

Northern India

A different experience

November 2023

Commencing on the 4th November 2023, join us on a journey through the North of India and experience a very different "Sub-Continent" which most visitors would rarely see in just one visit.

This unique itinerary has been specially designed to explore and experience areas of India which highlight the diversity of the nation. From Delhi to the Punjab..., Himalayan Hill stations and the holy Ganges at Rishikesh..., Lucknow - the bastion of history, culture and cuisine..., Assam with its tea, rhinos and tribals..., then to Darjeeling deep within the foothills of the Himalayas, ending up in the metropolis of Kolkata, full of history and commerce.



JOURNEYS UNLIMITED

Wildlife Safari Consultants

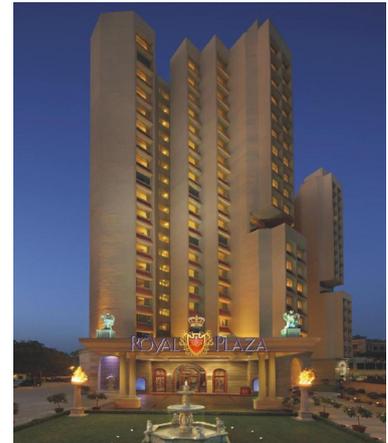




Day 1, Sat 4th November 2023 - Arrival at Delhi

Today you fly from Australia to India. We recommend using Singapore Airlines, via Singapore. This flight arrives mid-evening.

On arrival we will be met by our local representatives at the Indira Gandhi International Airport. After a warm welcome, we transfer to our hotel for the overnight-stay.



Our overnight stay is at The Royal Plaza, New Delhi

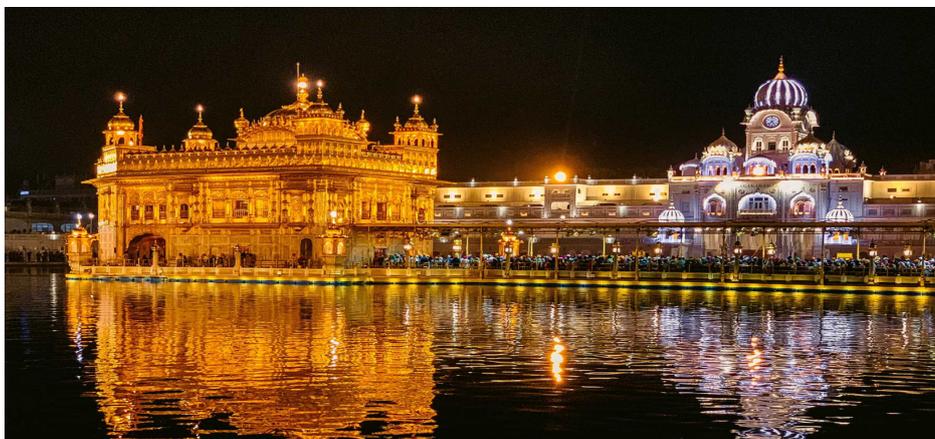
Day 2, Sun 5th November 2023 - Delhi to Amritsar

After an early breakfast we depart around 6:30am for the New Delhi railway station to board our train for Amritsar, The Shatabdi Express (Train #12029/31), which departs Delhi at 7:20am, and arrives into Amritsar at 1:30pm. The Express stops at 6 stations en-route.

We will be met at Amritsar Station and transferred to our hotel. Amritsar (also known as Rāmdāspur and colloquially as Ambarsar) was founded by Sri Guru Ramdass, the fourth guru of the Sikhs in about 1574 A.D. Before the city was founded, the area was covered with thick forests and had several lakes.

Early this evening we have dinner and after proceed to The Golden Temple, a place of extreme beauty and sublime peacefulness.

You will feel a sense of peace when you visit the Temple and absorb the tranquility of this holy shrine.





The main shrine's upper half and walls are adorned with pure gold leaf. Observe the beautiful limestone paintings enhancing the architectural value of the Golden Temple. Once inside the complex you will also see Akal Takht - the throne of immortal and highest seat of authority of Khalsa.

While in Golden Temple you will visit the "community kitchen", which is said to be the largest community kitchen in the world, where food is served to nearly 100,000 pilgrims every day from all around the world at no charge. While moving through the kitchen, you will witness the chefs and volunteers preparing the dishes like lentils, puddings, roti, vegetables, and tea. you will also visit the second floor of the kitchen and witness the roti making machine, which can make as much as 6000 rotis in one hour.

During your visit you will also witness the Palki Sahib Ceremony 'putting to bed ceremony' which takes place between 9.00pm to 9.30pm.

