afternoon comes around, you'll explore Shimla on foot, visiting its main attractions such as the Vice Regal Lodge, the Christ Church, the Gaeity Theatre, before taking a cable car ride to Jakhu Temple, Shimla's most famous temple, dedicated to the monkey god Hanuman. It's situated on the highest peak in Shimla at a height of 2,455 metres.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Shimla

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 8: Shimla to Haridwar

We have some free time this morning to finish looking around Shimla before we descend out of the hills again to catch a fast train from Chandigarh to Haridwar.

Haridwar is an ancient city on the banks of the River Ganges, and is an important Hindu pilgrimage site with thousands of pilgrims making their way there every year to bathe in the holy waters. The city is set at the point where the Ganges leaves the forested mountains for the plains below making it one of India's most beautiful city locations.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Haridwar

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 9: Haridwar to Rishikesh, Aarti ceremony at Triveni Ghat

We spend the morning visiting the banks of the Ganges in Haridwar and seeing the many pilgrims taking a dip in the river at the main Har Ki Paudi ghat. Other stops today include the Shanti Kunj ashram, the Chandi Devi temple, which we reach by cable car, and the Pawan Dham temple which features many incredibly intricate glass and mirrored ornaments and depictions of Hindu gods.

We leave Haridwar this afternoon for the short drive to Rishikesh, another holy city on the banks of the Ganges. Rishikesh is renowned now as one of India's centres for yoga and meditation, as well as adventure activities with white water rafting on the Ganges particularly popular.

This evening we will head down to the river to experience the Aarti ceremony at Triveni Ghat. This nightly prayer session takes around an hour and is accompanied by the chanting of bhajans, beating drums and ringing bells. Devotees, and visitors, light oil lamps and candles, placing them in flower filled boats made from leaves, before releasing them into the holy waters of the river

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Rishikesh

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 10: Rishikesh tour and free time

We'll take a walking tour of Rishikesh today, along the river and between the Laxman Jhula and the Ram Jhula bridges. We'll pass various temples and the Shivananda, Parmarth Niketanj, Geeta Bhawan and Swarg Ashrams, and learn about the importance of yoga and meditation to the Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and other religions.

The rest of the day is free to explore this fascinating town further.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Rishikesh

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 11: Free time & optional activities in Rishikesh, train to Delhi

Your day is free in Rishikesh today to explore independently, arrange some activities locally, or take one of our optional activities. These include a safari trip to the nearby Rajaji National Park in search of wild elephants and tigers, a cooking class with a local family, or an exciting white water rafting trip on the Ganges.

Later in the afternoon we return to Haridwar station to catch the fast train to Delhi for our final evening.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel in Delhi

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Rishikesh white-water rafting tour || Wildlife safari at Rajaji National Park || Indian cooking class with dinner

## Day 12: Delhi. Free time, transfer to airport included

Our tour ends in Delhi today with free time and then a transfer to the airport for your departure.

A range of optional half day tours of the city are available if you have a late flight or add an extra day or more in Delhi, as well as longer extensions to visit the holy city of Varanasi or to do some safaris in search of tigers and other wildlife at Ranthambore National Park.

**OVERNIGHT:** N/A

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Goa beach extension || Ranthambore National Park Safari || Extra day in Delhi - post-tour || Spinmonkey cycling tour || Varanasi extension || New Delhi half day by car || Old Delhi half-day walking tour || Salam Balak Trust walk

## Included

- All accommodation in mid-range hotels and heritage properties
- 24-hour airport arrival and departure transfer service
- Transport and transfers in AC vehicles
- Himalayan Queen toy train to Shimla
- Train from Kalka to Haridwar and Haridwar to Delhi (2nd class AC)
- Sightseeing tours and activities as per the itinerary
- Services of a local tour leader and specialist local guides
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary (11 breakfasts, 1 lunch, 1 dinner)

## Excluded

- International flights (available on request)
- Visa fees

- Travel insurance (compulsory, available on request)
- Meals not indicated in the itinerary
- Drinks, snacks and other personal expenses (e.g. laundry)
- Tips for drivers and guides
- Entrance fees (budget USD 52, payable in Amritsar)
- Any other items not mentioned above

# Options

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Our tours are designed to include all that you need to enjoy a really special time in the destination you're visiting.

However, we do also offer some extra options to complement the tour and add some additional sightseeing or activities, or some extra time at either end of the tour.

All accommodation based options (e.g. Single supplements, extra nights, cruise upgrades) should be booked and paid for in advance so that we can make the appropriate arrangements.

Other options may either be booked and paid for in advance or while you are on the tour, though we recommend booking in advance to ensure there are no issues with availability.

Many options are priced the same throughout the year, but some may incur single or high season supplements - full details are given on the tour reservation form or on request.

