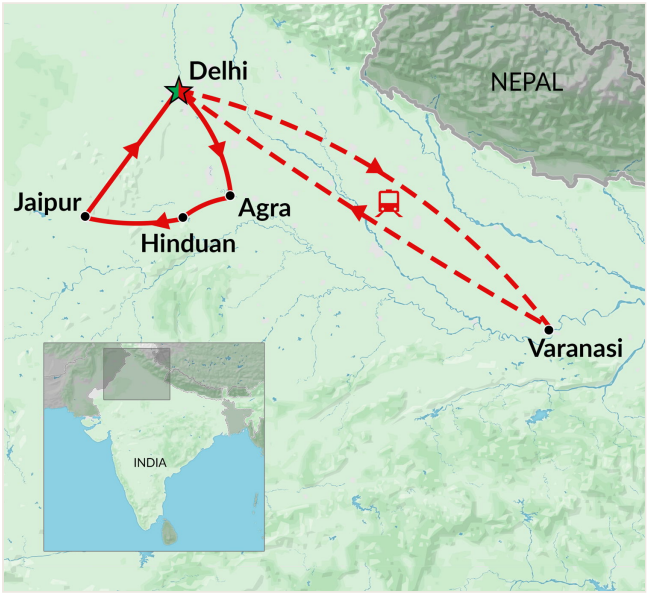
Taj to Varanasi

COUNTRY(IES)	India
TOUR TYPE	Small Group
TRANSPORT	A/C minivan/minibus and trains
GROUP SIZE	Min: 2 | Max: 14
DURATION	11 days
STARTS	Delhi, India
ENDS	Delhi, India
MEALS	Breakfasts - 10, Lunches - 1, Dinners - 1

TOUR ROUTE MAP **11 Days**



ROUTE: **Delhi** (Start) → **New Delhi** → **Delhi Division** → **Agra** → **Suroth** → **Jaipur** → **Delhi** → **Varanasi** → **Delhi** (End)

HIGHLIGHTS

Old and New Delhi, Taj Mahal, Agra, local village in Suroth Mahal, Pink city of Jaipur, hill top fort, Abhaneri step well, River Ganges at Varanasi, Buddhist site at Sarnath

Itinerary

DAY 1 Welcome to Delhi, transfer to hotel included

Land at Delhi Airport and travel to your hotel in the city before attending a welcome meeting with the tour guide. The briefing provides orientation and covers the upcoming travel arrangements, while the transfer itself offers an initial look at the capital’s urban landscape. With no major sightseeing planned on arrival, there is also time to settle in and prepare for the days ahead.

ACTIVITIES

- **Arrive at Delhi Airport**
  Arrive in Delhi and complete formalities at the airport. Meet your local representative who welcomes you to India's bustling capital.

- **Drive from Delhi Airport to Delhi City Hotel**
  Transfer from Delhi Airport to your city hotel. Settle in and prepare for the start of your tour.
- **Welcome Meeting with Tour Guide in Delhi**
  Meet your guide for an overview of the itinerary and local area information.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS	EXTRAS
Delhi hotel	None	Single room supplement (INSGTV), Extra day in Delhi - pre-tour

DAY 2 Exploring Delhi, Rickshaw Ride & Street Food Tasting

Spend the day moving between New Delhi and the older quarters of the capital, with a visit to Bangla Sahib before taking the Metro into Old Delhi. Explore Chandni Chowk and Chawri Bazar on foot and by rickshaw, observing the markets and everyday street activity at close range. A visit to Jama Masjid adds an important Islamic landmark and complements the Sikh heritage encountered earlier in the day.

