

# incredible indian tours

## heartlands of india

**trip-validity:** 1/1/11—31/12/12

From the beaches of Goa to the cultural capital of India, Kolkata, this journey traversing the breadth of the subcontinent will introduce you to some roads less travelled through rarely explored towns and cities of the heartlands of Incredible India. Beginning our journey in Panjim, the Portuguese influenced capital of Goa, we travel north and east through ancient villages and world heritage sites once major cities or holy towns. We explore rock-cut temples of sculptural extravagance grand Muslim mausoleums and the commercial capital - dazzling Mumbai. Afghani fortresses and Buddhist stupas, Hindu Palaces and the crumbling British heritage of Kolkata lead to a fascinating and exotic trip through an India which is all at once traditional, exotic, bizarre and totally unexpected.



## highlights

- o explore the traditional **Portuguese heritage** of Goa
- o wander the **ruins** of the once majestic Vijayanagar empire in **Hampi**
- o witness the spectacular **rock-cut cave temples** at Badami
- o uncover the charm of the ancient citadel of **Bijapur**
- o live it up in glitzy and glamorous **Mumbai**
- o explore the **wineries** and **temples** of Nashik
- o be left breathless by the unsurpassed **Ellora and Ajanta Caves**
- o uncover the history and charm of **Mandu**
- o be amazed at the **Buddhist ruins** of Sanchi
- o discover the temple village of **Orchha**
- o witness sunrise over the Ganges in **holy Varanasi**
- o get enriched in cultural **Kolkata**

## itinerary disclaimer

The itinerary attached is correct at time of printing. It may differ slightly during the tour. Occasionally itineraries need to change as we travel to allow for on the ground problems with transportation, Indian booking issues and travelers desires.

## itinerary (22 nights/23 days)

### Day 1 Panjim

Arrival Day. There are no group activities today.

We meet at 6pm for a short tour briefing before heading out for dinner.

### Day 2 Panjim

We spend today exploring the spiritual heart of Old Goa with its Portuguese churches, Basilica and Cathedral. The World Heritage Basilica of Bom Jesus is where the treasured remains of St Francis Xavier are housed. The saints body, with increasing signs of decay (encouraged most likely from the 'bits' that have been removed over the centuries) is put on show every 10 or 12 years. The next exposition is due in 2014.

Inland, away from the beaches and waterways is the Hindu heartland of Goa. Up in the hills are several spice gardens and we tour one, discovering the world of Indian spices before feasting on traditional Goan cuisine.



Goan Sunset

### Days 3-4 Hampi

A full days drive to Hampi up and over the Western Ghats where we enjoy the relaxed ambience and marvelous sights of Hampi.

Once buzzing with a population of nearly half a million, Vijayanagar was the capital of one of the largest Hindu empires in Indian history. After being sacked by Muslims in 1565, the city fast went into decline. Now a World Heritage site, there are 58 protected monuments around these fascinating ruins. The entire area encompassing 26 square kilometres is made all the more exotic with its boulder-strewn landscape softened by paddy fields and banana plantations, creating a quite magical atmosphere. Explore the temples and palaces.

Relax by the river or in one of the pleasant cafes. Cycle out to far-flung ruins or take a coracle boat across the river to Anegundi for a more peaceful experience.



Hampi - Tungabhadra River

### Days 5-6 Badami



Badami

An afternoon drive to Badami, once capital of the ancient Chalukya empire.

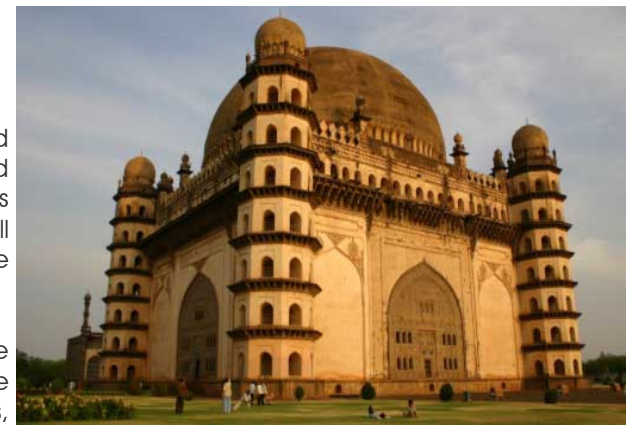
Badami occupies a dramatic site, squeezed in a small gorge between two high red sandstone hills. A small lake is between the hills and the township with its temples and quaint streets abuts the lake. The hills surrounding the picturesque lake are dotted with some of the most ancient examples of Dravidian temples and rock-cut caves.