Central is The Adi Granth, holy book, which rests on a throne under a jewel encrusted canopy. The Palki Sahib ceremony is when the holy book 'Guru Granth Sahib' is carried to a room for the night. This is a very symbolic gesture.



The holy singing stops, certain hymns are read by the respected priest, then the book is closed. After performing the prayer, the book is then placed in a golden palanquin which is carried by all the devotees who are lined up to take Seva (Volunteer work). During this whole procession, there are the sounds of the drumbeat, trumpet, rose petal showers and people chanting holy hymns all around.

The entire ceremony is very spectacular and spiritual, as well as the temple at night is certainly a treat for the eyes & soul.

After our visit we retire to our hotel.

Overnight Stay: Ranjit's SVAASA, Amritsar

Day 3, Mon 6th November 2023 - Amritsar



After breakfast we undertake a sightseeing tour of Amritsar. Departing at 8:00am, our guide will take us deep inside the narrow lanes and bye-lanes of the 400 year-old city. One gets to see Katras, Akharas Bungas, Havelis, and Hatties. The tour takes you back in the time as you witness town planning, and see traditional trade and crafts being practiced in the same place and the same manner as has been done for centuries.





There will be around fourteen specific points starting from the Town Hall and ending at the iconic Golden Temple. We experience backstage access to "old Amritsar", designed to reconstruct old memories of the rich architecture, culture and street food, and to provide knowledge about the history of the Sikh religion and some of the ancient battles fought by the rulers. Understand the onset of the British Rule and its impact and then see and absorb the lives of the locals. Experience some of the most beautiful, picture-perfect places of old Amritsar.



Our tour will cover places like the Town Hall, Gurdwara Saragarahi, Qila Ahluwalia, Jalebiwala Chowk, Chitta Akhara, Darshani Deori, Baba Bohar Bazaar, Thakurdwara Dariana Mal, Chowrasti Atari, Taksal Mint, Thakurdwara Raja Tej Singh, Crawling Street and the Ancient Passage.

During this walk you will also visit the the garden that witnessed one of the worst human massacres in Indian history during the British rule in India "The Jallianwala Bagh"

Thereafter we proceed to Khairuddin Masjid, located in the Hall Bazar of Amritsar. Also known as Jama Masjid, it is a beautiful mosque built by Muhammad Khairuddin in 1876 CE. Renowned for its architectural beauty, the Jama Masjid reflects traditional Islamic architecture with beautiful calligraphy adorning its walls. The mosque is built of white marble and is decorated with miniature green colour paintings. The place looks magical beneath the blue skies.





After a very busy morning we shall break for lunch and a rest before our afternoon visit to the Border.

Later in the afternoon we proceed to "Wagah Border". Located around 30 km from Amritsar this is the India-Pakistan border. The spectacular lowering of the flags ceremony at The Attari, Wagah Border is a daily military practice that the security forces of India (Border Security Force) and Pakistan (Pakistan Rangers) have jointly followed since 1959.



The ceremony is called the "Beating the Retreat" ceremony. Soldiers from both countries march in perfect drill, going through the steps of bringing down their respective national flags. As the sun goes down, nationalistic fervour rises and lights are switched on marking the end of the day amidst thunderous applause. The drill is characterised by elaborate and rapid dance-like manoeuvres and raising legs as high as possible, which can be described as a "colourful and electrifying experience". It is both a symbol of the two countries' rivalry, and a display of brotherhood and cooperation between the two nations.

After the ceremony we return to the city for dinner

Overnight Stay: Ranjit's SVAASA, Amritsar





Day 4, Tue 7th November 2023 - Amritsar

Today we visit the very symbol of the Punjab - The Gobindgarh Fort, which is located right in the heart of the city. This magnificent heritage site has a glorious history of its own. It spans 257 years, right from the era of the Bhangi Misl to Maharaja Ranjit Singh to the British East India Company to the Indian Army. Now finally, it opens its gates to the people of Punjab.



The Gobindgarh Fort has a highly complex and sophisticated structure of walls, moats, ramparts, bastions, and buildings. In its material, construction, layout and the philosophy underlying its systems, it symbolises the martial spirit of the Punjab

We will take lunch inside the complex at "Kesariya Darbar" - an fine dining restaurant. Inspired by the din of battles, long campaign trails and resplendent durbars, Kesariya Darbar presents a cauldron of rare recipes, curated after intense research and gleaned from the finest kitchens, khansamas, practices and influences.