## Single Room Supplement (INSGFF)

**Min numbers:** 1 person

**Price:** \$625.00

This option books a single room in all the accommodation throughout the tour. If you are a single traveller and would be happy to share a room, let us know and we will see if we can pair you up with another single traveller of the same sex. If a room share is not available when you book then we will add the single room supplement to your booking and it will be payable with your balance payment unless we have arranged a room share for you by then. If a room share is arranged after you have paid the supplement then we will refund it to you. Room shares are arranged in order of booking.

## Extra day in Delhi - post-tour

**Min numbers:** 1 person

**Price:** \$70.00

This option adds an extra day to the end of your tour, staying in the same hotel as the main tour itself (subject to availability). Your airport departure transfer is still included. Prices shown are per person and based on two people sharing.

**Note:** Single room and peak season supplements apply.

## Goa beach extension

**Min numbers:** 2 persons

**Price:** \$679.00

After one of our busy sightseeing tours in northern India, why not finish your holiday with some time relaxing on the beach in Goa. Made internationally famous by the hippies that used to throng its northern beaches, Goa today has a huge amount more to offer. You can stay in simple guest-houses, eco resorts or luxury hotels at beaches frequented by backpackers, new-age travellers or remnants of those hippy days. The beaches are gorgeous, and the interior is well worth exploring as well. Extensions to Goa of any length are available on all of our India tours - please contact us for more information and prices.

**Day 1 - Travel to Goa**

We pick you up from your hotel in Delhi and transfer you to the airport for an internal flight to Panjim, the state capital of Goa. We meet you on arrival and transfer you to your boutique hotel in Calangute.

Overnight at Casa de Goa boutique 3-star hotel (B)

#### **Days 2-4 - Goa. Free time**

Your next 3 days are free to spend in Goa as you wish. You can relax on busy or remote beaches, go exploring inland, visit Anjuna flea market, or try a wide range of watersports. Goa also has its famous nightlife to try if that's your thing.

Overnight at Casa de Goa or similar (B)

#### **Days 5 & 6 - Return to Delhi**

We pick you up from your hotel and transfer you to your flight back to Delhi. You then have one night in Delhi and free time before we transfer you to the airport for departure

Overnight at Delhi hotel (B)

**Includes:** Internal flight Delhi-Goa, 5 nights' accommodation with breakfast, Return transfers by an AC CAR

**Note:** Prices shown are for low-season (mid-April to September) and higher rates will apply for high season and peak periods. These are shown on our online reservation form and are available on request. Single room supplements apply. There is a minimum of 2 people required to run this option.

## **Ranthambore National Park Safari**

**Min numbers:** 2 persons

**Price:** \$720.00

Ranthambore is one of the largest national parks in northern India and was declared one of the Project Tiger reserves in 1973. As well as the tigers which are the main attraction for most people, there is a multitude of other wildlife including more than 300 species of trees, 50 aquatic plants, over 300 species of birds, marsh crocodiles and monitor lizards, and 30 mammals including sloth bear, wild boar, Chinkara, Porcupines and Jackals, Leopards, Jungle cat, Sambhar, Chital, Nilgai, Gazelle, Boars, Mongoose and Indian hare. The park is within a day's journey from Delhi.

#### **Day 1 - Travel to Ranthambore**

We pick you up from your hotel in Delhi on the last day of the main tour and transfer you to the train station journey on the Kota Jan Shatabdi Express to Sawai Madhopur (approx. 13.20-18.00). The park and your lodge is a short drive from the station.

Overnight at Ranthambore Bagh, Tiger Den, Pugmarks Resort or similar (dinner)

#### **Days 2 & 3 - Morning & afternoon safaris**

We include an early morning and late afternoon guided wildlife safari on each of these two days. These are the best times for wildlife viewing, and the middle of the day is spent relaxing back at the lodge. We include two safaris travelling on a 'Canter' which is an open backed truck which provides good height to see into the bush and forest. An additional two safaris are included by jeep, which give you more flexibility to explore different parts of the park. The park is split into different zones, and we will aim to visit several to provide variety and the best chance of good animal sightings. Zones for each safari are allocated by the park authorities and out of our control.

Overnight at Ranthambore Bagh, Tiger Den, Pugmarks Resort or similar (breakfast, lunch & dinner)

#### **Day 4 & 5 - Return by train to Delhi**

You leave the lodge early to catch the NZM Jan Shatabdi Express back to Delhi (approx. 0705-1230). You then have one night in Delhi and free time before we transfer you to the airport for departure.

Overnight at Delhi hotel (breakfast)

#### **Notes:**

- This option is available between October and June. Pricing shown is based on a minimum of 2 people travelling.



Solo traveller and single room supplements apply.

- The extension can also be added to the start of the tour with the night in Delhi being spent at the beginning and Day 5 becoming the first day of the main tour. Please contact us if you would like to arrange it this way.

