Tour Code
IA16

ADVENTURESABROAD

INDIA & SRI LANKA

Featuring North & South India

40 days

Created on: 28 Mar, 2024

Day 1 Arrival in Delhi

Arrive in Delhi and transfer to our hotel.

Overnight in Delhi.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 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.

We will reboard our bus, 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, pre-dating 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 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.

Overnight in Mandawa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Bikaner - Manvar Resort

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 resort 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 by jeep 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 6 Manvar - Jodhpur - Luni

After breakfast drive to Luni.

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 Luni.

Overnight in Luni.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Bishnoi Village Jeep Excursion

After breakfast, we will visit the Bishnoi village by jeep. 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.

Later we travel to Ranakpur (or occasionally Rohetgarh) where we spend the night.

Overnight in Ranakpur.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 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.

In the evening we 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 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).

During our time in Pushkar we will 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.

Our fall departures coincide with the Pushkar Camel Fair,* on the full moon of the Hindu month of Karttika, when over 200,000 buyers, sellers and gawkers invade this peaceful, holy village. It is a calibre of mayhem that can only happen in India, an assault of colour, laughter and energy topped with a healthy dose of spirituality. From morning 'til night, it's a non-stop photo op. If you are in the market for a camel, you will have no problem finding one at bargain prices! At Pushkar, our accommodation comes in the form of large, comfortable tents with cots and private toilet facilities.

An aarti (Hindu prayer ceremony) is arranged specially for us at the banks of the lake today. After the ceremony we enjoy a cup of tea on the banks of the lake before a traditional thali dinner.

* Please note that this event historically spans +/- one week, during which the nature of activities and events change over time. We time our visit to coincide with the days at the beginning of the arrival of the camels and camel sellers, as this is the most traditional spectacle associated with this event. Over the years, the fair has expanded to include a religious and "cultural" component, which usually occurs toward the end of the week. As per previous traveller feedback, we prefer the start of the week as feedback indicates that the cultural programs have become rather touristy and somewhat over-hyped.

Overnight in Pushkar.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Jaipur & Amer Fort

After an early breakfast, we visit Amer Fort (also sometimes written "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. Though the option still exists, we choose to access the site by vehicle, rather than by riding elephants to the top.

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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Agra - Train to Gwalior & Gwalior Fort

After an early breakfast at the hotel, transfer to the Railway Station to board the Shatabdi Express train to Gwalior (+/- 01:15). We are met on arrival and transfer to the hotel.

This afternoon we visit the Gwalior Fort. The fort's walls and buildings were constructed by different generations of rulers. The most notable are the Suraj Kund, a tank built in the 8th century AD, two 11th century temples known as Sas Bahu ka Mandir, dedicated to Vishnu; the 16th century Gujri Mahal Palace and the Hindola Gate, which houses a small archeological museum. Later visit Jai Vilas Palace and Museum, located in the city. The enormous Jai Vilas Palace, built in the 19th century, has a pair of the world's heaviest chandeliers in the Durbar Hall and a crystal staircase. The dining table is fitted with an electric train made of silver, which carried brandy and cigars around the table after dinner.

Overnight in Gwalior.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Gwalior - Train to Jhansi - Orchha - Khajuraho

Today we travel by train to Jhansi from where we continue by road to Orchha for a tour of this impressive site.

Founded in the 16th century by the Bundela king, Rudhra Pratap, on the banks of the Betwa River, Orchha is a medieval city frozen in time and space, existing even today as it must have done in the 16th and 17th centuries, when it was built. The countryside undulates gently between riverine plains and rolling forest-clad hills and the landscape is dotted with palaces and temples, a fortress and cenotaphs. The architecture is a synthesis of traditional Hindu, hybrid Indo-Saracenic and ornate Mughal. One of the finest sights is the view of the cenotaphs from across the Betwa River. We visit the Jehangir Mahal, the most grandiose structure in Orchha; the Raja Mahal Rai Praveen Mahal.

We continue by road to Khajuraho.