After lunch we continue to explore the Fort and some of the four museums found inside: Toshakhana - the Kohinoor was housed here and a replica of the Kohinoor, as it used to be, can also be seen here. Pagdi Museum, Warfare Museum, and The Sikhi Art Museum - Living up to its image as one of the prime historical places in Amritsar, it also houses a stunning exhibition about the famous "Saints And Warriors" of Punjab.

The rest of the afternoon is free to explore the surrounding area prior to dinner.

Overnight Stay: Ranjit's SVAASA, Amritsar





Day 5, Wed 8th November 2023 - Amritsar to Rishikesh

We need to leave the hotel at 6:15am and proceed to the Amritsar Railway station for our Janshatabdi Express train to Haridwar, the "Gateway to the Gods", located on the right bank of the Ganges at the foot of the Shivalik range. Our train departs at 6:50am and we arrive at Haridwar at 1:50pm. (There are 9 stops enroute)



Upon arrival at Haridwar we will undertake a short walking tour of Ghats area of Haridwar "Hari Ka Dwar". One of the 7 holy cities in India which is blessed by the presence of River Ganga, making its way from its glacial origins to the plains. Set out on foot through the quaint but bustling market streets of the Haridwar ghat area and see what makes this city timeless. With hundreds of shops that sell artefacts, ritual offerings one cannot but sense the air of divinity around. Learn to identify the authentic sacred seed - the Rudraksha from merchants who go back generations. Taste the famous local snacks and savouries of Haridwar. Sample the Mathura Peda, Punjabi Samosa & Kachori and Poori from Mohan Ji poori waala.

Later we head to Rishikesh, a town surrounded by hills and bisected by the wide and mighty Ganges. This city is often claimed as the 'Yoga capital of the World'.

Overnight Stay: Holy River Hotel, Rishikesh

Day 6, Thu 9th November 2023 - Rishikesh

This morning you have the option of a yoga class at the hotel before breakfast.

Around 10:00am we shall take a short scenic drive to the legendary Beatles Ashram. A place where the four famous and successful pop musicians would drop by for three months at a time to study meditation in India. Explore the meditation pods and graffiti-covered yoga pavilions surrounded by wall art that preserves the memories of The Beatles.





The legendary 'Beatles' came to this 14-acre ashram in Rishikesh run by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment some 50 years ago. Since then, it has been immortalised as the Beatles Ashram. While Ringo Starr left after 11 days, the others stayed for up to two months and composed 48 songs here. The ashram's growing aura also pulled in singers Donovan, Beach Boys' Mike Love and actress Mia Farrow. The site was cleaned up few years ago and largely attracts young European tourists amongst other visitors. A cluster of igloo-like stone structures dot the entrance. These are the 'caves' or 'pods', where devotees meditated and one of these is called the 'Beatles Cave' as the group supposedly used it. Psychedelic graffiti and lyrics cover the walls. Overgrown with wild jungles, some of the structures remind one of a lost city akin to Cambodia's Angkor Wat.

En route we will stop at one of the stunning suspension bridges that stretch across the Ganges, Ram Jhula. With the Ganga flowing in full force below the bridge as you walk down, you are bound to be mesmerised by the beauty of the Himalayas.



We return for lunch and then some free time to discover some of the local activities and lives of Rishikesh residents.





Later in the afternoon we depart to visit the Parmarth Niketan for the Sunset Ganga Aarti, which draws thousands of visitors each day from all cultures, languages, religions and walks of life.

Ganga Aarti begins every day at sunset at Parmarth's Ganga Ghat. Yagna begins at the ghat a half hour before Aarti. Each evening as the sun's last rays reflect off the boundless waters of Mother Ganga, people gather for Ganga Aarti. This divine light ceremony is filled with song, diya (oil lamps), prayer, ritual and a palpable sense of the divine.



After the Aarti we have dinner.

Overnight Stay: Holy River Hotel, Rishikesh

Day 7, Fri 10th November 2023 - Rishikesh

You have the option of starting your day with yoga at the ghats.

Mid-morning we visit the temples and ghats of Rishikesh, commencing with the most ancient and sacred one, "Bharat Mandir". One of the major attractions in this temple is the huge old tree that lies right in front of the main door. Combining roots from three trees, it is impossible to understand how the roots are entangled with each other.

After visiting the ghats we proceed for Lunch with a local family including a cooking demonstration.



Around 5:00pm we will visit the Triveni Ghat for the evening ceremony. The Dusk Aarti on the Triveni Ghat is very impressive. After sunset, the ghat lights up with the light from the lamps that are set afloat on leaf boats after the Aarti. It is truly a sight to behold and the power of spirituality can be truly understood and experienced making it a must see in Rishikesh.