## **Varanasi extension**

**Min numbers:** 1 person

**Price:** \$465.00

This extension option takes you to Varanasi by train and adds 4 days to our tours that finish in Delhi. In Varanasi you'll discover its traditional villages and the holy Ganges River and join an Aarti ceremony, a Hindu ritual which sees small candles lit inside cups made from leaves and flowers, before they are floated down the river - a very important ceremony for residents and pilgrims alike.

### **Day 1 - Sleeper train to Varanasi**

We pick you up from your hotel in Delhi today (normally the last day of your main tour) and transfer you to the station for an overnight sleeper train journey to Varanasi. The train takes around 12 hours though delays of an hour or so are common, and your ticket is booked in the 2nd class AC carriage. Sheets, blankets and pillows are provided.

### **Day 2 - Exploring the villages of Varanasi and the holy Ganges River**

After your overnight train ride from Delhi, you'll have breakfast in the hotel in Varanasi before we head to the Sarai Mohana Weavers Village, well-known for its silk weaving, with most of the locals here skilled in the art. The Banarasi sarees made in Varanasi are some of the finest you'll find in India.

On the agenda as well is a trip to the Chirgaon Village, famous for its pickles, jams and guavas, before you spend the evening on the holy Ganges River participating in an Aarti Ceremony, a Hindu ritual where we'll light candles inside cups made from flowers and leaves and float it down the river.

### **Day 3 - A boat trip on the Ganges and a Brahman family lunch.**

You'll start your day with a boat trip on the calm waters of the Ganges. You'll notice how busy the banks of the river are, as the locals come here to pray and immerse themselves in its spiritually cleansing waters.

You'll also have the chance to explore Varanasi with a walking tour through its old streets, visiting its holy temples and busy markets, before visiting a local Hindu Brahman family for some cooking lessons. Here, you'll be given a masterclass in Indian cuisine, before sitting down to have lunch with the family.

This afternoon, we'll head to the ancient Buddhist site at Sarnath, the location where Lord Buddha gave his very first sermon after becoming enlightened. We'll head back to Delhi in the overnight sleeper train, or if you'd like to spend another night in Varanasi, board a flight back to Delhi in the morning.

### **Day 4 - Arrive in Delhi. Free day**

After arriving in Delhi we meet you at the station and transfer you to your hotel where breakfast is included. Normal check in time is midday but we will aim to get you into your room earlier if possible. The rest of the day is free. Various half day tour options are available if you would like to see some more of the city.

### **Day 5 - Departure airport transfer**

Your time is free today until we transfer you to the airport for your departure.

## New Delhi half day by car

**Min numbers:** 1 person

**Price:** \$55.00

This New Delhi half-day tour by car explores India's capital, located on the banks of the Yamuna River. We'll start at the towering India Gate Monument, a war memorial which resembles France's Arc-de-Triomphe. It was built to commemorate the soldiers who participated in the undivided Indian Army.

New Delhi is also the home of the Indian Government, and we'll pass buildings such the President's Palace and the Parliament of India, before visiting Humayun's Tomb - a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the Bangla Sahab Gurudwara Sikh Temple.

Prices are based on two or more people travelling. Solo traveller supplements apply.

## Old Delhi half-day walking tour

**Min numbers:** 1 person

**Price:** \$70.00

This Old Delhi half-day walking tour starts from your hotel and after arriving by car or metro in the old city we explore with a guide on foot, walking through some of its oldest and busiest markets such as the Chandni Chowk and the Chowri Bazaar, which sells unique brass, copper and paper creations.

You'll also have the chance to taste some of India's wide variety of tasty street snacks and delicacies, introducing you to the wonders of Indian cuisine. Once you're full, you'll head out in a rickshaw to explore the Jama Masjid, the largest mosques in India.

## Salam Balak Trust walk

**Min numbers:** 1 person

**Price:** \$55.00

This two hour tour operated by a respected local NGO through the city of Delhi is guided by adolescents who grew up living and working on the streets, but have since been trained as travel guides with the aim of helping them improve their communication skills and opportunities.

Listen to the stories of these kids as they take you through the busy streets of Delhi, exploring Paharganj and the area around the New Delhi Railway Station. The tour provides a fascinating and different insight into the daily lives of the locals that live here than most typical city tours.

The tour normally starts at 10am, though earlier or later starts can be arranged. It can be arranged on your final day in Delhi or if additional days are added. It can be run on any day of the week though Sundays are not ideal as the streets are much quieter. Transfers to and from your hotel are included.

## Spinmonkey cycling tour

**Min numbers:** 1 person

**Price:** \$55.00

The Spinmonkey cycling tours which run through Old and New Delhi are led by a group of young cyclists who want to change the way that people explore Delhi, promoting healthy interaction and fun along the way. It's the perfect introduction into the history, culture, food, architecture and spirit of Delhi.

