



India

ONE OF THE MOST VIBRANT AND VARIED COUNTRIES, in more way than one, India steals the heart of most visitors and offers an unforgettable journey wherever you travel to. With the Himalayan peaks, ancient cities and deserts of the north, and the rich jungles, rivers, tea hills and beaches of the south, there are seemingly endless places to explore, hike, relax, cruise or just soak up the local atmosphere. From lodges perched in national parks, traditional havelis and luxury camps to houseboats and characterful homestays, wherever you stay you'll be met with a warm smile. A truly beautiful country with rich, historic culture, India will provoke a desire to return.

Rajasthan & the north

Bustling markets, sprawling cities, quaint villages and rich history make Rajasthan and its neighbouring states popular destinations. The people are warm, welcoming and accommodation is varied and interesting. For a more rural experience, head to Gujarat; less-visited with a fascinating crafts and textile culture and unique wildlife opportunities.

Calcutta & the east

A gateway to the northeast, Calcutta is a lively and historic city which shouldn't be missed. Enjoy the colonial grandeur before taking a cruise along West Bengal's Hugli River or Assam's powerful Brahmaputra. Full of wildlife, tea plantations, great walks and views of the Himalaya, the region is remote but rewarding.

Indian Himalaya

Stretching from west to east across the top of India, the mighty Himalaya not only provides fascinating places to explore, but also endless walking opportunities, from a few gentle hours to multi-day treks. The mighty mountains and their foothills are home to many monasteries, rural villages, temples and colonial hill stations.

Mumbai, Goa & central India

A place of contrasts, central India is home to the beautiful beaches of Goa, one of India's smallest states, as well as Mumbai, the largest city with a population of over 21 million. A sprawling metropolis of incredible wealth, as well as the largest slum in Asia, Mumbai is the international gateway into the south as well as the little-visited Deccan Plateau. Full of cultural treasures and a history spanning centuries, it's worth spending some time here.

Tamil Nadu & Karnataka

Situated between the eastern Coromandel Coast and the striking Western Ghats, Tamil Nadu is a distinct region with its own language, history and religion. Karnataka stretches up and along the Arabian coast, bordering Goa. Both states are home to varied landscapes, jungles, tea plantations and a host of wildlife.



Kerala

One of India's most popular destinations, Kerala is known for its beautiful backwaters, traditional rice barges, palm-fringed beaches and welcoming homestay accommodation options. As well as the colonial history found in the tea hills and Cochin's fort, the people of Kerala make a stay here one to remember.

Wildlife in India

Since 1936 India has been protecting its incredible wildlife and now has over 90 national parks home to elephants, Asiatic lions, river dolphins and one-horned rhino to name a few. The vast array of birdlife, both indigenous and migratory attracts a lot of visitors, as does the opportunity of seeing a beautiful Bengal tiger.



Rajasthan & the north

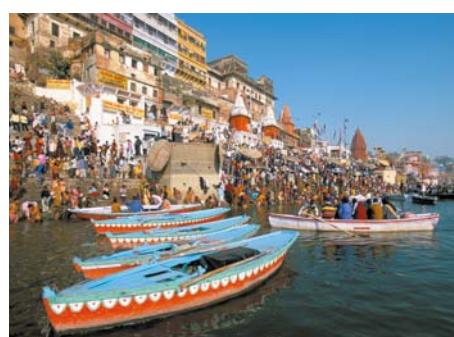
THE JEWEL IN INDIA'S CROWN, Rajasthan is home to some of the country's most magnificent architectural wonders with lavish palaces, forts and mansions built by a series of flamboyant royal families. The state's historic cities are fascinating places to explore with the romance of lakeside Udaipur contrasting with the splendour of Jaipur. In neighbouring Uttar Pradesh you'll find the iconic Taj Mahal and the magical holy city of Varanasi. In fact, right across India's north, the legacy of Mughal invaders and Rajput warriors lives on in vast fortifications and unrivalled achievements in architecture, art and empire building. This rich and complex history is matched by an equally impressive and incredibly diverse landscape that stretches from the Arabian Sea through the Thar Desert to the vast central plains south of the Ganges River. The north's pastoral rural areas are a marked contrast to the frenetic pace of the cities and a handful of national parks protect incredibly varied habitats home to a wide range of wildlife including Bengal tigers and the world's last Asiatic lions.

Audley in Rajasthan & the north

The spectacular monuments, colourful cities and classic sights of Rajasthan and the north make it a popular first stop for visitors to India. The region's highlights can be busy, especially around the Golden Triangle of Delhi, Agra and Jaipur, but we've worked hard to provide more unusual experiences to give you a unique insight into life in this diverse region. Unusual destinations we're keen to recommend include quieter wildlife parks such as Chambal, or less-discovered states like Gujarat. Whatever you decide to do, we will build a unique experience around your interests and help you get the best out of your time by providing knowledgeable, local guides as well as a private driver. The type and depth of guiding is determined by you and should you prefer, you can always explore under your own steam.

Accommodation

Rajasthan is one of India's most established destinations and the range of accommodation here is unmatched elsewhere in the subcontinent. Whether you are looking for unbridled luxury or a simple homestay we can match you to a suitable property hand-picked by our specialists. The northern region as a whole has some of the most characterful hotels in India with accommodation in restored forts and palaces, converted havelis (historic family mansions), and on tranquil farms. You'll find a range of interesting places to stay, which just adds to the appeal.



River Ganges, Varanasi



1 Taj Mahal

One of the world's most beautiful buildings, best visited at sunrise or sunset for evocative photographs and fewer visitors.
See page 11

2 Old Delhi

Explore the historic side of India's capital city from its ancient forts, mosques and tombs to the bustling bazaars of Chandi Chowk.
See page 10

3 Varanasi

Colourful, chaotic and endlessly engaging, Varanasi is one of India's most sacred and varied cities.
See page 22

4 Ranthambore National Park

Search for Bengal tigers in this beautiful park which is easily accessible from Rajasthan's Golden Triangle.
See page 13

5 Jaipur

Home to endless markets, an impressive city palace and one of the world's largest sundials.
See page 12

6 Jodhpur

The atmospheric 'Blue City' is steeped in history from its ancient bazaar to its grand clock tower and impressive Mehrangarh Fort.
See page 13

7 Rural Rajasthan

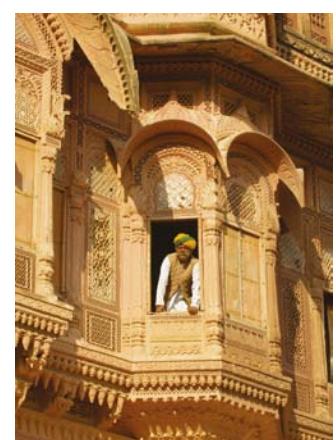
Relax in and around the unchanged villages of the north for an authentic insight into rural India.
See pages 14-15

8 Udaipur

Wrapped around Lake Pichola, Udaipur is the perfect city to end a trip, it's both romantic and easy to explore at a relaxing pace.
See page 17

9 Gujarat

Culture rich, the undiscovered state of Gujarat has lots of similarities with Rajasthan but without the crowds.
See pages 20-21



Mehrangarh Fort, Jodhpur



Humayun's Tomb, Delhi

Delhi

One of the world's megacities, Delhi can appear overwhelming at first but scratch just beneath the surface and you'll find medieval fortifications, Mughal mosques and colonial gems that reward visitors willing to explore. An ancient city established in 1000 BC, today Delhi is a captivating fusion of old and new. You can see the main sights in a day or two by taking in the ruined tombs and monuments of the 12th-century Qutub Minar complex, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the expansive Red Fort and the Jama Masjid Mosque. You'll also get a feel for New Delhi in the wide tree-lined avenues and distinct architecture, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. To discover the city's hidden charms however, you'll need more time to leave the bustling city streets behind; uncover a tranquil courtyard in Old Delhi, walk through Lodi Gardens at sunset, or browse the spice shops and food stalls of Chandi Chowk.



Imperial Hotel, Delhi



The Claridges, Delhi

Imperial Hotel, Delhi

Built in 1931, the Imperial Hotel remains one of Delhi's most luxurious places to stay. This lavish building was seven years in the making and retains many colonial touches with high ceilings, antique furniture and shining marble floors. Its 235 beautiful guestrooms are classically elegant with Burmese teak furniture and pale colour schemes. The hotel is just a stone's throw from Connaught Place and many of the city's sights. After a day exploring you can unwind in the Imperial Spa, enjoy the hotel's impressive art collection or book a table at the southeast Asian Spice Route restaurant.

The Claridges, Delhi

Ideally located for exploring Delhi, the Art Deco infused Claridges is now over 60 years old and despite multiple renovations, retains its 1950s charm. The 137 rooms and suites have plenty of modern facilities but some of the original features remain. In addition to afternoon tea in the gardens or an evening in the Aura vodka bar, there are four dining options to choose from including Dhaba, famous for its rustic charm and traditional north Indian cuisine.

The Manor, Delhi

With multiple awards and accolades to its name, the Indian Accent fusion restaurant is possibly more famous than the Manor hotel itself. As well as being home to one of India's best places to eat, this boutique hideaway in New Delhi has 14 modern rooms and suites, pretty gardens and courtyards, as well as Zehen, a contemporary spa.



The Manor, Delhi



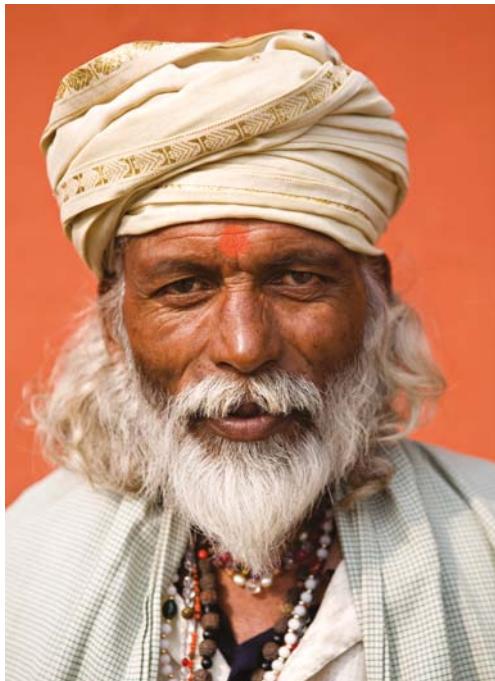
Bateshwar temples, near Chambal



Chilli peppers and spices, Agra



Abandoned mosque, Fatehpur Sikri



Local man, Agra



Women drying saris in view of the Taj Mahal, Agra



The Oberoi Amarvilas, Agra

Agra

Millions of visitors flock to Agra each year to see one of the world's most iconic buildings, the Taj Mahal. A stunning monument to enduring love, this extraordinary edifice, with its shimmering marble domes and towers reflected in landscaped pools, is every bit as impressive as its reputation suggests. Your first glimpse of its splendour is exhilarating and some of the best views are from Metah Bagh, or 'moonlight garden' across the Yamuna River. A trip here can be combined with a visit to Kachpura village on the outskirts of Agra for a glimpse of life in rural India. Proceeds from this excursion go directly to local community projects and help spread the wealth a little further beyond the Taj's walls. Apart from the Taj, Agra has a number of other impressive sights including the Red Fort, one of India's finest Mughal forts, and the intimate but magnificent tomb of Itmad-ud-Daulah, fondly known as the 'Baby Taj'.

The Oberoi Amarvilas, Agra

Offering Taj Mahal views from every room, this ideally located property is one of the most romantic places to stay in Rajasthan. Built in traditional Mughal style, its lavish public spaces feature crystal chandeliers, tiered archways and antique artworks. There are 102 rooms and suites decorated in a luxurious fashion but it is the views which remain longest in the memory. The opulence continues in the two restaurants, spa and manicured gardens.

The Gateway Hotel, Agra

The Taj Gateway in the heart of Agra has 100 rooms and suites, many of which offer views of the Taj across the city. Comfortable, modern styling combines with a touch of local character in the choice of colourful soft furnishings in the rooms. The hotel also has an inviting swimming pool surrounded by spacious lawns and gardens, excellent international and Indian dining options as well as a relaxed rooftop bar with views of the Taj Mahal across the city.



The Gateway Hotel, Agra

Fatehpur Sikri

After being the capital of the Mughal Empire for only 14 years or so, Fatehpur Sikri was abandoned shortly after its completion due to the scarcity of water; an important factor overlooked by Emperor Akbar. A popular site to visit en route between Agra and Jaipur, much of it still stands as an impressive testament to the Mughal Empire's wealth in the 16th century.

Chambal Sanctuary

Just over one hour from Agra, the Chambal Sanctuary protects a 400 kilometre stretch of the River Chambal and the ravines on either side. Home to endangered gharial and Gangetic dolphins as well as turtles, otters and nearly 300 bird species, the sanctuary is open from October to mid-April and best explored from the tranquil Chambal Safari Lodge. A lovingly restored property, it is nestled between the Chambal and Yamuna rivers and features 12 individually-styled rooms with plenty of character. Evening meals are shared around the campfire after days spent exploring the surrounding area. Safaris can be arranged by boat or 4x4, whilst the nearby Bateshwar temples and Fort Ater offer more cultural experiences.



Amber Fort, Jaipur



Samode Haveli, Jaipur

Jaipur

Awash with spectacular buildings and historic sites, Jaipur, the 'Pink City', is one of India's most rewarding destinations. The opulence and intricacy of Jaipur's historic buildings is staggering, from the Palace of the Winds, built so that royal women could observe festivities without being seen by the public, to the City Palace which contains an interesting museum of traditional costumes and weaponry, as well as vintage vehicles. The nearby royal observatory, Jantar Mantar, houses a fascinating collection of astrological instruments including one of the world's largest sundials. Just outside the city, the 17th-century Amber Fort is perched on a hillside and accessed through an elaborate gateway which leads to the Maharaja's apartments with their intricate mosaics and ornate murals. Jaipur has some wonderful traditional markets and bazaars best seen on a late afternoon walking tour.

Samode Haveli, Jaipur

Originally built for the Samode royal family, this beautifully preserved haveli still stands in the heart of the Pink City. Due to the age of the property, the 39 guest rooms and suites vary slightly in size and style, but all retain lots of character and original features such as stained glass windows, mirror work, frescoes and quirky arches. The swimming pool, courtyard restaurant and spa are all modern touches which add to the luxury.

Dera Mandawa, Jaipur

Dera Mandawa is a quaint haveli with eight rooms which has been in the Singh family for generations. Many extensions and personal touches have been added over the years; the building reflects family as well as local history in its style and decor. It's a charming place to stay and as well as interaction with the family, guests can try their hand at kite flying, henna art, sari or safa (Rajasthani turban) tying or cooking local cuisine.



Dera Mandawa, Jaipur



Basket weaving, Jaipur

Bazaars of Jaipur

Jaipur is widely considered by many as the craft capital of India. To get a real insight into the bazaars and craftsmen who have worked here for centuries, take a walk with one of our local guides in the late afternoon when temperatures are cooler and the bustling atmosphere is at its best. See local artisans, including silversmiths and turban makers busy at work, using traditional techniques from the 18th century, and sample some of Jaipur's culinary delights from the mouth-watering choice of street food.



Local man, Jodhpur



Clock tower and market stalls, Jodhpur

Ranthambhore National Park

One of India's most visited national parks, Ranthambhore is conveniently located between Agra and Jaipur and has a direct rail link to Delhi. The park is famous for its tiger sightings but its accessibility means that it is heavily visited and game drives must follow set routes allotted to them on entry which can detract from the experience. Having said that, the tiger population seems habituated to the many visitors and sightings are still frequent. Apart from the tigers, Ranthambhore is home to a host of other wildlife including deer, antelope, monkeys, hyenas and over 300 bird species. The park is a former royal hunting ground of the Maharajas of Jaipur and its dry deciduous forest and craggy ravines are dotted with ornate pavilions. At its heart is a wonderfully imposing 10th-century fort which sits high on a rocky outcrop offering a dramatic backdrop to the forest and wildlife below.



Bengal tiger, Ranthambhore National Park



Mehrangarh Fort and Jaswant Thada, Jodhpur



The blue buildings of Jodhpur



Raas, Jodhpur

Jodhpur

Dominated by the vast Mehrangarh Fort, Jodhpur is a fortified city contained by 16th-century walls. Although a bustling place, it is a little more intimate and tranquil than Jaipur and offers an authentic glimpse of Rajasthani life. Jodhpur is known as the 'Blue City' as many of its buildings are painted bright blue, the traditional colour of the highly respected Brahmin caste. The blue is also thought to deter insects and creates a stunning backdrop for photography. Stroll through the labyrinth of winding streets in the old town and climb up through a number of enormous stone gateways to the magnificent fort for glorious views. Inside, the intricately carved galleries display what is perhaps the best collection of artefacts in India. Below the fort is the colourful market with its atmospheric collection of stalls selling leather goods, spices and silks.

