



Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.

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Beguiling India - 60 Days

Major Destinations

Delhi - Rajaji National Park - Corbett National Park - Dudhwa National Park - Lucknow - Sarnath - Varanasi - Panna National Park - Khajuraho - Bandhavgarh National Park - Kanha National Park - Pench National Park - Pachmarhi Hill Station - Satpura National Park - Ranthambhore National Park - Amer - Jaipur - Sariska National Park - Bharatpur - Keoladeo Ghana National Park - Fatehpur Sikri - Agra - Chambal



Tour Highlights and Activities

This is a wonderful introduction to a captivating country, which rivals even Africa in terms of the sheer diversity of its wildlife. The only place on earth where you can view both lion and tiger in the wild, the vastly contrasting reserves and wilderness areas of India support another thirteen species of cat, four types of bear and many other rare and endemic mammals, reptiles and birds. This tour explores some of the very best national parks in the country, as well as several of the iconic landmarks for which this ancient land is justly famed. We will encounter an incredibly diverse range of cultures, beliefs and customs and will experience the glories and tribulations of both past and present India, from the luxury of the Maharaja's palaces to the ingenious irrigation systems of the rural villages. Exciting game viewing will take place in open jeeps, on elephant back, in boats and on foot; and we will also have the rare opportunity to search for nocturnal animals with spotlights at various suitable locations. Other activities include adventurous balloon flights and equally thrilling white water rafting, as well as horse and camel rides, canoe trips and picturesque hikes amid some of the most dramatic scenery imaginable. For all these and other highlights, including the rather special opportunity to bath an elephant, for the majority of first time visitors to India there is one particular image they will never forget, their first glimpse of a tiger, the most powerful predator on dry land and certainly one of the most majestic.

Day 1 - Delhi

Arrive in the capital Delhi and meet the local guide who will be with us for the entire duration of the trip. After a short transfer to our hotel, the rest of the day is free to discover this vibrant and welcoming city. A great starting point is a rickshaw ride through the narrow, pulsating lanes and bazaars of Old Delhi to the famous Red Fort, which always looks particularly attractive in the bright afternoon sunlight.

Days 2 to 3 - Delhi

A captivating blend of influences, cultures and religions, over the next two days we will visit some of the highlights of both Old and New Delhi, taking time to explore the substantial grounds and red sandstone buildings of the Red Fort, the world's tallest minaret and 1600 year-old iron pillar at Qutub Minar and the fascinating collection of astronomical instruments at the Jantar Mantar observatory,

one of five such observatories built by Maharaja Jai Singh II across the country in the early 18th century. Our excursions will also include India Gate, a memorial to the 90,000 Indian soldiers who died fighting for the British Raj in the First World War, the waterways and fountains of the Mughal Gardens and the Akshardham Temple, the largest Hindu temple in the World and certainly one of the most impressive buildings in this rich, historical city. Other places of interest will include the highly distinctive shopping centres of Chandi Chowk and Connaught Place, the tomb and intricate water courses of the Mughal Emperor Humayun and the beautiful 'Lotus Temple', a place of worship for all religions and one of the more recent architectural wonders of a city built in a dazzling array of styles over more than a thousand years.

Day 4 - Delhi to Rajaji National Park

We leave Delhi this morning and journey north to the first of our wildlife destinations, Rajaji National Park in the rugged Shivalik Hills, the southernmost mountain range in the Himalayas which extends as far west as Kashmir and as far East as the Indian state of Sikkim. Our home for the next four nights will be an idyllic retreat nestled within the lush forest of a beautiful valley just a few kilometres from the park's entrance gate,



which will allow us to spend full days within the reserve and to search for nocturnal creatures with spotlights at night. We will arrive at our accommodation around lunchtime and will have our first exciting opportunity to look for a tiger this afternoon, although Rajaji is more renowned for its large herds of Asian elephant and healthy leopard population.

Days 5 to 7 - Rajaji National Park

We have three full-days to explore Rajaji and our game activities will largely be conducted in open vehicles and also on elephant back, which is common in a number of the Indian national parks and can be an immensely natural and rewarding way of viewing wildlife. A variety of highly scenic hikes are also available and if you would like a break from the game viewing activities, white water

rafting can be arranged for all abilities on the mighty Ganges, which rises in the Himalayas and flows over 2,500km across India and Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal. In addition to the prolific birdlife, a feature of almost every wildlife area in India, an array of reptiles and almost 70 mammals can be found within Rajaji and the surrounding area, including four species of deer, sambar, chital, Indian muntjac and hog deer, India's largest antelope, the extraordinary looking nilgai or blue bull, and the goral, a nimble goat-antelope which can often be observed on steep slopes in and around the park. Some of the less common carnivores are particularly well represented, as sloth bear, striped hyena, golden jackal, jungle cat, leopard cat, yellow-throated marten and both large and small Indian civet all occur here.

Day 8 - Rajaji National Park to Corbett National Park

We depart Rajaji after breakfast and drive south east to the first of two destinations at Corbett National Park, one of the rest camps within the heart of this remarkably diverse ecosystem. After enjoying lunch and an uninterrupted panoramic view across the sweeping grasslands, we will take a jeep safari to familiarise ourselves with the area and to begin our search for the elusive tiger and other wildlife.