During the Old Delhi cycle tour, you'll visit the Turukman Gate, the Chawri Bazar, the Jama Masjid Mosque, Chandni Chowk, and a spice market before being treated to an authentic Indian breakfast.

The New Delhi cycle tour explores Connaught Place, the Gurudwara Bangla Sahib, Rashtrapati Bhawan, India Gate, Agrasen Ki Baoli, Dhobi Ghat before enjoying breakfast at the Bengali Market.

This cycling tour normally starts early at 6 or 6.30am during summer or winter to avoid the busy traffic later in the day, and lasts around four hours. The cycling tour can be arranged on your final day in Delhi (subject to your flight departure time) or if additional days are added. It can be run on any day of the week, and transfers to and from your hotel are included.

## **Rishikesh white-water rafting tour**

**Min numbers:** 1 person

**Price:** \$40.00

If you're looking for some thrills and adventure during your trip, then this half day Rishikesh whitewater rafting tour on the Ganges River is the ideal way to generate adrenaline rush.

The Rishikesh white-water rafting tour starts in Shivpuri and lasts for about two to three hours, as you paddle for around 16 kilometres on grade three or four rapids.

All equipment, rafting guides and instructions are included in the price, which is based on two or more people sharing a raft with other travellers. All transfers to and from the rafting are included as well. Solo traveller supplements apply.

## **Wildlife safari at Rajaji National Park**

**Min numbers:**

**Price:** \$115.00

Sprawling for approximately 820 square kilometres, the Rajaji National Park, situated in Uttarakhand is one of the best places to view India's wild tigers and boasts the largest number of elephants of all the national parks located in the region.

A safari here is great opportunity for a contrasting experience to the rest of your tour. With luck you'll get to see a broad range of wildlife with the park being home to leopards, monkeys, sloth bears, several species of deer including large herds of chital, mountain goats, Nilgai and Goral antelopes as well as the big ticket elephants and tigers.

Birdwatching is a treat here as well, with the park boasting over 400 different bird species, some which include the Scaly Thrush, Snowy-browed Flycatcher, Rusty-flanked Treecreeper, Pale-footed Bush Warbler, Tytler's Leaf Warbler, Green Avadavat and Reed Bunting, Northern Goshawk, Black-necked Stork and many more.

The Rajaji National Park is open to the public between 15 November and 15 June.

Morning safaris run from 6am to 9am, however, you will leave the hotel at 5am to reach the gate by 5.45am. Afternoon safaris begin at around 3pm. The whole duration of the safari generally lasts for between two and two and a half hours. You'll be transported around the park in a jeep.

Timings of the safari may vary due to month or weather conditions. Pricing is based on two or more people travelling

with all transfers included.

## **Indian cooking class with dinner**

**Min numbers:** 1 person

**Price:** \$70.00

Want to learn how to prepare a proper Indian dish? This cooking class with an Indian family in Rishikesh will teach you the basics in a simple, easy-to-understand way, giving you the skills to create your own authentic Indian dishes once you go back home.

It's ideal for beginners and you'll be preparing a vegetarian dish. The length of the cooking lesson is about two hours, before enjoying the fruits of your labour by settling down with the family for dinner.

Pricing is based on two or more people travelling with all transfers included. Solo traveller supplements apply.

# Tour Notes

## 1. Accommodation

We use good quality hotels rated at the Indian 3-star and 4-star level on this tour as well as some heritage properties. These heritage hotels are often converted from former palaces or merchant houses and are full of historical character, though they may feel a little dated. They are often a highlight of your stay.

The specific hotels listed on our website are our preferred hotels for our small-group tours. However, these may be changed from time to time based on current availability and other logistics. In this event alternative hotels of a similar standard will be used. If you would like to guarantee any particular hotels for your trip, please contact us to request a tailor-made tour.

Accommodation is based on twin or double en-suite rooms with air conditioning. All couples will receive a private double room.

Single travellers may choose to pay a single room supplement to guarantee themselves a single room throughout the tour. Alternatively, they may choose to share a room with another traveller of the same sex. If there are no other single travellers available to pair up with at the time of booking, then we will need to add the single supplement to your tour price, but will refund this or deduct it from your balance payment if we are able to pair you up later on.

## 2. Transport

Our trips feature a mix of different transport options. We want you to feel like you're really experiencing the country you're travelling through, but at the same time finish journeys refreshed enough to enjoy the next stage of the tour. Due to the somewhat chaotic nature of Indian roads, we only use private vehicles for all road journeys on this tour.

The tour also features three journeys on India's famous railway network, on the narrow gauge 'toy train' to Shimla, and a fast train from Chandigarh to Haridwar (~3.5-4hrs) and Haridwar to Delhi (~4.5hrs).