Overnight Stay: Holy River Hotel, Rishikesh





Day 8, Sat 11th November 2023 - Rishikesh to Dehradun

This morning we depart around 10:00am and travel to Dehradun, a charming hill town nestled in the foot hills of Shivalik Ranges. Only 45 kms and 90 minutes drive make the journey a sightseeing pleasure.

On the way we will visit the grand building of the Forest Research Institute, which is an icon of Dehradun, and even if you are visiting it for the first time, the colonial-era structure may look familiar, having been the location for several Bollywood films.



After taking lunch in Dehradun we visit the Mindrolling Buddhist Monastery. This is the largest buddhist monastery in India. One of the most famous places to visit in Dehradun, Mindrolling Monastery is among the six major monasteries of Tibet's Nyingma School. Originally constructed in 1676 by Rigzin Terdak Lingpa.



Surrounded by endless gardens, vast spaces, and a striking stupa, which is the tallest of its kind in Asia. Built according to Japanese architectural style, the edifice has five floors dedicated to Lord Buddha and Guru Padmasambhava. On the fourth floor, visitors find a massive open space that allows them to experience a 360° view of Dehradun Valley.

After our visit we return to our hotel prior to dinner.

Overnight Stay: Mango Tree Courtyard, Dehradun





Day 9, Sun 12th November 2023 - Dehradun to Lucknow

This morning after breakfast we will visit one of the famous street markets in Dehradun, the Tibetan Market which is also nicknamed as "Bhotia Market". The market is run by the Tibetan community and has a huge selection of products, from handicrafts, Garhwali jewellery and handbags to clothes, footwear and wooden artworks, the options here are endless. You will also have the opportunity to try some scrumptious Tibetan snacks here, like hot soups, momos, thupka and noodles !



Around noon we proceed to Dehradun Airport for our flight to Lucknow, the city of Nawabs and one of the major cultural hubs of India. The Indigo Airlines flight (6E 518) departs at 3:50pm and arrives into Lucknow at 4:50pm.

We are met and transferred to the hotel and then at 7:00pm we join a "Culinary Walking Tour". Lucknow is globally considered a niche attraction for gastronomes, for discovering and re-discovering the Awadhi Cuisine. Lucknow is one place that has a full colony (district) of chefs called 'Bawarchi Tola' and one complete street where one can find the best from Lucknow's very own traditional kitchens. Our walking tour allows us to hop-in, hop-out of the traditional roadside eateries, savouring the best that is on each menu. This is a guided tour with your own set of cutlery and basic dining essentials. It allows you to experience the best of the best, at the unpretentious eateries, without having to worry about how to eat without a fork or to wipe your hands clean after you are done.



Overnight Stay: La Sarovar Portico, Lucknow



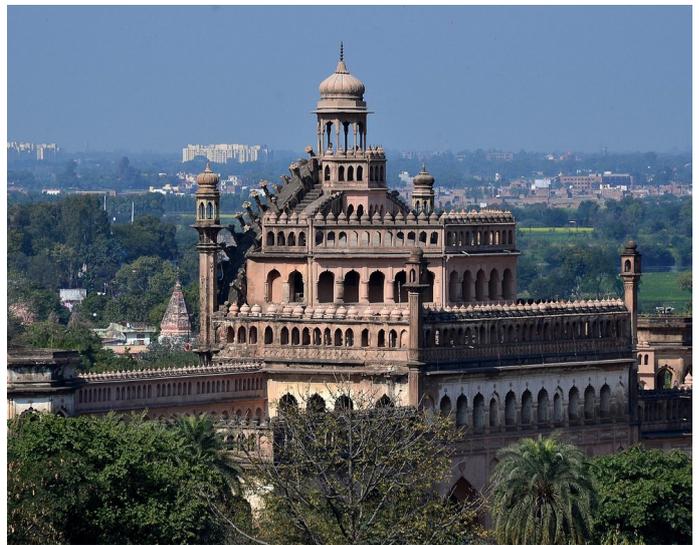


Day 10, Mon 13th November 2023 - Lucknow

Around 9:00am we commence our sightseeing tour of Lucknow, a city of historical sights and mouthwatering delicacies. It is the capital city of Uttar Pradesh and is one of the most important urban hubs in North India. It is regarded as one of the key cultural and artistic hubs of the nation and also it used to be the seat of power of the Nawabs of India in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Lucknow is a city of historic architecture, a rich culture and distinctive cuisine. Our local guides will take us through the highlights of this splendour. Included in the list of sites is

Asfi (Bara) Imambara, Husainabad (Chota) Imambara, Rumi Darwaza,



We take a break for Lunch at a local restaurant - The Mughal's Dastarkhwan

After lunch: the Clock Tower, The British Residency, Sadat Ali & Begun Tombs,

Later in the afternoon return to the hotel with free time to explore or rest before dinner.