Raas, Jodhpur

At the foot of the majestic Mehrangarh Fort, right in the heart of the walled city, Raas is a sleek and sophisticated boutique hotel built around an old haveli. The communal areas, spa and seven suites are in the atmospheric old house while the other 39 rooms are in contemporary buildings which surround an inviting pool. All rooms are modern and minimalist with designer style and luxurious furnishings, and all but four feature views of the fort.

Pal Haveli, Jodhpur

A stone's throw from Jodhpur's clock tower, Pal Haveli is a long-established family home which has been tastefully converted into a hotel. It has 21 simple but comfortable rooms decorated with the bright textiles and colourful wall paintings for which Jodhpur is known. The rooftop restaurant is the perfect place to enjoy some simple, traditional food with the impressive Mehrangarh Fort lit up dramatically in the background.



Pal Haveli, Jodhpur



Camel herders, Pushkar Camel Fair

Rural Rajasthan

Although Rajasthan is known most for its incredible architectural monuments and colourful cities, the noise, hustle and throngs of people can be overwhelming. A stop between cities in more rural areas offers the opportunity to slow down and recharge as well as learning about the traditional way of life that has remained largely unchanged for centuries. Staying in small villages with local hosts, you can visit craftspeople and camel fairs, temples and pilgrimage sites and get a sense of why many Audley travellers find Rajasthan's real charm lies here, in its small communities.

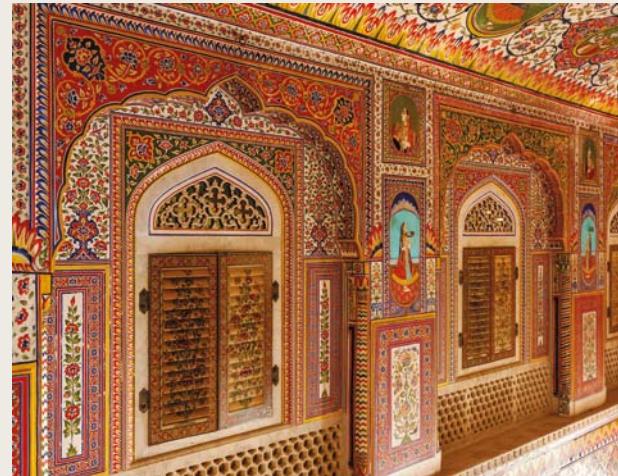
Samode

Set in the rugged landscape of the northern Aravalli Hills, Samode is an atmospheric retreat around an hour from Jaipur. A small, traditional village, it has a strong artisanal heritage and you can visit traditional printing and weaving workshops to see the craftsmen at work. Accommodation is available at the exquisite Samode Palace, an elaborate property that features numerous courtyards and terraces, intricate frescoes and mirror-work, 43 luxurious rooms and a grand infinity pool. Its sister property, Samode Bagh, is only slightly less flamboyant and offers 44 opulent tents within manicured Mughal gardens. Samode is a convenient stopover within the Golden Triangle, a quiet place to relax and good base from which to explore nearby Jaipur.



Chhatra Sagar, Nimaj

Chhatra Sagar, Nimaj
A long-standing Audley favourite, Chhatra Sagar is set in extensive farmland halfway between Jaipur and Jodhpur. This tranquil spot offers a rewarding insight into rural life in India with tours of the camp's organic vegetable farm and leisurely walking in the surrounding hills. The 11 comfortable tents, each with a permanent bathroom, are situated on a dam with beautiful sunrise views over the reservoir and its flocks of seasonal migratory birds. Chhatra Sagar is almost completely self-sustaining, and its home-grown, home-cooked food is not to be missed.



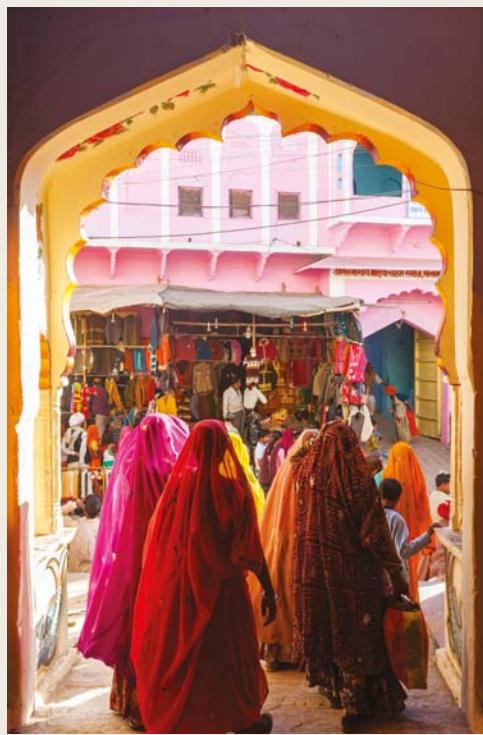
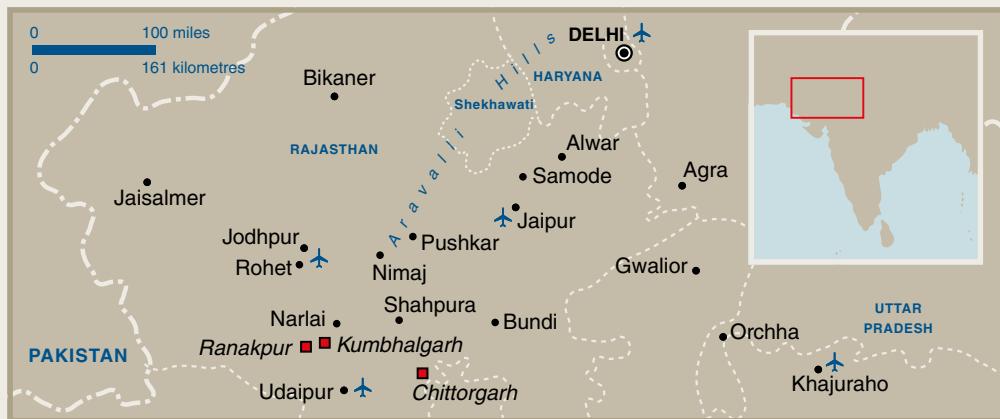
Samode Palace, Samode

Rohet Garh, Rohet

A heritage property less than an hour south of Jodhpur, Rohet Garh is a peaceful retreat in the small village of Rohet, originally a Bishnoi settlement. The hotel, parts of which date back to the 16th century, has 30 beautiful rooms and suites, and pretty gardens with relaxing seating areas as well as a small swimming pool. Peacocks roam the grounds and a short walk across the village takes you to the lake which attracts numerous migrating birds in the winter; a great spot for a cup of chai or a picnic. Outside Rohet, sister properties Mihir Garh and the Wilderness Camp offer desert experiences with luxurious accommodation, campfires and exquisite night skies.



Rohet Garh, Rohet



Amanbagh, near Alwar

Amanbagh, near Alwar

Roughly two hours north of Jaipur, Amanbagh is among the most opulent and exclusive accommodation options in India. A modern building constructed in a traditional style, it features the intricacy of Mughal design with the comfort of modern amenities. Service here is impeccable and the 24 stunning suites are only bettered by the 16 secluded pavilions which feature private pools and spacious gardens. There's a luxurious spa, tranquil yoga and meditation classes, as well as plenty of opportunities to get a taste of the local area on village walks, visits to nearby forts and temples, or trips to the fascinating 16th-century ruins at Bhangarh.



Vegetable market, Pushkar

Bundi

Surrounded by historic city walls and the Aravalli Hills on three sides, the small town of Bundi is dominated by the towering Taragarh Fort. Some parts of the 17th-century palace are closed to the public, but there is still plenty to explore, including the impressive frescoes in the Chitrashala. The fort is an evocative place, little-visited and somewhat neglected but all the more atmospheric because of it. There are a number of havelis hidden in the old town which have been converted into simple but comfortable accommodation, some with pretty rooftop terraces; perfect for an evening meal overlooking the Lake Jait Sagar.

handmade kilims (traditional woven rugs), antique paintings and photographs on the walls. There is a lovely communal lounge, dining area and an inviting pool in the gardens. Surrounded by lakes, the hotel is ideal for guided bird walks, picnics and boat rides and has a firm commitment to sustainable initiatives.

Pushkar

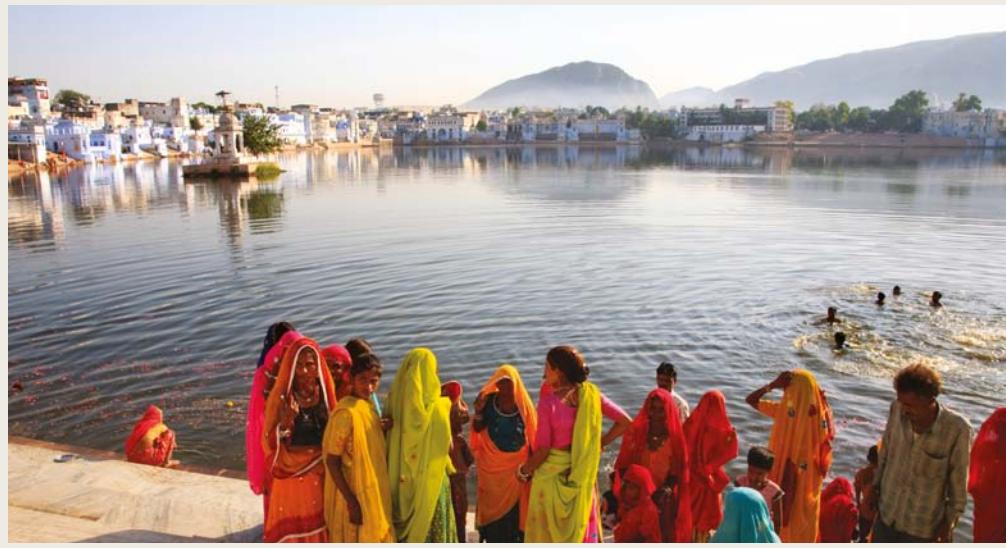
Pushkar is a small town with a big reputation. Considered by many Hindus to be the centre of the world, it is one of the main pilgrimage sites in India. Aside from the abundant temples and shrines, there are also 52 ghats (ceremonial steps) around the central lake where bathers soak in the holy water. Pushkar is also home to the only Brahmin temple in India, one of only a few in the world. Although busy with visitors and pilgrims year-round, Pushkar is spectacularly chaotic for two weeks in November when the Camel Fair arrives. Thousands of farmers, camels, cattle, spectators and buyers descend from all over the country for this astounding spectacle.



Fort Rawla, Narnail

Fort Rawla, Narnail

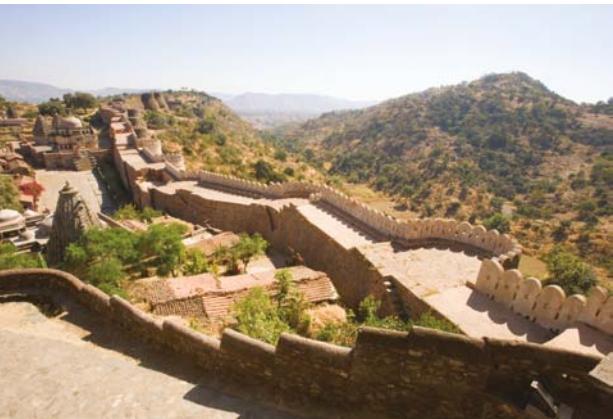
A great place to relax between Jodhpur and Udaipur, the 17th-century Fort Rawla is a boutique heritage property home to 32 characterful guestrooms, flower-filled gardens and a tempting pool. Above the hotel is the affectionately-known 'elephant rock' reached up a series of 750 steps, and offering wonderful views of the village and surrounding countryside. The village is small but locals are welcoming and happy for you to spend time in one of the local temples or visit the nearby step well. A bit further afield are the impressive Kumbhalgarh Fort and the Jain temples at Ranakpur.



Bathers at Pushkar Lake



Jain temple, Ranakpur



Kumbhalgarh Fort

Ranakpur

The remarkable Jain temple at Ranakpur is one of the largest and most ornate in India, meticulously decorated with intricate carvings and sporting 80 domes and 1,444 pillars. The complex is an incredibly peaceful place and a wonderful setting in which to reflect and learn about the intriguing Jain religion. Jains' respect for all living things and their concern for the welfare of the universe makes them extremely calm and conscientious and you'll often see devout Jains wearing masks so they don't accidentally inhale or harm any insects. The temple floors are swept almost continuously to avoid any living thing being stepped on and it is asked that visitors have the same respect and dress in long sleeves and trousers too.

Kumbhalgarh

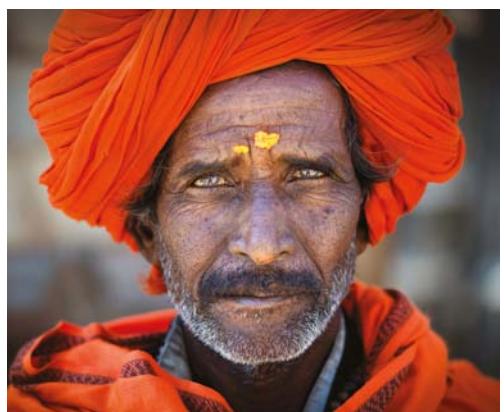
Perched high in the Aravalli Hills, the impressive 15th-century Kumbhalgarh Fort contains over 300 temples and 700 cannon bunkers and is enclosed by what is thought to be the second longest wall in the world. It is 36 kilometres long and 15 feet thick in places and a climb to the top offers panoramic views of the surrounding hills. Kumbhalgarh was originally built under the instruction of Rana Kumbha and was an attractive hiding place for centuries, its surrounding hills acting as a natural defence. It is now a beautifully scenic spot to learn more about Rajasthan's history.

Chittorgarh

Dominating the surrounding landscape, Chittorgarh fort complex is one of India's largest and most spectacular, sitting on top of a massive rocky outcrop surrounded by sheer cliffs. A series of ornate palaces, temples, towers and gates blanket the hilltop which provides wonderful views over the city far below. The fort's history is a long and tragic one, besieged and defeated on three occasions, Chittorgarh's women committed Jauhur, a planned death in the face of defeat by the enemy, each time. Accommodation options in Chittor are limited making it a good place for a day trip or to visit en route to your next destination.

Dungarpur

South of Udaipur, Dungarpur sits away from the most popular tourist routes and destinations, but still has a very strong historic background. Its most obvious attraction is Juna Mahal, a former Rajput palace originally built in the 13th century and greatly expanded and enhanced over the following centuries. Adorned with gems and intricate glasswork, its interiors were once truly magnificent, but left unoccupied it has lost some charm and has unfortunately been vandalised in places. By invitation (or following a request we can arrange on your behalf), visitors can explore inside and see its richly decorated walls painted with processional scenes. A visit to Dungarpur also offers the opportunity to spend some time in local temples or wander through the small surrounding villages, home to the Bheel people.



Local man, Chittorgarh



Kirti Stambh, Chittorgarh Fort



Market, Udaipur



Local woman, Chittorgarh Fort



City Palace, Udaipur



The Leela Palace, Udaipur

Udaipur

This intimate lakeside city has a gloriously romantic atmosphere, its tangle of narrow streets lined with temples, palaces, monuments and havelis. Smaller than both Jodhpur and Jaipur, it has a more tranquil atmosphere and is dominated by the magnificent City Palace with its extravagant detailing. Over 400 years, successive Maharajas tinkered with the original structure adding countless courtyards, balconies and halls, each more elaborate than the last. The palace overlooks serene Lake Pichola where the Lake Palace appears to float on the water against a backdrop of the southern Aravalli Hills. Away from the waterfront you'll find ancient bazaars full of colourful stalls and shops selling a tempting mixture of crafts, textiles and miniature paintings. Udaipur makes a particularly good stop at the end of a trip when you can spare the time to slow down and soak up the atmosphere.

The Leela Palace, Udaipur

Located on the banks of Lake Pichola, The Leela Palace offers an indulgent retreat from Udaipur's busy streets. Each of the 80 elegant rooms and suites command views over the lake, whilst an extensive network of hidden courtyards, water ponds and pools offer plenty of space to unwind. Yoga sessions at either sunrise or sunset offer further relaxation. Dining options include the lakeside restaurant and terrace cocktail bar which have the stunning backdrop of the city, the Lake Palace and the Aravalli Hills.