On the toy train journey we book chair seats on the Himalayan Queen service. The full journey from Kalka to Shimla takes around 5 hours, but we join the train about half way into the journey once it has started getting into the hills properly. We feel this provides a better experience all round. Your luggage will continue to Shimla with the tour vehicle, so you do not need to worry about carrying or storing it on the train.

For the fast train journeys we aim to always book seats in the AC2 chair class (2<sup>nd</sup> class air-conditioned carriage). This is relatively clean, comfortable and not overcrowded. Due to the huge distances some trains cover, Indian trains are subject to delays. These can be longer in the winter months if the weather is foggy.

Tickets are issued 120 days in advance and are subject to full cancellation fees after you have arrived in India (US\$10 up until that point). If you book within 120 days of departure we cannot guarantee that you will be allocated a seat next to other people in the group, though the carriage stewards are generally very helpful in arranging to swap you with another traveller.

## 3. Transfers

The tour price includes a 24-hour airport meet & assist service in New Delhi airport, your arrival and departure airport-hotel transfers and all other transfers.

## 4. International Flights

We want to give you as much flexibility as possible when it comes to booking your holiday with us. So, to take

account of people with varying travel plans, we don't include your international flights in the main tour price. We are however very happy to suggest flights to go with the tour. Please contact us with your preferred dates and departure airport and we'll give you a selection of airlines, times and fares to choose from.

Your airport arrival & departure transfers are included on the first and last days of the tour. Most of our Indian tours start and finish at Delhi airport (DEL).

## 5. Group Size/Tour Leaders/Guides

We are committed to being a small group operator, as we feel this gives everyone in the group the best chance to get to know their fellow travellers and to hear and make the most of their guide. There's no point in us providing great guides if you've got to peer over 30-40 shoulders to see them! So, we won't ever put you in a 50-seater coach with 49 other people and just one guide. Instead, we set our India small-group departures to have a maximum of 12 travellers. The minimum group size is 2.

In India we provide a fully trained, local English-speaking tour leader/driver to accompany our groups. On this tour they will accompany you from Amritsar through to Chandigarh where you will be shown to your seat on the train. You will then be met on arrival in Haridwar station by your guide for the Haridwar/Rishikesh section. You will then be met on arrival in Delhi station and transferred to your hotel for your final night. Additional specialist local guides are used for some of the sightseeing tours and activities included in the tour.

At Encounters Travel we have a policy of aiming to use only local Indian guides and reps. We feel this gives you the best experience of the country and the sites you are seeing.

## 6. Entrance Fees

The tour price does not include entrance fees to the tourist sites mentioned in the itinerary. This allows for fluctuations in the prices set by the local authorities, which do change from time to time.

You should currently allow approx. US\$52 per person to cover these entrance fees. You will also need to cover the cost of entrance to any other extra sites that you may wish to visit that are not listed in the main tour itinerary. Your guide will offer to collect the entrance fee cost from everyone at the start of the tour and pay on your behalf, or you can arrange them yourself as you go along.

## 7. Tipping and Haggling

Haggling is a traditional necessity, so its wise not to pay too much regard to initial prices. Instead fix an items value in your mind then negotiate towards it unhurriedly and don't be afraid to simply walk away if the price isn't right. Once you have offered a price though, you should be prepared to pay it as you may cause offence if you then back out.

While an accepted part of the culture and customs in India, tipping is always optional, and the amounts paid should reflect excellent service. We are often asked for advice on common amounts, and for assistance with tipping. Some suggested guidelines are given below.

**Restaurants and taxis:** Local markets and basic restaurants - leave the loose change. More up-market restaurants we suggest 5% to 10% of your bill.

**Local guides:** Throughout your trip you may at times have a local guide in addition to your tour guide. We suggest USD 5-10 per person per day for local guides.

**Drivers:** You may have a range of private drivers on your trip. Some may be with you for a short journey while others may be with you for several days. We would suggest a higher tip for those more involved with the group, for example if you don't have an extra accompanying guide. However USD 3-6 per person per day is generally appropriate.

**Tour Guides:** To answer your next question. . . as a guideline for tour guides who accompany you on the entire tour, we suggest you allow around USD 5-10 per person per day, but ultimately, as with all the tipping described above, its up to your satisfaction with their service and your personal budget. You should not feel pressured to tip any particular amount.

## 8. Health and Vaccinations - India

You should ensure you are fully insured for medical emergencies including emergency evacuation and repatriation.