Overnight Stay: La Sarovar Portico, Lucknow

Day 11, Tue 14th November 2023 - Lucknow

Around 9:30am we continue our tour of Lucknow commencing with Dilkusha (a British built palace with French design) and then visit "La Martiniere", Lucknow's best-known school and a gem of local architecture.





On our curated tour of La Martiniere you might have the chance to enjoy tea and snacks at the school canteen or a specially arranged session at the school.

On this very exclusive tour - 'La Martiniere Decoded', we take you on a walk through the campus of La Martiniere, visit the hidden corners to understand not only its history, but also to understand the education and administrative systems followed by the school.

After lunch some free time before joining a 4:00pm heritage walking tour of the city.



a

The history in Lucknow, stretches beyond the concrete walls of its monuments, spreads into the lanes of Lucknow and has many more nuances that can only be understood and appreciated in the lanes and by-lanes of Chowk. This evening the tour leaders will take us into the bygone era of this city that is a world unto itself. This tour covers a heritage lane and explains the culture, people and lifestyle of Lucknow. (No heritage monuments are a part of this walk.)

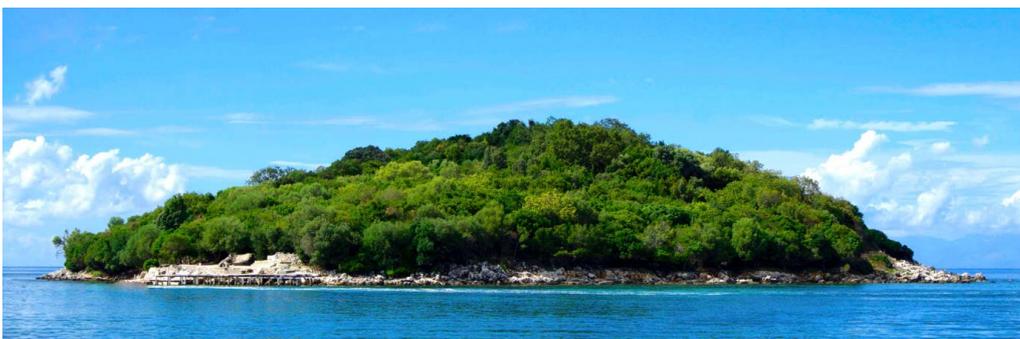
Overnight Stay: La Sarovar Portico, Lucknow

Day 12, Wed 15th November 2023 - Lucknow to Guwahati

Early this morning we travel to the airport for our direct flight for Guwahati. We are flying with Indigo (Flight 6E 146) departing at 8:35am, which arrives into Guwahati at 10:20am.

Guwahati is situated on the southern bank of the River Brahmaputra in the State of Assam and is a fast growing premier city being the gateway to the North Eastern States of India and a principal centre of socio cultural, political, industrial and trade and commerce of the entire region.

We transfer to the hotel and have lunch before catching a ferry to visit Umananda Island, the smallest inhabited island in the Brahmaputra River. It was also named as Peacock Island by the British. The old form of rock-cut figures of Lord Surya, Ganesh and Shiva demonstrates the beauty and skills of craftsmanship of Assamese people





On our return from the island we stop for dinner before retiring to our hotel.

Overnight Stay: The Lily Hotel, Guwahati

Day 13, Thu 16th November 2023 - Guwahati to Kaziranga

After breakfast we depart for Kaziranga National Park. Famed as a haven for the one-horned rhinoceros, one of India's great wildlife emblems, the Park encompasses grasslands, wetlands and forests for about 60km, also called India's Grassland Kingdom. It hosts around 100 tigers, 2,000 one-horned rhinos and 1,800 wild buffalo.

Upon arrival we will check-in and have lunch before departing for an afternoon game drive (referred to in these parts as a "Jeep Safari").



Jeep Safaris are permitted on pre-defined tourist circuits within Kaziranga National Park - currently at four entry points. Each of these circuits takes about one and half to two and half hours (or even more depending upon interest of the tourists), but is subject to local range conditions and weather.

Later we return to our Lodge before taking dinner there.

Overnight Stay: Infinity Resort, Kaziranga

Day 14, Fri 17th November 2023 - Kaziranga

This morning will be a very early start as we prepare for our Elephant Safari to the National Park. The vast expanse of tall elephant grass, marshland, and dense tropical moist broadleaf forests, undoubtedly makes the park look beautiful but it's the presence of Brahmaputra River, which makes it look enigmatic.





