

## Rajasthan to the Ganges

**Country(ies):** India

**Tour type:** Small Group

**Transport:** A/C minivan/minibus and sleeper train

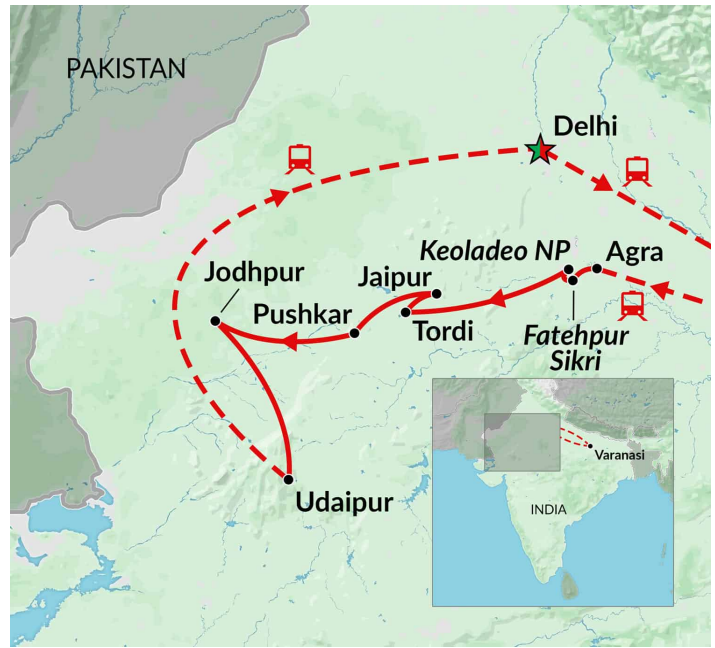
**Group size:** Min: 2 | Max: 12

**Days:** 17 days

**Start Location:** Delhi, India

**End Location:** Delhi, India

**Meals:** Breakfasts - 16, Lunches - 2, Dinners - 1



### Highlights:

Udaipur, Ranakpur Jain temples, Jodhpur, Holy town of Pushkar, Pink city of Jaipur, Tordi Garh, Abhaneri step well, Keoladeo NP, Fatehpur Sikri, Taj Mahal at sunrise, Agra Fort, River Ganges at Varanasi, Buddhist Sarnath, Delhi

# Itinerary

## Day 1: Your Indian adventure starts in Delhi, hotel transfer included

When you arrive in Delhi - one of our staff will meet you and transfer you to your hotel. Once you've settled in, we'll run through the itinerary for the next few days and arrange a time to collect you tomorrow.

**OVERNIGHT:** Delhi hotel

**MEALS:** None

**EXTRAS:** Single room supplement (INSGRG)

## Day 2: Visiting Delhi's most popular sights

We start with a morning tour of India's capital, New Delhi. Nestled on the banks of the Yamuna River, New Delhi is a city where ancient and modern seamlessly blend together. We'll visit the India Gate - a 42-metre high archway, built in remembrance of the 82,000 soldiers who participated in the undivided Indian Army.

New Delhi is India's political hub as well, and we'll drive past many government buildings such as the President's Palace and the Parliament of India. We'll also pass Humayun's Tomb, the first garden-tomb on the Indian subcontinent and a UNESCO World Heritage Site as well as the Bangla Sahab Gurudwara Sikh Temple.

We'll then hop onto a metro train with the locals at Connaught Place Station - as we make our way to Old Delhi. Here, we'll explore one of its oldest and busiest markets - the Chandni Chowk, before exploring the Chawri Bazar, famous for its brass, copper and paper creations.

We'll also be introduced to Old Delhi's unique street foods and delicacies, giving us a first taste of authentic Indian cuisine. Once our taste buds are sufficiently satisfied, we'll take a rickshaw ride to the Jama Masjid Mosque, one of the largest in India.

Finally we head to the station for an overnight train journey from Delhi to Udaipur (2nd class AC sleeper carriage). The journey takes around 12 hours, and is a great way to see more of the country, meet some local travellers, and cover the large distance efficiently.