Overnight in Khajuraho.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Khajuraho Touring - Fly to Varanasi

After breakfast we tour Khajuraho's western group of temples.

Built between 950 and 1050 AD, they are among the most creative examples of Indian architecture. Only 22 of the original 85 temples survive today. The most popular theme is woman: reflective, playful, and amorous. The carvings also depict gods in cosmic evolution, griffins, nymphs, beasts, demons in revolt and the several emotions of man -- fear, doubt, jealousy, ardent love and consummate passion.

The western group, contained within a fenced enclosure, is well-maintained as a park. The large Lakshmana Temple is dedicated to Vishnu and is one of the earliest of the western enclosure temples, dating from 930-950 AD. It is also one of the best preserved, with a full five-part floor plan and four subsidiary shrines. The Vahara Temple, dedicated to Vishnu's boar incarnation (Vahara avatar) faces the Matangesvara Temple and has a huge solid and intricately carved figure of the boar incarnation, dating from around 900 AD. The Kandariya Mahadev Temple is not only the largest but also artistically and architecturally the most perfect. Build between 1025 and 1050 AD; it represents Chandela at its finest. The Mahadeva Temple is small and mainly ruined. However, it houses one of Khajuraho's best sculptures -- a fine sardula figure caressing a lion. The Devi Jagadamba Temple was probably originally dedicated to Vishnu, but later changed to Parvati and then Kali. The Chitragupta Temple is unique in being dedicated to the Sun God, Surya. The Matangesvara Temple, standing next to the Lakshmana Temple, is not within the fenced enclose, because it is still in everyday use, unlike all the old temples.

Later this afternoon we fly to Varanasi.

Overnight in Varanasi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Varanasi Touring

Before sunrise we take a boat ride on the sacred Ganges River, where devout Hindus can be seen performing their daily ablutions. The bathing ghats, over 5 km in length, lead down from a steep bank to the river, are the soul of the city. Return to the hotel for breakfast.

Later we walk through an inextricable maze of small streets and alleyways, hiding in disorderly array no less than 2,000 temples and shrines. Domes, pinnacles, towers and derelict 18th-century palaces dominate the left bank of the Ganges River. The streets are noisy, colour is rife. Varanasi is the religious capital of the Hindu faith since the dawn of history. Known as Kashi in the 7th century BC it constitutes a microcosm of Indian life. No one knows how old it really is -- when Buddha came here in 550 BC, it was already a flourishing ancient settlement. Visit some of the more important temples such as the Bharat Mata Mandir and the Durga Temple. Go past the beautiful Tulsi Manas temple. Take a walk down Vishwanathji Ki Gali -- the ancient alley which is home to some beautiful temples. Here you will find shops that sell every conceivable item required in a temple.

Later in the evening, watch the spectacular aarti (religious ceremony) when thousands of butter lamps are lit and set afloat on the sacred Ganges. Return to the hotel for the night.

Overnight in Varanasi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Varanasi & Sarnath - Fly to Goa

This morning we visit Sarnath. Located 9 km from Varanasi, it the centre of the Buddhist world, just as Varanasi is that for the Hindu. It was

here that Buddha preached his first sermon, partially recorded on one of its stones. Dhamek Stupa dating back to 500 AD, is the largest with geometrical ornaments on its wall. Dharmarajika Stupa was set up by emperor Ashoka to contain the bodily relics of the Buddha.

Later today we fly to the former Portuguese enclave of Goa.

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.

Our hotel is not located on the beach in Goa as we prefer to stay inland in order to concentrate on the cultural heritage of the area. We will, however, have free time during which you can experience the beach/es for which the region is famous.

Overnight in Goa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 20 Goa Area Touring

Goa is a tiny part of India on the west coast. This small state is one of India's most popular attractions -- a land of more than 26 wonderful beaches, natural springs known for their medicinal powers, green hills, a huge collection of historic temples and churches, lush fields of vegetables and grains, plus kind hearted and very hospitable people with a rich cultural milieu.