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection measures vary according to the country you are visiting and where you are travelling from. We recommend you contact your GP/medical practitioner or a travel clinic for current information on vaccinations needed for your destination. You should ensure that you are up to date with vaccines and boosters recommended for your normal life at home, including for example, vaccines required for occupational risk of exposure, lifestyle risks and underlying medical conditions. In addition, additional courses or boosters normally recommended for the countries in this region are:

**India:** Additional vaccinations: Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. [Malaria map](#). Yellow Fever certificate: Yellow fever rules for India are quite complicated and lengthy. Please read the [WHO guidance](#).

**Malaria:** Vaccinations are not available against Malaria, which is a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that can be very serious and sometimes fatal. You should avoid mosquito bites by covering up bare skin with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers and applying insect repellents to exposed skin. When necessary, sleep under a mosquito net. Mosquitoes are most active during and after sunset. You should consult with your GP/medical practitioner/travel clinic about the most appropriate malaria prophylactic medication to take for the regions you are visiting. In general the north eastern regions of India including Assam and Orissa are considered high risk, while the rest of India is generally considered low enough risk that anti-malarial tablets are not necessary for most travellers doing relatively short tours.

**Yellow Fever:** This disease is spread by infected mosquitoes that bite during the day. A Yellow Fever Certificate of vaccination may be required as a condition of entry depending on which country you are arriving from, or that you have travelled or transitted through recently (including connecting flights with stopovers of over 12 hours). You can view a [World Health Organisation map](#) of areas where the virus is present in monkeys and therefore a potential risk to humans. Please ensure you have this certificate with you and to hand if necessary.

Please inform us of any pre-existing conditions such as diabetes or asthma and any prescription medicine you may be taking. We also need to know about any food allergies or physical disabilities that you may have.

## 9. Passports and Visas - India

Your passport expiry date must be at least 6 months after your time in India finishes. Do not bring a full or almost expired passport. You must also have a machine-readable passport or you may be denied entry. If you have an old-style manually issued passport you will need to replace this with a new machine-readable passport before you travel.

Most nationalities (including UK, USA, European, Australian, Canadian) will need to arrange their Indian tourist visa in advance. A new online e-visa system is available which makes the process more straightforward than before. You can make your application online here... <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/tvoa.html>

Visa requirements for India can and do change regularly and we suggest that you arrange your Indian visa early and re-check your specific visa requirements prior to travel for any changes.

## 10. Time

The time in India and Sri Lanka is GMT plus 5 1/2 hours.

The time in Nepal is GMT plus 5 3/4 hours.

The time in Bhutan is GMT plus 6 hours.

The time in Tibet is GMT plus 8 hours.

Daylight saving adjustments are not applied.

## 11. Voltage

Sockets are mainly two round pronged and 230 volts (Type C,D,M). Universal adaptors are available in most airport shops if you don't have one already. Standard European adapters will work fine, though sometimes they may feel a little loose in the sockets. All hotel rooms have electrical sockets where you can re-charge cameras, phones etc. Hair dryers are sometimes available on request from the hotel reception if not in your room already but cannot be guaranteed.

If you have US appliances (110 volts) you will need a voltage converter as well as a plug adapter.

## 12. Money

Rupee (INR; symbol Rs) = 100 paise. Notes are in denominations of Rs 2,000, 1000, 500, 200, 50, 20, 10 and 1. Coins are in denominations of Rs 10, 5, 2 and 1, and 50 paise (Rs 0.5). Note: The import and export of local currency is prohibited. Sometimes smaller vendors will not take bills larger than Rs 500. It is best to carry a range of rupee notes if you are shopping at bazaars and local markets.

Note: You must present your passport whenever you change currency or travellers cheques. Commission for foreign exchange is becoming increasingly rare; if it is charged, the fee is nominal.

Credit cards: In major cities, the full cadre of banks cards are generally accepted including debit cards, American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa. However, in smaller towns and villages, choice is generally narrowed to cash or MasterCard and Visa.

ATM: 24 hour ATM machines can be found in all the major cities and most large towns. Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus, Maestro and Plus are amongst the most commonly accepted cards.

Travellers cheques: These are gradually getting less accepted but may still be changed at larger banks and some larger hotels. The most widely accepted currencies include US Dollars and Pounds Sterling. Some banks may refuse to change certain brands of traveller's cheques whilst others may exchange quite happily.



## 13. What to take

**Luggage:** Suitcases are fine, though you may find rucksacks or large bags are more practical. You should also bring a small daypack/bag to take out during the day. Your main luggage will be left in the hotel during your sightseeing trips - you will not need to carry it far, and there are nearly always porters to assist.

**Luggage allowances:** Most international airlines restrict you to between 20kg and 23kg per person of luggage to go in the hold of the plane. Domestic flights often have smaller allowances around 15kg. As airline rules vary we recommend that you take no more than 20kg of luggage if your tour just includes international flights, and no more than 15kg if there are any domestic flights included in your itinerary. Please ask us for details if you are unsure about luggage allowances on your tour. Any excess baggage fees will be your responsibility to cover. Most airlines allow between 5kg and 10kg for hand luggage so we suggest that you take no more than 5kg unless you have confirmed that your airline(s) will allow more than this.