Jagat Niwas Palace, Udaipur

Traditional Rajasthani style and a convenient location are on offer at Jagat Niwas Palace, a 17th-century haveli hidden down Udaipur's winding streets. The house is set on the banks of Lake Pichola and is an excellent value option for exploring the old town on foot. Beautifully restored Jagat Niwas offers 29 individually-styled rooms, simply but traditionally furnished with plenty of local charm and character. The rooftop restaurant is a superb sunset spot, boasting stunning views of Udaipur.



Fateh Garh, near Udaipur

Fateh Garh, near Udaipur

Nestled up in the hills above Udaipur, Fateh Garh is set in a truly peaceful location. Each of the 48 bright, spacious rooms has stunning views of the lush surrounding hills and farmland providing the perfect place to relax. A modern hotel built on the foundations of an old palace, it has all the conveniences of a contemporary hotel with the romantic feel of a heritage property. The highlight is a well-placed pool area from which you can enjoy the panoramic views of Udaipur's lakes.



View from Jagat Niwas Palace, Udaipur



Local village



School headmaster

Araveli Cottages and Tented Camp

Araveli Cottages and Tented Camp is a very comfortable and highly rewarding place to stay in the picturesque hills of Rajasthan. The project is deeply rooted in the community and welcomes its guests with traditional warmth and offers the opportunity to interact with local villagers in a meaningful way.

The stylish tents and cottages are set in lush grounds around a tranquil lake. Solidly constructed and tastefully decorated, the spacious tents feature locally-made furniture and en suite bathrooms with hot running water and round-the-clock electricity.



Dining pavilion

The cottages are similarly styled with exposed stone walls, tiled floors and verandas offering spectacular views of the mountains. Each cottage has two large bedrooms with en suite bathrooms and a generous central area featuring local artworks.

Meals are served in a picturesque dining pavilion, set on higher ground, where guests can enjoy a wonderful introduction to the exotic flavours and dishes of Rajasthan. One of your evening meals is likely to be followed by a colourful local dance performance.



Tented accommodation



Carrying water

Araveli's real charm however, lies in the opportunity to soak up local culture and learn about life in rural India. The project is operated by Me to We, the social business arm of the development charity Free the Children of whom Audley are big supporters. Their development model aims to break the cycle of acute poverty and make communities self-sufficient by improving education, sanitation and crop diversity and by providing access to basic healthcare.

At Araveli, everyone has the chance to visit local villages and take part in projects supported by Free the Children. Days can begin with a sunrise yoga session and at the start of your stay you'll be encouraged to learn a little Hindi before meeting the local community for the first time. You can also take part in a puja, a traditional Hindu blessing, to ensure the success and prosperity of the work being undertaken. The exact details of activities during your visit will depend on your preferences as well as what projects are underway at the time. There are often construction projects to get involved with or you can help local women with their morning activities such as making chapatti, drawing water from the well or feeding the animals.

Guests can also join walks through the beautiful foothills to learn about the flora and fauna with a guide or take a Mewari art class with a local artist to try your hand at this traditional style of miniature painting. All activities are aimed to illustrate how your efforts and the work of Free The Children make a meaningful difference to the lives of local people.



Local craftsman

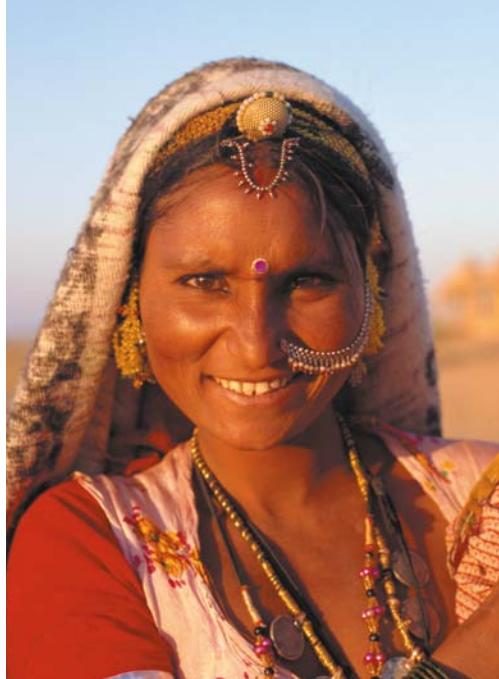
Araveli is an attractive destination in itself, but coupled with the opportunity to explore rural Rajasthan, learn about the joys and challenges of life in rural India and offer something back in return, you come away feeling privileged to stay here.



School children



Jaisalmer Fort



Local woman, Jaisalmer



Women in traditional dress, Jaisalmer



Interior of Junagarh Fort, Bikaner



Transporting rugs, Jaisalmer

Jaisalmer

A unique destination, the somewhat isolated city of Jaisalmer is a spectacular citadel rising up from the dusty Thar Desert. At the heart of the city is an ancient fort which is still a thriving commercial centre with narrow lanes lined by shops, temples and bazaars. The fortress dominates the skyline wherever you go and a guided walking tour is the best way to explore and navigate the winding streets lined with fragrant spices, colourful fabrics and local hawkers. Away from the city, a visit to the sand dunes at dusk is a romantic and peaceful contrast to the bustling city streets. There are multiple hotel options we recommend, all of which are outside the fort as the environmental impact of overcrowding threatens the fort's foundations.

The Serai, Jaisalmer

The Serai is a luxurious desert camp with 21 modern and thoughtfully designed tents, some of which have private plunge pools. The camp is extremely comfortable but still in tune with its desert surroundings and was built using Rajasthani stone and traditional materials crafted into shape by local people. Under an hour outside the city, it's a peaceful retreat but still within easy reach of the sights. The Serai is a good option for exploring Jaisalmer city or the nearby dunes by day and spending evenings dining by candlelight under a canopy of stars.



The Serai, Jaisalmer

Bikaner

A less-visited and highly authentic desert town, Bikaner is an ideal place to stop en route to the western desert towns of Rajasthan. Although a busy place with a somewhat workaday manner, it has an interesting history and is home to some fascinating temples such as the 17th-century Karni Mata, the 'Rat Temple'. Not for the faint-hearted, this unusual place of worship ensures all rats and mice are well fed and looked after as they are believed to be reincarnated saints. The town is dominated by the imposing and beautifully decorated Junagarh Fort which is best explored with a local guide. It is also worth spending some time wandering the dusty streets and just soaking up the busy atmosphere amongst camel carts and market stalls.

Shekhawati region

A fascinating place to spend a few days well away from the crowds, the Shekhawati region in the arid, rugged landscape of the northeastern Aravalli Hills is the traditional home of Marwari traders. This was once a thriving region located on an important trade route between Delhi and the Gujarat coast but it fell into decline once the railways diverted trade from the area. There are several interesting forts and temples here as well as numerous havelis. Many of these family-owned mansions can be visited to see their private inner courtyards decorated with murals of daily life and historic events from steam trains to images of colonial rulers.



Mural, Shekhawati region



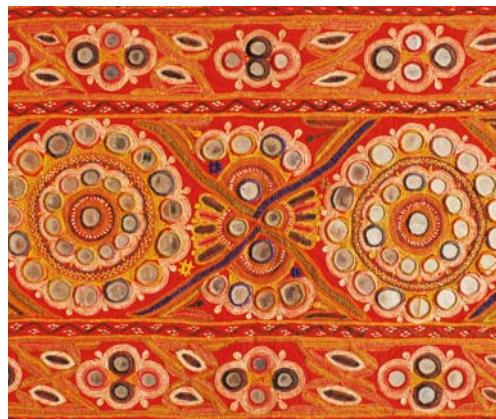
Mausoleum, Gujarat

Gujarat

The rarely visited state of Gujarat on India's northwestern coastline is known for its rich textile production, historic settlements and the only Asiatic lion population in the world. It's a diverse and captivating place to visit if you want to escape the crowds and is often compared to its neighbour Rajasthan, although it is less developed and has limited accommodation options. Aside from interesting history, remnants of tribal communities and the textile industry, wildlife is a major draw in this corner of India. Rare wild ass and Asiatic lions are found here, as well as hundreds of birds, including flamingos and many migratory species. A trip combining cities, villages, the Little Rann of Kutch and Sasan Gir National Park offers a varied flavour of this intriguing state.



Mir women, Gujarat



Traditional embroidered fabrics, Gujarat

Ahmedabad

The vibrant city of Ahmedabad acts as the gateway to Gujarat and can seem a little overwhelming on first arrival, but a good guide will help you dig a little deeper to find some of the city's gems. The old city is home to carved wooden temples, havelis, small neighbourhoods and narrow streets leading to specialist bazaars, while the night market is an ideal place to purchase high quality cottons, silks and embroidered clothes or simply just absorb the atmosphere. You'll find a comprehensive collection of fabrics and artefacts at the Calico Museum of Textiles while on the riverbank in the suburbs is the Ghandi ashram, from where the unassuming leader began his iconic march for independence.

The House of MG, Ahmedabad

Ideally located to explore Ahmedabad, the charming House of MG was built in 1924 and was once home to a local businessman and philanthropist, Mangaldas Girdhardas. It's since been lovingly restored by his grandson and has retained all its best features, including Italian mosaic flooring, cosy courtyards and stained glass windows. It is now home to 17 rooms and suites as well as one apartment. The courtyard cafe serves local snacks, but for a traditional thali (set meal) under the night sky, the rooftop restaurant is the place to be.

Bhuj

Bhuj is a lively and engaging place to visit in western Kutch, despite being devastated by an earthquake in 2001. Few tourists make it here but this friendly city has many colourful markets with excellent textile shopping, as well as original city gates, palace ruins and an interesting museum, Durbar Hall. Outside the city, a visit to the tribal Banni villages offers a fascinating insight into local life and century-old traditions.



Market, Diu Island



Orchard Palace, Gondal

Gondal

A small town in the heart of Gujarat, Gondal is steeped in history and famous for its palaces and vintage car collections. The Naulakha Palace is the oldest surviving palace in Gondal, dating back to the 17th century. Renowned for its stone carvings, intricate balconies, antique collections and ornate interiors, it's certainly worth having a local guide show you around. The current royal residency, Huzoor Palace, has one wing open to the public and the Riverside Palace gardens are also beautifully preserved and worth a visit. For car fanatics, the Royal Garages have an impressive collection of classic and vintage vehicles.

Orchard Palace, Gondal

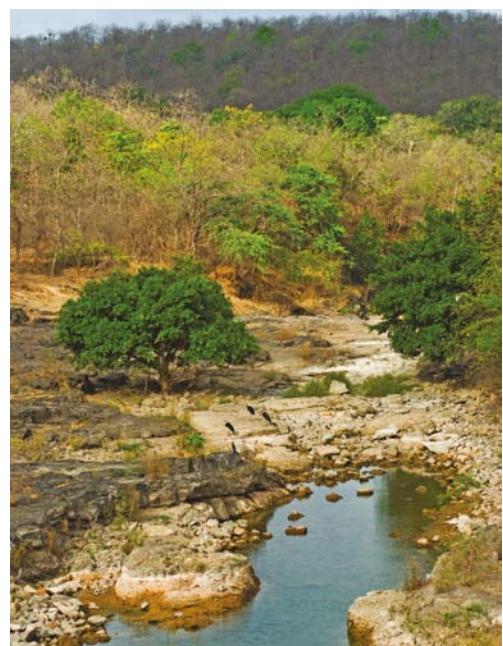
Part of the estate of the Gondal royal family, the Orchard Palace was built in the late 19th century to host personal guests of the Maharajas. It has since been converted into a seven room heritage hotel with a wonderful old-world charm. High ceilings, Art Deco furniture, antiques and handicrafts adorn the rooms which also have en suite bathrooms and modern amenities. One of the nicest properties in Gujarat, the aromatic home-cooked food and pretty terraces add to the bygone era of this hotel.



Fort, near Diu Island



Plum-headed parakeet, Sasan Gir National Park



Sasan Gir National Park

Diu Island

Lying off Gujarat's south coast, just 40 square kilometres in size, Diu Island is infused with Portuguese history and is a complete contrast to the rest of the state. Diu town is home to a 16th-century Portuguese fort as well as churches, lively markets, colourful houses and hotels. It has a Mediterranean feel and one Portuguese custom still very much respected is that of the afternoon siesta. The island follows Delhi's laws however and is the only place in Gujarat you can have an alcoholic drink. Vibrant yet relaxed, Diu is a great place to end your trip and is easily accessible with flights from Mumbai.

Sasan Gir National Park

One of the most important protected areas in Asia, Sasan Gir is the last remaining home of the pure Asiatic lion. The park was established in 1965 and covers almost 1,500 square kilometres of dense teak forests which also provide a habitat for leopards, panthers, hyenas, wild boar, marsh crocodiles and rich, varied birdlife. It is quite an underdeveloped area with poor infrastructure so receives fewer visitors than other parks allowing those who do make it here to enjoy it in peace.



Asiatic lions

The endangered Asiatic lion is only found in Gujarat, and is only one of five big cat species in India. Others include the Bengal tiger, Indian leopard, snow leopard and clouded leopard. Although slightly smaller than African lions, these majestic creatures are still large and fierce. As surrounding towns and populations increase, the lions are living in a shrinking habitat and in the last few years they have been spotted crossing park boundaries into surrounding villages and forests. Our local guides and naturalists offer a fascinating insight into both national and local perceptions and opinions regarding these intriguing mammals.



Ghats, Varanasi



Nadesar Palace, Varanasi

Varanasi

Intensely spiritual, colourful and incredibly chaotic, Varanasi is an ancient holy city at the centre of the Hindu universe. The area has been inhabited since the 6th century BC and such is its importance that simply dying here is enough to offer instant enlightenment. Stretching along the Ganges, its riverbank is lined with ghats where the faithful come to perform their daily ablutions, wash away their sins, cremate their dead and make offerings to the sacred goddess Ganga. Away from the water the narrow winding streets are teeming with life. You'll find temples on almost every corner and a vast array of markets, shops, restaurants and hotels, as well as throngs of people. The best way to appreciate the city is by boat, as the scent of sandalwood and incense fills the air. Varanasi is a city like no other; its heaving mass of inhabitants and visitors capturing the very essence of India.

Nadesar Palace, Varanasi

Originally built by the East India Company, Nadesar Palace is renowned for its friendly Indian hospitality and luxurious charm. This beautiful hotel is considered one of the best in the city and has played host to many royal guests over the years. The ten exquisitely furnished rooms and suites feature antique furniture, and original artworks from the Maharaja's collection, while at the same time offering all modern facilities.

Suryauday Haveli, Varanasi

Situated on the Shivala ghats, Suryauday occupies a riverfront location. With 14 rooms, including nine with river views, it's a comfortable retreat. Meal times are a highlight; delicious local dishes are served in the courtyard or on the rooftop terrace which is one of the best locations to witness the sun set over the atmospheric Aarti ceremony. Although no alcohol is served and food is vegetarian, it is an unbeatable location if you want to be in the heart of this holy city.



Suryauday Haveli, Varanasi



Lalit Temple View, Khajuraho

Khajuraho

Famed for its erotic storytelling and Kama Sutra sculptures, the stone temples at Khajuraho are both intricate and impressive. Built between the 10th and 12th centuries, the 21 temples are considered the Chandella Dynasty's ultimate architectural accomplishment. Scenes of battles, banquets and many other topics cover every pillar and the best way to understand them is with the assistance of a local guide.

Lalit Temple View, Khajuraho

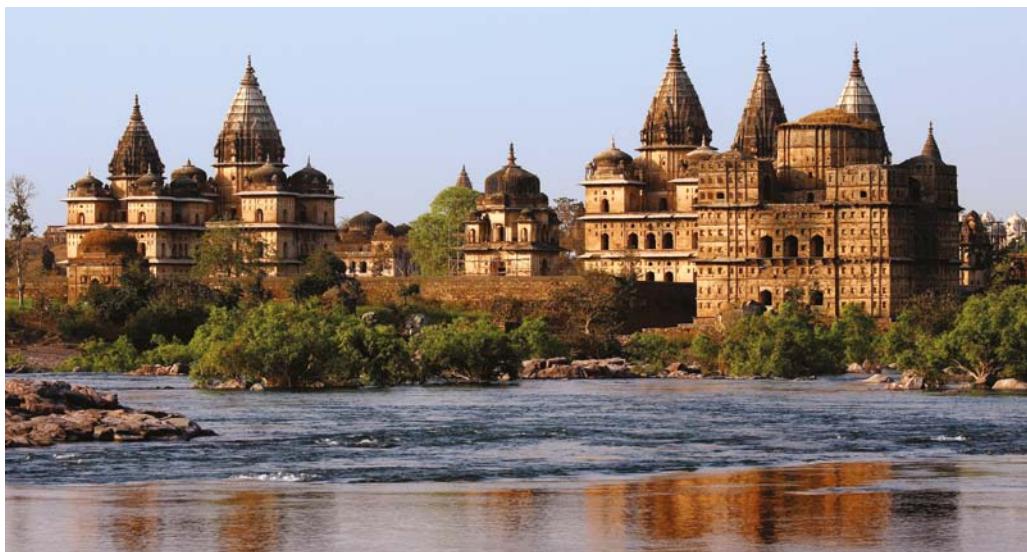
One of the best hotel's in Khajuraho, the Lalit offers 47 spacious and stylish rooms as well as modern facilities, including a spa and swimming pool set in manicured gardens. The hotel is just 500 metres from the western group of temples, making it a convenient as well as a comfortable option. The popular multi-cuisine restaurant has a lovely terrace with the temples of Khajuraho in the backdrop.



