



incredible indian tours essence of india

trip-validity: 1/1/12—31/12/13

From the sprawling commercial capital of Mumbai to Rajasthan, the land of the Kings and from the banks of the holy Ganges to the magnificence of the Moghal cities, we will show you the well known and introduce you to some wonderful secrets. The massive forts of Rajasthan, the opulence and splendour of Maharajah's palaces, markets and bazaars, holy cities, a town seemingly lost in time, a camel safari and a search for the elusive Bollywood star all make for a trip full of highlights and contrasts.

highlights

- o live it up in glitzy and glamorous **Mumbai**
- o enjoy the **beautiful lake city** of Udaipur
- o get **wild** in the hills of Mount Abu
- o spend the night in a **heritage hotel** at Bhenswara
- o be amazed at Jodhpur's **majestic Meherangarh Fort**
- o experience the **Desert city** of Jaisalmer
- o explore the palaces and bazaars of **Jaipur**
- o be left breathless by the unsurpassed **Taj Mahal**
- o explore the **Temple village** of Orchha
- o witness sunrise over the Ganges in **holy Varanasi**
- o be part of the **craziness and excitement** of India's capital city Delhi



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)

Days 1-2 Mumbai

We meet at 12 midday for a short tour briefing before heading out for lunch and an afternoon of sightseeing.

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 twelve and a half 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 perhaps the bustling Mahalaxmi or Mumbadevi 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.



Taj Hotel and Gateway of India - Mumbai

Days 3-4 Udaipur



Lake Palace Hotel - Udaipur

We take a morning flight to Udaipur, which without questions lives up to its reputation as India's most romantic city. Rolling hills, white marble palaces and lakes all combine to give Udaipur a very special appeal. It's a centre for artists, dancers and musicians and the shopping is superb. Its other claim to fame is as the setting for James Bond's Octopussy.

Whilst here in Udaipur, we visit the City Palace, part of the largest palace complex in India. We also take the opportunity to see a traditional Rajasthani dance show. We wander the local markets and partake in a cooking class to learn how to whip up a sensational curry. You might like to visit an artist's school and try your hand at creating a miniature painting.

An afternoon trip up to the Monsoon Palace or on the cable car to Machhla Hill rewards you with incredible views of the lakes and hills surrounding Udaipur, and a sunset boat trip on the lake is just magical.

Days 5-6 Mount Abu

A scenic 3-hour drive brings us to Mount Abu. Rajasthan's only 'Hill Station' - a town in the mountains where the erstwhile rulers would escape the heat of the summer plains - is famous for the exquisite Dilwara Jain Temples.

We take time to marvel at the stunning marble carvings on the inside of the temple which were created over several centuries and also have time to wander around the lake, trek through the hills, hike to hill-top temples and enjoy the carnival-like atmosphere of the town which attracts a lot of Indian holidaymakers, although few international tourists make it here.



Dilwara Jain Temples Interior

Day 7 Bhenswara



Ravla Bhenswara

We have another short drive today to Bhenswara, a small hamlet in a remote part of South-Western Rajasthan where we get to spend the night living like royalty in a Ravla (Castle) built in the late 1700's by local rulers and inhabited by ten generations of the royal family ever since.

Enjoy wandering through the castle grounds, take a dip in the pool and keep the camera handy as we take a jeep safari through local villages and out into the countryside where we might get lucky and spot a leopard amongst the abundant wildlife.

Days 8-9 Jodhpur

Situated at the edge of the Thar Desert, and dominated by the imposing Meherangarh Fort, which sits atop a sheer rocky ridge in the middle of town, Jodhpur, the 'Blue City' is the 2nd largest city in Rajasthan.

We explore the magnificent fort and the bustling Sadar Market in the city below. It's a great place to stroll around at leisure, with alleyways leading off to various bazaars selling all sorts of fruits, vegetables, spices, textiles and handicrafts.

Jodhpur is also famous for the creamy makhani (butter) lassi's (yogurt drink) which are found nowhere else in India. And yes, this is where the pants come from!



Meherangarh Fort - Jodhpur

Days 10-12 Jaisalmer



Jaisalmer

This ancient trading town is just like something out of 1001 Nights where a quarter of the town's inhabitants still live in the narrow paved streets and alleyways of the town's fort. Jaisalmer is a great place to wander around and watch the passing scene.

There is much to do here in Jaisalmer. The merchants and wealthy families of Rajasthan built beautiful homes - or havelis - and some amazing examples are to be found here. Spend time exploring the fort and the streets below. Wander down to Gadi Sagar. This small lake is the town's water supply and is picturesquely lined with temples and shrines. Check out the markets - Jaisalmer is famous for embroidery, Rajasthani mirror work, block print fabrics and leather. Or you may want to have an Ayurvedic massage to soothe those travel-weary muscles.