**OVERNIGHT:** Sleeper train

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Delhi to Udaipur flight upgrade

## Day 3: Eklingji & Nagda temples, free time in Udaipur

After arriving in Udaipur we take you for breakfast before starting our visits for the day. Udaipur is often dubbed as the 'Venice of the East', as it's set around a series of artificial lakes and is known for its lavish royal residences. It was founded in 1553 by Maharana Udai Singh of the Sisodia clan of Rajput, when he shifted his capital from the city of Chittorgarh to Udaipur.

We'll drive around 20km north of Udaipur to the early Mewar capital, Nagda, famous for an unusual temple that dates back to the 10th century. The temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu and it's made in two structures, one by a

mother-in-law and another, by a daughter-in-law.

We'll also visit the nearby temple complex of Eklingji, which is home to over 100 temples and very popular with Hindu pilgrims, though few tourists visit here. One of the most famous temples in Rajasthan, the main temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva, and holds a striking four faced idol of Eklingji (Lord Shiva) made in black marble. The Shivlinga (phallic form of Lord Shiva) is here garlanded by a silver snake and is also given great attention.

We'll then drive back to Udaipur, stopping at Jodhpur Mishthan Bhandar in Udaipur's city centre for a snack lunch, where we can try all sorts of unique Indian treats, such as Mirchi wada, Kachori, Samosa, Pakodi, Khaman (Gujarati food) and much more. After checking in, the afternoon is free for you to start looking around Udaipur.

**OVERNIGHT:** Udaipur hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 4: A sightseeing tour of Udaipur

Today is all about exploring Udaipur. We'll start with a visit to the City Palace, which was built over a period of 400 years and is one of Rajasthan's architectural marvels. Located on the edge of Lake Pichola the palace comprises an assortment of pavilions, terraces, courtyards, terraces and hanging gardens, encircled by granite and marble fortifications. We'll then make our way to the Saheliyon Ki Bari Gardens, famous for its lush green lawns, marble art and fountains, before we head to Lake Pichola and board a boat ride to Jagmandir Island, which houses a palace built by Maharana Karan Singh II in 1620. At its entrance, you'll be met by massive stone elephants and the island has an ornate 17th-century tower, the Gol Mahal, carved from bluestone.

We'll also visit the Jagdish Temple, located just outside the Royal Palace, before taking a walk through the Old City. As the evening arrives, we'll visit Bagore Ki Haveli, an ancient palace that has been converted into a museum on the waterfront of Lake Pichola, where we'll enjoy watching a traditional dancing and puppet show.

**OVERNIGHT:** Udaipur hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 5: Jain Temple & monkeys at Ranakpur

We make our way towards Jodhpur today, the second largest city in Rajasthan, with a stop on the way to visit the spectacular white marble Chaturmukha Jain Temple there, the largest and most important temple in the Jain religion built in the 15th century to commemorate the first Tirthankara of Jainism - Lord Adinath. We'll take an audio tour here, and also look out of the large population of monkeys that make the temple their home.

**OVERNIGHT:** Jodhpur hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 6: A walking tour of Jodhpur

Our morning starts with a visit to Mehrangarh Fort - one of the largest forts in India, standing on a perpendicular cliff, 410 metres above the city of Jodhpur. We'll also visit Jaswant Thada, a milky-white marble cenotaph built by Maharaja Sardar Singh of Jodhpur State in 1899 in memory of his father, Maharaja Jaswant Singh II.

We'll walk through the city, stopping to view the impressive Lord Krishna Temple - a marvel of rich architectural skill and craftsmanship, meeting with the priest and his family, before visiting Ram Rasoda, a community kitchen that has been in use for centuries.

We'll also visit the ancient temple of Jetha Bera, the deep step well of Toor ji ka Jhalra, said to be as old as the sixth century. It's an ancient well that often takes the shape of an inverted pyramid. For decades, the well sat filled with stagnant water, until the pool was recently purified and the steps were sandblasted.