We spend the morning of day 6 visiting the caves and you have the option of spending the afternoon visiting the nearby towns of Aihole and the World Heritage Pattadakal which abound with further examples of ancient Dravidian temples.

### Day 5 Bijapur

A short morning train trip brings us to Bijapur, an old Muslim stronghold with some of the finest Islamic architecture in India. Mausoleums and Citadels, Mosques and Palaces were built by the Adil Shahi kings between the 15th and 17th centuries. This traditional heartlands town still contains real character with some of the finest Muslim architecture in the Deccan.

We have plenty of time to explore the imposing Golgumbaz, with the worlds second largest unsupported dome, the mausoleum of one of the Adil Shah rulers, as well as other tombs, palaces and mosques, beautifully proportioned and still impressive, although in ruins.



Gol Gumbaz

We take a late afternoon drive to nearby Solapur from where we board our overnight train to Mumbai.

### Days 9-10 Mumbai



Gateway of India and Taj Mahal Hotel

Known as Bombay until its recent name change, Mumbai is India's financial, commercial and industrial capital, and its property prices are some of the highest in the world. As such the city hums with activity and its more than thirteen million residents seem to be constantly on the move. There is a distinct multicultural feel here, with people from all over India and abroad having gravitated to the metropolis in search of a better life.

Our hotel is centrally located and only a short walk to the nearby Gateway of India and the famous Taj Hotel. A stroll along Chowpatty Beach at sunset is a must, where you can try the local street delicacies and experience the carnival-like atmosphere of the nightly markets here. We visit Crawford Market, the fascinating Dhobi Ghats – the city's laundry washers and the bustling Mahalaxmi Temple.

Mumbai is also India's entertainment capital, and the home of Bollywood, so if you're lucky you might bump into a star, a film shoot on the streets or even get offered a part as an extra in a Bollywood extravaganza.

## Day 11 Nasik



Sula Winery

After a free morning in Mumbai we take an afternoon train to Nasik. One of the four sites of the Khumb Mela - the largest religious gathering on the face of the planet, makes Nasik one of India's most holy sites. Situated on the sacred Gadavari river, Nashik is a colourful town with exotic temples and bathing ghats where sadhus and pilgrims come to wash away their sins in the holy waters. Although Nasik is said to be an ancient town which dates back over 2500 years, none of the temples here are very old, however they do pertain to stories from the life of Rama.

Nasik is also home to the Sula Vineyards - one of India's oldest and most reputed wineries. Set against the rolling green plains around Nasik, a sort of Napa Valley in western India, Sula Vineyards is one of India's largest vineyards. We spend the afternoon touring the vineyard before enjoying a meal in one of the fine restaurants at the winery.

## Day 12 Ellora Caves

Travelling on to Aurangabad today, we spend the afternoon at the spectacular Ellora Caves - carved monasteries, chapels and temples dating back to 600AD. A UNESCO World Heritage site, the masterpiece is the breathtaking Kailash Temple. Larger and higher than the Parthenon in Athens, the temple was created to recall Mount Kailash, the home of the Hindu God, Lord Shiva. It appears to be an enormous, freestanding, multi-level temple complex, but was in fact carved out of a cliff-face.



Ajanta Caves

## Day 13 Jalgaon



Ajanta Fresco

We drive to Jalgaon today via the Ajanta Caves. Dating from around 200BC the Ajanta Caves comprise of around 30 rock-cut Buddhist caves, situated in a horseshoe shaped hillside in a forested ravine. The caves were hidden by the jungle for many centuries and were only discovered by a British hunting party in 1819. With intricate carvings and stunning frescoes, the Ajanta caves have, along with the nearby Ellora Caves, been proclaimed a World Heritage site. Thought to have housed around 200 monks and numerous artists, craftsmen and labourers, the carvings and frescoes in the caves retell the life story of the Buddha and reveal the life and culture of the people of the times.

## Days 14-15 Mandu

We have a full day's drive today to Mandu. Nestled along a 10km long hilltop fort, Mandu is covered in the ruins of Palaces, Temples and tombs dating from the early 15th century.

India is full of romantic ruins, forts and abandoned cities and one of the most interesting is Mandu. Once the capital city of a Northern Indian Muslim state between 1401 and 1561, Mandu has lain abandoned for over 400 years and is now little more than a small village surrounded by farmland which sees very few tourists.