The best way to explore the desert around Jaisalmer is on an overnight camel safari - camping out in the desert is an unforgettable experience, and will be a highlight of your holiday.

Putting our main bags into storage, we meet up with our camel crew and introduce ourselves to our new form of transport - that ship of the desert, the camel. Each camel is led by a camel man, and there is always the option to sit on the camel cart if you don't want to ride. We set off into the Thar desert 40km west of Jaisalmer for one night of camping under the stars.

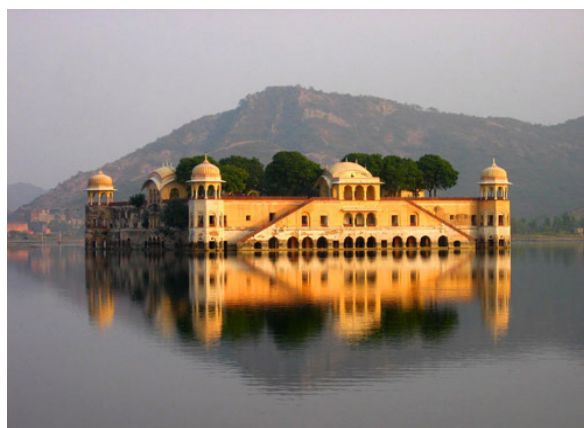
Returning to Jaisalmer mid-morning on Day 11, we have plenty of time to explore the sights of this amazing town before boarding our overnight train to Jaipur on the evening of day 12

Days 13-14 Jaipur

We arrive in very early this morning to the 'Pink City' of Jaipur. The streets and markets of this colourful and busy capital of Rajasthan, with its palaces and bazaars full of jewellery, textiles and folk-based arts, is sure to be a highlight of your holiday.

Crowning the crest of a hill, the fort palace at Amber was the former capital of the Rajasthan state, and we spend a couple of hours exploring this beautiful palace complex. We also visit Jaipur's famous landmark building, the Hawa Mahal or 'Palace of the Winds', the beautifully situated Jal Mahal (Water Palace) and the truly amazing 18th century Jantar Mantar (astronomical observatory). There is also the opportunity to wander through the City Palace Museum.

During our stay in Jaipur, we will also discover the extravagance of a Bollywood blockbuster, with all its action, romance, drama and music.



Jal Mahal

Days 15-16 Agra



Red Fort - Agra

The icon of India, probably the most famous and beautiful building in the world, the majestic Taj Mahal surpasses all expectations and it truly is a wonder of the world, if not the greatest ever testimony to love. There are opportunities to visit it at different times of the day to see how its colour changes with the light.

We also visit Agra's Red Fort, built by Emperor Akbar in the 16th Century and the Itimud-ud-Dualah, known locally as the 'Baby Taj', an exquisite marble tomb built by a Moghul Empress for her parents.

Whilst we are in Agra, we can also take an opportunity to see how handmade carpets and marble inlay work are produced.

Days 17-18 Orchha

We travel several hours south by train to Jhansi from where we transfer the 20km to the small village of Orchha, situated on the banks of the charming Betwa River. Orchha has changed little over the centuries. Originally a hunting area, during the 16th and 17th 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 afternoon 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.

On the evening of day 18, we board our train for an overnight journey by 2-tier air-conditioned sleeper to Varanasi.



Betwa River Cenotaphs, Orchha

Days 19-20 Varanasi

Arriving mid 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.

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.



The holy city of Varanasi on the banks of the Ganges

Days 21-23 Delhi



Humayans Tomb - Delhi

The morning is free to enjoy life along the river in Varanasi before we head to the airport for our flight to Delhi.

Heading out to Old Delhi, the walled city once known as Shahjahanabad which was the creation of the Moghal Emperor Shah Jahan, we visit one of it's most impressive buildings and Delhi's oldest mosque, the Jama Masjid. We join the crowds to walk in the bazaars of the old city, immersing ourselves in the noise and smells of the crowded narrow streets and alleys, where different areas specialize in festival paraphernalia, silk, copper, brass, jewelry and spices.

On our full day tour of Delhi we also visit the spectacular Humayans Tomb, and take a drive down Rajpath, the ceremonial avenue lined with impressive and imposing government buildings, India Gate and Rastrapati Bhavan, the Presidents residence.

Delhi is an exciting, busy and often chaotic city and one of the most interesting cities in India. With a past that stretches far back into the mists of time, it is rich with the splendor and vitality of an eternal city. Divided into an ancient and a modern part, 1000 years of history greet the visitor at

every step. Mosques, monuments and forts from many different eras, museums and galleries, shops and endless bazaars lie scattered across Delhi's sprawling expanse.