Mural in the Raj Mahal, Orchha



Stone temples, Khajuraho



Jehangir Mahal, Orchha



Sadhu, Varanasi

Orchha

Rising above the boulder-strewn landscape on the banks of the Betwa River, Orchha is a long abandoned 16th-century fort-palace and a highly atmospheric place to visit. The impressive buildings sit among dhak forest with the cenotaphs, temples and ramparts of the Jehangir Mahal dominating the landscape. Nearby you'll find the elegant Lakshmi Narayan Temple and wonderful murals in the Raj Mahal, all easily explored on foot from sleepy Orchha village. In the evening you can stroll along the river to watch the sun set and visit the Ram Raja Temple, a converted palace of pink tiles and gold domes where devotees gather every evening to sing a rousing chorus. Orchha is a very laid-back place with a limited choice of accommodation, four hours' drive from Khajuraho.



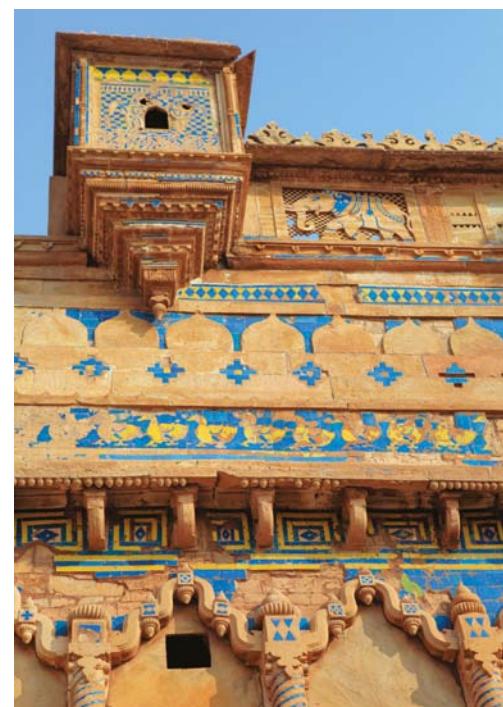
Detail on the Kandariya Mahadev Temple, Khajuraho



Usha Kiran Palace, Gwalior

Gwalior

An archaeological and historical treasure, Gwalior dates back to the 6th century BC. First occupied by Hun invaders, it later came under the control of the Tomars, the Lodhis of Delhi, the Mughals and Marathas. A 15th-century fort still dominates the city with huge Jain sculptures cut into the sandstone cliffs on the approach and deserted palaces and subterranean rooms to explore inside. Elsewhere in the city you'll find the 400-room Jai Vilas Palace, the extravagant home of the Royal Scindia family. Despite its obvious attractions, Gwalior attracts fewer visitors than north India's other cities and is well worth a visit as it is just three hours south of Agra.



Man Mandir Palace, Gwalior



Umaid Bhawan Palace, Jodhpur

Forts & Palaces

The forts and palaces of Rajasthan have always played a crucial role in this region's history and a selection of them have now been meticulously restored and have reopened their doors to welcome guests with a wealth of traditional charm. The following are a few of our favourites.

Ramathra Fort, Ramathra

Run by Rajput descendants, you are guaranteed a friendly welcome at this beautiful property in rural Rajasthan, nestled in the hills north of Ranthambore National Park. Beautifully renovated with six luxury tents and six spacious suites, there are some stunning spots to relax, including a Jacuzzi built into the rampart wall which offers breathtaking views. Unwind on the terraces, explore the local villages, enjoy a boat ride on Lake Kalisil or pick a quiet spot to observe the wonderful birdlife of the region. This 350-year-old fort is a stunning place to stay.



Ramathra Fort, Ramathra



Ramathra Fort, Ramathra

Fort Barli, Barli

Located within a small village, Fort Barli is a wonderful place to relax and absorb local life in Rajasthan. Perfect for breaking up long journeys in this vast state, the hotel has been renovated but still maintains lots of original character. Owned by the same family for 16 generations, your hosts will be on hand to share lots of history and stories with you, as well as assist with ideas and activities if you're planning to stay for a few nights. There are eight rooms, as well as a swimming pool and small restaurant.

Umaid Bhawan Palace, Jodhpur

A magnificent building both inside and out, the vast Umaid Bhawan Palace is still the home of the Maharaja, although one wing of this building now operates as an opulent hotel with 64 rooms and suites. A special place to stay, the building stands on the outskirts of Jodhpur overlooking the Blue City, and is a well-known local landmark. The palatial public spaces are matched by a series of luxurious rooms and suites with Art Deco inspired design and the latest modern amenities. There are a choice of dining options as well as a spa, two pools and expansive gardens and grounds.



Fort Barli, Barli



Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur



Views from Ramathra Fort



Chanoud Garh, Chanoud

Chanoud Garh, Chanoud

Set in the heart of a small village, Chanoud Garh is a meticulously renovated fort with seven beautiful suites. The lovingly dressed rooms surround a quiet courtyard and retain much of their original character. Each is individual in style with either exposed stone arches or ornate carvings and traditional fabrics in rich colours. Although there is no pool, shaded terraces offer great places to relax and enjoy the peace and quiet. After exploring the surrounding village and countryside, enjoy a home-cooked Rajasthani meal with your wonderful hosts, the Singhs, who help make this special place what it is.



Chanoud Garh, Chanoud



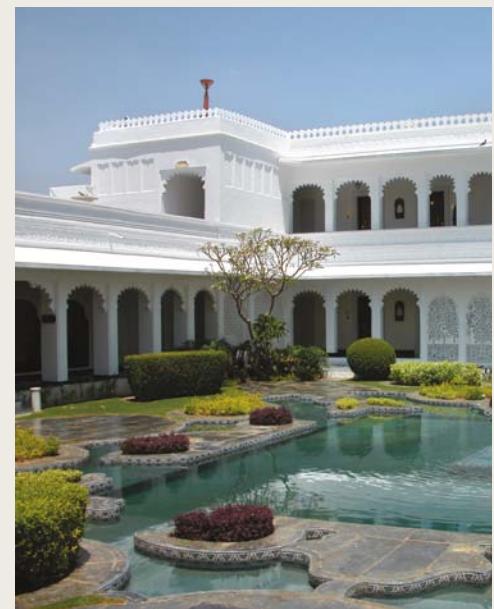
Devi Garh, Delwara

Devi Garh, Delwara

Just 45 minutes from Udaipur, this 18th-century palace is one of the most desirable places to stay in Rajasthan. The story of its painstaking renovation is often shared with guests, a fascinating tale of rebuilding stonework, restoring staircases and uncovering jewels as well as various other hidden delights. Now, sleek and contemporary with touches of original charm, the property is a tranquil escape with 39 suites. When not exploring Udaipur, enjoy the peace and quiet on one of the many terraces, be wined and dined under the stars, cool off in the pool or join a yoga class.

Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur

The Lake Palace is luxurious and extravagant with unrivalled views across Lake Pichola to Udaipur's City Palace. Guests arrive by boat and are greeted by unbridled opulence. Most of the 60 rooms and 17 suites offer lake views, the food is superb and the service impeccable. Along with the luxurious interiors, the hotel has pretty courtyards, a delightful spa and swimming pool, an in-house astrologer and offers guided walks around the palace.



Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur

Tailoring your trip

The itineraries shown are designed to give you a flavour of what is possible, and are routes that work particularly well. We can use these as a basis to plan your trip or can design a completely different itinerary to suit your tastes and interests. Please call one of our North India specialists to start planning your itinerary.

T 01993 838 345

Getting around

Most trips to North India start in Delhi. You can either plan a loop around the region returning to Delhi for your flight home or head south and fly out of Mumbai. This is a large region with long distances between sights and we will provide you with an air-conditioned car and driver, as most road journeys will be a minimum of a few hours. Rail travel is another viable option offering a fascinating insight into daily life in India but it is a totally different experience and may not suit everyone.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	~	~	~	~	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓

- ✓ The best time to travel.
- ✓ A good time to travel, but there may be some factors to be aware of.
- ~ Travel is possible, but this is not the best time of year.
- ✗ Travel is not recommended.

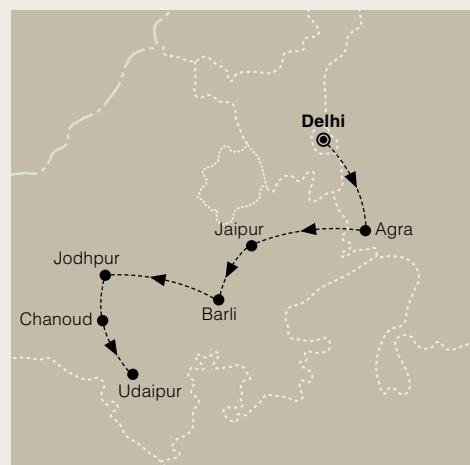
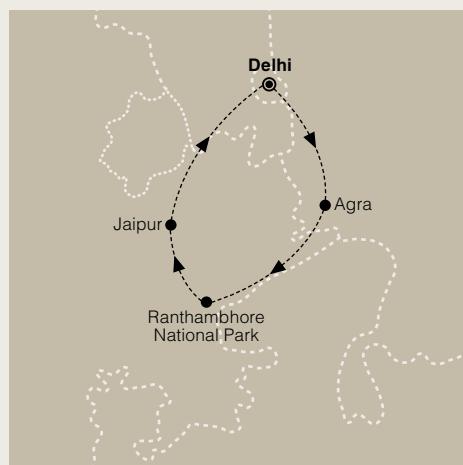
North India is best between October and March with warm daytime temperatures (upwards of 25C / 77F) and cooler evenings. October is a particularly green time to visit following the monsoon rains. Temperatures then start to drop and by December and January evenings and mornings are cold (around 5C / 41F), with the fog occasionally disrupting transport and sightseeing. By March temperatures begin to rise dramatically and April and May are very hot (upwards of 40C / 104F). During the summer monsoon, travel is still possible but not ideal.

North India has many festivals that can attract large crowds and put strain on rail and road networks. Republic Day, Holi, the Pushkar Camel Fair and Diwali are the main examples. Although amazing to witness, those wishing to attend do need to be prepared for large crowds – your specialist can recommend somewhere quieter to stay or help adapt your travel dates if need be.

⌚ Time difference: GMT+5.5 hours

Prices

We offer trips to cater for a wide range of budgets. You can find up-to-date guideline prices for your trip to Rajasthan and North India on our website, alternatively please call our specialists to discuss your plans.



Golden Triangle & Tigers

This short itinerary includes the highlights of North India's cities and the opportunity to go on the trail of the Bengal tiger at Ranthambore National Park. Classic attractions such as the Taj Mahal, Jaipur's Palace of the Winds and Old Delhi's bazaars can be combined with more unusual excursions to discover a different side of this well travelled route.

- Day 1** Fly overnight to Delhi.
- Day 2** Arrive in Delhi, afternoon free to relax or explore.
- Day 3** Guided tour of New Delhi as well as the bustling old side of the city.
- Day 4** Visit Agra's Red Fort, Itmad-ud-Daulah and Metah Bagh at sunset to see the Taj Mahal.
- Day 5** Sunrise visit to the Taj Mahal before travelling to Ranthambore National Park.
- Day 6** Morning and afternoon game drives in search of tigers and other wildlife.
- Day 7** Enjoy a morning game drive before continuing to Jaipur.
- Day 8** Guided tour of Amber Fort Palace and the 'Pink City' of Jaipur.
- Day 9** Morning at leisure, return to Delhi by road.
- Day 10** Transfer to the airport to connect with your international flight.

Stay longer

Spend a couple of nights in rural Rajasthan to escape the hustle and bustle of the cities or travel by train into the foothills and visit Shimla.



Sheep herders, rural Rajasthan

Classic Rajasthan

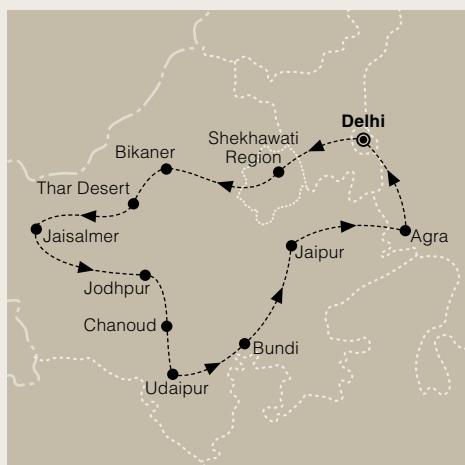
This classic itinerary highlights the very best of Rajasthan and the north, including the must-see monuments and bustling cities, as well as time in rural Rajasthan. Not only does this provide an insight into a traditional way of life, but also helps recharge the batteries and varies the pace of your trip.

- Day 1** Fly overnight to Delhi.
- Day 2** Arrive in Delhi, afternoon at leisure.
- Day 3** Explore the contrasts of Old and New Delhi.
- Day 4** Visit Agra's key sights and spend sunset at Metah Bagh opposite the Taj Mahal.
- Day 5** Sunrise visit to the Taj Mahal, drive to Jaipur via Fatehpur Sikri.
- Day 6** Explore the 'Pink City' of Jaipur and Amber Fort.
- Day 7** Travel to Barli in rural Rajasthan.
- Day 8** Explore the area, the farmland, meet the locals and socialise with your hosts.
- Day 9** Continue onwards by road to Jodhpur.
- Day 10** Guided tour of the Meherangarh Fort and vibrant clock tower market.
- Day 11** Travel south to Chanoud, another rural village.
- Day 12** Explore local village life and interact with your hosts for the best experience.
- Day 13** Drive to Udaipur via Ranakpur and Kumbhalgarh Fort.
- Day 14** Guided tour of Udaipur including the vast City Palace.
- Day 15** Head to the airport to connect with your onwards international flight.

Stay longer

Fly south to Goa to relax and unwind on a sandy beach or explore its colonial heritage at a leisurely pace.

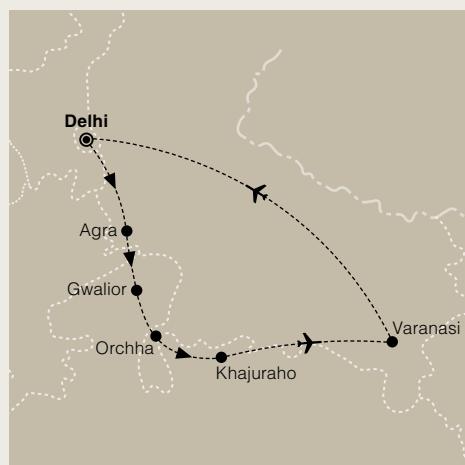
Suggested itineraries



Ultimate Rajasthan

This comprehensive itinerary allows in-depth exploration of the best that Rajasthan has to offer.