Days 9 to 11 - Corbett National Park

Over the next three days we are likely to encounter some of the species already seen at Rajaji, but Corbett has a relatively large population of tigers and we have a very realistic prospect of seeing this majestic cat during our stay here. I was fortunate enough to see my first tigers at Corbett, a tigress and cub walking across a forest path, and have been privileged to see at least one on every subsequent visit to this outstanding sanctuary. We will explore the tropical broad-leafed sal forests and immense open savannah in jeeps and on elephants and we also have the option of watching a few hours unfold at a particularly well-placed watchtower with a delicious packed lunch. In the heat of the late afternoon, herds of elephants can often be seen crossing and wallowing in the Ramganga River, very much the lifeblood of the park, and the Shivalik foothills surrounding the vast plains are home to both the Himalayan serow, another goat-antelope, and the Asiatic black bear, although both are extremely rare and notoriously difficult to observe.

Days 12 to 15 - Corbett National Park

After a final game drive within the centre of the reserve, we change location this morning and head to one of the best wildlife camps in the country, a forest paradise bordering the park with a very special atmosphere and the nicest hosts we are likely to meet. We will continue to game drive within Corbett, but will visit different areas and will also now have the opportunity to look for animals on foot and at night around the camp with spotlights. The trackers and field guides here are highly skilled and, as we will have already spent the previous few days with one in Corbett, they will know exactly what we have seen and which animals we would specifically like to look for during the remainder of our stay. They will spend time expertly tracking tigers for us, prompted by their knowledge of each cat's territory and the barks and alarm calls of nervous chital deer and the alert langur monkeys who watch over them. The same guides will escort us on enchanting hikes looking for rare animals against the gorgeous landscapes of the Himalaya foothills and we

will concentrate some of our time around the local rivers and lakes, which contain a profusion of wildlife, including gharial, mugger crocodile and all three Indian otter species, Eurasian, smooth-coated and Asian small-clawed.



Day 16 - Corbett National Park to Dudhwa National Park

Although we leave Corbett early this morning for the long drive to Dudhwa National Park, we take much of the relaxed atmosphere of the last few days with us, as our hosts will accompany us to this important reserve, which not only protects a small population of the Indian or greater one-horned rhino, but is also one of the few places in India at which it is possible to see the barasingha or swamp deer. We will split our four nights here evenly between two of the nicest Forest Rest Houses and will spend three full-days exploring the forests, grasslands and marshes that dominate the landscape.

Days 17 to 19 - Dudhwa National Park

We have a very good chance of finding the rhinos and it is always quite a thrill to watch these hugely impressive creatures from the back of an elephant, as they take almost no notice of the larger animal and instead continue calmly grazing, oblivious to our presence. We are also likely to see the barasingha, as the wetlands here represent an ideal environment for them, and may encounter one of the resident tigers or leopards. Of the smaller cats, fishing, leopard and jungle cat all occur and Dudhwa supports a fragile population of the endangered hispid hare, in the most southerly extreme of their limited range. Herds of migrating Asian elephants are occasionally spotted slowly traversing their well-trodden routes north into Nepal and the many swamps and lakes attract a huge variety of both resident and migratory birds, including numerous species of crane, heron, ibis, spoonbill and pelican. Raptors are well represented in terms of almost sixty species recorded here, as are the strikingly adorned kingfishers and bee-eaters, which decorate so many of India's reserves.