Elephant Safari operate from dawn and last around one hour [Timing allotment depends on the Dept. Of Forests]

The entry gate to the Central Range "Main Zone" of the Kaziranga National Park is located at Kohora town. The Central Zone starts from the Mihimukh riding tower, which is also the Elephant Safari starting point. The elephants go through months of training before they can carry tourists, and the mahouts are experienced and well informed about the animals in this reserve.



After your elephant safari you will have a morning Jeep Safari. Our jeep safari locations will vary so that we can experience the varying ecosystems of Kaziranga.

The Central Range passes through the entire habitat spectrum from ox-bow lakes, savannah woodland to swamp forests. It is very good for mammal sightings as well as for birds (Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Great Hornbill, Rufous Woodpecker). While driving along the trail, one can see rows of Indian Roofed and Tent Turtles (*Kachuga tecta* and *Kachuga tentoria*). Water Monitors (*Varanus salvator*) are sometimes spotted in the "beels".

The Eastern Range abounds in water birds such as bar-headed geese, falcated duck, grey-headed lapwing and spot-billed pelican (a colony of 200 pairs of this globally threatened species nesting on the Bombax trees can be found here).

The Western Range has the highest density of rhinos as this part of the park is swampier. It has grassland birds and raptors (swamp francolin, pallas's fish eagle etc). Smooth Indian Otters (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) can sometimes be seen fishing in it's ox-bow lakes.

After taking lunch at the resort and a rest period, we shall proceed to our afternoon jeep safari.

Overnight Stay: Infinity Resort, Kaziranga





Day 15, Sat 18th November 2023 - Kaziranga

This morning we have a "Boat Safari" experience, The adventure starts from the moment we reach the embankment which borders the northern boundary of the eastern flank of the park. This embankment which at first sight seems a dirt track racing patch is the lifeline of the "Mising" Community with their settlements spread on both its sides. The Misings are the only riparian community (live only along river banks) in Assam, and nothing describes their lifestyle better than their colourful weaves and their dwelling units. The key characteristics of their houses spread on both sides of the embankment are the raised stilt platforms made of bamboo, known as Chang-Ghars. And sitting prominently in front of every household would be their hand-loom with an amazing spattering of colours.



We cross the river and return to the resort for lunch, before enjoying our final jeep safari later this afternoon.

Overnight Stay: Infinity Resort, Kaziranga

Day 16, Sun 19th November 2023 - to Majuli & Jorhat

This morning we drive to Neematighat (90 minutes upstream) for a ferry boat crossing (effectively a one hour downstream boat cruise - the time taken depends upon the water level of the river) to Majuli - a World Heritage Site on the Brahmaputra River. It is the largest inhabited riverine island in the world, and famous for the Vaishnavite Satras or monasteries (Kamalabari Satra, Auniati Satra, Benganti satra, and many more) and culture.



Later in the afternoon ferry back to mainland and transfer to Jorhat.

Overnight Stay: Banyan Grove, Jorhat





Day 17, Mon 20th November 2023 - Jorhat to Dibrugarh

This morning we visit the Tocklai Tea Research Association (TRA) which is dedicated to scientific research and extension for improvement in productivity and quality of tea in North East India. After we proceed to Dibrugarh.



At Dibrugarh we will stay on a tea estate and so we will learn about difference between "CTC" & "Orthodox" tea. Experience a "Tea tasting" session of different types of tea with an expert maybe even the Estate Manager.

Then enjoy the rest of the day at leisure and in the estate surrounds.

Overnight Stay: Manohari - The Tea Retreat, Dibrugarh

Day 18, Tue 21st November 2023 - Dibrugarh-Bagdogra-Darjeeling

Mid-morning we will transfer from our tea-heaven to Dibrugarh airport for our flight to Bagdogra with Vistara Airlines (UK 726) which departs at 12:15pm and arrives Bagdogra at 1:35pm. Bagdogra is situated at the foothills of Himalayas near the large city of Siliguri. It is one of the most peaceful and untouched places in West Bengal and is often regarded as the gateway town to North-East India.

On arrival at Bagdogra Airport, we depart for Darjeeling, renowned as the 'Queen of Hills'. The marvellous hill station is set up at an elevation of 7100ft with mountains and valleys all around and is best-known for salubrious weather, natural beauty, tea farms, monasteries, lakes and museums. The awe-inspiring views of Kanchenjunga, (the third highest mountain peak in the world) leaves visitors awestruck.





