TOUR CODE

NP4

ADVENTURESABROAD

NEPAL & INDIA

featuring North, West & South India

35 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 - Mumbai: City Tour*

Today we fly to Mumbai. We are met on arrival and transferred to the hotel.

After freshening up, depart on a tour of the city. From humble obscure beginnings as a set of seven small islands, Mumbai (earlier called Bombay) has today risen to the eminence of India's most important commercial and industrial centre. At Dhobi Ghat, you can see a bewildering range of India’s contrasts. The dhobis (washermen) deal with staggeringly large washes every day. The Gateway of India was conceived as a triumphal arch to commemorate the visit of King George V and Queen Mary for the Delhi Durbar in 1911. The city has several fine examples of colonial architecture including the Afghan Memorial Church, established in 1847 which has Gothic arches and stained-glass windows; the Clock Tower - now called Rajabai Tower, the School of Art, built in the late 1800s, where Rudyard Kipling was born; Crawford Market which has bas-reliefs designed by Kipling's father; the massive Victoria Terminus and the Municipal Corporation building. Also of interest are the Hanging Gardens on Malabar Hill, from where you get a magnificent panoramic view of the metropolis and the Arabian Sea. Marine Drive is a long gracefully curving road along the buttressed seacoast.

Overnight in Mumbai. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 23 *Mumbai - Aurangabad: Ellora*

Early morning transfer to the airport for the flight to Aurangabad. We are met on arrival and transferred to the hotel (Check-in at noon).

In the afternoon visit Ellora, which has 34 rock-cut temples representing the Buddhist, Jain and Hindu Brahmanic faiths. All the cave temples are man-made. The artists who flocked to these remote areas from vast distances literally hammered monuments out of rock, working usually from the top of the temple and moving downwards, to eliminate the

need of scaffolding. The centre piece at Ellora is the Kailash Temple. In its galleries are recreated various scenes from Shiva myths. Although the carvings are of three religions, the structures are often similar. However, differences are visible -- the Jain carving are ascetic, the Buddhist caves, inspired by Buddhism's attempt at populism, show an austere richness.

Overnight in Aurangabad. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 24 *Aurangabad: Ajanta Caves*

After breakfast take a day trip to Ajanta, located 100 km from Aurangabad. The 30 caves not only contain sculptures but remarkably preserved frescos as well. The Ajanta caves are in a secluded site; because of this they were virtually forgotten and discovered accidentally only in the 19th century. The frescos and sculptures are startling in the voluptuousness of much of the imagery for Buddhism was a religion of denial. The Buddha forbade the worshipping of idols and the wearing of colourful clothing or any ornamentation, which might excite desire. After the Buddha's death, its preachers began to tell stories of Buddha's earlier incarnations. Thus began the process of Buddhism acquiring some of the sensuousness of Hinduism. Return to Aurangabad in the late afternoon.

Overnight in Aurangabad. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 25 *Aurangabad - Mumbai - Goa*

We have a morning flight to the former Portuguese enclave of Goa (via Mumbai).

Goa achieved fame when Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama sailed down the Malabar Coast in 1498 in search of "Christians and spices." Although he found neither, Goa became a Portuguese colony separated from the rest of India by the jungle covered hills of the Western Ghats. Goa's heartland and population is located in the alluvial strip inland from the beaches, a lush patchwork of paddy fields, coconut plantations, whitewashed churches and gently meandering rivers.

Overnight in Goa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 26 *Goa: City Tour*

This morning we include a sightseeing tour of Panjim. Proceeding to old Goa, we visit the Basilica of Bom Jesus, built in 1605 by the Jesuit fathers and still the most important church in Goa. Enshrined in a silver casket in one of its chapels, is the body of Saint Francis Xavier. Across the street is the Se Cathedral with an imposing vaulted roof, massive pillars and fourteen magnificent altars. Later we visit the Convent of St. Francis D'Assisi and the Chapel of St. Catherine.

This afternoon is free to enjoy this laid-back town.