Our walk takes us through narrow winding streets, between the city's famous blue-painted buildings to the grain, produce, silver, crafts and spice markets the streets around the clock tower. While we're walking, you can sample sweets such as Gulab jamun - a milk based sweet and Mawa Kachori - which is a fried puffed pastry stuffed with sweetened and flavoured khoya.

**OVERNIGHT:** Jodhpur hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 7: A Pushkar adventure

Today, we'll go on a morning drive to the town of Pushkar, located on the edge of the Thar Desert. Pushkar is one of India's oldest cities and also one of the Hindu religion's 5 most sacred dhams (pilgrimage sites). It is set around Pushkar Lake, whose waters are considered holy and are surrounded by 52 stone staircases which pilgrims use to bathe.

We'll arrive just in time for lunch, and once you've checked into your accommodation, we'll explore Pushkar Lake and its temples - including a 14th-century Jagatpita Brahma Mandir, dedicated to the god of creation and its surroundings. If time, there's also the option to take a sunset walk up to the Savitri Temple nestled in the Ratnagiri Hills which offers sweeping lake and valley views. There's also a cable car available to reach the temple.

Pushkar is also famous for its huge camel fair which takes place in October or November every year and one of our departure dates is timed to ensure we visit during the peak of the fair. Whilst there are a number of competitions and entertainment included at the fair, many of these don't consider the welfare of animals and therefore any visits we include to Pushkar camel fair focus on the cultural, trading and historic aspects of this historic event.

**OVERNIGHT:** Pushkar hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 8: Onwards to the Pink City of Jaipur

You have the option this morning to walk up to the Savitri Temple for sunrise and to watch how dawn breaks over the town.

We'll then say our goodbyes to Pushkar, as we make our way to the pink city of Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan. We'll stop to visit Amber Fort, the jewel in Jaipur's crown - an ancient fortress built on a hilltop in the 16th century dedicated to the ruling Kachhawa clan of Amber. It's a massive monument, with some saying it resembles the

Great Wall of China.

**OVERNIGHT:** Jaipur hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 9: A sightseeing tour of Jaipur

You have an option to embark on a hot air balloon ride this morning, soaring over Jaipur's magnificent palaces and forts as you take in the beauty of the Pink City from above. If you decided not to, your day starts with a sightseeing tour of the city.

You'll visit India's largest astronomical observatory known as the Jantar Mantar Monument, built by the Rajput king Sawai Jai Singh II between 1724 and 1730. You'll also make your way to the City Palace created between 1729-1732 AD, which was once the seats of the King of Jaipur and the leader of the renowned Kachwaha Rajput clan.

After lunch, you'll head to Jaipur's famous craft markets, where you can see craftsmen such as jewellers, silversmiths, textile workshops and bangle makers producing some of the most unique creations. You'll also have the chance to browse the fruit, vegetable and spice markets here.

**OVERNIGHT:** Jaipur hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Hot air balloon in Jaipur

## Day 10: Visiting the ancient village of Tordi

Your day starts with a visit to the rural Rajasthan village of Tordi, which was founded in the 16th century by Th. Akhey Singh, a descendant of Khangar Singh who overthrew the regional chief and built a hilltop fortress. All that remains today are ruins, however, the family still lives in the palace and in a fort on the plains below. You'll be accommodated in a wing of the palace which has been created for guests.

After settling in, your afternoon begins with a walk through the village, visiting a temple, a school and a potter's house, before chatting to some of the locals to find out more about their way of life.

You have a few optional activities available to you today, such as camel cart riding, a jeep safari to a 300-year-old-stepwell, visiting a shepherds village and watching the sun go down at the Tordi Sagar Dam. You can also hike to the 400-year-old Tordi Fort for drinks and snacks at sunset or try some horse-riding or henna hand art.