This morning we include a sightseeing tour of Panjim. a former fishing village made the capital of Goa by a decree from Lisbon. It is spread around Altinho, a residential area with Portuguese style bungalows. The dominant structure is the Patriarch's Palace with the statue of Christ the King on its lawns. Altinho offers a panoramic view of the city from its summit. The Idalcao (Adil Shah's palace), built in 1490, is the oldest monument in Panjim. The Goan capital has a different feel from any other Indian city. Stacked around the side of lush terraced hillsides at the mouth of the Mandovi River, its skyline of sloping red-tiled roofs, whitewashed churches and concrete apartment blocks, the essence of the city, purely based on Portuguese architectural style, is distinctively seen all around.

Visit the historic neighbourhood of Fontainhas, known as the Latin Quarter. Discover the area's Portuguese influences as you walk down narrow streets and past old, colourful villas. Pause at the small St Sebastian Chapel to view several statues of historical figures including the Roman Catholic monk Abade Faria. Known as the Church Square which is located in the heart of the city is Panjim's most photogenic landmark -- the Church of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception.

Our tour also takes us to Old Goa, the heartland of Asian Christianity, once a bustling metropolis but is now in ruins. Old Goa, called “Rome of the East,” bounds in churches and chapels, some dating back to the 16th century. The profusion and architectural excellence of churches include superb examples of late renaissance, early baroque, Manueline and Gothic. Visit some of the most popular and the best-known churches and cathedrals in Old Goa.

At some point in our day, we’ll enjoy lunch at Sahakari Spice Farm, an award -inning spice plantation set amidst lush green surroundings. A guide takes us around the farm, explaining the usefulness of the spices, tropical fruits, herbs and roots grown here, such as cashew, Areca nut (betel nut), and tropical fruit like star fruit, jackfruit, custard apple, banana, papaya and pineapple. After the tour, we are served an exquisite Goan lunch in traditional style.

Balance of the day at leisure to enjoy this laid-back town.

Overnight in Goa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 21 Goa: Heritage Tour

This morning we visit several sleepy villages, stepping back in time to get a glimpse of the historic remnants of the Portuguese era.

Our first stop is the little village of Loutolim. Built in 1590, it pre-dates the Taj Mahal by decades. It was designed by Jesuit priests from nearby Rachol Seminary to accommodate a newly-converted Goan family -- the Podiars, who took the name Figueiredo. The house's

sumptuous interior stands in studied contrast to the natural beauty of the paddy fields and coconut trees that surround it. In the 18th century, with the family's rise in power, the house was suitably augmented to achieve its current proportions.

We continue to the village of Chador to visit another heritage mansion, the Menzes Braganza Mansion, the biggest Portuguese mansion of its kind in Goa. Built in the 17th century and stretching along one whole side of Chandor's village square, it is the best example of what Goa's once-grand and glorious mansions have today become.

Finally, the Palácio do Deão, a 250 year old mansion built by a Portuguese nobleman, features some outstanding lush gardens, which have been known as the most beautiful pleasure gardens in Goa.

We enjoy a traditional lunch at Palácio do Deão, where you can savour Goan delicacies. Goan cuisine originated from its ancient Hindu roots, but was influenced by the 451 years of Portuguese colonialisation and the century of Muslim rule. As Goa is located in a tropical zone, the spices and flavours are intense.

The remainder of the day is yours to explore further, do some shopping, and/or enjoy one of the area's many beaches. Owing to the open-ended nature of our day and included lunch, we leave dinner to your own account today.

Overnight in Goa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 22 Goa - Badami

Today we travel by road to Badami, a full day's journey.

On arrival we visit Badami.* Sculpted out of solid rock, the temples are adorned with dwarfs, an 18-armed Shiva, a Nandi bull, Lord Vishnu and the goddess Durga. The famed Durga Temple represents the blending of southern and northern styles of architecture.

* Depending on our timing today, we may accomplish Badami sightseeing tomorrow morning.

Overnight in Badami.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 23 Badami - Aihole - Patadakkal - Hospet

We travel by road to Hospet.