Day 20 - Dudhwa National Park to Lucknow

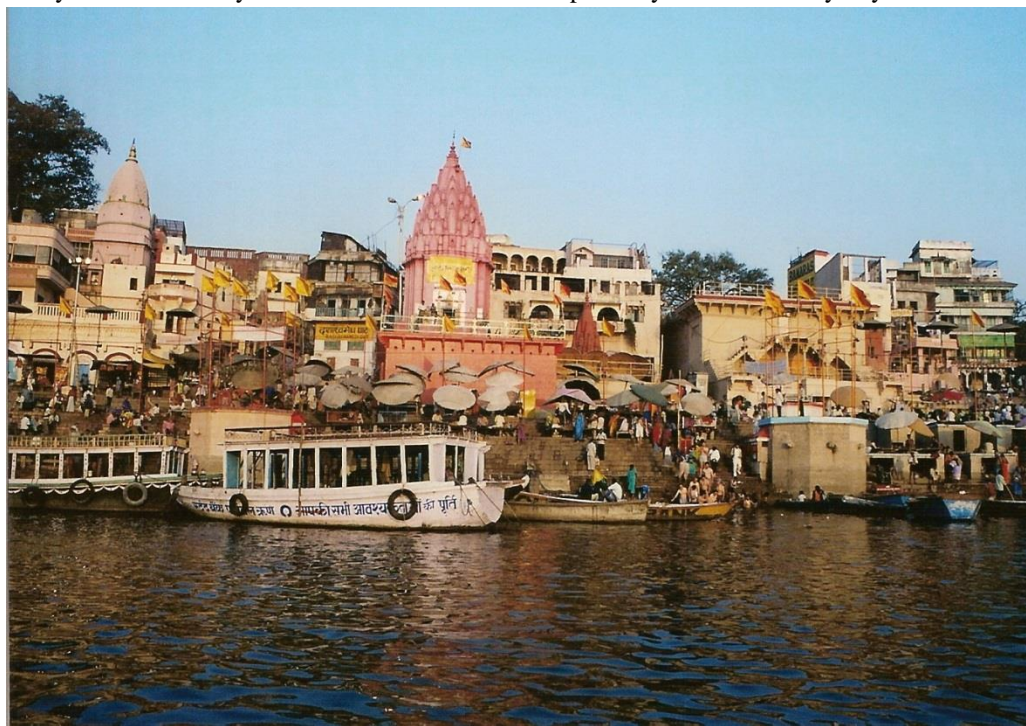
We say a reluctant goodbye to our friends from Corbett this morning, as they head back to their delightful home and we venture further south to Lucknow. The drive is not a difficult one and we should reach our hotel around lunchtime. After a short break and possibly a refreshing swim in the lovely grounds of our hotel, we will visit The Residency, scene of a bloody five-month siege during the 'Great Indian Mutiny' of 1857. Now known as India's First War of Independence, the rebellion of sepoys across much of the land changed the course of history, as the British Government assumed control of the country from the East India Company and the British Raj was born. The Residency is a fitting and somewhat haunting memorial to those turbulent times and the many who died here, as the ravaged buildings overlooking the Gomti River have been left untouched and the bullet and cannonball holes are still clearly visible in places. The museum is a good starting point for those interested in learning more about this historic conflict and after we have visited the graves of some of the fallen, we will take a short walk to the white obelisk which commemorates the 'Nationalist Insurgents' who lost their lives in the struggle. As the sun fades we will make our way to one of the best restaurants in Lucknow to savour the delicious local Awadhi cuisine, a wonderful assortment of natural ingredients infused with a blend of rich spices and cooked slowly over an open fire.

Day 21 - Lucknow

This morning we begin a leisurely tour of the city of the Nawabs, the Muslim equivalent of the term Maharaja, meaning King. Our tour will include the superb architecture of Bara Imambara, the highly ornate Hussainabad or Chhota Imambara, the magnificent gateway to the city of Rumi Darwaza, the 67m high British built Hussainabad Clocktower and the twin tombs of Nawab Saadat Ali Khan and his wife Khurshid Zadi. To bring our stay full circle in this historic city, we will also visit the Gandhi Museum and Library, which celebrates the life of the extraordinary Mahatma Gandhi, who defied an empire and led India to independence in 1947.

Day 22 - Lucknow to Varanasi

Today we have an easy drive to Varanasi and will stop shortly before this holy city to visit another fascinating sacred site, Sarnath,



where Buddha was said to have given his first sermon after gaining enlightenment. The complex at Sarnath is popularly known as the Deer Park and, according to legend, the resident deer are believed to be descendants of the animals protected by Buddha around 2,500 years ago. The central monument at Sarnath is the imposing Dhamekh Stupa, a cylindrical construction decorated with delicate carvings, and there are a number of other interesting ruins at a complex sacked by the Turks in the late 12th Century. We will also visit the Archaeological Museum and will certainly encounter the enterprising local youngsters, who sell bags of carrot peel to feed to the deer. From Sarnath our journey continues for just a few kilometres to our hotel in Varanasi, one of the oldest

inhabited cities in the world and one of the holiest to disciples of the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain faiths.

Day 23 - Varanasi

Situated on the west bank of the Ganges, Varanasi can best be described as a total assault on the senses and our day here will begin with a highly evocative early morning boat ride to watch the sun rise above the ghats, as the faithful trickle and then pour through the labyrinth streets to bath and worship in the holy waters of the Ganges. Regardless of any religious beliefs, the scene that unfolds before us is an absorbing one, an authentic taste of India as the pilgrims make their offerings in the water and the smoke of the funeral ghats rises and is lost across this ancient city. After a belated breakfast, we will continue our tour of Varanasi, including visits to the Kashi Vishvanath Temple or Golden Temple, which can only be viewed from the outside by all non-Hindus, and Bharat Mata Mandir, which is dedicated to Mother India and features a large marble relief map of the country.

Day 24 - Varanasi to Panna National Park

Having discovered a little of India's rich culture and history over the previous few days, we will transfer south west this morning to Panna National Park to renew our search for the dazzling array of wildlife in this most diverse of lands. Panna is the first of five national parks we will visit consecutively in the state of Madhya Pradesh and our perfectly situated lodge offers the rare opportunity to game drive at night with spotlights, as well as a fabulous treetop dining area which overlooks the Ken River running directly through the park. We will make a first foray into the reserve after lunch and have three further days to explore Panna and the many attractions of the surrounding area.