We spend a full day visiting the various sites including the Royal Enclave, the Jama Masjid (Friday Mosque), and various tombs and palaces which lie scattered along the hilltop.

## Day 16 Bhopal

A short drive this morning to Indore from where we board our afternoon train to Bhopal.

Bhopal is famous (or infamous) as the site of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy in 1984, the worlds worst industrial disaster. However, it is a pleasant enough city to explore, although we are only here for the night.

## Day 17 Sanchi-Orchha

We spend the morning visiting nearby Sanchi, with its stunning Buddhist ruins.

Founded by Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BC, many stupas and other religious structures were built here over the following centuries. These ruins are some the oldest and most interesting Buddhist structures in India. Decayed and forgotten, like the Ajanta Caves, the ruins were discovered by a British officer in 1818. In the early 20th century, careful restorations were carried out and the structures are now one of the most peaceful and beautiful of the World Heritage sites in India.

An 3 hour afternoon train takes us to Jhansi and we transfer the 11km to Orchha.

### Day 18 Orchha

Situated on the banks of the Betwa River, Orchha has changed little over the centuries. Originally a hunting area, during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, it became the capital of the Bundelas who built a fort palace on a small island on a bend in the river. Orchha has more temples and palaces than any town of this size deserves! Pillaged by the Mughal imperial army, the magnificent monuments have lain virtually deserted ever since.

We spend the morning with a local guide exploring the palace and temples scattered across the peaceful countryside, walking in rural areas untouched by modern life and meeting the very friendly local people.

We take the opportunity to catch up with friends for a home-cooked meal and in the evening we head back to Jhansi to catch an over-night sleeper train to Varanasi.



Sanchi Stupa

### Days 19-21 Varanasi

Arriving early morning into Varanasi, we transfer to our hotel on the banks of the holy Ganges before taking an orientation wander along the ghats and around the streets of the old city.



Varanasi Ghats

Said to be the oldest living city in the world, Varanasi, also known as Benares or Kashi, seems to encapsulate all of India within its boundaries. The ultimate destination for all Hindu pilgrims, the city is full of temples, shrines and devotees.

Life in Varanasi revolves around the Ghats along the Ganges where the bulk of the temples are located. We walk in the old city with its maze of narrow twisting alleys full of small shops and stalls and take boats out onto the river to see the sun rising over the holy river.

There's time to visit the markets here as well as a chance to just hang out on the ghats and watch the pilgrims go about their rituals. We experience the magical atmosphere of a ceremony as old as time itself as the sun sets over the Ganges to the beating of drums and the ringing of bells.

After receiving enlightenment at Bodhgaya, The Buddha traveled to Sarnath, just on the outskirts of modern-day Varanasi to preach his first sermon. Since then, Sarnath has remained a major Buddhist site. We take the opportunity to visit the monasteries, ruins and temples of Sarnath.

On the evening of day 21, we board our train for an overnight journey to Kolkata.

### Day 22 Kolkata

The original capital of British India, Kolkata (Calcutta), the 'City of Joy' has a fascinating and chequered history. Today's Kolkata is the cultural capital of India with a host of museums, galleries and a vibrant literary, theatre and film scene. A combination of heritage British architecture, deeply entrenched culture, a river and bridge of fame, as well as traditional and modern shopping makes Kolkata a truly fascinating and exciting city.

We check out the 125 year old flower markets situated under the bustling Howrah Bridge, said to be the busiest bridge in the world, before checking out the crumbling British buildings around Dalhousie Square, the Victoria Memorial (the British attempt to build their 'Taj Mahal') before visiting the fascinating Kali Temple where goats are sacrificed daily (where once human sacrifices took place).



Kolkata - Howrah Bridge

There is more to see and do here in Kolkata than we can possibly fit in our short time. You may wish to stay on an extra day or two to really soak up the atmosphere of this lively and fascinating city which is at once completely Indian as well as being completely unique.

### Day 23 Departure Day

There are no organised activities today. You are free to depart at any time.

# general tour information

## group size

10 maximum

## days

23 days 22 nights

## starts in

Panjim, Goa

## and finishes in

Kolkata

## price includes

Arrival and departure transfers

All accommodation as specified

All transportation between overnight stops and to and from included sights

Entrance fees for all sites listed as part of the itinerary

Meals as specified

## price does not include

Visa costs

Meals other than those listed

Drinks, meal tips, laundry and other items of a personal nature

International flights

## accommodation

Guesthouses/hotels (19 nights), Overnight train (3 nights)

This tour uses a variety of accommodation. From basic guesthouses to heritage hotels, we experience a wide range of accommodation styles. Most hotel rooms are twin share with private bathrooms with western style toilets. Although a few rooms may be air-conditioned, most will be fan-cooled.

