TOUR CODE

NE1

ADVENTURESABROAD

NEPAL & INDIA

Featuring Northern India 'Classic'

22 days

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Day 1 ***Arrival in Kathmandu***

Welcome to Nepal, a country with spectacular geography and a rich cultural diversity. Within its narrow borders we will find a complete climatic range, from tropical to temperate, alpine to Arctic. As many as 30 different languages and dialects are spoken among the many ethnic groups.

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

Day 2 ***Kathmandu: City Tour***

This morning we travel to Kathmandu's central meeting area, Durbar Square, a profusion of temples reflecting the different architectural styles dating from the eleventh century. The area also includes the Royal Palace with its gilded gates and elaborate statues. The square is alive with a multitude of nationalities, intermingled with stalls displaying a wide variety of Nepalese and Tibetan handicrafts. We will also see "Freak Street" -- a famous hippie meeting place from the 60's.

We then proceed to Swayambhunath Temple, Nepal's most significant centre of Buddhist worship. There has been a temple on this site since at least the 5th century. Swayambhunath is also known as the "Monkey Temple" due to the large population of monkeys that make the grounds their home. The temple buildings are set atop a hill and offer an excellent view of Kathmandu and its valley.

Our next stop is Pashupatinath Hindu Temple, a very interesting place located on the sacred Bagmati River where there may be cremations taking place on the ghats. We also visit Boudhanath Stupa, one of the holiest Buddhist sites in Kathmandu and one of the largest spherical stupas in Nepal.

Overnight in Kathmandu. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 ***Kathmandu - Chitwan***

Today we travel by road to the world-famous Chitwan National Park. When one thinks of Nepal it is usually of soaring, snow-capped Himalayan peaks. However, Nepal is situated along the southern slopes of those mountains and encompasses land from over 8,000 metres (over 26,240 ft) down to less than 100 metres (328 ft) above sea level. In fact, only a very small proportion of Nepal's population lives in the mountains and over 50% of the people live in the lowland Terai region bordering India. This lush band of countryside runs from the western border right across Nepal to the eastern border and is only about 50 km (30 miles) wide. Its fertile soil and warm climate make it the most productive agricultural region in the country, and consequently most of the preserved natural vegetation is in the Chitwan National Park.

The park was created in 1973, principally as a sanctuary for the Asian one-horned rhino and the majestic Bengal tiger. The park is set around the confluence of three rivers -- the Narayani, the Rapti and the Reu; the vegetation mainly forest

and tall grass.

Overnight in the vicinity of Chitwan National Park. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Chitwan National Park*

With our naturalist guide we explore the area and learn about the inhabitants of this complex ecosystem. Bird watching is excellent in this area. One of the highlights of our Chitwan explorations is a wildlife viewing expedition while riding on the back of an elephant. Moving effortlessly through the tall grasses and underbrush, the elephants provide the best vantage point from which to see Chitwan's abundance of birds and animals. We may even be lucky enough to see a rhino or a tiger.

Overnight in the vicinity of Chitwan National Park. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 5 *Chitwan - Pokhara*

We drive through winding gorges and across fast flowing rivers from Chitwan to Pokhara, located on the shore of a crystal blue lake with the peaks of the Himalaya filling the skyline, including Machhapuchhare, a peak that has never been climbed.

Pokhara is an extraordinary landscape and one of the most attractive destinations in Nepal. The treasures of Pokhara include the tranquillity of Phewa Lake, spectacular views of Annapurna range, luscious green hills, terraced farm slopes, countless species of vegetation, rushing rivers in a tropical-like environment. Pokhara is, since ancient times, the traditional export center for trade with India and Tibet. Merchants from remote Himalayan regions of Nepal, such as Muktinath and Mustang, still come here with mule trains.

Overnight in Pokhara. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Pokhara Valley*

Today we admire the landscape and enjoy a tour of the area's highlights. Bindhyabasini Mandir is a local Hindu temple, dedicated to Goddess Bhagwati, on the northeast of Phewa Lake in the vicinity of the Old Bazaar, still the commercial hub of merchants from the remote Himalaya. We also visit a Tibetan village where we will encounter Tibetan Buddhism, culture and crafts. After the Chinese invasion of Tibet in the 1950's over 30,000 Tibetan refugees settled throughout Nepal.

Overnight in Pokhara. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Pokhara - Bhaktapur*

This morning we travel to Bhaktapur and the Kathmandu Valley, the cultural and economic heart of Nepal.

Stretched along a ridge above the sacred Hanumante River, Bhaktapur grew from a collection of villages strung along the old trade route between India and Tibet. Like an island, the city rises out of lush green fields of rice-huddled red-tiled roofs punctured by the soaring spire of the five-storied Nyataponla temple, and set against the movie-set backdrop of the snow capped Himalaya. Bhaktapur is virtually 100% Newari and adamantly rural at heart. About 60% of its 80,000 residents are farmers, among the country's best. From the rich black soil they grow rice and other crops which

are some of the highest in Nepal.

Bhaktapur's deep roots in the land are apparent in the people on its streets: farmer women in their characteristic red-border black saris pleated in the front and raised high in back, revealing blue tattoos above their ankles; farmers with double baskets of giant radishes suspended from their shoulders.

Overnight in Bhaktapur. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Bhaktapur - Kathmandu, Nepal - Delhi, India*

Today we fly from Kathmandu to Delhi and transfer to our hotel.

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 9 *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 10 *Delhi - Mandawa*

After an early breakfast we depart for Mandawa, arriving early afternoon.

The town of Mandawa lies in the heart of Shekhavati, a semi-arid region located in the northeast part of Rajasthan, famous for its heritage havelis and colourful fresco art. As you approach it, Mandawa emerges from the sand like a mirage. Wind your way through two imposing gateways up to Mandawa Castle. The handsome rugged fort of Mandawa was built in 1755 by Thakur Nawal Singh, who also founded the town of Nawalgarh.

In the afternoon, wander through the streets to admire the mansions of the Goenkas, Sarafs, Ladias and Chokhanis with their imposing gateways and elaborate frescoes. A painted arched gateway adorned with Lord Krishna and his cows leads to the bazaar. Tie and dye fabrics flutter in the breeze, skilled hands craft colourful bangles in lac and cobblers make leather shoes embroidered with gold thread.

Overnight in Mandawa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Mandawa - Shekhavati - Bikaner*

After breakfast we drive to Bikaner, arriving around midday. En route, we stop at some of the ancient settlements of Shekhavati.

Founded at the close of the 15th century, Bikaner stands on high ground, surrounded by fine embattled walls. The 16th century fort contains palaces, temples and a mosque, mostly made of red and yellow sandstone. The marble images are considered to be the finest specimens of Hindu art.

Within the massive edifice of the fort, the entrance of which is flanked by two life-size effigies of elephants, are housed some of the rarest gems of Rajput civilisation. The Durbar Hall is in Mughal style, lavishly decorated with paintings. Gilt reliefs, glass mosaics and lace- like mirrors adorn the intimate and graceful Zenana -- the women's wing, separated from the main palace by a broad courtyard with panelled niches.

Overnight in Bikaner. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Bikaner - Manvar*

After breakfast we drive to Manvar, an ideal base to explore the Indian desert life, culture, wildlife and natural beauty. On arrival, we check-in at our comfortable desert camp in time for lunch.

This afternoon we enjoy the unique desert atmosphere for which this region is famous. Keep an eye out for the chinkara -- a shy gazelle -- as they make way across the silent sands. Watch the children trotting off to school, while their mothers prepare their afternoon meal on dung-fire. Our village tour will allow us to share the fascinating culture of these friendly people and enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of this vast desert.

The evening is enlivened by a campfire, mashaals (traditional songs), and local musicians and dancers. With stunning sunrises, mesmerizing sunsets and dazzling night skies, life in this peaceful wilderness is spectacularly elemental -- and extraordinarily silent.

Overnight near Manvar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Manvar - Jodhpur - Rohetgarh*

After breakfast drive to Rohetgarh (Rohet).

En route we stop at Jodhpur. This is the land of the valiant Rathore kings, whose courage was a match for the tyranny of the Thar Desert. A bleak scarp rears up 120 meters from the desert valley. Straddling the rocky crevices is the massive Jodhpur Fort, its sheer walls reflecting the strength of its warrior builders. The fort is entered through seven gates, each a formidable barrier. The museum within the fort is one of the finest in Rajasthan and displays royal apparel, ancient paintings and manuscripts, fabled treasures of the royal household and an armoury. An interesting section displays folk musical instruments from different regions of Rajasthan. Delicately latticed windows and pierced screens worked in sandstone form the dominant motif within the rugged casket of the fort and the palaces are exquisitely decorated.

On arrival we check in at Rohetgarh, a warm fortified home still alive with traditions of old. In the evening, there is time to visit the family cenotaphs, wander around the village picking up bargains
in leatherware, fabrics, metalware and silver jewellery.

Overnight in Rohetgarh. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Rohetgarh Area*

After breakfast, visit the Bishnoi villages. The Bishnois are a fascinating community which follows the 29 (bish-noi) tenets laid down by the 15th century Guru Jambeshwar. They fervently believe in the sanctity of animal and plant life so all animals live near their villages without fear. When a Bishnoi dies, he is sometimes buried in the sitting position and often placed at the threshold of the house or adjoining cattleshed. A Bishnoi believes he will later be reincarnated as a deer, hence the herds of blackbuck often seen near their villages.

Afternoon at leisure.

Overnight in Rohetgarh. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Rohetgarh - Ranakpur - Udaipur*

After breakfast we depart on our drive to Udaipur.

En route, we visit the famous Jain temples of Ranakpur which lie buried in a shady glen and cover a vast area. The central temple is called Chaumukha (four-faced) and is the most complex and extensive of Jain temples in India, covering an area of over 40,000 sq. feet (3600 sq metres). Its 29 halls are supported by 1,444 pillars, none of which are alike. Subsidiary shrines in the shape of side alters throng around in all directions, including a temple dedicated to the Sun God which displays erotic carvings.

On arrival in Udaipur, check-in at the hotel.

Overnight in Udaipur. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Udaipur: City Tour*

Our morning sightseeing in Udaipur includes a visit to the City Palace, which stands on the crest of a ridge overlooking Lake Pichola. The largest palace in Rajasthan, it was built at various periods but still preserves the harmony of design, enhanced by massive octagonal towers surmounted by cupolas. Now a museum, it is a labyrinth of courtyards richly decorated with inlaid mirror-work, galleries covered with frescos, temples and roof gardens, which afford a wide

panorama below. The Jagdish Temple in the old town was built in the mid-17th century and has a remarkable bronze statue of Garuda, the mythical bird, facing his revered master Lord Vishnu.

Sahelion-ki-Bari (Garden of the Handmaidens) is a good example of the Hindu art of landscape gardening on a princely scale. Ornamental pools with finely sculptured cenotaphs of soft black stone are surrounded by a profusion of fountains.

The afternoon is at leisure. The shops and craftsmen's ateliers in the narrow streets of the bazaar justify endless walks.

OPTIONAL: In the evening take a boat ride on Lake Pichola. The steel blue waters of the lake, artificially created in the 14th century, reflect the white phantom Jag Nivas Palace, now the Lake Palace hotel which was built in 1746 as the summer residence of the rulers, and Jag Mandir said to be built by Maharana Karan Singh for his friend Prince Khurram, who was later to become emperor Shah Jehan. Huge seamless stone slabs of translucent thinness where used. The rooms were embellished with inlaid stones -- onyx, jade, carnelian, jasper and agate.

Overnight in Udaipur. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Udaipur - Pushkar*

After breakfast we depart on the drive to Pushkar. On arrival check in at the resort, set amidst orchards of Indian gooseberry and fields of roses. (As Pushkar is a holy town the resort serves no alcohol or non-vegetarian food, though a wide variety of vegetarian delicacies from around the world are on offer here.)

In the late afternoon we visit the Brahma temple. This town boasts of the only temple dedicated to Lord Brahma in the world. Lord Brahma is the Creator in the Holy Trinity of Gods. You get a chance to walk through the winding lanes of Pushkar before reaching the lake, which is magical at sunset.

An aarti (Hindu prayer ceremony) is arranged specially for you at the banks of the lake today. After the ceremony we enjoy a cup of tea on the banks of the lake before starting our journey back to the resort. Enjoy a traditional thali dinner at the resort.

Overnight in Pushkar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Pushkar - Jaipur*

This morning we depart for Jaipur.

This afternoon we explore 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 it is still the Maharaja's residence, while most of the complex has been developed into a museum containing rare manuscripts, fine specimens of Rajput and Mughal paintings, royal apparel and an armoury. Jantar Mantar observatory was built by the founder of Jaipur, Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh. The huge stone instruments were devised to study the movements of the sun, moon and planets and are incredibly accurate. Hawa Mahal (Palace of Winds) is the landmark of Jaipur. Built of pink sandstone with a delicate honeycomb design and 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.

Overnight in Jaipur. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 *Jaipur & Amber*

After an early breakfast, we visit Amber, the capital for 6 centuries before Jaipur was built, 11 km north of Jaipur. Rising majestically on the slopes of a hill, this 11th century fort and palace complex is a blend of Hindu and Muslim styles -- the earlier constructions in the inner apartments designed by the Hindu founder are austere, while later constructions abound in the rich flourishes characteristic of Muslim influence. Experience the thrill of riding up to the fort on gaily decorated elephants, in the manner the Rajputs of old made their royal ascent centuries ago.

The afternoon is at leisure. You have time to wander through the colourful bazaars, a veritable collector's paradise where you can watch ancient craft forms: Meenakari or enameling work, exquisite jewellery in silver or gold sparkling with emeralds, rubies, white sapphires and dangling pearls. In tiny ateliers you can see the age-old tie-dye methods of cloth printing, miniature paintings on cotton or silk, statues hand-carved in wood or bone, fine metalwork and the renowned blue pottery of Jaipur.

Overnight in Jaipur. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 20 *Jaipur - Fatehpur Sikri - Agra*

We depart for Agra. En route, stop at Fatehpur Sikri, the deserted sandstone city, which was the glorious but short-lived imperial capital of Akbar, the greatest of Mughal emperors. Lying on a rocky ridge, it is today a haunting complex of empty palaces, forts and mosques. A variety of architectural styles are found, since craftsmen representing many schools were employed.

On arrival in Agra, check in at the hotel.

Overnight in Agra. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 21 *Agra: Agra Fort & the Taj Mahal*

After breakfast we tour Agra. Visit the red sandstone Agra Fort, which stands like a crescent on the banks of the Jamuna River, enclosed by forbidding 20-meter high walls, with a 12-meter moat between them. Three successive Mughal emperors -- Akbar, Jehangir and Shah Jehan -- helped create this massive structure which contains Hindu and Muslim architecture.

The highlight of your trip will be a visit to the Taj Mahal, the greatest monument to love and one of the wonders of the modern world, constructed by Emperor Shah Jehan as a mausoleum for his beloved queen Mumtaz Mahal. Completed in 1652, skilled craftsmen from Persia, Turkey, France and Italy and some 20,000 labourers worked for 17 years to build this edifice. You have time to explore the bazaars and craftsmen's ateliers, where you can watch the ancient art of marble in-lay work.

Overnight in Agra. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 22 *Agra - Delhi - Depart*

Today we return to Delhi by road. Departure from Delhi.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.

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