TOUR CODE

IN6

ADVENTURESABROAD

NORTHERN INDIA

with the Eastern Himalaya

21 days

Updated 06/01/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in Calcutta*

Today we arrive in Calcutta.

Overnight in Calcutta. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Calcutta - Darjeeling*

We fly to the market town of Siliguri (Bagdogra Airport) in North Bengal and then start our 3 hour drive from the plains to Darjeeling along a road that soon leaves the rice fields and coconut palms of the lowlands for the tea plantations of the lower hills. Driving close beside the narrow gauge Darjeeling Hill Railway drawn by century old steam engines, we reach the halfway point of Kurseong where we stop for a tea break before driving to Ghoom at about 2400m / 8,000 ft There is a 350m / 1,000 ft descent into the busy town of Darjeeling.

Darjeeling or 'the place of the thunderbolt' and the surrounding area once belonged to the rulers of Sikkim. In 1833 the British gained control of the hill on which Darjeeling stands after considerable political maneuvering in return for a small annual payment to the King of Sikkim. It soon grew to a popular health resort after a pony road and some houses were built and tea growing introduced. Later in the 19th century, the remarkable mountain railway from the plains was built and Darjeeling boomed as a resort and holiday destination for the British bureaucracy wanting an escape to cooler climates.

Built on a crescent shaped ridge, Darjeeling (2134m / 7,042 ft) faces the Himalayan peaks and is surrounded by cultivated slopes, thick forests and tea plantations.

Overnight in Darjeeling. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Darjeeling: Everest Sunrise & Ghoom Monastery*

We are woken before dawn with a cup of tea before boarding Land Rovers for the 15 km drive to Tiger Hill to see the amazing colours of sunrise on Kanchenjunga. At 2550 m / 8,500 ft, Tiger Hill commands superb views of the mountains and valleys of the eastern Himalaya with Everest, Lhotse and Makalu visible in the far distance on clear days. We stop at Ghoom monastery on the way back; this monastery built in 1875 belongs to the yellow hat (Gelugpa) sect lamas and has a 5-metre high statue of the Maitreyi (future) Buddha.

In the afternoon, we will tour the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute and the small zoo beside it has several interesting Himalayan species. The institute itself houses a considerable collection of items used by the early Everest explorers and also has a fine topographical model of the Eastern Himalaya. Later we drive to a nearby tea plantation for which this region is famous and see the picking and processing of tea leaves. Sometime during the day, we will make a quick visit the Tibetan Refugee and Handicraft Centre where Tibetan refugees live cooperatively and their children attend school while their parents work on wool making, carpet weaving and handicraft production.

The rest of the day is free to browse the 'Chowrasta' or town square and explore the well-known Oxford Book Shop with its excellent collection of books on the history and cultures of the Himalaya. You could also walk down to the Lower Bazaar where the local residents shop for produce, fabrics and spices.

Overnight in Darjeeling. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Darjeeling - Gangtok (Sikkim)*

We have an early departure for our steep descent through a series of tea plantations to the tropical Teesta Valley. Passing through sal forests and cinchona (quinine bark) plantations, we stop briefly at the Teesta Bridge checkpoint to show our Sikkim entry documents before continuing onwards to Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim.

Located in the Eastern Himalaya, Sikkim forms a natural border between Nepal to the west and Bhutan to the east. To the north lies Tibet and to the south the Teesta and Ringgit rivers form a natural boundary with the Indian state of West Bengal; to the east lies the Kingdom of Bhutan separated by a tongue of Chinese controlled Tibet.

The climate is subtropical in the lower valleys, but changing fast to temperate and alpine with increase in elevation. Vast rhododendron forests cover most of the slopes between 3300-4000 m (10,800-13,000 feet) and the Himalayan cypress is widely found near the tree line. Mixed forests of bamboo and dozens of orchid species are common between 1500-3000 m (5,000-9,850 feet) -- 660 varieties of orchids are known to grow in Sikkim. The cardamom spice is a cash crop that grows wild extensively around Yuksum and Phodang.

Later today we will visit the Institute of Cottage Industries where young Sikkimese people are taught traditional crafts. There is a sales centre attached for a number of local handicrafts, most with a strong Tibetan look to them. Woollen carpets, shawls and traditionally painted tables are good buys, all at government regulated prices.