## single supplement

If you are a single traveller and do not wish to share accommodation, but would like to guarantee your own room throughout the tour a single supplement payment of AUD1190 (or equivalent) will be payable. Please note that often, you might be the only single traveler, therefore automatically getting a room to yourself.

## transport

Train, Bus, Boat, Bicycle, Jeep, Private Vehicle, Auto rickshaw, and cycle rickshaw. Train travel in India is essential considering it is such an efficient and extensive network, and is also such a part of India's culture and heritage. For our overnight journeys, we travel in air-conditioned sleeper carriages with either two or three levels of berths. They are arranged in door-less sections each of four or six berths. Broad-gauge, three-tier sleeping carriages also have a row of two-tier (upper and lower) berths along one side. A conductor ensures that nobody without a reservation gets into the carriage. Each carriage has 'squat' style toilets at either end. Bedding is supplied and is clean, but for peace of mind you may wish to bring a sleeping sheet. Meals are not included during our overnight train journey, but food is usually available.

Train journeys by day give us an opportunity to experience Indian life by rubbing shoulders with the locals. Travelling locally is always exciting and fascinating – you never know who you will meet.

We will be taking private vehicles for most other journeys.

## activities included

The following is a list of included activities on this trip. Other activities are optional and will be at your own expense.

Panjim, Old Goa, Spice Gardens, (Goa)

Vitalla Temple; Royal Enclosure (Hampi)

Badami Caves, (Badami)

Gol Gumbaz, Ibrahim Roza, (Bijapur)

Gateway of India, Dhobi Ghats, Crawford Market, Chowpatty Beach (Mumbai)

Sula Vineyards Tour, (Nasik)

Mandu Ruins, (Mandu)

Sanchi Buddhist Stupas, (Bhopal)

Palace Complex, Chaturbhuj Temple, (Orchha)

Dawn Boat Cruise, Sarnath Visit, River and City Walk (Varanasi)

Flower Markets, City Walk, Kali Temple (Kolkata)

## meal inclusions

14 Breakfasts, 2 Lunches, 1 Dinners

## meals

Traveling with Incredible Indian Tours we ensure that you will experience a vast array of the gustatory treats available in India. Generally, meals are not included in the trip price when there is a choice of eating options. This allows you to choose where, and what to eat. More often than not however we eat together as a group. Your leader will offer suggestions for favourite restaurants throughout the trip.

## money exchange

 As at April 2010

AUD1 = 40 INR

CAD1 = 44 INR

EUR1 = 59 INR

GBP1 = 68 INR

NZD1 = 31 INR

USD1 = 44 INR

There are many ATM machines (which accept both Cirrus/Maestro debit cards and Visa and MasterCard) throughout India. This is a safe and convenient way to access money in India, however we suggest that you bring some money as cash/travellers cheques in case there are times that ATMs are not available. The easiest currencies to exchange are USD or GBP, however AUD and other major currencies are no problem in general. Only bring Thomas Cook or Amex Travellers cheques. Black markets do not readily exist in India. Visa & MasterCard credit cards are accepted in major shops and restaurants in the bigger cities.

## spending money

Although entrance fees to specified sites are included in the tour price, there are additional sights that you may like to visit. Many sites levy camera fees.

Spending money requirements will differ from one person to the next. You will need to take into consideration your spending habits when allowing for drinks, shopping, and optional activities.

You will need to allow enough money for the following:

Meals – AUD350 (or equivalent)

Optional Activities – AUD100 (or equivalent)

Money for drinks, shopping and incidentals.

Tipping is an integral part of Indian life and is essential to a smooth trip. To make things easier we will collect money to cover tips for hotel room boys, local guides and for drivers of private transport we use. This does NOT cover restaurant tips.

Tips—allow AUD50 (or equivalent)

## physical rating



You may need to carry your bag/pack up and down railway station and

hotel stairs. There will be plenty of walking around towns or sites, which due to the warm to hot weather in India at this time of year will make general sightseeing a little more strenuous.

## culture shock rating



Conditions in India are not always as comfortable as in other countries. You

may need to occasionally deal with a squat toilet, cold showers or power failure.

## travel insurance

Travel Insurance is highly recommended whilst traveling to India and is compulsory for any group tour with Incredible Indian Tours.

## visas

All foreign nationals require a visa to enter India. They are not available at port of entry and must be obtained in advance. Be wary however of applying for your visa too early as they are valid from the date of issue, not date of entry into India.

For information, or assistance with obtaining a visa, check out the following websites.

<https://visalink.com.au/frontpage.aspx>

<http://www.travcour.com/>

## health

We recommend that you consult your doctor for current medical travel information about before departure. Your leader will be carrying a basic first aid kit, but we suggest you bring along your own as well as any personal medical requirements .

The following websites have up-to-date information about health requirements.

<http://www.travelvax.com.au/>

<http://www.travelhealth.co.uk/>

## communications

Internet cafes are commonplace and cheap throughout India. Finding a café is usually not a problem, but speed can be. Connection times are often painfully slow, although this does vary from place to place. Telephone shops are situated on nearly every street corner of India. Rates are reasonable and international lines are good. You can also purchase a local prepaid sim card relatively easily and inexpensively in India. Recommended are Airtel, Idea and Hutch. Be sure to bring extra passport photos for this.

## your group leader

Your group leader is there to organise and streamline your travels and to help you have the best trip possible. Whilst they are not a guide per se, they will share their local knowledge, give you suggestions for your free time and manage the day to day running of the tour. They will introduce you to their local friends and recommend great local restaurants and experiences. They will have a broad general knowledge of India, so do feel free to tap into their wisdom. At some sites, local guides may be hired where we think more specific knowledge will add to the enjoyment of the places we are visiting.

## responsible travel

We believe strongly in responsible travel. This includes being respectful to the local culture (ie dressing appropriately, and learning a few basic cultural do's and don'ts), being mindful of the environment, and leaving a positive image behind. Remember we are ambassadors for our country. Bringing a few photos of your family and home with you is a great way to interact with the locals by giving them a glimpse of your world whilst you visit theirs.

## joining hotel

Panjim Inn

E-212, 31st January Rd

Fontainhas, Panjim, Goa 403 001

Ph: +91 0832 222 6523/7169/8136

Fax: +91 0832 243 5220

## transfer/joining instructions

Your airport transfer pickup will await you holding a sign with your name when you exit the baggage claim area of the arrivals hall. There may be large crowds here so please look carefully for your transfer.

## arriving early

Our hotel in Panjim is located in the heart of the Latin Quarter of Fontainhas in Panjim, Goa's capital city. The hotel is surrounded by quaint lanes and aristocratic houses. The hotel itself was built in the late 1800s and has been owned by the same family over 5 Generations.

## early arrival information

If you are arriving earlier than day 1, extra accommodation in Panjim is available at AUD80/100Single/Double (or equivalent) per night per room. Please notify us as early as possible if you require extra accommodation as hotels in Delhi tend to be heavily booked up well in advance.

## finishing hotel

TBA

## staying on

If you are staying on in Kolkata after the tour, extra accommodation is available at TBA Single/Double (or equivalent) per night per room.

## what to take

We will be on the move a lot, so try to pack as lightly as possible. The smaller your bag in India the better, as the various modes of transport we use tend to have limited storage space.

India is very conservative and we ask that you dress accordingly. As a guideline, shoulders and knees should always be covered. The wearing of shorts is looked upon by locals as akin to wearing your underwear and will limit your entry into mosques, temples and other places of worship. Loose, lightweight, long clothing is both respectful and cool. Singlets, tank tops and shorts are not suitable attire for India.

## laundry

Inexpensive laundry facilities are offered by most hotels we use.

## weather

The weather during our journey should be great. Daytime temperatures will be warm to hot, in the range 25-35°C. Night time temperatures will be comfortable. An umbrella, sunblock and a hat are essentials. Blankets are provided on the overnight train journeys.

## checklist

Travel documents: passport, visa, travel insurance (don't forget your emergency insurance contact details), air tickets.

Photocopy of above documents

Day pack

Health vaccinations/medication

First aid kit

Money: ATM card (widely available and easy to access); credit cards (widely accepted in big cities); cash and travellers cheques (for emergencies).

Money pouch

Alarm clock and torch/flashlight

Mosquito repellent

Ear plugs can be useful if you are a light sleeper

Lock for your back pack or bag

We recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt to store your passport, air tickets, credit cards and cash. Avoid bringing valuable jewellery with you. Some hotels we use have safety deposit boxes. A lock and chain are useful for securing your luggage on overnight train journeys.

Updated on: 2/12/2010.