TOUR CODE

NP2

ADVENTURESABROAD

NEPAL & NORTHERN INDIA

22 days

Updated 06/01/2013

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 - 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 11 *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 12 *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 13 *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 14 *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 15 *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 16 *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 17 *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 18 *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 19 *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 20 *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 21 *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 22 *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.