Overnight in Gangtok. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Gangtok: Area Tour - Kalimpong*

A brief drive to Rumtek Monastery on the opposite side of the valley from Gangtok. Rumtek is the seat of the Tibetan Kagyugpa sect of monks and a major centre for Tibetan religious studies. The 16th Gwalpa Karmapa, the head of the Kagyugpa sect, took refuge in Rumtek after the Chinese invasion of Tibet in the 1950's; he and his followers escaped with whatever statues, 'thangka' paintings and scriptures they could and built Rumtek monastery as a replica of the Chhofuk monastery that they had left behind in Tibet.

A scenic drive past forest covered slopes and fast flowing rivers to Kalimpong (1250 m / 4,100 feet), an important market town located strategically at the crossroads of Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal and Bengal until the 1960s when the Indo-China war put an end to cross border trade. It is now well known for its numerous flower and orchid nurseries.

We stay in the Himalayan Hotel, run by Tim MacDonald, grandson of the Tibetan explorer David MacDonald, who accompanied many of the early British Younghusband expeditions to Tibet around the turn of the century. The MacDonald family home is something of a museum to the early exploration of this part of the Himalaya; its 16 rooms decorated with memorabilia donated by notable Himalayan explorers who have stayed at the hotel over the years. The main house was built in the 1920s and has a mature garden with dozens of varieties of flowering trees and shrubs and views of the Himalaya from the verandahs.

Overnight in Kalimpong (1247 m / 4,100 ft). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Kalimpong: Area Tour*

Today we drive to the monastery that overlooks superb views of Kalimpong town (and the Himalayan peaks) and visit the historic Dr Graham's home. The extensive boarding and day school facilitiy was established over a century ago. We will see its classrooms and boarding houses to get an idea how students of both sexes from all over India and neighbouring countries like Bhutan spend their days during the study year. There is an Anglican church with fine stained glass windows nearby, and you can also visit one of the flower nurseries for which Kalimpong is well known across India.

Overnight in Kalimpong (1247 m / 4,100 ft). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Kalimpong - Bagdogra - Delhi*

Today we drive down to the plains of North Bengal and the airport of Bagdogra from where we fly to Delhi.

The name Delhi, Dehali or Dilli is derived form Dhillika, the name of the first medieval township of Delhi, located on the southwestern border of the present Union Territory of Delhi, in Mehrauli. This was the first in the series of seven medieval cities, also known as Yoginipura, the Fortress of the Yoginis (female divinities).

Overnight in Delhi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Delhi: City Tour*

Today we have a full-day tour of Delhi. We start with a drive north into Old Delhi, passing along the Rajpath (King's Way) and stopping for photos at the India Gate. The 42m high India Gate, an "Arc de Triomphe"-like archway in the middle of a crossroad, commemorates the Indian soldiers who lost their lives fighting for the British Army during WWI. This landmark also bears the names of British and Indian soldiers killed in the Northwestern frontier in the Afghan War of 1919.

Next we will make a visit to the Jamma Mosque. Located in the heart of Old Delhi, the largest mosque in India can accommodate as many as twenty-thousand worshippers. This imposing architectural monument, with it's three gateways and two minarets, took fourteen years to complete (1644-58). Time permitting we will enter to have a brief look inside.

From here we board our cycle rickshaws for a tour of Chandni Chowk (Silver Street). Here we are given a glimpse into an old world lifestyle slowly fading from Delhi. The hustle and bustle of everyday life can be felt in the Chandi Chowk's narrow lanes. We will reboard our bus after the rickshaw ride, going past the Red Fort (photo stop), and we disembark at the Raj Ghat, set within a beautiful park. This national monument is where the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, was cremated.

After a stop for lunch we continue our sightseeing with a visit to Humayan's Tomb, an excellent example of Mughal architecture, predating the Taj Mahal by almost 100 years. Persian in style, this is a beautiful red sandstone building inlaid with black and white marble.

We will finish our day with a visit to the Qutub Minar. Few other monuments are as closely identified with Delhi as the Qutub Minar, this first monument of Muslim rule in India. It heralded the beginning of a new style of art and architecture which came to be know as the Indo-Islamic.

Overnight in Delhi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Delhi - Varanasi & Sarnath*

This morning we fly to Varanasi.* After a break at our hotel we embark on our afternoon sightseeing programme.

With more than 2,000 temples and shrines Varanasi has been the religious capital of the Hindu faith since its beginning. No one knows how old it really is -- when Buddha came here in 550 BC it was already a flourishing ancient settlement. The town is a maze of small streets and alleyways, hiding no fewer than 2,000 temples and shrines. Domes, pinnacles, towers and derelict 18th century palaces dominate the left bank of the Ganges River.