Darjeeling is also home to a famous World Heritage Train and the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, the narrow gauge track connecting Darjeeling and Siliguri. Popularly known as the Darjeeling "Toy Train", the train started its operation in around 1881 and is one of the few hill railways still operating in India. The train passes through the rolling hills, green jungles and tea farms of Darjeeling.

After check-in at the hotel you are free to wander around the local markets. Some of the unique buys of Darjeeling that shouldn't be missed during your visit include a variety of teas, amazing kitchen wares, brass statues, woven fabrics and shining jewelries.

Overnight Stay: Central Heritage Resort & Spa, Darjeeling

Day 19, Wed 22nd November 2023 - Darjeeling

This morning there is the option of rising very early and travelling to nearby Tiger Hill (8,500') to witness sunrise over the Himalayas. From Tiger Hill, you can have a perfect view of Kanchenjunga, the third-highest peak in the world. If you are very lucky, you may also see the world's highest peak, Mount Everest.

After breakfast around 9:00am we will transfer to the Darjeeling Rangeet Valley Passenger Ropeway (Cable Car). Here you will ride the cable car for about 45 minutes and will descend from an altitude of about 7,000 ft [or 2150 m] down to 800 ft [or 250m].



Following this spectacular experience we will visit the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Center. It is a perfect place to explore Tibetan Culture through the artifacts, wooden carvings, photographs, carpets, leather work. Afterwards we visit St. Joseph's School, Darjeeling, commonly known as the "north point". It is a private catholic primary and secondary school for boys. Nearby is the Padmaja Naidu Zoological Park which is famed for some rarely seen species including Red Panda, Tibetan Wolf, Black Bear, and Snow Leopard.

A visit to the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute will reveal Tenzing and Gombu Rocks - two big natural rocks set opposite to each other and both the rocks are training locations for Himalayan Mountaineering Institute students.





After all of these visits you will have the rest of the day free to wander the markets and lanes of the upper areas of Darjeeling.

Overnight Stay: Central Heritage Resort & Spa, Darjeeling

Day 20, Thu 23rd November 2023 - Darjeeling

At 8:15am we transfer to the Darjeeling Railway Station to board our "Toy Train" ride. Departing at 9:00am we will enjoy a short journey which includes 7 kilometres through the picturesque "Batasia Loop". Rail enthusiasts and global travellers all enjoy this amazing scenic journey.



After our train journey we will pay a short visit to the nearby Ghoom Monastery built by Lama Sherpa Gyaltsho.

We proceed to the Sourenee Tea Estate, a premium plantation estate spread over 137 hectares stretching at the altitudes ranging between 700m to 1300m, situated in the picturesque Mirik Valley of Darjeeling. The estate is more than 100 years old and has over the years yielded quality teas that has made the estate very popular amongst tea lovers all over the world. We can experience spectacular views of the tea gardens, Mirik Valley and even Nepal. We will have lunch while at Sourenee Estate.

After Mirik we will visit the "Peace Pagoda", a Buddhist stupa monument specially put up to maintain peace and unite people of all religions.

Overnight Stay: Central Heritage Resort & Spa, Darjeeling





Day 21, Fri 24th November 2023 - Darjeeling to Kolkata

After breakfast we depart Darjeeling and travel to Bagdogra Airport for our flight to Kolkata (Calcutta). We are flying with Air Asia (I5 612) which departs at 1:35pm and arrives into Kolkata at 2:50pm.

Kolkata is the capital of the state of West Bengal. It is also the commercial, cultural, and educational centre of Eastern India, while the Port of Kolkata is India's oldest port as well as its sole major riverine port. The city's documented history begins with the arrival of the English East India Company in 1690. Upon arrival we will be met and transferred to our hotel.

In the early evening we proceed to Esplanade Metro Station where we meet a Kolkata Food Tour expert. Kicking off at sundown, we head north to a district known for having the best places to eat in Kolkata.

Starting with a tropical lassi, we then meander through the calm residential streets taking in sights and picking up tasty titbits on the move. Our food tour will reveal how local people chill out and relax after hours and what they like to nibble on when doing so, snacking all the while. We will pass the largest municipal swimming baths you'll ever see, offering local Bengali's a refreshing dip in the sweltering heat of summer. Back on College Street it's a hop, step and a jump onto the oldest tram in Asia to continue the journey.

We finish in the old book district with Indian favourites like sandesh, sherbet soda and a trip to a grand old smoky coffee house for a final taste the faded splendour of the British Empire.



in

Overnight Stay: The Kenilworth, Kolkata





Day 22, Sat 25th November 2023 - Kolkata

This morning you have the option of rising at 5:00am to join the "Magic Hour Tour". See Kolkata wake up. The light sensitive neon street lamps of Calcutta go off just when there is just enough light. Hop on the first tram of the day as it meanders through the sleepy 300 year old city. The next few hours are spent visiting some local hidden spots around the oldest part of the city.