**OVERNIGHT:** Tordi Garh hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Dinner

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 11: The world's largest step well & birdwatching in the Keoladeo Ghana NP

Today we'll head to Bharatpur to explore the wildlife-rich Keoladeo Ghana National Park, a birdwatcher's paradise. On our way there, we'll stop at the largest step well in the world: the Abhaneri step well which boasts 3,500 steps and is 13 stories deep.

You'll have a chance to settle in at your accommodation before we head out once more, this time on a guided cycle rickshaw ride through Keoladeo, which is home to over 360 species of birds.

Keoladeo, which is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is strategically located on the Central Asian migratory flyway and is an important destination for wintering water birds, most notably the endangered Siberian crane and its huge heronry which in good years can host more than 20,000 nesting birds of various species.

You won't just find birds here though, other wildlife that you can see include wild boar, black buck, sambar, chital, mongoose, porcupine, several different wild cats, and some huge pythons.

**OVERNIGHT:** Bharatpur hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## **Day 12: A first view of the magnificent Taj Mahal, optional activities available**

Say goodbye to Keoladeo as we make our way to the city of Agra, which is home to India's most popular tourist attraction - the towering Taj Mahal.

You'll have time to settle in at your hotel before heading out on a Mughal Heritage Walk, which was designed by a local NGO to create more jobs and better infrastructure of the local community. The walk takes you through the ancient village of Kachhpura and surrounding farmland on the banks of the Yamuna River, giving you spectacular views of the Red Fort and the Taj Mahal.

One of the locals will also give you a tour of the village, showing you their agricultural techniques, how they cook and their unique architecture and places of worship. You'll also be introduced to the local cottage industry for leather shoe making which helps Agra export shoes all over the world.

You'll then explore the Mehtab Bagh Park which is one of 11 parks built by Emperor Babur on the east banks of the Yamuna River, but as the sun goes down this afternoon, you'll be treated to the mesmerising views of the Taj Mahal at sunset - something that cannot be missed.

Tonight, you have an option to join a local Hindu family for a vegetarian cooking lesson and a tasty meal before settling in for the night.

**OVERNIGHT:** Agra hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Cook with a Hindu family in Agra

## **Day 13: Exploring the majestic Taj Mahal, train transfers included**

Our day starts with a visit to one of the seven wonders of the world - watching the sunrise at the towering Taj Mahal mausoleum. Built over the course of 22 years by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, this morning we'll watch how the colours of the monument changes as the light gets brighter. It's a once in a lifetime experience.

We'll have a tasty breakfast before we hit the road once more, this time to visit the Agra Fort - a UNESCO World Heritage Site - which served as the home of the emperors of the Mughal Dynasty until 1638, before the capital was shifted from Agra to Delhi.

This afternoon, we'll continue to discover Agra from the back of an electric rickshaw, experiencing the incredible culture and cuisine that the city has to offer, before visiting its old bazaars, restaurants and places of worship.

We'll also visit the Gurdwara, situated a stone's throw away from the Taj Mahal, Dara Shikoh's library, Mirza Ghalib's birthplace, the ancient Manka Meshwar Temple, the Jama Masjid as well as Asia's oldest convent, St. Patrick's Junior College. While we're here, you'll visit the Johri Bazar, the paan mandi, the petha mandi and the chaat-pakori street of Seth Gali.

We'll head back to our accommodation, where a day-use room will be available for you to relax and freshen up before we head to the station to board an overnight train to Varanasi.

**OVERNIGHT:** Overnight sleeper train to Varanasi

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 14: Discovering the villages of Varanasi and the holy Ganges River

Upon arrival in Varanasi - one of India's holiest cities, you'll enjoy breakfast before visiting the Sarai Mohana Weavers Village, famous for its silk weaving, in fact, most of the residents here are skilled in the craft. In fact, the Banarasi sarees made here are some of the most expensive in India. While you're here, we'll also visit the Chiraiyaon Village, famous for its pickles, jams and guavas.

This evening, we'll make our way to the holy Ganges River to partake in an Aarti ceremony - a Hindu ritual which sees small candles lit inside cups made from leaves and flowers, before it's floated down the river - a very important ceremony for the people who call Varanasi home.