Overnight in Goa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 27 *Goa - Bangalore - Srirangapatnam - Mysore*

Today we fly to Bangalore and continue by road to Mysore. Until independence, Mysore was the seat of the Maharajas of Mysore, a princely state covering about a third of present day Karnataka. En route we visit Srirangapatnam.

Srirangapatnam derives its name from Lord Ranganatha. We visit the 1,000 year old temple dedicated to Ranganatha, proclaiming the historical background of the city. Besides the mythological association of the town, the town has assumed significance for the heroism of Hyder Ali Khan and Tipu Sultan in fighting the British in association with the French. It was also the capital of the Vijayanagar representatives and later Mysore rulers, during whose period Srirangapatna had witnessed glorious days.

Overnight in Mysore. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 28 *Mysore: City Tour*

Today we tour this historic city, including the spectacular Maharaja's Palace. This charming, easy-going city has long been a favourite with travellers -- it's a manageable size, enjoys a good climate and has chosen to retain and promote its heritage rather than replace it. The city is famous for its silk and is also a thriving sandalwood and incense centre.

Overnight in Mysore. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 29 *Mysore - Belur & Halebid - Hassan*

Today we travel to Hassan via Belur and Halebid.

Belur and Halebid were both capitals of The Medieval Hoysala kings who built the exquisitely carved temples in the 12th & 13th centuries. Belur is famous for it Hoysala architecture; its Temple of Lord Channakeshava is embellished with carving which has few equals in the world. It took 103 years to complete and you can see why. The facade of the temple is filled with intricate sculptures and friezes with no portion left blank: elephants, episodes from the epics, and sensuous dancers.

Halebid was the seat of Hoysala Kingdom; its great Hoyaleswara Temple was built in the typical Hoysala style. The temple, dating back to the 12th century, is astounding for its wealth of sculptural details. The walls of the temple are covered with an endless variety of gods and goddesses, animals, birds and dancing girls. Yet no two facets of the temple are the same. This magnificent temple -- guarded by a Nandi Bull -- was never completed, despite 86 years of labour.

We continue to Hassan.

Overnight in Hassan. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 30 *Hassan - Bangalore: City Tour*

Today we travel by road to Bangalore, the cosmopolitan capital of Karnataka.

Bangalore is called the Garden City for it's delicate blossoms and greenery that impart a unique beauty to this lovely city. The weather is the city's best feature, with pleasant summers and bearable winters. Bangalore, which literally means the 'town of baked beans', was founded by Kempe Gowda, a chieftain of the Vijayanagar Empire, around the 16th century. He built four towers in four directions to specify its boundaries.

Today we tour Bangalore, visiting the Lal Bagh which has a variety of old trees, fountains, lotus pools, terraces and an assortment of tropical herbs and subtropical herbs. We also see the government buildings and the Maharaja's Palace.

Overnight in Bangalore. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 31 *Bangalore - Kochi: City Tour*

Early this morning we fly to Kochi (Cochin).

The history of European involvement in Kochi, from the early sixteenth century onwards, is dominated by the aggression of, successively, the Portuguese, Dutch and British, competing in their desire to control the port and its lucrative spice trade. From 1800, the state of Cochin was part of the British Madras Presidency; from 1812 until Independence in 1947, its administration was made the responsibility of a series of diwans, or financial ministers. In the 1920s, the British expanded the port to make it suitable for modern ocean-going ships; extensive dredging created Willingdon Island, between Ernakulam and Fort Cochin.

On arrival we have a tour of Kochi, including: Chinese fishing Nets -- A legacy of one of the earliest visitors to the Malabar coast, these nets are unmistakable as one enters the harbour. Records show that they were first erected between AD 1350 and 1450. Constructed out of Teak wood and Bamboo poles, they work on the principle of balance. The best place to watch is from Vasco Da Gama square, a narrow promenade that parallels the beach with little stalls that serve fresh seafood, tender coconuts and so on.

Santa Cruz Basilica: Built by the Portuguese, the church was elevated to a Cathedral by the Pope Paul IV in 1558. Spared by the Dutch conqueror of Cochin who destroyed many Catholic buildings in 1663, it later fell into the hands of the British who demolished it when they took over Cochin in 1795. For almost 100 years there was no church on the site, until the Bishop Dom Gomez Vereira commissioned a new building in 1887.