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Day 1 | Fly overnight to Delhi. |
| Day 2 | Relax after arriving in Delhi. |
| Day 3 | Explore Old and New Delhi with your local guide. |
| Day 4 | Head into the Shekhawati region, exploring deserted havelis. |
| Day 5 | Drive onwards to Bikaner. |
| Day 6 | Guided tour of Junagarh Fort and optional visit to the Karni Mata 'Rat Temple'. |
| Day 7 | Continue into the Thar Desert. |
| Day 8 | Morning camel safari before continuing to Jaisalmer. |
| Day 9 | Take a guided tour of Jaisalmer Fort exploring the narrow lanes on foot. |
| Day 10 | Travel through the desert to Jodhpur. |
| Day 11 | Explore Mehrangarh Fort and the vibrant clock tower markets. |
| Days 12-13 | Continue to Chanoud in rural Rajasthan. Enjoy the slower paces of village life. |
| Day 14 | Drive to Udaipur via Ranakpur and Kumbhalgarh Fort. |
| Day 15 | Explore Udaipur's City Palace and Old City streets. |
| Day 16 | Onwards to Bundi via Chittorgarh. |
| Day 17 | Explore the Taragarh Fort and frescos in the palace before heading to Jaipur. |
| Day 18 | Guided tour of Amber Fort Palace and the 'Pink City' of Jaipur. |
| Day 19 | Continue, via Fatehpur Sikri, to Agra and spend sunset at Metah Bagh. |
| Day 20 | Sunrise visit to the Taj Mahal, visit the Red Fort before returning to Delhi. |
| Day 21 | Return to the airport to connect with your international flight. |



North India uncovered

This itinerary covers some of north India's cultural highlights but follows a path less well travelled away from central Rajasthan, offering authentic experiences and an insight into India's diverse religions.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Day 1 | Fly overnight to Delhi. |
| Day 2 | Leisurely day in Delhi following arrival. |
| Day 3 | Guided tour to discover the contrasts of Old and New Delhi. |
| Day 4 | Visit Agra's key sights and watch the sun set across the Taj Mahal. |
| Day 5 | Sunrise visit to the Taj Mahal before travelling onwards to Gwalior. |
| Day 6 | Guided tour of Gwalior before taking the train to Orchha. |
| Day 7 | Explore the village and temples of Orchha, continue by road to Khajuraho. |
| Day 8 | Full day to explore the impressive, UNESCO-protected temples. |
| Day 9 | Fly to Varanasi. Enjoy sunset at the busy river ghats. |
| Day 10 | Early morning boat ride on the Ganges River, afternoon tour of Sarnath. |
| Day 11 | Leisure time before a short domestic flight to Delhi. |
| Day 12 | Transfer to the airport for your international flight. |

Stay longer

Spend a couple of nights enjoying India's wildlife at one of the many national parks, the nearest being Ranthambore, Panna or the Chambal Sanctuary.



North and South India

This itinerary is perfect for those that feel they will only visit India once, covering the highlights of two of India's most diverse and popular states: Rajasthan and Kerala.

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| Day 1 | Fly overnight to Delhi. |
| Days 2-3 | Relax or explore the sights of both Old and New Delhi. |
| Day 4 | Visit Agra's key sights including the Taj Mahal from across the river. |
| Day 5 | See the Taj Mahal at sunrise before travelling to Jaipur via Fatehpur Sikri. |
| Day 6 | Guided tour of the impressive Amber Fort and 'Pink City' sights. |
| Day 7 | Head off the beaten track to Barli. |
| Day 8 | Enjoy the slower pace of village life. |
| Day 9 | Continue by road to Udaipur via Chittorgarh. |
| Day 10 | Explore Udaipur with a local guide. |
| Day 11 | Fly south to Cochin via Mumbai. |
| Day 12 | Guided tour of colonial Cochin including St Francis church and the Dutch Palace. |
| Day 13 | Drive to Munnar and enjoy a walk through the tea plantations. |
| Day 14 | Relaxing morning at leisure before continuing to Periyar. |
| Day 15 | Early morning jungle walk before exploring local spice plantations. |
| Day 16 | Transfer to the backwaters and board your houseboat for the night. |
| Day 17 | Disembark your traditional barge and relax at your backwater accommodation. |
| Day 18 | Short drive to Marari, afternoon at leisure on the beach. |
| Day 19 | Day at leisure. |
| Day 20 | Return to Cochin to connect with your international flight. |



Calcutta & the east

THE UNIQUE CULTURE AND LANDSCAPES of the northeast give this fascinating region a distinct character which in many ways is more like its neighbours Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar, than the rest of India. The region's largest city, Calcutta, is a cultural, economic and political centre indelibly marked by its time as the capital of the British Raj. Glorious colonial architecture lines its wide boulevards and stately mansions age gracefully on leafy streets. The city also acts as a gateway to the Himalaya with easy access to the former colonial hill station of Darjeeling with its old-world charm, colourful Buddhist monasteries, Hindu temples and Christian churches. In laid-back Assam, where lush tea estates and paddy fields unfold across the landscape, the unhurried pace of life and tranquil waterways induce a sense of calm and tranquillity lacking in many other parts of India. Cruise along the rivers, explore ancient Ahom palaces and Hindu temples, or sip tea on the lawns of a colonial mansion. Further south, little-visited Orissa rewards visitors with medieval temples, national parks, tribal villages with vibrant traditional cultures, and a mellow charm that's hard to resist.

Audley in Calcutta & the east

A little-explored region that is refreshingly undeveloped, the challenges of travel in the northeast are best solved with the aid of a driver and guide. Standards of English can be low so a local guide who stays with you throughout your trip can be invaluable in ensuring that it runs smoothly. Our specialists have first-hand knowledge of the region and can help plan an itinerary to suit your interests and match your preferred pace of travel, and once on the ground, our local guides are passionate and knowledgeable. Alternatively, river travel is a popular way to navigate through both West Bengal and Assam, using the Hugli and Brahmaputra rivers to reach areas largely inaccessible by road.

Accommodation

Calcutta offers a range of accommodation including luxurious five star hotels and smaller, boutique guesthouses. Many colonial-era properties have been converted into atmospheric hotels while elsewhere stilted tea bungalows and lodges offer local character and charm. While all of these properties are clean and comfortable, they may not have a full range of amenities or facilities. They will however, enhance your experience of the area and our up-to-date local knowledge will ensure you have the best accommodation available.



Tea harvesting, Assam



1 Calcutta

Once capital of the British Raj, Calcutta's crumbling grandeur defines this atmospheric old city. See page 30

2 Brahmaputra River

A cruise along the Brahmaputra is a wonderfully leisurely way to see rural India's ancient villages and national parks. See page 32

3 Kaziranga National Park

Beautiful and isolated, Kaziranga is famous for its one-horned rhino. See page 31

4 Dibrugarh

Explore the vast tea estates and learn about the traditional skills needed to turn raw leaves into the perfect cup of tea. See page 31

5 Jorhat

A cultural gateway close to ornate Ahom temples and the beautiful, laid-back Majuli Island with its fascinating monasteries. See page 31

6 Hugli River

A meandering river at the heart of colonial India, take a boat trip to explore the Dutch and French settlements of Serampore and Chandernagore. See page 32



Taking flowers to market, Calcutta



Fishing boat crossing the River Hugli, Calcutta



Oberoi Grand, Calcutta

Calcutta

The flamboyant former capital of the British Raj, Calcutta is northeast India's most atmospheric city where grand imperial buildings line wide boulevards and India's gentry still frequent the city racecourse and private clubs. Along with the colonial grandeur, the presence of synagogues, churches and bazaars reveals the city's global importance in its heyday. Stroll past the Victorian buildings on Dalhousie Square to the famous cricket ground in Eden Gardens, the Victoria Memorial and the aging mansions of Chowringhee for a taste of the city's illustrious past. In contrast, the bustling streets with shanty homes tucked in the smallest spaces and millions of commuters remind you that this is one of India's largest cities. Soak up the atmosphere in the vibrant flower markets or head to the river early to see the city come to life.

Oberoi Grand, Calcutta

The Grand Dame of Calcutta hotels, this landmark property first opened its doors over 125 years ago and its sweeping staircases, crystal chandeliers and elaborate stuccowork are just as impressive today. Conveniently located within walking distance of many city sites, including the Indian Museum and the Park Street Cemetery, the hotel's 209 rooms and spacious suites are extremely comfortable and decorated in an elegant, classical style. There's also a luxurious spa, swimming pool and variety of excellent restaurants.



Flower market, Calcutta



Calcutta flower market

Catch a glimpse of Calcutta's colourful daily life with an early morning visit to the city's vibrant flower market on the banks of the River Hugli. This is one of Asia's largest flower markets with local and regional traders coming to buy and sell mountains of brightly coloured blooms and garlands of vibrant orange and yellow marigolds. It's a very traditional market with stall holders almost lost amongst a sea of intense colours and smells. It is a fascinating place to explore and a guided walk with a passionate and professional guide will reveal the hidden secrets of the market along with its history and significance to the local people and economy.



Sibsagar Temple, near Jorhat



Chilli peppers and spices, Calcutta

Assam

One of the most languid and verdant regions of India, Assam is a remote state, bordered by mountains and cleaved by the mighty Brahmaputra River. The Ahom dynasty invaded the region from Southeast Asia in the 13th century, building wonderful ochre brick neo-Vaishnavite temples and creating a distinct culture and atmosphere that make this an intriguing area to explore. Guwahati, a bustling city, is the gateway to this incredibly friendly region where the temperate climate provides a perfect environment for tea cultivation. Elsewhere you'll find historic river islands and ethnic minorities, national parks home to large populations of rhinos, and glorious Hindu temples. Although rural, infrastructure in this area is improving and it is becoming easier to cross into Bhutan or Myanmar from Assam, making a fascinating side trip into these highly traditional and enigmatic lands.



Parakeet, Kaziranga National Park



Tea harvesting, Assam



One-horned rhino, Kaziranga National Park

Kaziranga National Park

Wild and remote, Kaziranga is justly known for its one-horned rhinos. Over 70% of the world's population lives here and can be seen grazing on the river floodplains alongside deer and buffalos. Elephants, elusive tigers, sloth bears, Asiatic black bears and Ganges river dolphins are also present as well as a huge variety of birdlife. The park's 430 square kilometres of tropical forest, towering elephant grass and swampy marshland are best explored by 4x4, though the wildlife here is so prolific you're likely to see rhinos grazing on the river bank from the comfort of your lodge.

Jorhat

The bustling market town of Jorhat serves as a convenient gateway to some of Assam's most fascinating ancient temples and the majestic Majuli Island. The Ahom dynasty made their capital in this region in the 18th century and the surrounding area is littered with ornate temples, the highlight of which is Sibsagar with its intricate carvings, palaces and monuments. West of this former capital, in the midst of the great Brahmaputra, is the serene Majuli Island, India's largest, but fast eroding, river island. Home to the Mising people, it is also a spiritual place with 22 Hindu-Vaishnavite monasteries where you can learn about philosophy and local culture.



Mancotta Chang Bungalow, Dibrugarh

Dibrugarh

An ideal place to end a trip through the state, Dibrugarh is Assam's most famous tea city and is surrounded by vast tea estates where row upon row of immaculate tea bushes are only broken by the occasional acacia tree or paddy field. This region, at the furthest reaches of Assam, is a great place to spend a few quiet days taking tranquil walks through the plantations, enjoying the aromatic local food and sipping endless cups of tea on the veranda of your plantation home.

Mancotta Chang Bungalow, Dibrugarh

This traditional plantation bungalow on a working estate is surrounded by manicured tea bushes and offers simple but comfortable rooms in a friendly, homely environment. Old sepia-tinted photos line the walls, meals are served on elegant china alongside the family silver and in many ways it feels as if time has simply stood still here. There are six rooms with polished hardwood floors, king size beds and plain furnishings but the service is attentive and meals are hearty. A tranquil spot to while away a few days, visit local villages or take a plantation tour, it makes an ideal spot to unwind at the end of an Assamese tour.



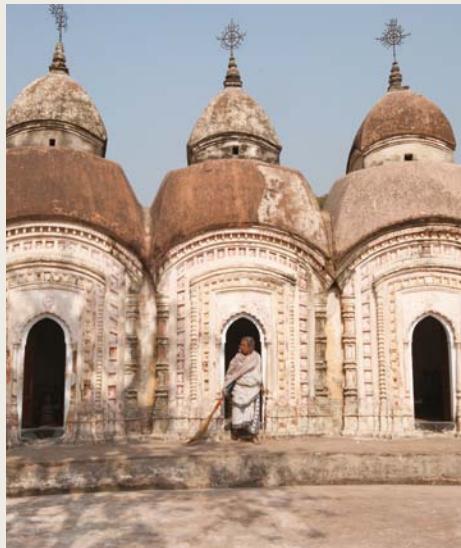
ABN Sukapha

River cruising

India's roads and trains provide fascinating, and at times exhausting, ways to travel but a cruise along the Brahmaputra or Hugli is a far more leisurely experience. Relaxed and serene, these boat journeys allow you to sit back with a gin and tonic in one hand and a pair of binoculars in the other as you glide along to visit some of India's most inaccessible sights. Assam Bengal Navigation (ABN) have a fleet of three cruisers across both rivers, running set journeys of varying lengths. Trips run up and downstream, taking in Ahom ruins, rhino-filled Kaziranga National Park and the lush tea plantations for which the region is so famous. Going west you'll encounter British, Dutch and Portuguese settlements, intricate Hindu temples, colonial-era battle sites, tiny villages and bucolic farmland. At the end of each day you return to your boat and can share your day's stories with fellow guests and your knowledgeable guides over a sundowner on the deck.



ABN Rajmahal



Shiva temples, Kalna

ABN

ABN's three comfortable riverboats offer relatively spacious air-conditioned cabins decorated in tasteful contemporary style. The Sukapha and Charaidew have 12 cabins, the slightly larger Rajmahal has 22. You'll also find large sundecks and a sociable lounge on board, as well as good quality Assamese meals, which are milder than the food found in other parts of India. Service is attentive and very friendly, providing a warm and welcoming atmosphere for guests.

M/V Mahabaahu

A more luxurious option for cruises along the Brahmaputra, Far Horizon's Mahabaahu is a larger and highly sophisticated vessel with a wide range of facilities. The 23 cabins and spacious suites are stylish and there's also a swimming pool on the deck, a small spa, a theatre and a fitness room. The boat visits the state's most treasured sites on a series of three to seven night cruises.



Scenery along the Brahmaputra



Sun Temple, Konark



Kutia Kondh woman, Orissa

Orissa

Little-visited and incredibly laid-back, Orissa is a highly rewarding destination with a tranquil atmosphere not found in many other parts of India. The streets of the capital Bhubaneswar are lined with ancient temples and secular buildings, while coastal Puri, a Hindu place of pilgrimage, is a mellow resort with a long beach. The intricately carved Sun Temple at Konark, one of Indian's greatest monuments and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is accessible from both cities and another fascinating place to explore. For wildlife enthusiasts, a trip to Lake Chilika is a must to see Irrawaddy dolphins and a variety of migratory birds. This captivating blend of history, culture and religion as well as the region's unhurried charm and excellent seafood make it an irresistible destination, and although travel here can be more challenging than elsewhere in the subcontinent, it seems a small price to pay for such a rewarding experience.

Suggested itinerary

Tailoring your trip

The itinerary shown is designed to give you a flavour of what is possible, and is a route that works particularly well. We can use this as a basis to plan your trip or can design a completely different itinerary to suit your tastes and interests. Call one of our northeast India specialists to start planning your itinerary.

T 01993 838 345

Getting around

Although there are no direct flights to Calcutta, it is easy to get to the northeast via Dubai, Delhi or Mumbai. As travel in Assam can be more challenging than elsewhere in India and standards of English are often lower than in other areas, we recommend a private driver and English-speaking guide throughout to reveal the very best of this unique region.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓✓	✓✓

- ✓✓ The best time to travel.
- ✓ A good time to travel, but there may be some factors to be aware of.
- ✗ Travel is possible, but this is not the best time of year.
- ✗ Travel is not recommended.

On the whole, the best time to visit the northeast is from November to March. April is a good time for wildlife viewing as grasses are low, increasing rhino sightings, but stronger winds decrease visibility and comfort whilst cruising along the Brahmaputra. Kaziranga National Park closes in late April and does not reopen until November.

Time difference: GMT+5.5 hours

Prices

We offer trips to cater for a wide range of budgets. You can find up-to-date guideline prices for your trip to Calcutta & the east on our website, alternatively please call our specialists to discuss your plans.



Lemon vendor, Calcutta market



India's northeast

This itinerary covers some of the many highlights of the northeast, taking in both its cultural and natural treasures, from the bustling colonial city of Calcutta to the more sedate charms of rural Assam.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Day 1 | Fly overnight to Calcutta. |
| Day 2 | Arrive in Calcutta and have the afternoon at leisure. |
| Day 3 | Explore Calcutta's fascinating streets on a guided walking tour. |
| Day 4 | Continue on to Guwahati and board your river cruise. |
| Day 5 | Glide along the Brahmaputra stopping at a series of interesting sights en route. |
| Day 6 | Enjoy a second full day on your cruiser taking in some of India's least accessible attractions. |
| Day 7 | Transfer to Kaziranga National Park. |
| Day 8 | Track one-horned rhino on a 4x4 safari deep into the park. |
| Day 9 | Drive to Jorhat for a stay in a colonial-era property. |
| Day 10 | Visit India's largest river island, Majuli. |
| Day 11 | Continue on to Dibrugarh stopping to see Sibsagar's remarkable treasures en route. |
| Day 12 | Enjoy a day exploring Dibrugarh's tea plantations. |
| Day 13 | Fly to Calcutta from Dibrugarh. |
| Day 14 | Return to the airport for your international flight. |

Stay longer

A journey through Calcutta and Assam can easily be combined with a contrasting experience in the Himalayan foothills of West Bengal, around Darjeeling, or in enigmatic and mountainous Bhutan. Alternatively, flights via Delhi mean the 'Golden Triangle' is also easily accessible to explore.