**OVERNIGHT:** Varanasi hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## Day 15: A boat trip on the Ganges and a Brahman family lunch

Our day begins with a boat ride along the serene waters of the Ganges, which is a constant hub of activity during the day, as the locals head to the banks of the river to pray and immerse themselves in it's spiritually cleansing waters.

Today we'll explore the city on foot, browsing its medieval streets, holy temples and bustling markets, abuzz with the authentic noise of Indian life. We'll then visit a Hindu Brahman family, where you'll learn how to make authentic Indian dishes, before enjoying the fruits of our labour by having lunch with the family.

After lunch, we'll make our way to the ancient Buddhist site at Sarnath, the place where Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon after becoming enlightened. Our day ends with an overnight sleeper train journey to the city of Delhi, however if you prefer to spend another night in Varanasi and board a flight back to Delhi in the morning.

**OVERNIGHT:** Overnight sleeper train to Delhi

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch

**EXTRAS:** Varanasi to Delhi flight upgrade

## Day 16: Leisure time in Delhi. optional activities available

Once we arrive in Delhi, you have the day free to yourself. There are a few half-day tour options available to pre-book or arrange while in India (a few days notice is required) or go shopping and sightseeing on your own.

**OVERNIGHT:** Delhi hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Salam Balak Trust walk

## Day 17: All good things come to an end! Airport transfer included

You have some more leisure time in Delhi this morning, before being transported back to the airport to board your flight home. If you'd like to extend your stay, why not add on a tiger safari in the Ranthambore National Park or spend some time at the sun-kissed beaches of Goa for some relaxation before heading back home.

**OVERNIGHT:** N/A

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Goa beach extension Ranthambore National Park Safari Spinmonkey cycling tour Salam Balak Trust walk

### Included:

- All accommodation in mid range hotels, homestay and heritage properties
- 24-hour airport arrival and departure transfer service
- Transport and transfers in AC vehicles
- Sleeper train from Delhi to Udaipur (2nd class AC, flight upgrade available)
- Sleeper train from Agra to Varanasi (2nd class AC)
- Sleeper train from Varanasi to Delhi (2nd class AC, flight upgrade available)
- Sightseeing tours and activities as per the itinerary
- Services of a local tour leader and specialist local guides
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary

### 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 179, payable in Delhi)
- Any other items not mentioned above

## Notes

## **Restoration of the Taj Mahal**

The Taj Mahal, one of India's most iconic structures, is getting a much need facelift. The almost-four-century-old Taj Mahal is finally showing signs of ageing. Air pollution is unfortunately turning its ivory-white complexion - yellow. Adding to the colouration problems, the Yamuna River, with which the Taj Mahal shares a river bank, is contaminated and the insects that breed in its waters are leaving patches of green residue on its marble. In order to restore the Taj Mahal's glistening white marble, mud-pack therapy is being used. If you're worried that it might affect your India tour, this handy [Taj restoration guide](#) will tell you everything you need to know.

# 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.

## Extra day in Delhi - pre-tour

Min numbers: 1

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

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

## Extra day in Delhi - post-tour

Min numbers: 1

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.

## Hot air balloon in Jaipur

Min numbers: 1

Capture the spectacular views of Rajasthan's forts with an early morning hot air balloon ride over Jaipur for a different perspective of this vibrant capital. Float high above the pink painted rooftops and enjoy a bird's eye view of Jaipur.

**This option runs from 1st of September to 10th of May each year, subject to weather conditions.**

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## 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. We normally use a homestay property in Jodhpur on this tour, though as it is very popular and only has a few rooms available, occasionally this may be exchanged for a heritage hotel.

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. See the Transport notes for details on the sleeper train accommodation.