ACTIVITIES

- **Guided Tour of Delhi City Sightseeing**
  Discover New Delhi's landmarks, including India Gate, a 42-metre war memorial commemorating Indian soldiers who died in the First World War and related campaigns. Drive past the President's Palace, the Parliament of India, Humayun's Tomb and Bangla Sahib Gurudwara.
- **Explore Bangla Sahib Gurudwara**
  Explore this important Sikh temple known for its spirituality and community service.
- **Travel from Metro Ride – Connaught Place to Old Delhi**
  Travel with locals on the metro from Connaught Place to Old Delhi.
- **Explore Chandni Chowk Market**
  Walk through one of Old Delhi's busiest bazaars, full of colour and energy.
- **Explore Chawri Bazar**
  Explore narrow lanes specialising in brass, copper and traditional paper goods.
- **Rickshaw Ride in Old Delhi Bazaars**
  Take a cycle rickshaw ride through Old Delhi's narrow streets, watching daily life unfold past shops, temples and market stalls, and finishing at the Jama Masjid, one of the largest mosques in India.
- **Explore Jama Masjid in Old Delhi**
  Visit Jama Masjid, one of India's largest mosques. Admire its impressive courtyard and Mughal architecture overlooking Old Delhi.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Delhi hotel	Breakfast

DAY 3 Head to Agra. Sheroes Hangout, Mughal Heritage Walk. First glimpse of the Taj Mahal

The day begins with the road journey to Agra and lunch at Sheroes Hangout Café. After hotel check-in, join the NGO-designed Mughal Heritage Walk through Kachhpura and surrounding farmland, where a villager guides the group through local life and cottage industries. Continue to Mehtab Bagh for the sunset view of the Taj Mahal. A cooking lesson and meal with a Hindu family is available separately as an optional evening activity.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Delhi to Agra**
  Leave Delhi and drive through rural Uttar Pradesh toward Agra. Pass small towns and fields on the road to the city of the Taj Mahal.
- **Explore Sheroes Hangout Café in Agra**
  Stop at Sheroes Hangout Café run by survivors of acid attacks. Hear their stories while enjoying an included lunch that supports this community project.
- **Mughal Heritage Walk – Kachhpura Village and Yamuna River**
  Join a guided heritage walk through Kachhpura village and surrounding farmland across the Yamuna River from the Taj Mahal. Learn about local life, traditional housing and small-scale industries.
- **Explore Mehtab Bagh in Sunset View of Taj Mahal**
  Stroll through Mehtab Bagh, a riverside garden opposite the Taj Mahal. Enjoy atmospheric sunset views of the monument across the Yamuna.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS	EXTRAS
Agra hotel	Breakfast,Lunch	Cook with a Hindu family in Agra

DAY 4 Taj Mahal sunrise. Drive to Suroth Mahal, enjoy a Village Walking tour

Visit the Taj Mahal in the early morning before travelling from Agra to Suroth Mahal. On arrival in rural Rajasthan, walk through a nearby village and spend time observing community life away from the larger cities. Later, join a cooking demonstration at Suroth Mahal, adding a practical food-focused activity to a day that moves from famous Mughal architecture into the quieter countryside.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Taj Mahal in Sunrise**
  Experience the Taj Mahal at sunrise as its colours shift with the morning light.
- **Drive from Agra to Suroth Mahal (Rajasthan)**
  Drive from Agra into rural Rajasthan and the small town of Suroth. Leave the main tourist trail behind as you head towards a heritage palace hotel.
- **Village Walking Tour in Suroth**
  Explore village life, local shops and traditional streets with your guide.

- **Cooking Demonstration in Suroth Mahal Heritage Hotel**
  Enjoy a cooking demonstration at Suroth Mahal heritage hotel before dinner. Learn how traditional dishes are prepared in a historic setting.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Suroth Mahal heritage hotel	Breakfast,Dinner

DAY 5 To Jaipur via the Abhaneri step well. Optional Bollywood Movie or Cooking Demo

Travel from Suroth through rural Rajasthan and stop at Abhaneri to visit Chand Baori, where a remarkable geometric arrangement of stairways descends deep into the historic stepwell. Continue onwards to Jaipur as village landscapes gradually give way to the busier streets and distinctive architecture of the Pink City. Free time after arrival allows you to rest or begin exploring Rajasthan’s capital independently.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Suroth to Abhaneri Stepwell**
  Travel toward Jaipur with a stop at Abhaneri, home to a spectacular stepwell.
- **Explore Abhaneri Stepwell in Chand Baori**
  Visit Chand Baori, one of India's largest and deepest stepwells. Admire the geometric pattern of its steps and the scale of this ancient water structure.
- **Drive from Abhaneri to Jaipur City**
  Continue the journey to Jaipur, Rajasthan's vibrant capital city.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS	EXTRAS
Jaipur heritage hotel	Breakfast	Jaipur Bollywood Movie - Raj Mandir Cinema, Hot air balloon in Jaipur, Jaipur Cooking demo and dinner with local family

DAY 6 Amber Fort & Jaipur City. Block printing workshop

Begin with Amber Fort and continue into central Jaipur for sightseeing before turning your attention to the city’s craft heritage. A block-printing session introduces a traditional textile technique, while a gemstone demonstration shows another important local skill. The activities complement the historic forts and streets by revealing industries that remain closely connected to Jaipur’s reputation as a major centre for art, design and skilled craftsmanship.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Amber Fort in Jaipur**
  Explore Amber Fort, a hilltop palace complex overlooking Jaipur. Walk through ornate courtyards and halls

decorated with marble and sandstone.

- **Guided Tour of Jaipur City Sightseeing**
  Explore Jaipur including Jantar Mantar and the City Palace complex.
- **Block Printing Workshop in Jaipur**
  Join a block printing workshop to see how designs are hand-stamped onto fabric. Try your hand at creating a simple pattern using carved wooden blocks.
- **Gemstone Demonstration in Jaipur**
  Watch a gemstone demonstration and learn how stones are cut and polished. Hear why Jaipur is a major centre for the gem trade.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS	EXTRAS
Jaipur heritage hotel	Breakfast	Hot air balloon in Jaipur

DAY 7 Return to Delhi (optional multimedia show at the Akshardam Temple)

Travel from Jaipur to Delhi and spend the day primarily on the road between the two cities. Rural landscapes and increasingly busy transport corridors mark the transition from Rajasthan back into the capital region. No formal activities are specified during the journey, keeping the focus on the return transfer and arrival in Delhi after the cultural and architectural experiences of Jaipur.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Jaipur to Delhi**
  Leave Jaipur and drive back to Delhi. The journey crosses the plains of northern India between Rajasthan and the capital.
- **Free Time in Delhi**
  Enjoy some free time in Delhi to rest after your journey. Meet your representative for a briefing about the days ahead.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Delhi hotel	Breakfast

DAY 8 Morning train to Varanasi, evening Aarti ceremony by the Ganges

Leave Delhi by train and travel across the northern plains to Varanasi. Once in the city, attend the evening Ganges aarti and observe the religious ceremony performed beside the river. Priests, lamps and chanting create a highly atmospheric introduction to Varanasi’s devotional life and provide cultural context to the ghats that will feature prominently during later exploration of this historic centre of Hindu pilgrimage.

ACTIVITIES

- **Train from Delhi to Varanasi**
  Board the Vande Bharat train for the journey across northern India to Varanasi.
- **Explore Aarti Ceremony in Ganges River**
  Attend the atmospheric evening Aarti ceremony along the sacred river.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Varanasi hotel	Breakfast

DAY 9 Sunrise on the Ganges, Varanasi Exploration and visit to Sarnath

Start with a morning boat trip on the Ganges before exploring Varanasi on foot through the historic areas beside the river. The walking tour provides a close look at temples, lanes and devotional activity within the city. Afterwards, continue to Sarnath and focus on its importance in Buddhist history as the location of the Buddha’s first sermon, creating a day centred on two major religious traditions.

ACTIVITIES

- **Sunrise Boat Ride on the Ganges on Varanasi**
  Enjoy sunrise on the Ganges as daily rituals unfold on the riverbanks, passing the burning ghats where funeral pyres line the water's edge - Varanasi is considered an extremely auspicious place to die, and many come here to spend their final days. While on the river you have the opportunity to offer Pind Daan in memory of any deceased loved ones.
- **Walking Tour of Varanasi**
  Walk the ancient streets, temples and vibrant markets of Varanasi.
- **Explore Sarnath**
  Visit Sarnath, where Buddha delivered his first sermon after enlightenment.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Varanasi hotel	Breakfast

DAY 10 Train to Delhi. Free afternoon

Travel by train from Varanasi to Delhi and complete the return journey to the capital after time beside the Ganges. The rail transfer is the main organised element of the day, with no additional sightseeing attached. Once back in Delhi, the remaining time is free, allowing you to recover from travel or make your own plans around areas already familiar from earlier in the trip.

ACTIVITIES

- **Train from Varanasi to Delhi**
  Return by train to Delhi with free time on arrival.

- **Free Time in Delhi**
  Enjoy some free time in Delhi to rest after your journey. Meet your representative for a briefing about the days ahead.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Delhi hotel	Breakfast

DAY 11

Bon Voyage! Airport transfer included

Spend the first part of the day at leisure in Delhi and choose how you would like to use the remaining hours in the city. No planned visits are included, allowing you to rest or explore nearby areas independently. Later, travel from the hotel to Delhi Airport for onward travel, completing your stay in the capital with a practical and uncomplicated departure transfer.

ACTIVITIES

- **Free Time in Delhi**
  Enjoy some free time in Delhi to rest after your journey. Meet your representative for a briefing about the days ahead.
- **Drive from Delhi City Hotel to Delhi Airport**
  Transfer to Delhi Airport in time for your international departure.
- **Depart from Delhi Airport**
  Check in for your international flight from Delhi. Say goodbye to India's sights, sounds and flavours.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS	EXTRAS
N/A	Breakfast	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
- 24-hour airport arrival and departure transfer service
- Morning trains Delhi-Varanasi-Delhi - AC Chair Car
- Sightseeing tours and activities as per the itinerary
- Delhi Tour, Rickshaw Ride & Street Food Sampling in Delhi
- Agra Sheroes Cafe, Mughal Heritage Walk and Taj Mahal visit
- Suroth Mahal Village tour & cooking demonstration
- Jaipur Amber Fort, City Tour & craft workshop
- Varanasi Aarti Ceremony, Sunrise Boat Ride, Visits to Ghats, Temples and Sarnath
- 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, get a quote here)
- Meals not indicated in the itinerary
- Drinks, snacks and other personal expenses (e.g. laundry)
- Tips for driver and/or tour guide
- Entrance fees (allow approx. US$105)
- Any other items not mentioned above

Notes

Similar tours:

The following tours also connect with this trip on a similar shortened or extended itinerary:

- **Incredible India** - follows the same itinerary but ends in Delhi, instead of continuing east to the holy city of Varanasi
- **Temples & Tigers** - adds some wildlife safaris in search of tigers at Ranthambore National Park after Jaipur and then misses Varanasi
- **Mumbai Express** - if you would also like to visit Mumbai, why not consider our Mumbai Express tour which can be booked to start on any date

Tour Options

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 spectaculars 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 ear, subject to weather conditions.

Jaipur Bollywood Movie - Raj Mandir Cinema

Min numbers: 1

Head to the famous Raj Mandir cinema in Jaipur to enjoy a night infront of the silver screen, Bollywood style!! This option includes transportation to and from the cinema, plus your movie ticket.

Jaipur Cooking demo and dinner with local family

Min numbers: 1

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

The evening will start with a demonstration on how to prepare a meal, before enjoying the fruits of your labour by settling down with the family for dinner.

Important Notes

1 Accommodation

We use good quality hotels rated at the Indian 3-star level on this tour as well as some carefully selected 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.

Please check the Single Room Supplement option for details on room sharing options and charges for solo travellers on this tour.

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 a journey on India's famous railway network. The journeys from Delhi to Varanasi (and return) takes around 8 hours and we book AC chair seats. You will be shown to your seat in the departure station and met on the platform on arrival. Delays of up to an hour are quite common, especially during the winter season if the weather is foggy. Tickets are issued 120 days before departure. If you book within that time we cannot guarantee that you will be seated with other travellers, though the train stewards are normally very helpful and will arrange seat swaps with other people on the train, who are normally very accommodating.

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 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 throughout the whole loop from Delhi/Agra/Jaipur/Delhi with a separate escort in Varanasi. On groups of 5 or more, a guide will accompany you for the duration of the tour, for groups of 2 to 4, you will have a driver and local guides in each city.

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.

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$105 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.

6 Dates & Prices

We run small-group departures on our Indian tours throughout the year, with less frequent start dates during the hot and wet 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.

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: Diptheria, 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 vacinnation 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.

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

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.

travel aware
gov.uk/travelaware

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 descrbed 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.

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.

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 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.

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.