Indian Himalaya

SPECTACULAR SCENERY, colonial history, magnificent architecture and incredible cultural diversity await in the Indian Himalaya, an extremely rewarding destination to visit. The western Himalaya are home to exiled Tibetan Buddhists who have settled in Dharamshala, Sikhs who congregate in Amritsar to worship at their most sacred shrine, and Hindus performing puja on the riverfront steps, or ghats, along the banks of the Ganges. The cooler temperatures in the mountains made them especially popular in colonial times and the vestiges of the era survive in the former hill stations such as Shimla where beautiful churches and quaint British architecture hark back to days gone by. In the foothills, the holy cities of Rishikesh and Haridwar attract hordes of pilgrims, while the beautiful Corbett National Park is home to a variation of wildlife. Further east, tea plantations blanket the hills around Darjeeling and stunning vistas are revealed as you walk the trails of Kalimpong or Sikkim for an insight into village life. Most remarkable of all, however, is northerly Ladakh with its dramatic desert scenery, magnificent glaciers and age-old cultural traditions.

Audley in the Indian Himalaya

The Himalaya's spectacular scenery is a major draw for travellers and with an excellent network of trails there are a host of options for exploring on foot, from half day walks to more difficult hikes, as well as multi-day treks. All are tailor-made to your preference and ability and even if a walk is across a number of days, it doesn't have to be arduous if you don't want it to be. Our specialists have first-hand knowledge of the areas so are well-placed to make recommendations regarding walks and excursion ideas, as well as accommodation options. We also work with some fantastic guides, porters and drivers who will accompany you throughout your trip. A fascinating destination for a standalone visit, the Indian Himalaya can also be easily combined with travel in Rajasthan, north India, Nepal or Bhutan.

Accommodation

Across the region accommodation varies from remote lodges with simple facilities to small, characterful guesthouses and a handful of luxurious hotels. Visitor numbers are lower here than in other parts of India and most of the smaller properties are independently owned and run. Service is generally extremely friendly but not as polished as in larger hotels and levels of spoken English may be lower. However, the opportunity to meet local people and interact with them is far higher and the views are simply spectacular. Larger hotels can be quite lavish with the dramatic setting matched by luxurious interiors and a host of facilities.



1 Amritsar

Protected by a series of medieval gates, Old Amritsar is home to the magnificent Golden Temple, the most sacred Sikh shrine.

See page 36

2 Dharamshala

Get an insight into Tibet's culture and heritage in Dharamshala, home of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile.

See page 36

3 Shimla

Quaint colonial architecture and dramatic views combine in this former summer capital of the British Raj.

See page 37

4 Corbett National Park

Famed for its prolific wildlife including the elusive tiger.

See page 39

5 Sikkim

Walk among dramatic hills and experience rural life in the mountains as well as Sikkim's ancient Buddhist culture.

See page 41

6 Darjeeling

A refreshingly cool former hill station, Darjeeling's lush tea plantations are set against a backdrop of snow-capped peaks.

See page 41

7 Ladakh

A unique culture, breathtaking scenery and incredible birdlife make Ladakh a fascinating place to visit.

See pages 42-43

Mountain railways

Enjoy a nostalgic trip through stunning scenery on an old colonial-era narrow gauge railway from Kalka to Shimla or Darjeeling to Ghoom.



The Golden Temple, Amritsar



Ranjit's Svaasa, Amritsar

Amritsar

Thronged with pilgrims who come to see the spectacular Golden Temple, Amritsar was founded in the 16th-century by Sikh guru Ram Das. The old town is a maze of narrow streets and bazaars protected by a series of medieval gates lored over by the soaring domes of the magnificent gilded temple. Sikhism's most sacred shrine, the Golden Temple is awash with people who come to bathe in its holy waters and is at its most seductive in the evening when the Adi Granth, the original holy book, is paraded before jostling crowds in the 'Putting to Bed' ceremony. Amritsar sits close to the border with Pakistan and you can go to see the theatrical daily closing ceremony when soldiers from each side attempt to outshine each other. Amritsar makes an interesting extension to a trip around Rajasthan, or within a journey through the Himalayan foothills.

Ranjit's Svaasa, Amritsar

A wonderfully warm and atmospheric place to stay, this traditional haveli is tucked away in a residential area off the main road in Amritsar's bustling new city. The rooms here are set around a tranquil courtyard and the public areas resemble an ornate home rather than a hotel, with family photographs and antiques giving them a charming, old-world character. The 18 guest rooms are individually styled with rich fabrics and dark woods while the well-regarded Ayurvedic spa offers a wide range of treatments. Group yoga sessions are available as well as other activities around the local area.

Pragpur

The heritage village of Pragpur is a necessary but rewarding stop to break the journey between Shimla and either Amritsar or Dharamshala, and is a quiet place to spend a night or two. Pragpur's history is visible in some of its buildings, making it a great place to wander, soak up the village atmosphere and see how people in this part of India live. The only accommodation option, Judge's Court, is on the edge of the village and takes you back to the days of the Raj. Its old-world charm, throughout the ten rooms, is enhanced by period furniture and captivating old family photographs depicting the village, family and property over the years.

Dharamshala & McLeodganj

Home to the Dalai Lama and a large community of exiled Tibetan Buddhists, Dharamshala is set in the western foothills of the Himalaya, surrounded by beautiful mountain views. The lower town is the main transport hub while the upper town, McLeodganj is ten kilometres further into the mountains and the more interesting place to visit. Temples, shrines, monasteries and meditation centres line the streets and the sound of monks chanting fills the air. An extremely relaxed and friendly place, there is a palpable buzz in town when the Dalai Lama is in session in the Tsuglagkhang Complex. Visit the Norbulingka Institute, a Tibetan cultural centre to learn about the country's arts, crafts and literature, or take to the hills for some magnificent walking through forests of pine, rhododendron and Himalayan oak. A range of simple but characterful properties provide an ideal base from which to explore the region.



Norbulingka Institute, McLeodganj



Shimla



The toy train, Shimla

Shimla

The summer capital of the British Raj in the 1820s, Shimla has a wonderful mountain setting. Mall Road, the town's main street, is closed to traffic and is lined with colonial-era architecture such as the Gaiety Theatre, Christ Church, the library and town hall, all of which create a sense of stepping back in time. Standing separately on its own hill, the ornate Viceregal Lodge was built in 1888 and was home to the Viceroy of India. The surrounding countryside is home to traditional villages, open pastures and orchards which make for leisurely walking and it's worth spending three nights here to fully soak up the atmosphere. The most enjoyable approach to Shimla is on the 'toy train', the narrow-gauge Kalka-Shimla railway. Completed in 1903, the track has 864 bridges and 103 tunnels and offers glorious views.

Clarkes, Shimla

Conveniently located at one end of Mall Road, Clarkes was established in 1898 and is one of Shimla's oldest hotels. The property is within easy walking distance of many of the town's attractions and is set in a quaint colonial-era building. Inside, the 32 guest rooms are comfortably but simply furnished and offer good value for money. Although the public areas are a little tired, the history of the building still gives it charm and its location makes it ideal for those wanting to explore Shimla by foot.

The Oberoi Cecil, Shimla

A grand, heritage hotel on the outskirts of Shimla, The Cecil offers the charm of bygone days, as well as lovely mountain views. From the moment you enter the impressive central atrium with its grand piano, roaring fire and cast iron lamps, you will know you are somewhere special. The 75 rooms and suites are decorated in an elegant but classical style with teak floorboards, an ottoman and leather-topped desk, while elsewhere you'll find a pool and spa as well as a choice of dining options. A terraced garden outside provides an excellent spot to unwind. The Cecil is set at the quiet end of Mall Road and is a 15 to 20 minute walk from the heart of town along this pedestrianised street.



Local woman, McLeodganj



Mall Road and Christ Church, Shimla



Wildflower Hall, near Shimla

Wildflower Hall, near Shimla

This luxurious property built on a mountaintop once home to Lord Kitchener's residence, is a perfect retreat surrounded by pine forest and glorious views of the distant Himalaya. A grand property, its old-world charm is matched by excellent facilities and service ensuring an extremely comfortable stay. The building is decorated in period style throughout with wood-panelled walls, crystal chandeliers and intricate rugs. The 87 rooms and suites are more contemporary but still classical in style and there is a choice of two pools as well as a spa, horse riding and a range of trails though the extensive grounds and surroundings for tranquil and scenic walking. Wildflower Hall is part of the Oberoi group and is a 45-minute drive north of Shimla.



The Oberoi Cecil, Shimla



Aarti, Haridwar

Haridwar

Situated at the point where the Ganges flows through its final rapids and transforms into a slower body of water, Haridwar is one of India's seven holy Hindu cities. This spot has been inhabited for thousands of years and its history is intertwined with the very origins of Hinduism itself. It has witnessed numerous rulers and invaders over the centuries and today draws huge crowds. Temples, monuments and intricately carved havelis line the streets, but the city looks its most impressive in the evening when pilgrims flock to the riverbanks for the evening Aarti and set floating candles adrift on the water. A wonderfully spiritual place, Haridwar is well connected by road and rail and within easy access of Delhi, making it an unusual and highly atmospheric gateway to the region.

Haveli Hari Ganga, Haridwar

This 90-year-old haveli is situated directly on the edge of the River Ganges and has been carefully restored, offering 19 classically-decorated rooms with rich fabrics and modern bathrooms. Some of the rooms lead onto shared, large balconies that overlook the river and a small temple in the inner courtyard. The hotel is a 20 minute walk from Hari Ki Pari, where the evening Aarti ceremony takes place.

Aarti

An important daily ritual, an Aarti is a Hindu ceremony where burning lamps are offered to worship a sacred deity. The most public of these ceremonies are the Ganga Aarti (worship to the Ganges River) when priests hold large fire bowls in their hands and pilgrims offer small flames and flowers to the river as a symbol of hope and to give thanks to the Ganges for being a source of life and prosperity. People crowd onto the ghats where the sound of gongs and chanting, as well as the smell of incense,



Priest performing Aarti, Haridwar

fills the air. It is an enchanting ceremony and witnessing an Aarti can be a magical and humbling experience as you realise the importance that religion plays in everyday life in India. Varanasi, Haridwar and Rishikesh are the best places to experience this moving ritual.



Offerings, Aarti ceremony

In Varanasi an evening boat trip along the river offers a different perspective on the ceremony and helps avoid the crowds on the banks. In Rishikesh the crowds are smaller but with many travellers attending the ceremony it can feel less authentic. For the most traditional experience visit Haridwar but be prepared to jostle with hundreds of locals on the riverbanks.



Sadhu, Haridwar



Rajasthani women, Rishikesh



Haveli Hari Ganga, Haridwar



Ananda, near Rishikesh



Teak trees, Corbett National Park

Rishikesh

Another of India's seven holy cities, Rishikesh is located upriver from Haridwar where the Ganges emerges from the Sivalik Hills. A city of pilgrimage since ancient times, Rishikesh is renowned as a centre for yoga and meditation and attracts hordes of pilgrims seeking enlightenment. The pace of life here is unhurried but ever since the Beatles visited in 1968 it has been a popular destination for Western travellers. More recently Rishikesh has emerged as a popular river rafting destination with both gentle meandering and quicker paced trips through white-water rapids. The rafting season runs from September to June.

Ananda, near Rishikesh

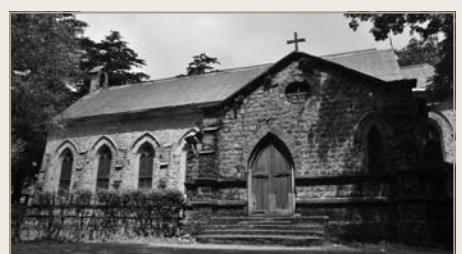
Gloriously relaxed and indulgent, Ananda is a luxurious retreat set in a vast estate. A centre of well-being, the approach here is holistic, from the wide range of Ayurvedic treatments and yoga classes to the delicious but healthy food in the restaurant. The 78 spacious rooms, suites and villas are stylish and well-equipped with panoramic windows and balconies or private gardens offering beautiful views down the valley over the Ganges to Rishikesh. Should you wish to do something more active, there's a small golf course, cooking classes, good walking and white-water rafting on the Ganges available.

Corbett National Park

Named after the legendary hunter-turned-conservationist Major Jim Corbett, this park is one of India's oldest and sits majestically on the edge of the lower Himalaya. This vast park covers open parkland and dense sal forest and is renowned for its enormously varied birdlife including eagles and great hornbill, as well as frequent elephant sightings and plenty of antelope, deer, wild boar and jackals. Although there is a healthy population of tigers in the park, they can be difficult to spot due to the dense vegetation. Accommodation here is generally simple but comfortable and most safaris are by 4x4.



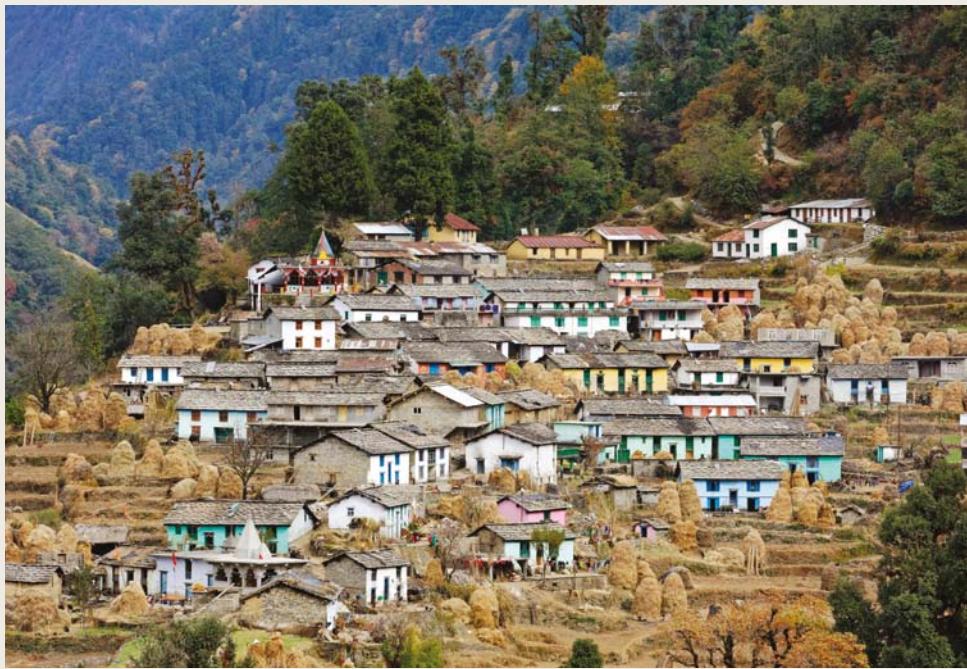
Indian pond heron, Corbett National Park



Tracing family links

For almost 200 years the British had a significant role in Indian affairs and the history of the two countries is inextricably linked. From architecture and cookery to language and culture, both India and Britain have to some extent been transformed by each other. In 1947 India finally celebrated its birth as a sovereign nation, but for many families the ties remain strong and as younger generations start to research their family history the links to the subcontinent become apparent.

Our Indian Subcontinent team can help trace roots and assist in planning visits to hospitals and schools to relive old memories, tales and photographs. Talk to a specialist to ensure your itinerary is planned accordingly.



Kumaon



Path to Shakti 360° Leti, Kumaon region



Lepcha woman, Sikkim

Trekking & village walks

The majestic Himalayan landscapes are best appreciated on foot and we specialise in short walks or day treks across the region. We also feature a series of remote village walks in Kumaon, Ladakh and Sikkim which are a wonderful way to appreciate rural life in this area. Walking in the mountains allows time to appreciate the crisp air and stunning views as well as offering the opportunity to meet the local people who live in this incredible landscape. Although moderate fitness is required, we plan walks of between one and five hours per day with an emphasis on enjoying the walking and the scenery rather than testing your limits in higher altitudes. An expert guide will accompany you and introduce you to local community members to enhance your understanding of Himalayan life, while local porters will carry your bags. Accommodation is provided in traditional village houses, some simple, others stylishly renovated, but all of which provide a unique and memorable place to stay in the mountains.