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## 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 several overnight journeys on India's famous railway network (Delhi-Udaipur, Agra-Varanasi, Varanasi-Delhi). These provide a great way of seeing more of the country and meeting other local travellers. We aim to book seats in the AC2 class (2<sup>nd</sup> class air-conditioned carriage). This is relatively clean, comfortable and not overcrowded. You get a padded seat during the day which the carriage steward will convert into a flat padded bunk with pillows, sheets and blankets in the evening. There are no separate self-contained compartments, with the layout more open plan with curtained bays of four bunks on one side of the aisle (two upper and two lower) and two arranged along the wall of the carriage across the aisle from there. Meals and drinks are available on board.

Due to the huge distances some trains cover, Indian trains are subject to delays and on these overnight journeys of around 12 hours a delay of an hour is not unusual. Delays 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 berth next to other people in the group, though the carriage stewards are generally very helpful in arranging to swap you with another traveller.

Flight upgrades are available for the Delhi to Udaipur and Varanasi to Delhi journeys if you feel that three sleeper train journeys is too much.

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## 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.

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## 4. 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 Udaipur through to Agra where you will be shown to your seat on the train. You will then be met on arrival in Varanasi station by your guide for the stay there. Additional specialist local guides are used for some of the sightseeing tours and national park 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.

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## 5. 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\$179 per person to cover these entrance fees (this includes one visit to the Taj Mahal). 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.

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## 6. 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.

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## 7. Health and Vaccinations

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 this US CDC information about where the virus is present and follow the links to further information detailing which countries need you to have a Yellow Fever vaccination as part of their entry requirements. 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.

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## 8. 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 heard)

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.

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## 9. 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.

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## 10. 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.

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## 11. Financial Security

We are a UK registered company and are committed to providing our customers with financial protection to provide peace of mind and to allow you to book with confidence.

We have therefore partnered with Trust My Travel Ltd., which provides financial protection services to over 2000 partners around the world. Funds paid to us by our customers are protected via an Insurance policy held by Trust My Travel. Each traveller and the description of services sold is declared against Trust My Travel's insurance policy directly against our financial failure. In the event of our insolvency, you will be refunded for any unfulfilled products and/or repatriation to the UK (where applicable). Please see [our website](#) or [booking conditions](#) for more information.

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## 12. 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).

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### 13. 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)

<https://x.com/encounterstravl> (yes, without the 'e')

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### 14. 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).

Considering travel insurance for your trip? [World Nomads Travel Insurance](#) offers coverage for more than 150 adventure activities as well as emergency medical, lost luggage, trip cancellation and more.

If your tour includes car hire, or 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.*

## **Covid-19**

**Before purchasing any travel insurance, please check the coverage provided for situations related to Covid-19, and for the rules about government travel advice. Your normal policy may not be suitable.**

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## **15. 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.



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## **16. Reduce Plastic Waste with Water-to-Go Filter bottles**

Traveling responsibly means minimizing plastic waste, but staying hydrated on the go is essential. At Encounters Travel we are committed to reducing single-use plastics, which is why we've partnered with Water-to-Go. Their portable filtration system removes over 99.9% of contaminants from any non-saltwater source, turning even questionable water sources into safe drinking water.

Given that tap water is un-safe to drink in many of the countries in which we operate, we recommend purchasing a Water-to-Go bottle prior to departure. This will help you avoid the use of single use plastic bottles and keep you hydrated on the go.

Save big! Get a huge 25% off your Water-to-Go bottle and other Water-to-Go products (such as filters, lids, and carriers). Use code **ENCOUNTERS25** at checkout (valid in the UK, USA and Canada).

### **How Water-to-Go Technology works:**

- Their reusable, BPA free water bottles contain their own unique 3-in-1 filtration technology effectively providing clean safe drinking water from any non-salt water source around the world.

- Three different (1 traditional and 2 nano) technologies are combined in one filter cartridge to remove up to 99.9999% of microbiological contaminants in water.

#### **The three technologies used in a Water-to-Go filter are:**

- Mechanical filtration – A tiny pore size, so small contaminants can't fit through.
- Electrical – A positive charge reduces the pore size even further and attracts contaminants like a magnet, trapping them inside the filter.
- Activated Carbon – Unlike most carbon based filters, instead of using adhesives to glue the carbon particles together, (which vastly reduces the carbon's efficiency) it is contained within the membrane, helping to reduce contaminants whilst eliminating bad tastes and odours. Try filtering water from your tap at home and taste the difference!