**Clothing:** The weather is mainly hot most of the year with significant variations from region to region. The coolest weather lasts from around the end of November to the beginning of March, with fresh mornings and evenings, and mostly sunny days. The really hot weather, when it is dry, dusty and unpleasant, is between March and June. Monsoon rains occur in most regions in summer anywhere between June and early October.

**NOTE:** India is very traditional and some heads will turn if you dress provocatively in public. Short tops, short skirts / shorts, tight or body revealing clothes etc should be avoided. You might invite unwanted attention from certain men who stare and pass comments at women to amuse themselves. More detailed climate information is available on the India Country Guide page on our website.

**Suggested List:** This is a guide only - there's no problem if you bring more or less with you. Cheap comfortable clothing is also readily available in India and laundry is inexpensive. It is also worth having some smarter clothes for going out. Towels are provided and laundry services are available in all the hotels we use.

Men: Lightweight trousers, shorts, light shirts & t-shirts, Swimwear

Women: Light cotton skirts/dressers, loose-fitting trousers, light shirts or t-shirts, loose shorts, Swimwear

Men & Women: Jumper/sweatshirt/fleece, Long sleeved shirt(s) (for cool nights, protection from the sun & mosquitoes, and visits to religious sites etc), Handkerchiefs, socks & underwear, Comfortable trainers/sandals for daily wear, Other shoes/sandals for evening wear, Sunhat or headscarf (headscarfs come in handy for some sights which require women to cover their head)

First Aid: Although First Aid and medication is readily available in India, it may be very different to what you are used to so individuals should consider bringing along their own personal kit. Your personal kit might include: Sunscreen, sunblock & aftersun, Insect repellent/relief, Antiseptic cream/spray, Plasters and a bandage, Lomotil or Imodium against diarrhea, Pills against nausea, Aspirin for heat-stroke (or hangovers) Your kit should also include your brief medical history, including allergies, blood group, drug vaccinations etc. We suggest bringing copies of prescriptions if you will be carrying medicines on board your flight.

**Toiletries:** Razor, soap & box, shampoo, Toothpaste, toothbrush & container, Sanitary items

**Note:** If you wear contact lenses, you should consider taking or wearing glasses instead, as lenses can be uncomfortable and/or cause infections in hot and humid climates.

**Other useful items:** Sunglasses, Small Torch, Money belt, Camera and equipment, Toilet paper (this is not always provided in public toilets so it is a good idea to carry some spare tissues in your bag. It should be placed in the basket beside the toilet, not flushed away, for you might block the pipes).

**IMPORTANT:** As it can get extremely hot in India, and the sun can burn very quickly, it is very important to ensure you are protected from the sun with sun-cream & sun-hats, and do not get dehydrated.

## 14. Dates & Prices

We run small-group departures on our Indian small-group tours throughout the year, with less frequent start dates during the hot monsoon months of May to September. All departures are guaranteed to run with a minimum of 2 travellers. Departure dates and prices are listed on our website (please check the website for up-to-date prices and special offers).

Private and tailor-made tours are available on any dates and may be adjusted to fit your personal requirements, available time and budget.

## 15. Booking & Payment

If you would like to book a place on this tour, please complete the online reservation form on our website (via the Dates & Prices tab on the tour page). You may make a deposit or full payment online, or just hold a reservation if you prefer (full payments are due 8 weeks before departure). We will then contact you with more details about how to complete your booking. Payments may be made by debit or credit card (subject to a card processing fee), or by making a bank transfer, or posting us a cheque/bank draft. Full details will be provided in your booking confirmation email. Please [contact us](#) if you would like any more information or have any questions before making a booking.

## 16. Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory on all of our tours and needs to cover personal accident & liability, medical expenses and repatriation, travel delay & abandonment. We also strongly recommend that you take out cover against cancellation and lost/stolen baggage. Personal medical insurance does not normally provide sufficient cover and is generally not suitable for travel on our tours. You will not be able to join your tour if you have not provided us with details of your insurance or if you arrive without cover in place (no refunds will be due in this event). [More information...](#)

You may arrange your own insurance, or you can take advantage of a comprehensive policy that we can arrange for you through Endsleigh Insurance which has been designed to be suitable for our tours. The policy is available to travellers of all nationalities and you do not need to live in the UK to take out the policy. For full details of cover

provided, prices and to apply for one of our policies, please complete [travel insurance application form](#).