Before the bustling giant city wakes up, you will have used all the iconic transport modes of Kolkata, enjoyed sights that are just ignored in plain sight, like taking breakfast by a hidden hole in the wall. The "unguided tour", as it is called, is wrapped up savouring Chai (tea) in a bhaad (earthen cups), the best sweets of Calcutta and finding our way through the winding streets to the place where we began.

You will also visit the the Mullick Ghat Flower Market, stroll through one of Kolkata's most prominent flower markets. Many varieties of flowers are kept on display here. The morning hustle and negotiation by dealers and buyers alike make for a unique experience.



After the tour return to the hotel for breakfast before our sightseeing tour of Kolkata, which starts at 10:00am. We commence by visiting the Victoria Memorial, a white marble structure built to commemorate the memory of Queen Victoria of England. Next to the Kali Temples - ancient temples dedicated to goddess Kali, from which the city of Kolkata derives its name. On to the famous Jain Temple and then a colonial fort built by British to guard the city against the French.

We stop for lunch and then proceed to the Marble Palace an incredibly magnificent maisonette located in Babu Street. The palace is among the few remaining buildings of the nineteenth century. Later we stop at The Mother House of the Missionaries of Charity. It has been home to Mother Teresa and her sisters from February 1953 to the present day. It is here that Mother lived, prayed, worked, and guided her religious family of sisters spread across the world. It is here that her body was laid to rest.

Overnight Stay: The Kenilworth, Kolkata





Day 23, Sun 26th November 2023 - Kolkata

This morning we visit Kumortuli, the "Potters Quarters" [Clay Statue Village]. There are over 500 pottery workshops in this quarter where the potters make lifelike statues of Hindu Gods and Goddesses from the clay of the Ganges River.

You can learn about Hindu Culture, and can witness the traditional heritage of Kumortuli. You won't find many tour groups or crowds wandering around here as it hasn't been ruined by over-tourism.

While you walk around, you'll be amazed by just how many workshops are packed inside this area. It's like a labyrinth of laneways, with storage areas all crammed in, using up all the available space there is. Many of the karigars work in small stalls selling miniature idols. But some have huge warehouse-like rooms to store the bigger idols they are creating. The clay statues can be anything from 5 feet to 30 feet high.



After lunch the remainder of the afternoon is free until around 4pm when we transfer to the River Hooghly, site of the famous Howrah Bridge which is crossed each day by more than a million commuters. Here we board a boat and enjoy a trip to the former French, Dutch and Portuguese settlements along the banks of the river.

A Cruise on the Ganges is a great way to explore the city. There are 54 ghats (quaysides) and all have great history and heritage, Some of them are Bathing ghats, Ceremonial ghats and then the Ferry ghat which connects the two banks at various places. Many monuments, memorials and markets are along the river side.

During the cruise you will have a 45 minute stop at Belur Math, a temple complex that spans 40 acres along the banks of the Hooghly River We visit the jewel in its crown, the Ramakrishna Temple during the "Aarti", where the priests of the temples lead the local pilgrims in prayer.

Overnight Stay: The Kenilworth, Kolkata





Day 24, Mon 27th November 2023 - Kolkata & departure

The day is free to continue to explore areas of Kolkata and perhaps take advantage of the great shopping opportunities that abound.

Later in the day we will transfer to the airport for our return flights to Australia.

Day 25, Tue 28th November 2023 - arrival back in Australia



Features of this tour:

Unique itinerary based on 30 years of group tours to India

All meals included

Accompanied by a dedicated National Guide from beginning to end

Local specialist guides at each place of visit

Tour cost of AU\$ 8,280* per person (sharing) :

(Single room supplement of AU\$1925.00* applies to sole use of a room)

The costs associated with this tour (not included) are:

- Your international airfare (recommended: Singapore Airlines)
- The cost of an Indian Visa ("evisa")

The Tour Cost includes : Tour as per the itinerary / Domestic flights and all other transport / all entrance fees and charges associated with the itinerary.

The Tour Cost does not include: alcoholic or non-alcoholic drinks / personal expenses like laundry , souvenirs etc / any activities, tours, or entry fees not specified in the itinerary / any photographic fees charged by parks and monuments / any tipping.

(*Tour costs are based on a Jan '23 AUD:INR exchange rate of R52:A\$1. Any significant variations to the exchange rate may require a price amendment when final payments are made)