There is more to see and do than we can possibly fit in during our short time here. If you are staying on after the tour, take the opportunity to make more discoveries - the ruins of Qutb Minar and Purana Qila, the Lotus Temple, Indira Gandhi Museum and Rajghat are all recommended, as are the market areas of Dilli Haat, Khan Market and Haus Khas.

We finish up the trip with a farewell dinner at one of Delhi's fabulous restaurants.

There are no organized activities on day 23. You are free to leave at any time.

general tour information

group size

10 maximum

days

23 days 22 nights

starts in

Mumbai

and finishes in

Delhi

price includes

Arrival and departure transfers

All accommodation as specified

All transportation between overnight stops and to and from included sightseeing

Entrance fees for all sites listed as part of the itinerary

Tips for hotel staff, porters, guides and drivers as applicable

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 (2 nights), Desert Camping (1 night)

This tour uses a variety of accommodation. From guesthouses to heritage hotels, we experience a wide range of accommodation styles. Hotel rooms are twin share with private bathrooms with western style toilets. Although most rooms will be air-conditioned, some may 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 AUD1590 (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, 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 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 usually has 'squat' and 'western' 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.

Gateway of India, Dhobi Ghats, Mani Bhavan (Gandhi Museum), Crawford Market, Chowpatty Beach (Mumbai)

City Palace, Cooking class, Market walk, Traditional dance show (Udaipur)

Dilwara Jain Temples, Morning trek (Mount Abu)

Village Safari (Bhenswara)

Meherangarh Fort, Market walk, (Jodhpur)

Overnight camel safari, (Jaisalmer)

Amber Palace, Jantar Mantar, City walk, Bollywood movie (Jaipur)

Taj Mahal, Red Fort, Itimud-ud-Dualah, Fatehpur Sikri (Agra)

Dawn Boat Cruise, Sarnath Visit, River and city walk (Varanasi)

Old Delhi, Humayans Tomb, (Delhi)

meal inclusions

19 Breakfasts, 1 Lunch, 3 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 Dec 2011

AUD1 = 52 INR

CAD1 = 50 INR

EUR1 = 68 INR

GBP1 = 81 INR

NZD1 = 40 INR

USD1 = 52 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 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.

It is recommended you allow enough money for the following:

Meals – AUD400 (or equivalent)

Optional Activities – AUD100 (or equivalent)

Money for drinks, shopping and incidentals.

Tippling is an integral part of Indian life and is essential to a smooth trip. To make things easier we cover tips for hotel room boys, local guides and for drivers of private transport we use. We do NOT cover restaurant tips. You will need to allow approximately 10-15% on top of your restaurant bill.

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 for most nationalities 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.

<http://www.vfs-in-au.net/>

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

<https://indiavisa.travisaoutsourcing.com/homepage>

<http://in.vfsglobal.ca/>

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/>

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/>

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. Some of our hotels have Wifi, but do not rely on it being available.

You can also purchase a local prepaid sim card (for unlocked cell phones) and data sticks (for mobile internet on your laptop) easily and inexpensively in India. Recommended are 'Vodafone' and 'Airtel' for phone and 'Reliance' for internet. You will need extra passport photos for this as well as photocopies of your photo and visa page from your passport.

your group leader / tour escort

Your group leader / tour escort 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

Residency Hotel

26 Gunbow Street & D.N. Road

Fort, Mumbai, 400001

Ph: +91 22 2262 5525-9

Fax: +91 22 2261 9164

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 Mumbai is located in the bustling fort area, surrounded by a mix of shops and restaurants, and nearby street markets. It is only a short taxi ride to the Colaba area and Gateway of India. The hotel has a restaurant, and all rooms have air conditioning and cable TV.

early arrival information

If you are arriving earlier than day 1, extra accommodation in Mumbai is available at AUD80/90 Single/Double (or equivalent) per night per room. Please notify us as early as possible if you require extra accommodation as hotels in Mumbai tend to be booked up well in advance.

For online bookings visit:

<http://www.cleartrip.com/flights>

finishing hotel

Thikana

A-7 Gulmohar Park,

New Delhi 110049

Ph: +91 11 460 41569

staying on

If you are staying on in Delhi after the tour, extra accommodation at Thikana is available at AUD110/130 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. In addition, you will find that your bag probably needs space to expand for all that shopping!

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. Rain is not very likely at this time of year, but sun is, so sunblock and a hat are essentials. Blankets are provided on the overnight train journey.

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 very 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: 19 December 2011.