Days 25 to 27 Panna National Park

Although Panna has suffered more than its share of poaching atrocities in recent years, it is still possible to observe tigers here, but in truth we are just as likely to encounter one of the other five cats known to occur in the park i.e. leopard, caracal, jungle cat, rusty-spotted cat and wild cat. We also have a reasonable chance of seeing dhole, the Indian equivalent of the African hunting dog and one



of the real highlights of any trip, as well as sloth bear, wolf, striped hyena, several deer species and the chousingha or four-horned antelope. Smaller mammals include wild boar, smooth-coated otter, both the small Indian civet and the common palm civet, known locally as the 'Toddy Cat', golden jackal, Indian pangolin, Indian porcupine and the tenacious and often highly amusing honey badger. As we will be able to search for wildlife at night, we have far more chance of finding some of these creatures and we should certainly see the common palm civet, an arboreal animal which can often be found in the branches overhanging the dining hall, scavenging for any tasty snack on offer. The majority of our game viewing will take place in open jeeps and there is also an option of a boat safari to observe the reptiles and waterbirds of the Ken River. In addition to the wildlife, we have the option of visiting the famed erotic carvings at the temples of

Khajuraho, which are less than 30km from our lodge, as well as both the Raneh and Pandav waterfalls. Raneh Falls are actually a series of waterfalls within a deep, multi-coloured granite canyon forged by the Ken River and further downstream lies the Ken Gharial Sanctuary, which protects a small population of these critically endangered reptiles.

Day 28 - Panna National Park to Bandhavgarh Park

After a final early morning game drive, we will transfer south to Bandhavgarh National Park, where the attractive jungles and grasslands conceal the highest density of tigers in the country. Following a pleasant lunch and the option of a cooling swim during the midday heat, we will begin our search for the most regal of all predators. They say that you are unlucky if you do not see a tiger at Bandhavgarh and from personal experience this is probably true, as I have never failed to see less than three in all of my visits here. On this first afternoon we may also visit Charger Point, the memorial to the legendary Charger, a dominant male tiger that ruled a large territory within Bandhavgarh for almost a decade and who acquired his nickname as a result of his fondness for charging at tourist vehicles and elephants which strayed a little too close. Given that male tigers rarely manage to defend a territory for more than five years, Charger was an exceptional cat and was believed to be around seventeen at the time of his death in September 2000, an astonishing age for a wild tiger.

Days 29 to 31 - Bandhavgarh National Park

The game activities at Bandhavgarh are traditional in that they take place in open jeeps and on elephant back, but the difference is that here you do not generally take to the elephants until a tiger has been spotted and then they are used to enable visitors to get a great deal closer to these powerful, but terribly persecuted cats. Our three full days will give us the best possible chance to find a tiger and Bandhavgarh is also an excellent place to see dhole and even the elusive wolf. In addition to the animals listed for Panna, all of which can also be found here, both parks are home to ruddy and Indian grey mongoose, nilgai and chinkara antelope, Indian or Bengal fox and two widespread Indian primates, the common langur and rhesus macaque. Another attraction of the park is Bandhavgarh fort, imperiously perched atop one of the highest of the many hills within the park. With permission and a local guide, the fort can be visited on foot and the view from the escarpment can only be described as breathtaking. The reasonably vigorous ascent features a number of interesting statues and ruins, including a beautiful statue of Lord Vishnu reclining above a spring pool among the encroaching green foliage. The birdlife in the park is as plentiful as elsewhere in India and the surrounding cliffs provide nesting grounds for four species of vulture, Indian, Egyptian, red-headed and white-rumped, as well as the crested serpent-eagle.



Day 32 - Bandhavgarh National Park to Kanha National Park

We say farewell to Bandhavgarh after a last game drive and head further south to Kanha National Park, the inspiration behind Rudyard Kipling's classic collection of stories *The Jungle Book*. Aside from being another premier tiger destination, Kanha is also one of India's most scenic parks and on our first afternoon we will conclude our game drive at Bamni Dadar, a plateau with a superb vantage point over the picturesque sal forests and open meadows and a favourite spot to enjoy a spectacular Kanha sunset.

Days 33 to 35 - Kanha National Park

Given that we have three days to explore what is a massive reserve, we are likely to see tiger again here and there are also good chances for some of the other major carnivores, most notably leopard, dhole, sloth bear, golden jackal and jungle cat. Rarities of the park include gaur, commonly known as the Indian bison and the largest species of all wild cattle, barasingha and the large brown flying squirrel, which can occasionally be observed in the grounds of our lodge during informative guided forest walks with a qualified naturalist. Another real treat at this particular lodge is a chance to visit the elephant camp in the afternoon and to help the mahouts bath these gentle giants in the Banjar River. In the evening traditional dancers entertain the guests around the camp fire and day trips to local villages and schools can be arranged for a chance to experience rural life in the region. As at Bandhavgarh, the elephants at Kanha are deployed to get us closer to the tigers and there are a number of viewing platforms situated at the most regularly visited waterholes and dams, as tigers are the only big cats to relish water and can often be found cooling themselves in rivers and pools during the oppressive midday heat.