The antiquity of Varanasi can be traced back to at least the middle of first millennium BC. Since time immemorial, it has served not merely as holy center of pilgrimage, but also as a great seat of traditional Hindu learning and culture.

This afternoon we take a short journey to the buried city of Sarnath. After attaining enlightenment at Bodh Gaya the Buddha went to Sarnath; and it was here that he preached his first discourse in the deer park to set in motion the 'Wheel of the Dharma'. It is one of the most holy sites as in this place the stream of the Buddha's teaching first flowed. The Dhamekh Stupa, Dharmararjika Stupa (the Main shrine where the Buddha sat in meditation), the sacred promenade from where he preached, and the Ashoka Pillar are monuments that still stand today.

* Please note: You will notice that in the Northern portion of our India itineraries contains some days that are conditional in their content, depending on which date the trips operates and the various festivals they include. Those who book will receive a more detailed itinerary specific to their chosen date prior to departure. Please also note that from Fall 2013, this tour will be re-designed; many of the same highlights will be included, but the order will be updated and we will not include any festivals.

Overnight in Varanasi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Varanasi - Khajuraho*

Early this morning we take a boat ride on the sacred Ganges. Hindus regard the Ganges as the elixir of life bringing purity to the living and salvation to the dead. At dawn, thousands stand waist-deep in water praying to the rising sun. At dusk, hymns and prayers are uttered by the faithful in the light of hundreds of lighted lamps. The bathing ghats, over three miles in length, lead down from a steep bank to the river. Manikarnika burning ghat is the chief cremation centre of Varanasi.

We will have a walk through the narrow streets of Varanasi before returning to our hotel.

Later this morning, we fly to Khajuraho, renowned the world over for its fine temples. Built between AD 950 and 1050, these temples are among the most creative examples of Indian architecture, of which only 22 of the original 85 temples survive.

We visit the western group of temples, contained within a fenced enclosure and maintained as a park. The Lakshmana Temple is dedicated to Vishnu and is one of the earliest, dating from AD 930-950. It is also one of the best preserved, with a full five-part floor plan and four subsidiary shrines. We also visit the eastern group of temples. These can be subdivided into two groups: a complex of Jain temples in the walled enclosure, and a group of four temples scattered through the small village of Khajuraho. Parsvanath is the largest of the Jain temples and also the finest in Khajuraho, noted for the exceptional skill and precision of its construction and for the beauty of its sculptures. The Adinath Temple has fine carvings on its three bands of sculptures. The Shanti Nath Temple is a relatively modern one, built about a century ago, but it contains many components from older temples around Khajuraho.

Khajuraho has achieved fame for the sensual appeal of the erotic sculptures, but these form only a small part of the wealth of the site. Taken in totality, the sculptures of Khajuraho depict the everyday life of the people and the court in the 10th and 11th centuries.

Overnight in Khajuraho. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Khajuraho - Jhansi - Agra*

We continue by road to Jhansi, visiting the palace at Orchha, the former capital of the Bundela Dynasty. From Jhansi we catch the 18:00 train to Agra, arriving at approximately 20:00.

Agra continues to be medieval in structure: narrow, crowded streets and lanes, full of colourful shops sell that all kind of goods, especially local handicrafts, including gold and silver embroidery, imitation Mughal inlay on marble, and fine leather goods. Agra Fort lies on the bend of the River Yamuna, almost in the heart of the town. It was built by Akbar as his citadel over the years 1565 to 1573 in the finest architectural style . It has imposing gates and walls of red sandstone and a moat. The fort was successively occupied by three great Mughals -- Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jehan, each of whom made significant structural contributions to this complex.

Overnight in Agra. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Agra: the Taj Mahal & Agra Fort*

Today we tour the city and visit its main attraction: The Taj Mahal, one of the world's most beautiful buildings. Called "A dream in marble," the Taj Mahal was built by Shah Jehan as a memorial to his queen Mumtaz Mahal. Shah Jehan built the Taj to enshrine the body of his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal (elect of the palace), who died shortly after giving birth to their 14th child in 1631.

Construction by a work force of 20,000 men from all over Asia commenced in1632 and the tomb was completed in 1653. Marble was brought from Makrana, near Jodhpur, and precious stones of onyx, amethyst, malachite, lapis lazuli, turquoise, jade, crystal and mother of pearl were carried to Agra from Persia, Russia, Afghanistan, Tibet, China and the Indian Ocean.