#### **Water-to-Go filter bottles deliver safe, healthy water worldwide**

- Water-to-Go filters remove bacteria, viruses, waterborne disease, protozoa, heavy metals such as lead as well as harmful chemicals.
- Their filters remove Chlorine and Fluoride from tap water.
- The filter will eliminate harmful contaminants from the water but allow beneficial minerals such as sodium and magnesium to pass through leaving you with the healthiest water possible.
- Water-to-Go filters have been independently tested against internationally recognised standards by industry specialists including The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (UK), BCS Laboratories (USA), Bangalore Test House (India) and IMI (China).

#### **Use Water-to-Go products and you'll be healthier, wealthier and helping to make the world a better place!**

- Depending on filter size, each Water-to-Go filter is able to replace 260 or 400 single-use plastic water bottles!
- They ensure you have access to safe water anywhere in the world without ever having to buy environmentally damaging bottled water.
- Their water bottles deliver safe, clean drinking water at just 5p per litre.
- The filter membrane is biodegradable and the shrouds are recyclable.
- The water bottles are used and approved by everyone from backpackers to commuters, gym users to expecting mums. Perfect for everyday, outdoor and travel.

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### **17. Private & Tailor-made Tours**

While our group departures offer a fantastic way to explore with like-minded travellers, we understand that some guests prefer a more exclusive experience. Most of our group tours can be booked on a private basis, allowing you to enjoy the same expert-led routes with your own dedicated party. The primary advantage of choosing a private arrangement is the flexibility it provides; we can easily customise the itinerary to include your preferred style of accommodation or adjust the pace to suit your needs. Private tours can be run on the same start days as our group tours, or on other dates. However, some activities within our trips are restricted to particular days of the week - we will advise you on anything like this that we need to work around. Pricing will be based on the number of travellers in your party, and any customisations you may like to make.

For those seeking something truly unique, our specialist sales team is available to collaborate with you on a completely tailor-made tour, designed from the ground up to match your specific interests, accommodation level and requirements.

To request a quotation for a private or tailor-made tour, please [contact us](#).

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### **18. 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).

We do also sometimes advertise flight inclusive packages from selected airports. Where these are shown on our website, prices are correct at the time of quoting, but are subject to continued availability of the fare used. Prices will be reconfirmed at the time of booking, and we will also provide the flight times and airline details before tickets are issued.

Flight inclusive prices are based on the cheapest Economy ticket class available which is generally non-refundable and non-changeable unless the flight is cancelled for reasons such as Covid-19, in which case the airlines are more flexible. More flexible ticket options, as well as Premium Economy and Business Class tickets are available on request for an additional supplement. Any changes made to flight inclusive bookings will be subject to the airline rules on your ticket.

### **Flight CO2 Emissions:**

Traveling by air is an amazing way to explore the world, but flights also contribute to carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions that impact the environment. By considering the airline's CO2 emissions when you choose your flight, you can help minimize your travel footprint.

When selecting your international flights and airline, we do therefore recommend that you try and also take into account the flight CO2 emissions. Some airlines and flight search websites (eg. Google Flights, Skyscanner) do publish this information, so you can compare between your flight options and make an informed decision. Thankfully, many airlines are working towards sustainability efforts, and choosing a greener option allows you to contribute to positive change while still enjoying your incredible adventure.

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## **19. Tipping - India**

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.

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## **20. 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 at [indiavisaonline](http://indiavisaonline).

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.

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## 21. Voltage

In Nepal, India and Sri Lanka, sockets are mainly two round pronged and 230 volts (Type C,D,M). In Bhutan a range of different sockets can be found, including two and three round pronged and three flat pronged (Type D,F,G).

Universal adaptors are available in most airport shops if you don't have one already. Standard UK-European adaptors 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.

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## 22. 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.

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**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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