

## Taj to Varanasi

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**Country(ies):** India

**Tour type:** Small Group

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

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

**Days:** 12 Days

**Start location:** Delhi, India

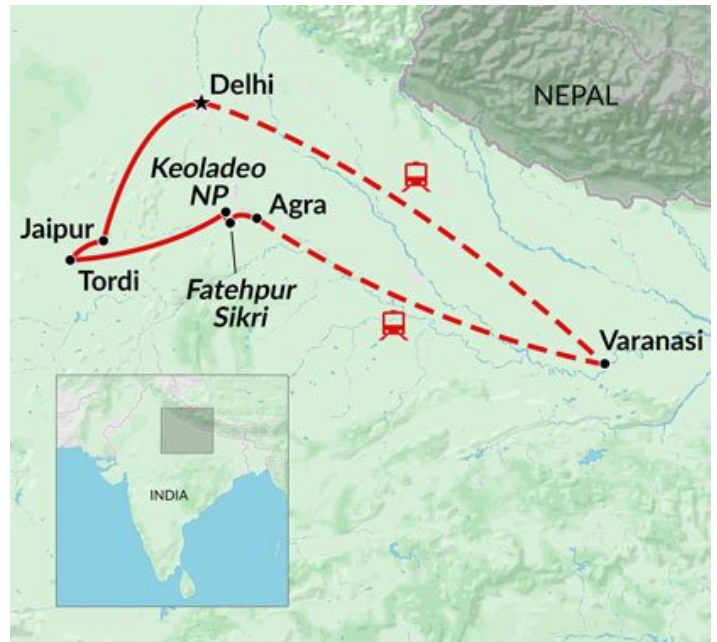
**End location:** Delhi, India

**Departs On:** Saturday

**Meals:** Breakfasts - 13, Lunches - 1, Dinners - 1

**Highlights:** Old and New Delhi, Pink city of Jaipur, Tordi Garh, Abhaneri step well, Keoladeo NP, Fatehpur Sikri, Taj Mahal at sunrise, Agra Fort, River Ganges at Varanasi, Buddhist site at Sarnath

**Places Visited:** Delhi, Jaipur, Tordi, Agra, Keoladeo National Park, Agra and Varanasi



# Itinerary

## Day 1: Arrival in Delhi, hotel transfers included

Your Incredible India Tour starts in the capital city of Delhi. One of our local staff members will be waiting to greet you at the airport, before transferring you to your hotel. You'll have some time to settle in, before we run you through the tour itinerary, introduce you to the local area and discuss a time to collect you tomorrow.

**OVERNIGHT:** Delhi hotel

**MEALS:** None

**EXTRAS:** Single room supplement (INSGTV) || Extra day in Delhi - pre-tour

## Day 2: Exploring India's capital & its street food cuisine

Today we'll make our way to the city of New Delhi, nestled on the banks of the Yamuna River. New Delhi was announced as India's new capital in 2012, taking the title from Calcutta.

Our tour of New Delhi begins at a 42-metre high archway known as India Gate, often compared to Paris's Arc de Triomphe. Since New Delhi is the home of India's government, we'll explore its buildings, such as the Parliament of India and the President's Palace. We'll also pass the Humayun's Tomb and the Bangla Sahab Gurudwara Sikh Temple, a Sikh house of worship, known for its pool inside its complex called the 'Sarovar'.

You'll then go to Connaught Place Station to board a metro train to Old Delhi, where we'll explore the busy market of Chandni Chowk and the Chawri Bazar, renowned for its paper, copper and brass creations.

Once afternoon comes around, your guide will take you on a street food journey where you'll eat like a local, trying all the unique snacks and delicacies - a great introduction to Indian cuisine. Once you're full, you'll hop into to a rickshaw to explore Old Delhi a little more, before stopping to view the Jama Masjid Mosque, one of the largest mosques in India.

**OVERNIGHT:** Delhi hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 3: Jaipur and a visit to Amber Fort

Your next stop on your Incredible India tour is the 'Pink City' of Jaipur - the largest city in the Indian state of Rajasthan.

You'll visit Amber Fort, an ancient sandstone fortress built in the 16th century atop a hill to commemorate the ruling Kachhawa clan of Amber. Take in its beautiful architecture and rich history, as you explore its massive fortress walls and its marble palace.

You'll then go for a Lassi tasting, a rich-tasting yogurt drink often flavored with ground and roasted cumin. It's the perfect pairing with spicy foods and is made in two ways - either sweet or salty.

After an action-packed day, you'll check into your hotel for the night. You have an option to head out this evening to watch a Bollywood movie at the Raj Mandir cinema.

**OVERNIGHT:** Jaipur hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 4: Exploring the city of Jaipur

Today, you have an early morning option of flying above Jaipur in a hot air balloon, giving you a bird's eye view of the Pink City's beautiful architecture.

If you decided to sleep in, your day starts with a tour of Jaipur, exploring its top attractions such as the unique Jantar Mantar monument - the biggest astronomical observatory in India, built in 1724 by Raja Jai Singh II. We'll also visit the courtyards and manicured gardens of the City Palace - which was once the royal seat of the King of Jaipur and the leader of the Kachwaha Rajput clan.