Day 36 - Kanha National Park to Pench National Park

We have one last opportunity to explore Kipling's famous jungle this morning before we transfer south to Pench National Park, one of the few remaining tiger strongholds in the country and the location of the landmark BBC documentary 'Tiger: Spy in The Jungle'. The dry deciduous teak forests of Pench team with life and support some of the highest concentrations of game in the country, including thousands of chital and sambar deer, nilgai antelope, wild boar and a relatively large population of gaur. Predators abound and leopards, who outnumber tigers in this reserve, are seen more commonly here than anywhere else. Packs of up to twenty dhole have also been recorded, as well as sloth bear, golden jackal, striped hyena, jungle cat and the occasional wolf. Our search for these and many other animals will begin this afternoon and, whether we find a graceful tigress taking shade or a shaggy sloth bear digging out termites, we are unlikely to leave this typically Indian reserve without a host of memories.

Days 37 to 39 - Pench National Park

Wildlife viewing will mainly be conducted in open jeeps and, after the rejuvenating monsoon rains have transformed the parched grasslands and jungle into a lush, green oasis, boat safaris are available on the Pench River. Elephants will be used to venture into the dense forested areas inaccessible to vehicles and guided nature walks and night game drives are also highly recommended in parts of the buffer area surrounding the park. We will make time to visit the large reservoir to the south of the park, which, as one of the few reliable water sources during the dry season, attracts an abundance of herbivores and the many animals that predate on them. Horse rides are another option and, whether we are in a jeep, or on an elephant or horse, there are few more beautiful sights than a bright pink sunrise above the misty dawn of an Indian jungle.



Day 40 - Pench National Park to Pachmarhi Hill Station

We will have time for one final activity at Pench this morning before we depart for a little slice of heaven perched in the luxuriant hills of the Satpura Range. Predominantly founded by the British during the Raj, usually in glorious locations and at altitude to escape the intense summer heat, no tour of India is complete without a visit to a hill station and the colonial retreat at Pachmarhi is among the finest in the country. This afternoon we will take an easy walk to the ancient Panch Padav caves, the delightful Apsara Vihar or 'Fairy Pool' and the Rajat Prapat waterfall, where we can cool down under the 107m high cascade.

Day 41 - Pachmarhi Hill Station to Satpura National Park

This morning we have the option of a horse ride along one of the many pretty trails that meander through the dense woodland, before we hike to the Handi Khoh ravine and on to Priyadarshini Point, which affords a tremendous view of Pachmarhi and the sheer 90m high cliff walls of the ravine and thick, carpeted forest canopy below. At the end of a tiring, but rewarding day, we will make the short transfer to our elegant lodge at Satpura National Park for a delicious and well-earned meal overlooking the pristine wilderness that will be our home for the next four nights.

Days 42 to 44 - Satpura National Park

One of India's best kept secrets, Satpura National Park is a serene mix of ageless teak forests, sunlit glades and shimmering rivers. The glorious landscapes are accentuated by the dramatic rolling hills and although tiger sightings are less common here, so are people; and the absence of large crowds and the resulting natural behaviour of the animals, more than compensate. Our time will be spent uncovering the many treasures Satpura has to offer and this is one of the few reserves in India which allows guided safari walks

within the actual park. We will therefore enjoy the privilege of walking in the shadows of tigers and leopards and of tracking these secretive animals as we come across their pugmarks. Jeep, boat and elephant safaris are all available and we also have the opportunity to canter through forest trails on glistening thoroughbred horses and to glide silently across the water on enchanting canoe trips. Whilst the crowds are absent, most of the animals of the region are represented here, including sloth bear, dhole, striped hyena, golden jackal, jungle cat and rusty spotted cat. Herds of gaur roam the forest clearings and blackbuck antelope, Indian flying fox, stripe-necked mongoose and wild cat all occur within this relatively undiscovered gem.



Day 45 - Satpura National Park to Ranthambhore National Park

Our tour turns back north today, as we leave Satpura early for the long drive to the renowned Ranthambhore National Park in Rajasthan. If we arrive in time, we will this afternoon make our first excursion into a park which, until recent years, had enjoyed the deserved reputation of being one of the best reserves in the country for tiger sightings. This changed sadly a few years back, when Ranthambhore suffered a series of horrific poaching incidents in which a number of tigers were killed. Fortunately, under increased protection, several cubs have been born recently to the surviving tigers and the population is slowly recovering.

Days 46 to 49 - Ranthambhore National Park

The prospect of seeing a tiger at Ranthambhore during our four-day stay is now fairly high again and we also have a good chance to



observe leopard and sloth bear. Although they are extremely rare and we would indeed be fortunate to encounter one, caracal are seen here and at nearby Sariska more than anywhere else and this is also a good reserve for a number of scavengers and small carnivores including striped hyena, Indian fox, golden jackal, small Indian civet, common palm civet, ruddy mongoose and honey badger. Our game drives will take place in open jeeps and we will concentrate much of our time on the three main lakes within the park, which attract a large number of deer and antelope, as well as the tigers that come to hunt them. We also have the option of visiting the splendid Ranthambhore Fort, which commands a formidable strategic location 200m above the surrounding plains and has seen plenty of action during its

chequered 1000-year history. The huge fort complex is one of the most impressive of many wonderful forts in Rajasthan and can be reached by a drive and a short hike for a dramatic view across the park. For an even more spectacular view, one morning will be

reserved for one of the real highlights of our trip, a magical dawn balloon flight over the fabled jungles and lakes of Ranthambhore. As we drift almost timelessly above the trees, we will observe herds of deer and other animals in complete tranquillity and will have time to contemplate this wonderful natural theatre from a truly unique perspective. Other activities in the area include colourful displays of local folk music and dance, camel rides and a visit to a neighbouring area to see a population of blackbuck antelope.