Kumaon

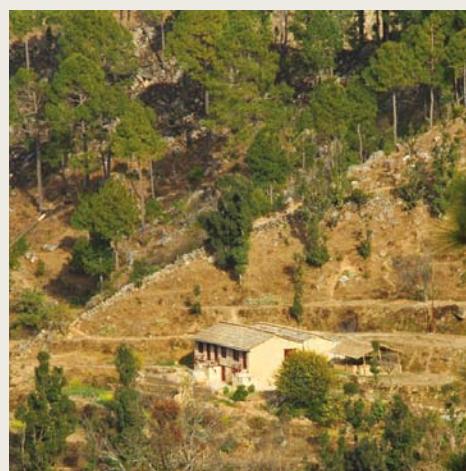
The exceptional scenery in Kumaon has earned it the moniker of the 'Abode of the Gods' and the region's little-visited villages are joined by meandering paths through paddy fields or sal forests and set against a backdrop of Himalayan peaks. A charming region not far from Almora, traditional culture and lifestyle are important here and make it a fascinating place to visit. Few people have heard of Kumaon outside India which means you are unlikely to meet any other travellers and can enjoy this incredible region more or less to yourself.

Ladakh

Highly traditional and incredibly beautiful, Ladakh is one of India's most remote regions and is home to some of the most spectacular mountain scenery on the subcontinent. During the short summer season from June to September, this destination makes for great walking and cultural sightseeing. Rugged snow-capped peaks tower over deep, turquoise lakes and high altitude desert while a visit to villages provides an insight into one of the most intact Tantric Buddhist societies still in existence.

Sikkim

One of India's most rewarding destinations for mountain scenery, Sikkim is a small but incredibly diverse state with a rich Buddhist culture dating back to the 8th century. It is a well-established destination but we will ensure that you capture the tranquillity in unspoilt villages and serene monasteries. Throughout a visit the mighty Kanchenjunga, the world's third highest peak, provides a stunning backdrop.



Itmenaan Estate & Lodges, Kumaon region

Itmenaan Estate & Lodges, Kumaon region

A hillside estate of terraced fields and orchards, pine, oak and rhododendron forest, Itmenaan offers traditional village accommodation in an intimate setting. A restored dry-stone house and a small cottage lie at the heart of the estate, while two further cottages sit in outlying villages. All have been refurbished using reclaimed materials and traditional local skills and offer simple but authentic mountain accommodation. The rooms have comfortable beds with warm duvets and en suite bathrooms, and a cook is on site to provide hearty traditional meals made from local produce. Each house has a communal area to relax in and outdoor space; a courtyard with an open fire or a canopied roof terrace to admire the views.

Shakti 360° Leti, Kumaon region

Wake to a panorama of the Himalaya at this luxurious mountain retreat that blends traditional local construction with contemporary style. There are just four exclusive cottages, each built with dry-stone walls on three sides and floor-to-ceiling windows on the fourth revealing uninterrupted views of the Pancha Chuli peaks or the lush valleys below. Although remote, service here is impeccable and the food sumptuous, with regional and international meals made from fresh local produce. After walking through the villages of Kumaon, Shakti 360° Leti is an indulgent yet somehow unassuming choice providing unforgettable views of the mountains.



Monk, Sikkim



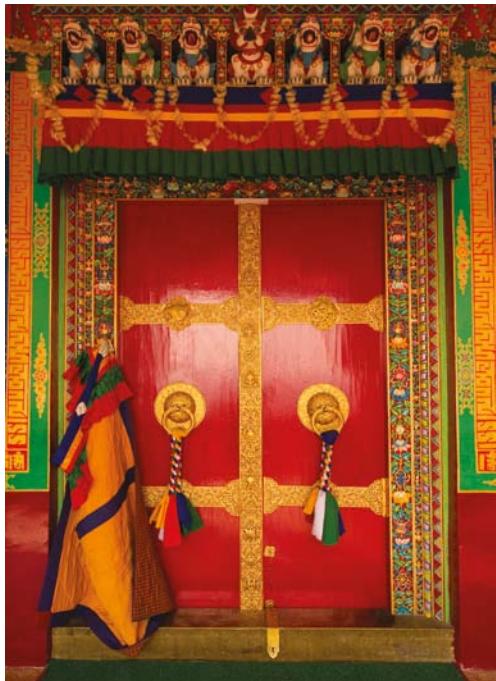
Orchid, Kalimpong



Darjeeling



Darjeeling Himalayan Railway



Rumtek Monastery, Sikkim

Darjeeling

India's most famous hill station sits on a high ridge surrounded by lush tea plantations set against a backdrop of snow-capped peaks. An escape from the summer heat of the plains since colonial times, it is home to Nepali, Bhutanese and Tibetan people and popular with international travellers. Along with colonial-era architecture you'll find Buddhist monasteries and tea estates to explore as well as the fascinating Tenzing Norgay Mountaineering Institute. Most visitors head to Tiger Hill for dawn to see the sun rise over the magnificent mountains and to catch a glimpse of Kanchenjunga, or Everest on clear days, but equally breathtaking vistas are revealed aboard the historic toy train, the narrow-gauge Darjeeling Himalayan Railway which travels here at a sedate pace.



Glenburn, near Darjeeling



Tea harvesting, Darjeeling

Glenburn, near Darjeeling

A gorgeous colonial bungalow set in the heart of a working tea estate, Glenburn provides luxurious period-style accommodation about one and a half hours' drive from Darjeeling. The eight beautiful rooms are split between two bungalows and feature hand-embroidered bed linen, intricately carved furniture, free-standing baths and fresh flowers. Guests can take a cookery lesson in the open kitchen, go fishing, or enjoy one of the many walking trails in the area, all of which offer excellent opportunities for birdwatching. Guests are also invited to tour the tea plantation on foot with the estate manager to learn about tea cultivation and processing before sampling a cup of their finest blend on the terrace while soaking up the spectacular views.

Kalimpong

An important centre for the trade of tea along the Silk Route in ancient times, today Kalimpong still attracts local merchants to its colourful market and is a bustling place, home to a variety of monasteries. Quiet routes give visitors an excellent opportunity to meet local people as walks pass through remote villages. School visits or lunch breaks in a villager's house can be arranged for an authentic insight into life in this isolated mountain region. Kalimpong is also an important plant nursery centre with an ideal climate for the cultivation of gladioli, dahlias and beautiful orchids.

Sikkim

Nestled deep in the foothills and overlooked by the mighty Kanchenjunga, Sikkim is a fascinating place, culturally different from other parts of India. Buddhist culture has long been established here and brightly-clothed Tibetan monks can be seen wherever you go, as can views of the snow-capped peaks reaching as far as Everest on a clear day. Gangtok and Pelling are two fascinating places to visit with Pemayangste and Sangachoeling monasteries accessible from Pelling, while the Rumtek Monastery and the Research Institute of Tibetology are in Gangtok.



Monastery at Basgo, Ladakh

Ladakh

India's most remote state, Ladakh is known as 'the roof of the world'. Its high altitude deserts and glaciers are beautiful and the people here are some of the most traditional in India. The sacred Indus River runs through the region from Tibet and is framed by the Karakorum Range to the west and Tibetan Plateau to the east, ensuring Ladakh hosts some of the world's most spectacular mountain scenery. In the Nubra Valley, sand dunes are sculpted by the wind, while elsewhere stunning lakes play host to a plethora of migratory birds. The Ladakhis are predominantly Tibetan Buddhist and the food and architecture strongly reflect this, but the culture here is unique with women enjoying higher status and relative freedom compared with many other parts of the country. Ladakhis are also generally self-sufficient despite the hostile climate in which they live. Because of the harsh climate the region is only open to visitors from June to September, and is reached from Delhi by air or by an epic overland journey by road from Manali, which takes at least two days. Due to the altitude you will need time to acclimatise once you arrive. Leh, the capital, is an interesting place to do so with its fort, palace and maze of narrow streets. After a few days here, head into the open countryside to see the traditional way of life and the staggering scenery.



Shakti Ladakh, Ladakh

Shakti Ladakh, Ladakh

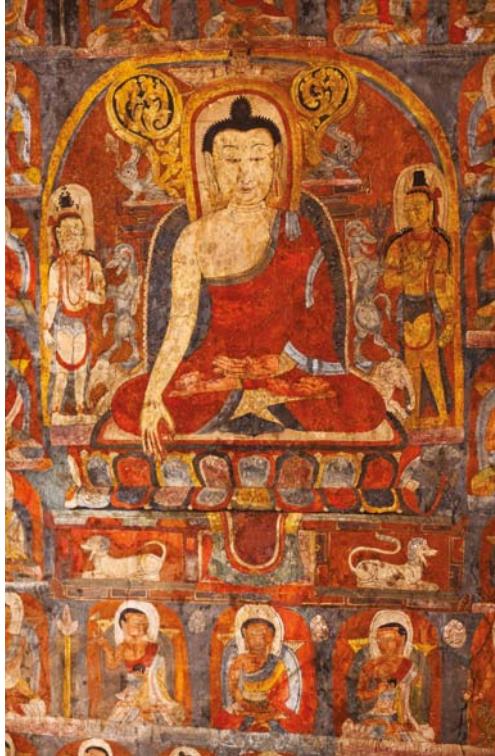
A wonderful way to see the traditional villages of the Indus Valley, Shakti Ladakh provides an authentic but very comfortable village experience in locations well off the beaten track. The whole concept revolves around gaining a deeper understanding of the way of life in this remote region and provides guests with a seamless way to participate in local life without having to compromise on comfort. Walk between traditional villages and visit local schools, monasteries and markets before arriving at your village house, a simple traditional dwelling restored and refurbished with refined but understated elegance. Exposed beams and solid-fuel stoves ensure plenty of local character but the carefully chosen furniture and curios, beautiful fabrics and richly woven rugs show impeccable taste. Each village house is individual in style and decor but all offer a deeply luxurious stay as well as a genuine village experience.

Chamba Camp, Thiksey

Another excellent option for exploring the highlights of Ladakh, Chamba Camp is an extremely comfortable base for a bespoke six-day itinerary. Guests stay in this tented camp at the foot of Thiksey Monastery and set out each day to visit ancient monasteries and sacred sites, traditional villages, age-old fortresses and the fascinating Ladakhi capital, Leh. Itineraries can be adjusted to suit your interests; watch a game of polo, raft down the Indus, go birdwatching, trekking or just enjoy a leisurely picnic in a secluded spot with stunning views. The tents have high ceilings, air-conditioning, private decks and en suite bathrooms and are furnished in a romantic, classical style with four-poster beds, hanging lamps, crisp linens and dark woods. All come with private butler service and the superb camp food is made to local family recipes. In the evenings guest speakers offer an insight into local traditions, customs and history in a series of fire-lit talks.



Chamba Camp, Thiksey



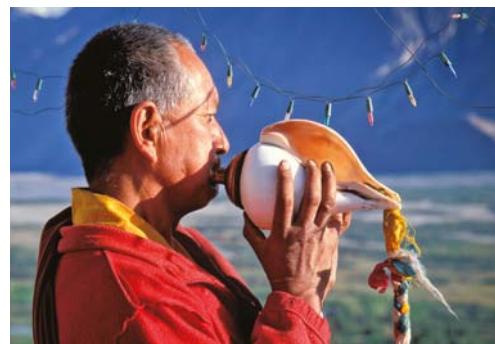
Early Buddhist artwork, Alchi



Nubra Valley



Shanti Stupa, Leh



Monk, Nubra Valley



Ule Ethnic Resort, near Alchi

Leh

Set between magnificent peaks, high mountain desert and a splash of bright green irrigated fields, Leh, the capital of Ladakh, makes a fascinating introduction to the country. The city sits at an altitude of 3,505 metres and it is necessary to acclimatise here before travelling further or even taking any moderate exercise. Leh's extreme location and harsh climate means it is cut off from the rest of the world for much of the year, but for centuries it has been an important trading post for Himalayan people. Routes run up into the Nubra Valley, to the Silk Route, and over the high passes to Manali and the Indian plains. Today, much of the trade comes from tourism and while travellers enjoy the souvenir shops and restaurants, locals lead an almost medieval way of life. Mud-brick houses line the streets, vibrant markets provide a lifeline for local subsistence farmers who come to trade their meagre wares, and for most, life continues much as it has done for centuries. A laid-back city in a spectacular setting, Leh offers a glimpse of an age-old way of life as well as a number of interesting attractions such as the ruined Tibetan-style Leh Palace which dominates the skyline, the Tsemo Fort and Gompa, and the glittering Shanti Stupa.

Grand Dragon, Leh

One of Leh's best accommodation options, the Grand Dragon is a modern hotel blending contemporary design with traditional Ladakhi touches. There are 50 comfortable rooms decorated in sleek international style and offering modern conveniences. The large windows overlook either the stunning Stok Ranges to the south or Leh Palace and Khardung La pass to the north. A range of different cuisines is served in the colourful, traditionally-decorated restaurant and there's a spacious garden outside with plenty of seating for admiring the views. The hotel also has good environmental practices including solar panels providing the hot water.

Alchi

Some of the rarest and most extensive examples of Buddhist art in the Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakhi regions can be found in Alchi, a small village at an altitude of 3,120 metres. The temple complex here dates back to the 11th century and is known for its delicate painted shrines. Remarkably vivid and incredibly detailed, the paintings, along with giant statues and elaborate wood carvings make this one of Ladakh's most famous sites. The monastery is situated in the village and easy to explore on foot before wandering around the relaxed village market.

Ule Ethnic Resort, near Alchi

This family-run resort is one of the oldest places to stay in Ladakh, surrounded by orchards and set on the banks of the Indus a 20-minute drive west of Alchi. There are 31 cottages and 15 rustic huts, all of which are simply but comfortably furnished, each with its own bathroom. There's a spa, library and a range of activities on offer but few other facilities. Despite this, the resort is an incredibly memorable place to stay.

Nubra Valley

Locked between the Ladakh Range and the higher Karakoram Range, the isolated Nubra Valley is most easily reached via the Khardung La pass, the world's highest motorable mountain road. The oasis villages along the valley are traditional places dependent on agriculture and with a confluence of rivers and long hours of sunshine there are two annual harvests here. Beyond the irrigated fields, stark sand dunes form against a backdrop of snow-capped peaks.



Boats on Dal Lake, Srinagar



Pine forest, Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu & Kashmir

A region once popular with travellers for its beautiful alpine scenery, cool air and scenic trekking, Jammu and Kashmir is currently largely off limits. Recent conflict, especially in disputed Kashmir, mean that many parts of this area remain dangerous and at the time of this brochure going to print, the government advises against all travel to wide swathes of the region. For this reason, Audley is not sending travellers here at this time but hopes to do so as soon as the situation improves and the travel advisory is lifted. Ladakh is not included in the warning and remains as serene and sedate as ever, offering a wonderful alternative destination with a rich culture and heritage, the region's most spectacular scenery and incredibly friendly people.



Tsemo Fort and Gompa, Leh

Tailoring your trip

The itineraries shown are designed to give you a flavour of what is possible, and are routes that work particularly well. We can use these as a basis to plan your trip or can design a completely different itinerary to suit your tastes and interests. Please call one of our North India specialists to start planning your itinerary.

01993 838 345

Getting around

Although dramatic in their nature, the Himalaya are relatively easy to explore with good road, rail and air links. Most fly into Delhi or Mumbai from where you can connect with a domestic airline for an internal flight into the mountains. The rail system from colonial days makes train travel a good option too, although it is not up to Western standards, so may not suit everyone. Most travel is done by road across the Himalaya regions, however varying road quality and volume of traffic means journey times can be unpredictable. We use 4x4 vehicles where required and ensure you always have a driver and guide with you. In Ladakh we will also provide porters if necessary.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	~	✓✓	✓✓

✓✓ The best time to travel.

✓ A good time to travel, but there may be some factors to be aware of.

~ Travel is possible, but this is not the best time of year.

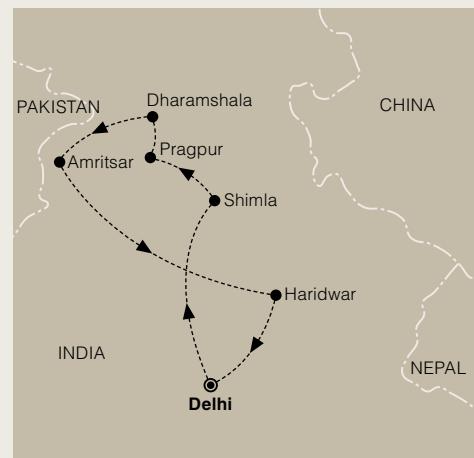
✗ Travel is not recommended.

Warm daytime temperatures (around 20C/68F) and cooler evenings (around 10C/50F) make February to April the best months to visit the Indian Himalaya. October and November also offer similarly good conditions after the monsoon has ended. Changeable and cold (5-10C/40-50F) weather in December and January makes winter a less suitable option, but when clear, the incredible mountain views will be your reward. If you wish to visit tea plantations in the Himalaya, it is worth noting that picking and production stops from about mid-November until mid-March. Ladakh is completely different to the lower Himalaya regions. Its harsh climate means that travel is only possible from June to September.