The Taj is remarkable for its perfect proportions and rich pietra dura, with minute details executed with great skill. The building marks the most developed stage of Mughal architecture. The designer of this grand sepulchre is believed to be Ustad Ahmad Lahori, a master architect of the age. The calligraphic ornamentation on the Taj was authored by Amanat Khan Shirazi, a great writer of the 17th century.

The balance of our day will be spent visiting some of Agra's other remarkable monuments such as the Agra Fort, as rugged as the Taj Mahal is ethereal where we will have a chance to view the perfectly-proportioned Moti Masjid (Pearl Mosque) and have a visit to the Itimad-ud-daulah Mausoleum on the other side of the Yamuna River.

Overnight in Agra. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Agra - Jaipur*

After leaving Agra we will visit Fatehpur Sikri, an ancient capital of the Moghul Empire built by Emperor Akbar the Great between 1569 and 1585. It was later abandoned due to the lack of a dependable water supply, but remains one of the most perfectly preserved examples of a Moghul city. Now deserted, it is almost perfectly preserved, a masterpiece

in sandstone glowing in subtly changing shades of pink and red as the day progresses and the light fades. The very embodiment of Akbar's unorthodox court, the city fuses Hindu and Muslim artistic traditions.

Jaipur has been dubbed the "Pink City" because of the many buildings inside the old city walls that are painted pink. Scattered throughout the northeast section of the town are palaces and temples designed in a variety of styles; the city lies snugly on a bed of a long-dry lake.

Overnight in Jaipur. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Jaipur - Amber - Jaipur*

Today our tour takes us to Amber, once the ancient state capital but now deserted. Located on the crest of a rocky hill behind Maota Lake, 11 km (7 miles) north of Jaipur, the Rajput stronghold was the capital of the Kuchhawa Rajputs from 1037 until 1728. Rising on the slopes of a steep hill is the Amber Fortress with its imposing facade. The interior presents a galaxy of art including the world's best Chamber of Mirrors.

In the afternoon take a tour of Jaipur, one of the best-planned cities in India, built of rose-pink sandstone by the great astronomer-king Jai Singh II in 1727. The City Palace stands in the centre of the city, part of which is still the Maharaja's residence. The complex has been developed into a museum containing rare manuscripts, fine specimens of Rajput and Mughal paintings, royal apparel, and an armoury. Hawa Mahal (Palace of Winds), the landmark of Jaipur, is a curious building, elaborate and fanciful, built of pink sandstone with a delicate honeycomb design. Rising five storeys high, it is composed of semi-octagonal overhanging windows, each with its perforated screen, which allowed the ladies of the court to look onto the main street without being seen. We visit the Observatory, the City Palace which now houses a museum, and take the opportunity to photograph the exterior of the Palace of the Winds.

Overnight in Jaipur. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Jaipur to Pushkar OR Jaipur to Jodhpur*

Our AUTUMN departure will travel to Pushkar in order to take in the Pushkar Camel Fair.

NOTE: The Camel Fair is a 15-day event, the last four days of which are open to tourists. During this time, the Department of Tourism arranges different events daily -- camel races, turban tying, folk dances, magic shows, puppet shows, etc. Unfortunately the programmes are NOT announced in advance so it is impossible for us to provide an exact listing of the activities that we will be able to witness. Sightseeing will include a town tour featuring the holy Pushkar Lake and the Brahmaji Mandir temple (one of the only temples in all of India devoted to Brahma).

FEB / MAR DEPARTURES: On these dates we will travel to Jodhpur and have a tour on arrival.

Jodhpur is a place of wonderful bazaars, where you can seek out puppeteers and dyers and get a real taste of rural Rajasthan. Our sightseeing in Jodhpur includes a visit to the massive fort which stands upon a rocky hill and engulfs the city with its 10 km (6 miles) of wall and eight gates. A fairly steep climb leads up through seven gateways. The palaces within are carved from a hard sandstone which the sculptors' chisels have carved as if it were soap. An extensive museum displays howdahs, paintings, thrones, banners, doors, weapons and a spectacular 17th century tent.