We make a stop at Aihole. The seventy temples at Aihole exemplify Hindu medieval art. The Durga temple with its pyramidal roof has some remarkable sculpture, and the Jain Meguti temple is composed of 630 small stone blocks.

We also visit Patadakkal, the place where the Chalukuan kings had their coronation ceremonies. The ceiling of the Papanath temple, built around 680 AD, has a carved smiling Shiva, appearing to bless with his outstretched palm from whatever direction he is viewed. The Virupaksha Temple is a curious figure -- an elephant on one side and a buffalo on the other.

Continue to Hospet.

Overnight in Hospet.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 24 Hospet - Hampi - Hospet

After breakfast we depart for a day trip to Hampi, the seat of the famed Vijayanagara Empire, which was the capital of the largest empire in

post-Mughal India, covering several states. Although in ruins today, this capital city once boasted riches known far beyond the shores of India. The ruins of Hampi of the 14th Century lies scattered in about 26 sq. km area, amidst giant boulders and vegetation. Protected by the tempestuous river Tungabhadra in the north and rocky granite ridges on the other three sides, the ruins silently narrate the story of grandeur splendour and fabulous wealth. The splendid remains of palaces and gateways of the broken city tell a tale of man's infinite talent and power of creativity together with his capacity for senseless destruction.

Return to Hospet.

Overnight in Hospet.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 25 Hospet - Hassan

After an early breakfast, depart on the long (+/- 7 hours) but interesting drive through rural Karnataka to Hassan. Upon arrival check-in at the hotel.

Overnight in Hassan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 26 Hassan: Belur & Halebid

Today we visit 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 return to Hassan.

Overnight in Hassan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 27 Hassan - Mysore

This morning we travel to Mysore, arriving around midday.

In the afternoon we explore Mysore, famous for its silk and sandalwood, as well as its numerous palaces, well laid out boulevards and beautiful parks. The Maharaja's Palace is the most impressive of Mysore's ochre-coloured buildings -- a modern edifice built in 1897, where the oriental decorative imagination runs wild. One of the largest palaces in India, it is a gigantic synthesis of Hindu and Muslim styles. The royal family's private chambers, including the impressive Durbar Hall, are open to the public. The Marriage Hall has life-like paintings of the Dassera procession and in the museum is the ruler's golden elephant throne, used during festivities. Chamundi Hill lies 10 km from Mysore and is named after Chanduswari, the consort of Lord Shiva and the patron goddess of the royal family of Mysore. On the way up is a colossal figure of Nandi, carved out of a single rock in 1659. The view from the top of the hill is superb.

Overnight in Mysore.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 28 Mysore - 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.

On arrival we tour Bangalore, visiting the Lal Bagh Botanical Gardens, 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.

Overnight in Bangalore.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 29 Bangalore - Fly to 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 30 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 31 Allaphuza - Fly to Chennai

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

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.

Overnight in Chennai.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 32 Chennai & Mahabalipuram

Today we travel to 60 km (37 mi) to Mahabalipuram (also known as Mamallapuram), 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.

After a comprehensive tour of the site and relaxing lunch break next to the Bay of Bengal we return to Chennai.

Overnight in Chennai.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 33 Chennai, India - Colombo, Sri Lanka - Negombo

Today's 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.

After dinner we board our evening flight to Colombo, Sri Lanka and transfer to Negombo, situated nearby the International Airport and approximately 35km (22 mi) north of Colombo. Negombo town is a historically interesting place that has been strongly influenced by the Catholic Church. The Dutch captured the town from the Portuguese in 1640, lost it again in the same year, and then captured it again in 1644. The British then took it from them in 1796 without a struggle. Negombo was one of the most important sources of cinnamon during the Dutch era.

Overnight in Negombo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 34 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 35 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 36 Dambulla - Sigiriya - Polonnaruwa - Dambulla

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 then 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 37 Dambulla - Kandy

This morning we have 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 38 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 39 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 40 Departure

Departure from Colombo.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast