TOUR CODE

NP6

ADVENTURESABROAD

NEPAL, INDIA & SRI LANKA

featuring India's 'Golden Triangle'

20 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 - Agra: The Taj Mahal & Agra Fort*

Today we travel by road for Agra. On arrival 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 in 1632 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 11 *Agra - Fatehpur Sikri - Jaipur*

Before 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 12 *Jaipur - Amber - Delhi*

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 we tour Jaipur, one of the best-planned cities in India, built of rose-pink sandstone by the great astronomer-king Jai Singh II in 1727. We visit the City Palace, 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) is the landmark of Jaipur, 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.

Later this afternoon we return to Delhi.

Overnight in Delhi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Delhi, India - Colombo, Sri Lanka - Negombo*

Today we fly to Colombo and transfer to our hotel in Negombo, a seaside town just north of Colombo, the commercial capital of Sri Lanka with a population of 1.1 million inhabitants.

Overnight in Negombo. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Colombo Area - Muthurajawela Nature Reserve - Anuradhapura*

This morning we make the 180 km (110 mile) drive to Anuradhapura, the first capital of Sri Lanka.

En route we take a boat ride through the Muthurajawela Nature Reserve. This protected area of wetland is thriving with bird life, with 126 resident species and 40 species which migrate here. The boat ride provides a view of Sri Lankan wetlands as never seen before. Imagine listening to the chorus of feathered creatures, watching the water lilies dancing on the tropical sun, monkeys swinging on treetops and crocodiles moving stealthily in water.

We continue to Anuradhapura, arriving in the afternoon.

Overnight near Anuradhapura. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Anuradhapura - Dambulla*

This morning we visit a selection of the most remarkable sights of Anuradhapura. As per written records Anuradhapura was made royal capital by the king Panduk Anhaya in 380 BC. It remained residence and royal capital for 119 successive Singhalese kings till the year AD 1000 when it was abandoned and the capital moved to Polonnaruwa. You will see some of the most famous as well as the tallest dagoba of Sri Lanka, remains from palaces, temples, monasteries, ceremonial baths and the temple of the holy Bo-tree. This tree was grown from a sapling of the very tree under which more than 2500 years ago the Buddha found enlightenment.

We continue to Dambulla and have a tour of its major attractions, which are spread over 5 caves containing statues and paintings. Since it's founding in the first century BC by King Valagamba, many improvements and additions have been carried out to the collection. Hindu statues are believed to be of the 12 century AD and the latest paintings are of the late 18-century. Dambulla is a unique and important historical site because of the amalgamation of material from many eras.

Overnight in Dambulla. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Dambulla - Polonnaruwa - Dambulla*

In the morning we drive to Polonnaruwa for a visit of the well-preserved remains of capital of the Singhalese kings from the 11th to the 13th century. We see the excavations: Temples, dagobas, the royal palace, the royal library. The most famous Singhalese king, Parakrama Bahu the Great (1153-1186), built in the environs of Polonnaruwa, an impressive irrigation system with many artificial tanks interconnected with irrigation channels.

Overnight in Dambulla. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Dambulla - Sigiriya - Kandy*

Taking advantage of cooler morning temperatures, we will have a tour of Sigiriya. The complex lies on the steep slopes and at the summit of a granite peak standing some 370 m (1,220 feet) high. This is the earliest surviving royal palace in Sri Lanka, with several chambers and meticulously planned water gardens, the earliest such gardens found in Asia. The Mirror Wall, which had been exposed to elements for over fifteen centuries, still carry some of the original sheen that has given it the name. This archaeological site, unparalleled in South Asia, has been declared a World Heritage Site.

We continue for a tour of a local spice garden. A local guide will most likely show us custard apples, jackfruit, cocoa, cardamom, pineapples, lemon grass, wild asparagus, nutmeg, curry leaves, cinnamon, ginger, vanilla plant, coco, aloe vera, etc. We continue our travel through the interior of the island, past paddy fields, palm groves and coconut plantations.

Our journey continues via a road that begins to ascend gradually. After 92 km / 58 miles (90 minutes), we arrive at the old royal city of Kandy, situated at 500 m (1,640 feet) above sea level and beautifully nestled between green hills. In its very centre lies a small artificial lake and palace of the last Singhalese king which has become a temple and the holiest shrine in Sri Lanka and where the tooth relic of the Lord Buddha is highly venerated.

On arrival we will drive around the lake and visit the National Museum. This evening we shall pay a visit to the Temple of the Holy Tooth followed by an opportunity to attend a dance performance (subject to availability) where we will see the famous Kandyan dance as well as up-country and devil dances.

Overnight in Kandy. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Kandy: Botanical Garden - Nuwara Eliya*

After breakfast we will visit the world-famous Botanical Garden at Peradeniya. The park dates back to 1371 under the reign of King Vikrama Bahu III when he held court here. The English put the cornerstone of the present garden in 1821. During the Second World War the garden served as the headquarters of Earl Mountbatten, the supreme commander of the allied forces in Southeast Asia who later became the last Viceroy of India. In the garden we find an immense variety of orchids, spice trees, palms, bushes, as well as tropical plants and flowers of all types.

We then travel 77 km (48 miles) to Nuwara Eliya. The road ascends steadily and shortly before reaching Nuwara Eliya, we will have climbed 1500 m (4,920 feet). You are now in the tea-country; wherever you look, you will see tea plantations, the rich full green of thousands and thousands of tea bushes. Occasionally you can see a few rice fields and near villages, vegetable plantations or gardens. En route we visit a tea factory and plantation.

We tour the resort town of Nuwara Eliya, situated at 2070 m (6,790 feet) above sea level, lies on a little lake and is surrounded by mountains covered over and over by tea bushes. The town itself was the favourite hill station of the British who set it up to look like a misplaced British village. The charming, old, pink-brick post office, the English country house-like Hill Club with its hunting pictures, mounted hunting trophies and fish, the 18-hole golf course (said to be one of the finest in Asia), and even the well-stocked trout streams speak of the area's English past.

Overnight in Nuwara Eliya. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 *Nuwara Eliya - Colombo*

We have an early start for our drive back to Colombo to allow us time to have a panoramic tour of the city.

Colombo was probably known to Roman, Arab, and Chinese traders more than 2,000 years ago. Muslims settled there in the 8th century and controlled much of the trade between Sinhalese kingdoms and the outside world. The Portuguese arrived in the 16th century and built a fort to protect their spice trade. The Dutch captured the city in the 17th century. The British made the city the capital of their crown colony of Ceylon in 1802. The University of Sri Lanka, several colleges, an observatory, a national museum, and numerous churches, mosques, and Buddhist and Hindu temples are all located in and around Colombo; on the outskirts are two major Buddhist universities.

Overnight in Colombo. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 20 *Departure*

Departure from Colombo.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.