Day 50 - Ranthambhore National Park to Jaipur

We have another game drive this morning before we make the short transfer to Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan and part of the famous Golden Triangle, a popular tourist circuit between Delhi, Agra and Jaipur. After checking into our rather special home for the next two nights, an opulent former royal palace hotel, we will drive just north of Jaipur to visit the Amer Fort, commonly known as the Amber Fort and one of the very finest examples of the magnificent Rajput style of architecture. We will make our journey up to the fort on elephant back and will spend the afternoon exploring the handsome courtyards, ornate mirrored ceilings and walls, and exquisitely carved frescos and columns. The superbly decorated three-storey entrance gate Ganesh Pol is a particular highlight in a complex full of them and the heavily latticed screens provide a different perspective of the intricately designed gardens built within Maota Lake. We will return to Jaipur by way of Jaigarh Fort, a heavily fortified stronghold built to protect Amer and connected to it by an underground tunnel. On the way back we will also stop at Jal Mahal or the 'Water Palace', before heading to a restaurant in the old city centre to enjoy a traditional Rajasthani meal. Constructed in Man Sagar Lake, Jal Mahal is beautifully lit in the evening and looks especially inspiring when the lake's water level is high during the monsoon.

Day 51 - Jaipur

Known as the Pink City because of the welcoming pink wash the buildings were dressed with to commemorate the royal visit of Prince Albert in 1876, Jaipur is an exuberant, colourful capital and after breakfast we will begin our tour at Hawa Mahal or the Palace of the Winds, which forms part of the east wall of the City Palace and was designed in the shape of the crown of the Hindu god Krishna. Built for ladies of the Maharaja's harem, this five-storey red and pink sandstone palace was designed in such a way that it was possible for the concubines to view the street life of Jaipur without being observed. After admiring this unique design and all 953 latticed windows bathed in the golden glow of the early morning sunlight, we will move inside the city walls to the main complex, a series of magnificently constructed palaces, courtyards, pavilions and temples. Some of many highlights include Chandra Mahal, the earliest building in the palace and still the residence of the current Maharaja of Jaipur, Mubarak Mahal, a



perfectly constructed two-storey guesthouse which now displays traditional costumes from all over India, the superb Armoury Museum and the two huge silver urns that Maharaja Madho Singh II had constructed for his visit to England in 1901 for the coronation of Edward VII. Each urn was filled with water from the Ganges to enable the Maharaja to avoid drinking the English water during his stay. Of the many other treasures on display here, the Ridhi Sidhi Pol gates, which depict the four seasons in detailed, breathtaking beauty, are perhaps the most fitting tribute to the incredibly skilled artisans who crafted them with such care. Given that the first buildings here were conceived and constructed during the rule of Maharaja Jai Singh II, it is probably not surprising that another of his five Jantar Mantar observatories can also be found in the palace grounds and we have the option of studying more of his ingeniously designed instruments before returning to the city for lunch and a leisurely stroll through the lively bazaars. During the afternoon we will visit Albert Hall or Central Museum in the Ram Niwas Gardens, the colony of entertaining rhesus macaque monkeys at Galtaji Temple and Nahargarh Fort in the Aravalli Hills, for the best possible view of the city, Man Sagar Lake and Jal Mahal palace.



Day 52 - Jaipur to Sariska National Park

We have two options this morning, as we can either enjoy a relaxed breakfast and the first-class facilities of our hotel, or we can take another balloon flight for an astounding view of the Pink City. Both options are fine, as we have plenty of time before we make the short transfer to Sariska National Park and another equally luxurious royal palace hotel. As with so many protected areas across the globe, Sariska has suffered at the hands of poachers in recent years and the tigers that live here now have all been reintroduced and are being carefully monitored away from the main tourist circuits. We are therefore unlikely to see tigers during our stay, although they are still occasionally spotted, but Sariska is a good reserve for other animals and our presence will also support the essential conservation efforts that are being made here. After lunch and a relaxing stroll through the lush green vegetation of the sprawling hotel gardens, and maybe a swim in the enticing crystal clear water of the massive pool, we will take our first game drive this afternoon and over the next two days can expect to see many of the animals previously sighted at neighbouring Ranthambhore. However, as the majority of tourists generally visit that park when touring Rajasthan, we will have the pleasure of discovering Sariska on near empty roads and our encounters here are likely to be relatively undisturbed.