You'll have lunch, before exploring we head out into the city to witness Jaipur's popular craft markets. Here, we'll watch craftsmen such as jewellers, silversmiths and bangle-makers do what they do best, creating all sorts of unique items that the locals love. We'll also make our way to its busy fruit, vegetable and spice markets.

**OVERNIGHT:** Jaipur hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Hot air balloon in Jaipur

## Day 5: A village experience at Tordi, optional activities available

Today, you'll explore the rural Rajasthan village of Tordi, which was built in the 16th century by Th. Akhey Singh, a descendant of the Khangar Singh, who overthrew the regional chief and built a hilltop fortress here. Its ruins can still be seen today. The family still lives in the palace and in a fort built on the plains below. We'll stay in a wing of the palace that has been customised for guests.

We'll then explore the village, engaging with the locals as we visit a temple, a school, and a potter's house. You can also choose to do some optional activities, such as camel cart riding, a jeep safari to a 300-year-old step well, a visit to a shepherds village, watch the sun go down at the Tordi Sagar Dam or if you're looking to do something more strenuous, a hike to the 400-year old Tordi Fort for snacks and drinks. Horse riding and henna hand art activities are also available.

**OVERNIGHT:** Tordi Garh hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Dinner

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 6: A guided cycle rickshaw ride and the world's largest step well

Say goodbye to Tordi as we make our way to Bharatpur to visit the Keoladeo Ghana National Park, one of the best birdwatching locations in India.

On our way, we'll stop at the Abhaneri step well, which has 3,500 steps and is 13 stories deep, making it the largest and deepest step well on the planet.

Once you arrive, you'll check into your accommodation before going on a guided cycle rickshaw ride through Keoladeo, which was once a duck hunting reserve but has since become a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with over 360 species of birds calling this sanctuary home.

Keoladeo is also a stopover for the birds who partake in the Central Asian migration, especially for wintering water birds and the endangered Siberian Crane and its huge heronry which in good years can host more than 20,000 nesting birds of various species.

The national park is also home to other wildlife such as wild boar, black buck, sambar, chital, mongoose, porcupine, several different wild cats, and some huge pythons.

**OVERNIGHT:** Hotel next to Keoladeo National Park

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 7: The first view of the Taj Mahal

Today we'll make our way to the ancient city of Agra - the home of the most famous mausoleum on the planet - the Taj Mahal.

Agra was once the capital of the Mughal between 1572 and 1585 and is the only Indian city to have three UNESCO World Heritage Sites - the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri.

Once you've checked into your hotel and settled it, your afternoon will be spent exploring the Mughal Heritage Walk through the ancient village of Kachhpura and surrounding farmland on the banks of the Yamuna River, which will provide you with spectacular views of the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort.

The Mughal Heritage walk was designed by a non-governmental organization who provides employment and new infrastructure to the locals. You'll also be given a tour of the village life and the homes of the locals who live here as well as getting a unique insight into the local cottage industry for leather shoe making which helps Agra export shoes all over the world. You'll also visit some of the lesser known, but still important Mughal Era Monuments.

As the day comes to an end, we'll visit the Mehtab Bagh Park, which one of 11 parks created by Emperor Babur on the east banks of the Yamuna River, before taking in the spectacular sight of the Taj Mahal at sunset.

This evening you have an option to join a Hindu family for a vegetarian Thali cooking lesson and meal tonight before settling in at your hotel for the night.

**OVERNIGHT:** Agra hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

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

## Day 8: A Taj Mahal sunrise and a rickshaw tour, train to Varanasi

Today we'll start early to witness one of the wonders of the world at sunrise - the Taj Mahal. Created by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan over the period of 22 years, witnessing the magnificence of the Taj Mahal at sunrise is spectacular. As the light changes gradually, so does the colour of the Taj Mahal.

We'll then have breakfast before visiting the Agra Fort - a huge complex which was the main residence of the emperors of the Mughal Dynasty till 1638 before the capital was moved from Agra to Delhi. The Agra Fort is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

As the afternoon comes around, we'll continue to explore Agra, this time from the back of an electric rickshaw, enjoying the incredible culture and cuisine that the city has to offer. This tour gives you an authentic view of Agra, taking you to its old bazaars, traditional eateries and its places of worship.

We'll start at the gurdwara near the Taj Mahal, before visiting Dara Shikoh's library, Mirza Ghalib's birthplace, the home of the Radhasoami faith, the ancient Manka Meshwar Temple, the Jama Masjid as well as Asia's oldest convent, St. Patrick's Junior College. We'll also pass the busy Johri Bazar, the paan mandi, the petha mandi and the chaat-pakori street of Seth Gali.

After an action-packed afternoon, a day-use room is available for you to freshen up before we transfer to the station

to board an overnight train to Varanasi, the next stop on our Indian adventure.

**OVERNIGHT:** Overnight sleeper train to Varanasi

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 9: Exploring the villages of Varanasi

Once we arrive in Varanasi, we'll have a tasty breakfast, before making our way to visit the Sarai Mohana Weavers Village. Sarai Mohana is famous for its silk weaving and most of the locals here are involved in the craft. The Banarasi sarees made by these weavers are among the finest and most expensive saris in the whole of India. We'll also visit Chirgaon Village, famous for its pickles, jams and guavas.

As night falls, we head to the holy Ganges River for the evening Aarti ceremony, a devotional Hindu ritual which involves numerous small candles being lit inside cups made from leaves and flowers and floated down the river. Varanasi is one of India's holiest cities and we get our first taste here of how important the city and the Ganges River is to the country's Hindu population.

**OVERNIGHT:** Varanasi hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** None

## Day 10: A boat trip on the Ganges and a Brahman family lunch

Our second day in Varanasi starts with an early morning boat ride along the Ganges River, as we explore the city. The Ganges is a constant hive of activity throughout the day, as hordes of people come to pray and immerse themselves in its spiritually cleansing waters. The city is also considered an extremely auspicious place to die, and many people come to Varanasi to spend their final days. We'll see many funeral pyres on the ghats at the edge of the river as we pass by on the water.

We'll then go on a walking tour of the city, exploring its medieval streets, intricate temples and busy markets, abuzz with the general cacophony of Indian life. After exploring the old city, we'll make our way to a local Hindu Brahman family, which has 14 members living under one roof. Here, we'll be given a cooking master class of Indian cuisine, before having lunch with the family.

This afternoon we take the short trip to the ancient Buddhist site at Sarnath where Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon after becoming enlightened. In the evening we transfer to the train station to catch another overnight sleeper train to Delhi (approx. 12 1/2 hrs). If you prefer, you can spend an extra night in the hotel in Varanasi and fly to Delhi tomorrow morning instead.

**OVERNIGHT:** Overnight sleeper train to Delhi

**MEALS:** Breakfast, Lunch

**EXTRAS:** Varanasi to Delhi flight upgrade

## Day 11: Arrive in Delhi, free time

You arrive in Delhi this morning where we meet you and transfer you to your hotel for breakfast. The rest of the day is free to do as you please. A range of half-day tour options are available to pre-book, or you can just do some final shopping or sightseeing independently.

**OVERNIGHT:** Delhi hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Salam Balak Trust walk

## Day 12: Bon Voyage! Airport transfer included

You have some free time in Delhi this morning until we transfer you to the airport in plenty of time for your flight home. You could also consider adding to go on safari looking for tigers in Ranthambore National Park, or head to the beach at Goa for some sun, sea and relaxation, Indian style.

**OVERNIGHT:** N/A

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Ranthambore National Park Safari || Extra day in Delhi - post-tour || Spinmonkey cycling tour

### Included

- All accommodation in mid-range hotels and heritage properties
- All transport and transfers in AC vehicles
- 2nd class AC sleeper train journeys from Agra-Varanasi and Varanasi-Delhi
- 24-hour airport arrival and departure transfer service
- 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 (allow approx. US\$139)
- 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.

## Single room supplement (INSGTV)

**Min numbers:** 1 person

**Price:** \$400.00

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 - pre-tour

**Min numbers:** 1 person

**Price:** \$70.00

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 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.

## **Cook with a Hindu family in Agra**

**Min numbers:** 1 person

**Price:** \$40.00

In this optional activity, you'll learn the art of making a few authentic Indian dishes, before settling down for a Vegetarian Thali meal with a Hindu family.

You'll be given a tour of the live kitchen, which whips up strictly vegetarian Indian cuisine, before enjoying a meal which incorporates dishes from the North Indian, South Indian, Punjabi, Gujarati, Rajasthani and Mughal cuisines.

You'll be mesmerised by the aromas of the homemade spices - before going on a journey of rich Indian cultural heritage, leaving you with a feeling of love, family and warmth of an Indian home.

## **Hot air balloon in Jaipur**

**Min numbers:** 1 person

**Price:** \$265.00

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.**

## **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.

## Varanasi to Delhi flight upgrade

**Min numbers:** 1 person

**Price:** \$150.00

This option exchanges the sleeper train journey from Varanasi to Delhi to an extra night in the Varanasi hotel and then a domestic flight back to Delhi the following morning. All transfers are included, and you don't miss anything on the normal tour itinerary by choosing this option.

**Notes:** Train tickets are generally issued 4 months before departure and are non-refundable after your arrival in India. If you select this upgrade while you are in India, a supplement will need to be added to cover the unused ticket. Prices are also subject to flight availability. Single room 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. See the Transport notes for details on the sleeper train accommodation.

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 two overnight journeys on India's famous railway network, from Agra to Varanasi, and Varanasi to Delhi. 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 Varanasi to Delhi journey if you feel that one sleeper train journey is enough.

## 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 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 Delhi 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.

## **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\$139 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.

## **7. Tipping and Haggling**

Haggling is a traditional necessity, so it's wise not to pay too much regard to initial prices. Instead fix an item's 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.



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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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