Overnight in Kochi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 32 *Kochi - Allaphuza: Houseboat*

We continue by road to Alappuzha (Alleppey), known as the "Venice of the East", situated on Vembanad Lake, the longest in India. A maze of canals and a network of bridges give this busy commercial town its descriptive sobriquet. Alleppey is known for its coir, the retted fibre of the coconut husk and for black pepper.

Today we board our houseboat for a very special Kerala delight -- a slow boat through its forests and palm-shaded canals. We take a leisurely cruise on the beautiful backwaters, enjoying the magnificent scenery along the waterways and stopping to admire what history and religion have left along the way.

THE HOUSEBOAT will be approx 60 feet long and 13 feet wide in the middle. There are comfortable beds, and traditional lanterns, and air-conditioning. There will be a sundeck for daytime relaxation. The boats are made of local natural fibres that truly echo the villagers harmony with the natural surroundings. As your oarsman slowly and silently propels us along the backwaters, we will enjoy the magnificent scenery along the waterways. We will stop to view working villages and witness locals fishing, swimming, crafting, and bathing (most boats will have oarsman though some will be motorized with a silencer on the motor).

NOTE: Single cabins are NOT available on the houseboat. Single supplements reflect sharing for this one night.

Overnight houseboat cruise. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 33 *Allaphuza - Chennai*

Today we return to Kochi and fly to Chennai (Madras).

Overnight in Chennai. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 34 *Chennai: Mahabalipuram & Kanchipuram*

Today we travel to 60 km (37 mi) to Mahabalipuram, the seaport of the ancient Palava dynasty of Kanci. The temples and carvings here date back to the 7th century. They stand out because of their simplicity and the fact that they also depict many scenes from the every-day life of every-day people. It is now recognized as the site of some of the greatest architectural and sculptural achievements in India.

Kanchipuram is known as one of India's Seven Sacred Cities and the historical capital of the Pallavas under whom, from AD 6th to 8th century, it became the citadel of Cholas, Vijayanagar Kings, the Muslims and the British. It has been a centre of Tamil learning, cultural and religious background for centuries. Kanchi has magnificent temples of unique architectural beauty bearing eloquent testimony to its glorious Dravidian heritage.

After a comprehensive tour of the site we return to Chennai.

Overnight in Chennai. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 35 *Chennai: City Tour - Departure*

Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu, is, like Mumbai and Calcutta, a comparatively modern creation. It was founded by the British East India Company in 1639, on a narrow five-kilometre strip of land between the Cooum and Adyar rivers, a few kilometres north of the ancient Tamil port of Mylapore and the Portuguese settlement of San Thome, established in 1522. The British were repeatedly challenged by the French who, in 1746, destroyed much of the city. Robert Clive ("Clive of India"), then a clerk, was taken prisoner, an experience said to have inspired him to become a campaigner. Clive was among the first to re-enter Chennai when it was retaken three years alter, and continued to use it as his base. Following this, fortifications were strengthened and the British survived a year-long French siege (1759), completing the work in 1783. By this time, however, Calcutta was in the ascendancy and Madras lost its national importance.

Our city sightseeing of Chennai includes a visit to the National Art Gallery and Museum, which has a selection of ancient paintings from almost all schools of art, as well as a section entirely devoted to modern art. We will visit Fort St George, once a stronghold of the British; St Mary's Church, the oldest Anglican church in India; the San Thome Cathedral where the remains of St Thomas the Apostle are believed to have been buried; the Mylapore Temple dedicated to Lord Shiva and the Light House which is the only one of its kind in the world to be located on top of a High Court. We drive along the Marina, the thirteen kilometre-long beach which, with its shining white sands, aqua blue sea and violet lights at night, is the pride of Chennai.

Later we transfer to the airport for our homeward flight. Departure from Chennai.

PLEASE NOTE: If you are booking your own air, please ensure that your flight departs AFTER 8 pm (or miss today's sightseeing tour).

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.