Days 53 to 54 - Sariska National Park

We will ensure that we enter the park at first light on both days, as the thick dhok forests and lovely waterholes are particularly



pleasing in the early morning mist and this is the best time to look for leopard and the even more elusive caracal, which thrive here but are rarely seen. The waterholes are good areas to find the many deer and antelope species, including sambar, chital, nilgai and chousingha and Sariska is also notable for the large number of peafowl, which can often be photographed displaying the extravagant fan of their dazzling tail feathers. Wild boar, golden jackal, dhole, jungle cat, Indian porcupine and striped hyena all occur and there are also large populations of common langur and rhesus macaque. Although originally believed to be confined to southern India and Sri Lanka, the incredibly rare rusty spotted cat has also been recorded at Sariska, as well as in Udaipur and as far north as Jammu and Kashmir. The area has a number of interesting temples and ruins that can be visited during our spare time and, this being

Rajasthan, camel and horse rides are also widely available. In the evening sumptuous feasts are prepared in the lavish grounds of our palace hotel, against a backdrop of blazing fires and intoxicating Rajasthani music and dance.

Day 55 - Sariska National Park to Keoladeo Ghana National Park

We will enjoy our final major jeep safari of the trip this morning, followed by a short transfer east to Bharatpur and the celebrated Keoladeo National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site which has been attracting birdwatchers from all over the planet for several decades. Vehicles are not allowed in the park, but bicycles and cycle-rickshaws can be hired and the best way to view the wildlife is on foot with a knowledgeable guide.

When the water levels permit it is also possible to take a pleasant boat ride to view the colonies of nesting birds, but water shortages have been a problem at Keoladeo in recent years, primarily as a result of pressure from local communities and farmers and the highly unpredictable monsoon rains. Whilst the staggering variety of birds are the main attraction here for the majority of visitors, including a host of migratory waterfowl, almost 30 mammal species have been observed in the park and this afternoon we have a chance to look for wild boar, small Indian mongoose, Indian grey



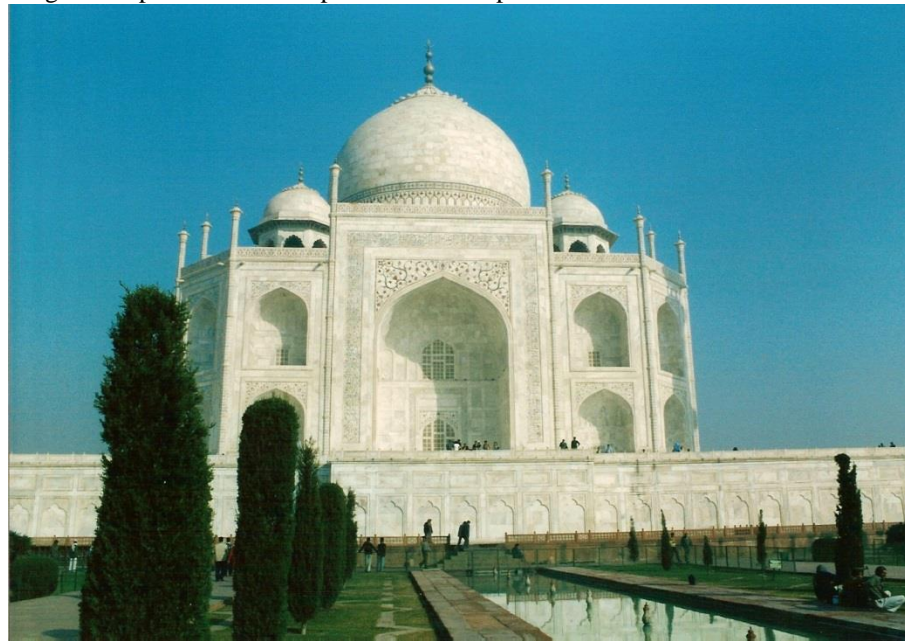
mongoose, jungle cat, leopard cat, common palm civet, small Indian civet, smooth Indian otter, golden jackal, striped hyena, porcupine, Indian fox, Indian hare and nilgai antelope. Keoladeo is also one of the few places in the country where it is possible, probable would be stretching things somewhat, to find the extremely rare fishing cat and rock python are easier to see here than anywhere else, as sightings are almost guaranteed if you spend a couple of days looking in the right areas. Monitor lizard are another common reptile species and until 2005, when she died of natural causes, a wandering tigress chose to make Keoladeo her own private sanctuary.

Day 56 - Keoladeo Ghana National Park

Today we can either spend a full day in the park with a packed lunch or we can split the day in two and return to our nearby lodge to relax and swim during the midday heat. There is also the option of visiting the striking fortifications, palaces and gardens of nearby Deeg, the original capital of the area before Bharatpur.