Overnight in Pushkar (autumn) or Jodhpur. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Pushkar to Jodhpur OR Jodhpur to Jaisalmer*

OUR AUTUMN DEPARTURE coincides with the Pushkar Camel Fair, on the full moon of the Hindu month of Karttika, when over 200,000 buyers, sellers and hawkers have traditionally invaded this peaceful, holy village. After taking in the sights and sounds of the camel fair in the morning, we will depart after lunch for our 4-hour drive to Jodhpur (please note that 2012 will be our last tour to visit the Camel Fair. This tour will be re-designed for 2013 and will not include this festival).

Our February tour will travel instead to Jaisalmer, the land of the Bhatti princes, born of the moon, dates back to AD 1156. The skyline holds kiosks with parapets, balconies and terraces. Jaisalmer has been called the "Golden City" because of the colour imparted to its stone ramparts by the setting sun. This morning we visit the city gates and the massive fort inside, which rises majestically above the city. The fort itself is a warren of narrow,

paved streets complete with beautiful Jain temples.

Our February 2013 departure will coincide with the famous Jaisalmer Desert Festival when the sands come alive with the brilliant colours, music and laughter. Dressed in brilliantly hued costumes, the people of the desert dance and sing haunting ballads of valor, romance and tragedy. The fair has snake charmers, puppeteers, acrobats and folk performers.

Camels, of course, play a stellar role in this festival, where the rich and colourful folk culture of Rajasthan is on show. Over the years, the desert dwellers in their solitude have woven a fascinating tapestry with threads of music and rhythm and the Desert Festival is a celebration of their heritage.

Overnight in Jodhpur OR Jaisalmer. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Jaisalmer OR Jodhpur*

AUTUMN 2012: This trip will spend the day in Jodhpur. Our sightseeing in Jodhpur includes a visit to the massive fort which stands upon a rocky hill and engulfs the city with its 10 km (6 miles) of wall and eight gates. A fairly steep climb leads up through seven gateways. The palaces within are carved from a hard sandstone which the sculptors' chisels have carved as if it were soap. An extensive museum displays howdahs, paintings, thrones, banners, doors, weapons and a spectacular 17th century tent.

Our February 2013 trip will spend an additional night in Jaisalmer.

Overnight Jodhpur (autumn) or Jaisalmer. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Jodhpur to Kumbalgarh OR Jaisalmer to Rohet*

AUTUMN DEPARTURE: We will depart Jodhpur for our three to four hour drive to Ranakpur and its intricately carved Jain Temple. We will have the opportunity to visit the temples and have some lunch in this small village at the entrance to the Aravalli Hills. Afterwards, we will make our way to the nearby off-the-beaten-track hill fort town of Kumbalgarh, a strategic fort of the Mewar Kingdom. On our approach we will be passing through rustic villages and hilly terrain. The fort itself offers commanding west-facing views from a ridge of the Aravalli Hills. We aim to stay in

Kumbalgarh for a night at the heritage hotel situated in the fort itself. However, due to the limited rooms available we may opt to stay in the nearby village of Ranakpur, close to the site of the Jain Temple.

February: This departure will travel to Rohet for overnight. Avoiding central Jodhpur (already visited) will better-place us for tomorrow's trip to Udaipur.

Overnight in Kumbalgarh (autumn) OR Rohet. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 *Kumbalgarh to Udaipur OR Luni to Udaipur*

After breakfast we drive to Udaipur through the picturesque Aravalli Hills, passing through small villages and bountiful agricultural land.

Overnight in Udaipur. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 20 *Udaipur: Area Tour*

Today we see the lakeside City Palace, made up of eleven constituent mahals (palaces) constructed by successive Maharajahs over 300 years. Together they comprise the largest royal complex in Rajasthan. The palace, iridescent with tile and mirror inlays, includes the impressively carved Jagdish Temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu.

The afternoon is free to browse in this beautiful city of temples, fairy-tale palaces and vast city gardens surrounding several lakes. This is only one of the seven major Rajput states to uphold its Hindu allegiance in the face of Muslim invasions and political compromises. The present nobility are perhaps the longest surviving dynasty in the world, being the seventy-sixth in the unbroken line of Mewar suzerains. An afternoon drive around nearby Fateh Sagar Lake concludes an inspiring day.

Overnight in Udaipur. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 21 *Udaipur - Delhi - Depart*

Today we fly from Udaipur to Delhi. International departure from Delhi.

PLEASE NOTE: Many flights from Indian cities depart after midnight, ie just into TOMORROW. If this is the case re your departure, you may consider booking an extra hotel night so that you will have a place to rest prior to your flight tonight.

BON VOYAGE!! Meal plan: Breakfast.