Note: Any country that borders the Mediterranean is considered as 'Europe' for the purposes of travel insurance (including Turkey, Israel, Egypt and Morocco). If you are doing a tour that visits one country in 'Europe' and one that is 'Worldwide' (for example, an Egypt and Jordan tour), then you need a 'Worldwide' policy. When completing the form you should enter your travel dates including any extra days involved in overnight flights or connecting travel between your home and the tour. Our policies are not able to cover any extra time or activities other than your tour and options booked with us and your travel to & from home.

Note - to comply with insurance sales regulations, our travel insurance policies are only available to customers booking directly with us. If you have booked through a travel agent you will need to arrange your own insurance.

If you plan to arrange a hot air balloon flight locally, or do some scuba diving during your tour, you should check the small print in your policy to make sure these are covered (these are covered in our policy). Please also check the maximum altitude that you will be reaching and that full cover including emergency evacuation is provided up to this altitude.

If you are taking expensive camera gear or other electronic equipment with you then please check the coverage and the fine print of your policy to ensure that you have sufficient cover.

*IMPORTANT: We must have your travel insurance details (policy number and type of insurance) before you depart or you may not be allowed to join the tour. If you haven't told us already, please let us know the details when you can. You should take a paper copy of your insurance policy with you as you may be asked to show this at the start of the tour.*

## 17. Financial Security

We are a UK registered company and an ABTA Member (Y4447) and you can be confident when booking with us that your money is safe and protected.

Financial failure insurance is also provided through Affirma to protect all customers for the land portion of your tour. Please see [our website](#) or [booking conditions](#) for more information.

## 18. Responsible Tourism

It is impossible not to have an impact on the local environment, cultures and eco-systems when you travel. However, it is very possible to try and ensure that these impacts are as limited, or positive as possible. We are committed to ensuring that we try to leave our host countries in a better state than we found them and encourage and assist our travellers to help us with this.

The following are a few simple tips that require very little effort on your part but which will help ensure that any effect you have on the locations you visit is positive rather than negative.

- Don't prejudge: Things in different countries will almost certainly be different. That doesn't make them worse or inferior, just different.
- Communicate: Don't expect locals to speak your language. Take the trouble to learn a few words or phrases of the local language. Don't worry about sounding silly. Most locals are patient and accommodating and appreciate you making the effort to communicate in their language.
- Conserve energy: Be careful not to waste valuable resources. Use local resources sparingly. Switch off lights, air-conditioning and fans when you leave the hotel room and don't waste water. Remove superfluous packaging. Many countries have far less efficient waste disposal systems than ours. Remove packaging from newly acquired items before leaving home.
- Don't litter: No matter how untidy or dirty the country you're travelling in may look to you, avoid littering, as there is no need to add to the environment's stress. Many of the countries we visit have a tough challenge dealing with rubbish and waste. Please consider taking home as much plastic waste as you can (e.g. water

bottles).

- Choose environmentally friendly products: By using environmentally friendly (bio degradable) sun creams, shampoos and detergents you can help reduce pollution.
- Respect local customs and traditions: As you are a guest in these countries, you should also comply with the local customs. If you are friendly and well mannered, the locals will reciprocate and it will only enhance your experience. It's important to follow dress and behaviour guidelines especially when visiting religious or sacred sites (your tour leader will advise you how best to do this).
- If a client commits an illegal act the client may be excluded from the tour and Encounters Travel shall cease to have responsibility to/for them. No refund will be given for any unused services.

All porters are employed and equipped following guidelines set by the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG).

## 19. Follow Us Online

You can stay in touch with us online by following us on Facebook and Twitter. We post updates on relevant travel news in our destination countries, special offers and discounts and other interesting travel related news and information.

[www.facebook.com/encounterstravel](http://www.facebook.com/encounterstravel)

[www.twitter.com/encounterstravl](http://www.twitter.com/encounterstravl) (yes, without the 'e')

## 20. Before you travel

It is important when considering and preparing to travel anywhere in the world that you have a good understanding of the country you are visiting, its laws and customs, and the possible risks and situations that may occur. This includes specific risks related to your itinerary (eg. does it involve water & can you swim, are you fit enough for the activities included), as well as more general risks such as terrorism and natural disasters.

General details and links to more information about health risks, visa requirements, money, and travel insurance are given in these tour notes. We recommend that you re-read all these before your departure as well as the small print of your travel insurance policy so you know exactly what is covered and what is not.

You should take copies of your important travel documents with you and ideally also store them online securely as a backup. Make sure that you have given us your emergency contact details and told that person where and when you are travelling. Ensure you take enough money with you and that you have access to emergency funds.

Finally, you should read through and stay updated with the current [official government travel advice](#) for your destination. We are registered partners with the UK Foreign Office's ['Travel Aware' campaign](#) which provides further useful and invaluable information.



**Printed on:** Friday 23rd of August 2019

**Note:** Please [download an up-to-date copy](#) of these tour notes shortly before you travel as itineraries and information does change from time to time.

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