Day 57 - Keoladeo Ghana National Park to Agra

We leave Bharatpur this morning to travel a few kilometres south to the walled city of Fatehpur Sikri, the former capital of the Mughal Empire for a short period until Emperor Akbar the Great moved his court firstly to Lahore and then to Agra. Perfectly



preserved and built in a distinctive blend of Islamic, Hindu and Jain architecture, the red sandstone palaces and audience halls of Fatehpur Sikri are fine examples of the grandeur and religious tolerance of the Mughals. The five-tiered open pavilion of Panch Mahal and the public and private audience halls of Diwan-i-Aam and Diwan-i-Khas are all highlights of this sophisticated city and other notable structures include the Tomb of Sheikh Salim Chishti, overlaid in pristine white marble, the Jami Masjid mosque and the Anup Talao platform, set amid a pool and reached by four symmetrical bridges. After lunch we will move on to Agra and one of the most visited landmarks on the planet, the celebrated Taj Mahal, a mausoleum built by the fifth Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan on the bank of the Yamuna river in memory of his favourite wife Mumtaz Mahal. A marvel of both craftsmanship and symmetry, construction on

the superlative main marble tomb began in 1632 and took 20,000 workers twelve years to complete. The imperceptibly leaning minarets, ornate mosque and monumental entrance gate were added over the next ten years. We will spend the early afternoon experiencing the perfect architectural harmony on display here and marvelling at the exquisite decorative art, particularly the elaborate lattices, sculpted from single blocks of marble, the superbly carved flower and plant reliefs and the intricately inlaid flowers, each created by dozens of individual precious and semi-precious stones set in marble. Our final visit of the day will be to the neighbouring Agra Fort, a commanding walled citadel with an uninterrupted and memorable view of the Taj Mahal. The monuments of this red sandstone fortification are almost as unforgettable and we will have plenty of time to admire the grand palaces, towers and gateways before we stop at the highest rampart to marvel at the deep orange glow of the sun slowly slipping away behind this timeless city.

Day 58 - Agra to Chambal

We leave our hotel before dawn today to watch the first rays of the morning sun illuminate the brilliant, white marble of the Taj Mahal and after a late breakfast we drive south to the final destination of our tour, the National Chambal Sanctuary, a conservation initiative protecting a 400km stretch of the Chambal River and large swathes of the ravines on both riverbanks. This is an exciting final wildlife experience, as the Chambal supports one of the last remaining populations of the Ganges subspecies of the south Asian river dolphin and this afternoon we will take a boat safari with a qualified naturalist to search for these intelligent but endangered creatures. The waterways of the sanctuary are also home to eight turtle species, smooth coated otter, monitor lizard and sizeable populations of gharial and mugger crocodile. In the evening the enthusiastic staff at our sanctuary lodge will help us search for common palm civet, Indian flying fox, jungle cat and Indian hedgehog.



Day 59 - Chambal

We will have another boat safari this morning, as the dolphins are generally easier to locate in the early morning, and, depending on whether we have seen the dolphins or not, the rest of the day is free to enjoy the other activities on offer at our lodge, including a jeep safari through the Chambal and Yamuna ravines. These ravines, which form part of the sanctuary, support an unexpectedly large number of species, including wolf, striped hyena, jungle cat, golden jackal, Indian fox, nilgai and blackbuck. Guided walks, horse and camel safaris and cultural visits are among the other optional activities. In the evening we will savour the special atmosphere of an Indian farewell meal and will have one final opportunity to spotlight in and around the grounds of our lodge.

Day 60 - Chambal to Delhi

After breakfast we drive back to Delhi where our epic exploration of this equally epic country finally comes to an end. Overnight accommodation and airport transfers can be arranged in Delhi depending on the departure time of your international flight.





Additional Options

As per most of my sample tours, India is simply too big and has too much to offer to include the majority of highlights in one single trip. Other options are detailed in my 'Jewels of Rajasthan' guide and even these do not begin to scratch the surface of what is possible in this alluring country. Expeditions can be mounted to Jammu and Kashmir state in the extreme north to search for the almost mythical snow leopard and further east from Sikkim and West Bengal to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland to look for even more elusive species, including clouded leopard, marbled cat, sun bear, red panda, spotted linsang, binturong, masked palm civet and Chinese pangolin. This trip is easily combined with a visit to Gujarat and the Asiatic lions of Gir National Park and Sunderbans to the east and Periyar to the south are just two of the innumerable national parks and protected areas that can be included within one of the most diverse wildlife tours on the planet. Extended hiking and climbing treks are available for all abilities in a number of remote and untamed areas and, for those who enjoy slightly more sedate pursuits, there are literally thousands of kilometres of beaches and countless snorkelling and diving opportunities. Although the emphasis of this tour is very much on wildlife, it has been designed as an interesting and diverting blend of natural wonders, enduring culture and enthralling history. If the cultural and historical aspects are therefore of more appeal, any number of specialist themed tours can be arranged, from the hill stations of the British Raj and the great forts and temples of almost every region, to the holy sites of the river Ganges and the Buddhist monasteries of Ladakh. Similarly, if your interest is purely wildlife, all of the other elements can be changed or omitted and it is now entirely feasible to encounter tigers, lions and snow leopards, as well as a host of other animals, on one carefully planned expedition. India is an immense land of incredible possibilities and wonders, where the warmth of the people is equalled only by the diversity of the wildlife. It would be impossible to explore more than a fraction of the country on one solitary trip, but the real beauty of India is returning over several years and each time discovering a few more of her enchanting secrets.



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