Time difference: GMT+5.5 hours

Prices

We offer trips to cater for a wide range of budgets. You can find up-to-date guideline prices for your trip to Indian Himalaya on our website, alternatively please call our specialists to discuss your plans.



Western Himalaya Explored

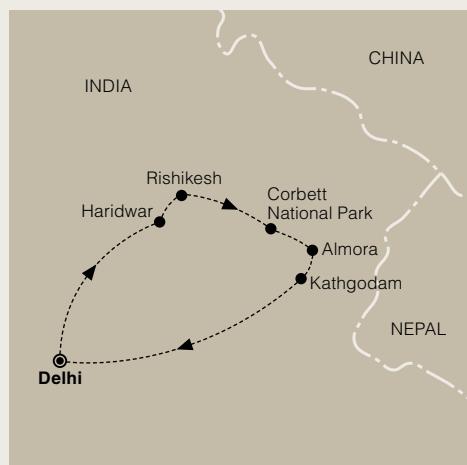
India's western Himalaya is an incredibly diverse area and this itinerary takes in its cultural and historic highlights.

- Day 1** Fly overnight to Delhi.
- Day 2** Arrive in Delhi and enjoy a leisurely afternoon.
- Day 3** Take the train to Kalka before continuing on the scenic 'toy train' to Shimla.
- Day 4** Discover Shimla's charms with a stroll along Mall Road and visits to its historic sights.
- Day 5** Drive to Pragpur for an insight into rural life.
- Day 6** Continue to Dharamshala and visit McLeodganj, home to the Dalai Lama.
- Day 7** Learn about Tibetan culture, lifestyles and beliefs on a visit to the Norbulingka Institute and a Buddhist monastery.
- Day 8** Drive to Amritsar and enjoy the closing of the border ceremony.
- Day 9** Explore the spectacular Golden Temple by day and return at dusk to see the elaborate 'Putting to Bed' ceremony.
- Day 10** Take the train to Haridwar and enjoy the evening Aarti ceremony.
- Day 11** Visit Rishikesh and experience a different Ganges Aarti.
- Day 12** Catch the early morning or late afternoon train back to Delhi.
- Day 13** Transfer to the airport for your international flight.

Stay longer

Follow your trip with a few days in Rajasthan to see its cultural and architectural treasures or visit Corbett National Park to trek through the jungle on the trail of wild elephants.

Suggested itineraries



Adventurous Himalaya

A more active trip through the Indian Himalaya, this activity-focussed itinerary offers plenty of opportunities to explore the mountain scenery up close as well as get a sense of local culture. Take in historic cities, raft down the Ganges, track wildlife in Corbett National Park and hike between mountain villages in the remote Kumaon region for an insight into rural life.

Day 1	Fly overnight to Delhi.
Day 2	Explore or relax after arriving in Delhi.
Day 3	Take the train to holy Haridwar, join the crowds on the riverbanks for the evening Aarti.
Day 4	Drive to Rishikesh to raft down the Ganges or explore rural villages.
Day 5	Continue by road to Corbett National Park for an afternoon 4x4 safari.
Day 6	Explore the park in more depth on the trail of some of its exotic wildlife.
Day 7	Drive to Almora and start your walk heading to a Kumaon village house.
Day 8	Continue on foot to the next village house, enjoying tranquil trails and stunning views.
Day 9	Spend another day walking between villages in the mountains.
Day 10	A final morning walking before meeting your car and taking the train from Kathgodam to Delhi.
Day 11	A final day in Delhi to explore or relax.
Day 12	Transfer to the airport for your international flight.

Stay longer

Extend this itinerary with a few more nights in a remote mountain retreat such as the luxurious Shakti 360° Leti with its stunning mountain views, or combine it with the cultural highlights of Rajasthan or the cities of the western Himalaya.



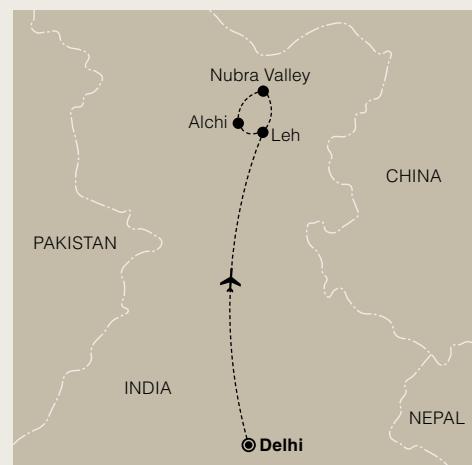
Tea and Buddhism

Explore spectacular mountain scenery and Nepali, Bhutanese and Tibetan culture in the northeastern Himalaya on this comprehensive itinerary taking in the grand architecture of Calcutta as well as the Buddhist monasteries of Sikkim, the villages of Kalimpong and the tea plantations of Darjeeling.

Day 1	Fly overnight to Calcutta.
Day 2	Arrive in Calcutta and have the afternoon at leisure.
Day 3	Explore rich history and culture on a guided tour.
Day 4	Fly to Bagdogra and travel by road to the ancient trading post of Kalimpong.
Day 5	Walk to local villages for a glimpse of mountain life and enjoy lunch in a local home.
Day 6	Travel from Kalimpong across the Sikkim border to Gangtok.
Day 7	Visit the Rumtek Monastery and the Research Institute of Tibetology.
Day 8	Drive to Pelling to visit the Pemayangste and Sangachoeing Monasteries.
Day 9	Head to the former colonial hill station of Darjeeling.
Day 10	Explore a local tea estate and learn about tea cultivation and production.
Day 11	Unwind with a leisurely walk through the surrounding hills.
Day 12	Fly to Delhi or Calcutta from Bagdogra.
Day 13	Return to the airport for your international flight.

Stay longer

Combine time in the northeastern Himalaya with a boat trip along the River Hugli or through Assam on the Brahmaputra. Alternatively, travel to Nepal or Bhutan for a contrasting Himalayan experience and a greater understanding of Buddhism.



Ladakh Explored

Explore the spectacular scenery and cultural treasures of 'Little Tibet' on this itinerary which takes in the monasteries around Leh, the Khardung La pass and Nubra Valley. Ladakh is only accessible from June to September.

Day 1	Fly overnight to Delhi.
Day 2	Arrive in Delhi, spend the afternoon relaxing or exploring.
Day 3	Fly to Leh and have a quiet day to acclimatise to the altitude.
Day 4	Explore Leh on a walking tour and visit the Shanti Stupa at sunset.
Day 5	Enjoy dramatic scenery and visits to Thiksey, Shey and Hemis monasteries.
Day 6	Enjoy a spectacular drive along the Indus Valley to Alchi, visiting Rizong Monastery en route.
Day 7	Explore Alchi and the ancient Buddhist history of the area.
Day 8	Drive back to Leh visiting the remarkable ruins at Basgo en route.
Day 9	Visit the isolated monasteries at Stakna, Matho and Stok, all surrounded by stunning, towering peaks.
Day 10	Drive over one of the world's highest road passes to the Nubra Valley.
Day 11	Explore the Nubra Valley.
Day 12	Return to Leh by road.
Day 13	Connect with your international flight.

Stay longer

Stay in Ladakh for longer, spend a little more time acclimatising, have more relaxation or embark on an overnight trek depending on your abilities and interests. Alternatively, a short flight back to Delhi could mean a quick exploration of north India's Golden Triangle.



Mumbai, Goa & central

FROM THE FRENETIC PACE OF INDIA'S LARGEST CITY to the deserted plains of the Deccan Plateau, central India is one of the subcontinent's most diverse regions and rewards visitors with an immense variety of landscapes and attractions. Here the faithful toiled in the sun to carve elaborate temples from remote cliff faces while medieval princes grew fabulously wealthy on the spoils of the region's rich mineral resources. This was once a region of Hindu and Muslim kingdoms, and today is dotted with ancient cities, colonial gems and some of the country's most striking religious monuments. The majestic Deccan Plateau remains little-visited, its unusual landscapes and crumbling monuments more than compensating for any lack of infrastructure. By contrast, cosmopolitan Mumbai is an expanding metropolis, home to a melting pot of people and cultures, a truly fascinating city to explore both day and night. Further south, lush forested hills descend through sleepy villages to Goa's heralded beaches and the Arabian Sea. Enduringly popular, Goa's laid-back charm and natural beauty make it a relaxing end for a trip along a road less-travelled.

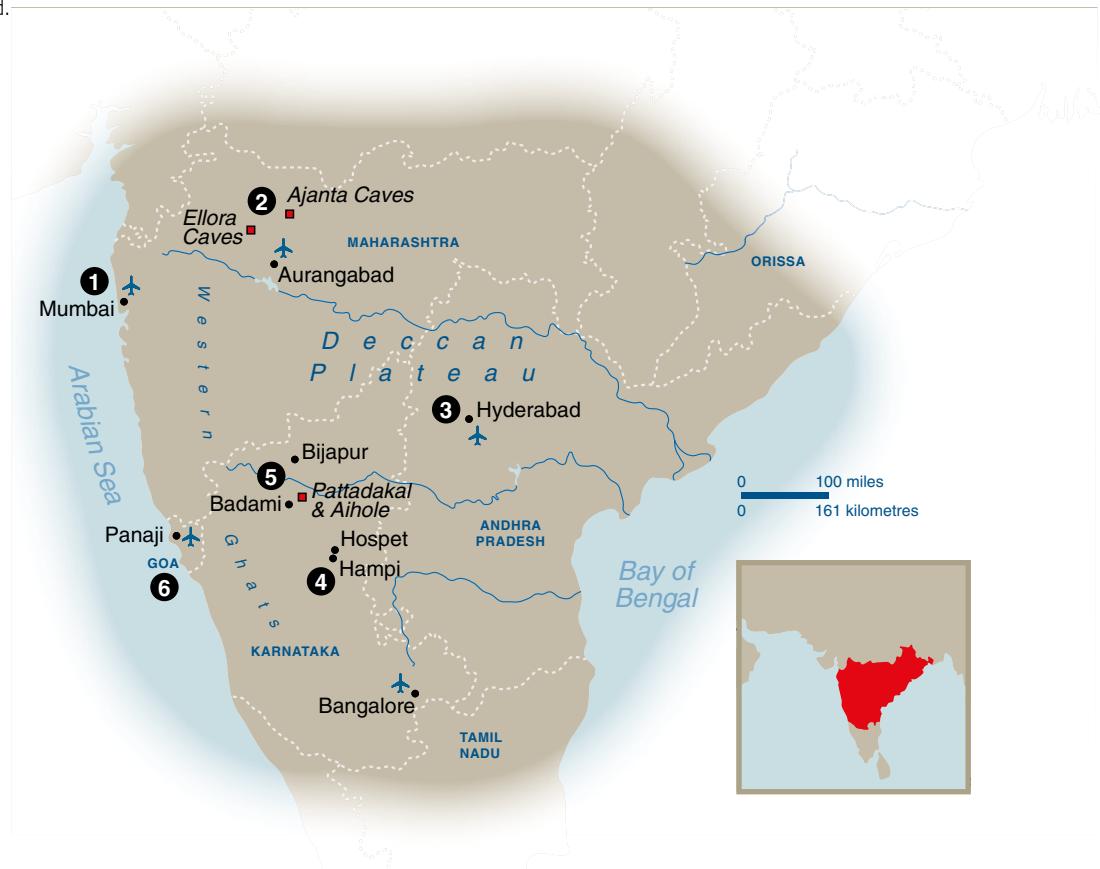
Audley in Mumbai, Goa & central India

Standards of infrastructure and accommodation vary across this vast area, but our knowledge and experience of the region, as well as our honest advice, will help you plan your trip. We use knowledgeable guides to help navigate any challenges and ensure your trip runs smoothly and is enjoyable from start to finish. Mumbai can be an overwhelming place on first arrival, but our recommendations will help you discover some of the most vibrant and memorable parts of the city.

The Deccan Plateau is a largely undeveloped region, but we have spent time exploring and getting to know the hidden treasures. Our specialists will offer the best advice on where to go after discussing your interests and expectations. By comparison, Goa is an extremely easy end to a trip and offers stunning beaches and an irresistible languid charm.

Accommodation

Accommodation options vary widely across this region. Unsurprisingly, Mumbai offers hotels for every taste and budget, we have hand-picked a few favourites in the best locations which we can recommend to you. In the central Deccan Plateau the choice is limited and towns often have only one reasonable hotel. Goa's popularity means that hotels are numerous but busy. We have sought out some quieter options that offer character and charm as well as excellent locations and service. These vary from colonial mansions and boutique hotels to more modern waterfront resorts, but all offer a memorable base from which to enjoy this captivating state.



1 Mumbai

Ancient yet avant-garde, India's largest city is an astounding place with relentless energy.
See page 48

2 Ajanta & Ellora

Two remote UNESCO World Heritage Sites, these richly decorated cave temples are simply breathtaking.
See page 51

3 Golconda

A medieval capital and fort which grew wealthy on the trade of some of the world's finest gemstones.
See page 51

4 Hampi

Elaborate ancient temples and palaces set in a surreal boulder-strewn landscape.
See page 52

5 Deccan Plateau

A rewarding but little-visited region with temples and cultural treasures.
See pages 52-53

6 Goa

Gloriously laid-back and relaxing, Goa offers endless beaches as well as the fascinating remnants of a colonial past.
See page 54



Gateway of India, Mumbai



Mumbai beach and city view

Mumbai

Financial hub, commercial centre and the glittering home of Bollywood, Mumbai is a glorious assault on the senses. It is India's largest and most cosmopolitan city, sprawling in every direction as people flock here to make their fortune. At first an overwhelming and contradictory place where the excesses of India's most wealthy butt up against some of the world's largest slums, scratch under the surface and you will discover a fascinating city of contrasts where the whole gamut of life is laid bare before you. The historic downtown area has an incredibly rich collection of colonial-era buildings, monuments and museums as well as glittering shopping malls, bustling markets and some of India's finest restaurants and bars. If it all gets too much, it's relatively easy to escape the hectic pace of city life in the numerous parks and gardens, along the seafront, or on a boat trip to Elephanta Island to see its interesting cave temples.



Trident Nariman Point, Mumbai

The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai

The Grande Dame of Mumbai hotels, The Taj Mahal Palace is a legendary place and one of the city's most famous landmarks. The hotel has hosted royalty, foreign dignitaries and celebrities over the years and is renowned for its opulent decor and impeccable service. The eclectic design takes elements from Moorish, Oriental and Indian architecture and blends them with more contemporary Asian and Western influences to create a rich, heritage style. A diverse collection of antiques and artworks adorn the public spaces while the 560 rooms and suites are decorated in a luxurious classical style. There are ten restaurants to choose from, a swimming pool, spa and even a shopping mall.

Trident Nariman Point, Mumbai

Built on a grand scale, this large high-rise hotel overlooks Mumbai's stylish Marine Drive and the seafront promenade, and has modern interiors throughout. Attracting a mix of business and leisure travellers, it is a vibrant choice with a range of restaurants as well as a well-equipped fitness centre and spa. The 555 spacious rooms are contemporary in style with views over the city or across the bay. This excellent value hotel also has a wonderful pool with sea views, maximising its great location.



The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai

The Leela, Mumbai

Conveniently located close to the airport, The Leela is a comfortable, modern hotel with great service and facilities. Although contemporary in style, the hotel manages to retain local character with carved panelling and curios, inspired by India's rich history. The 391 rooms and suites are luxuriously decorated in an international style and feature all modern conveniences. Set in extensive gardens, the hotel has a choice of good restaurants and a lovely outdoor pool.



The Leela, Mumbai



Dhobi ghat, Mumbai

Under the skin of Mumbai

For some, Mumbai is just an airport hub for onwards travel, but if you have a day or two to spare there is lots to discover. A fast-paced, densely packed metropolis with a myriad of attractions and neighbourhoods, it is best explored with a local guide who can simplify logistics and reveal the heart and soul of the city and its fascinating people. Depending on your interests, there are many options for exploring the city; from a guided tour at dawn before the city awakes and browsing local markets to visiting the set of a Bollywood film, or a poignant insight into the lives of Mumbai's entrepreneurial slum dwellers.



Dharavi slum, Mumbai

Laundry and the dhobi-wallahs

A visit to a traditional open-air laundry area called a dhobi ghat, offers visitors a revealing insight into the hidden workers who keep the garments of this enormous city clean. Every day thousands of pieces of laundry are taken to the ghats from hotels, hospitals, restaurants and private homes and washed by a legion of dhobi-wallahs (laundry workers). A visit here is one you are unlikely to forget with hundreds of families working together, soaping, thrashing and pounding out the dirt at concrete wash pens. Dried in colourful lines and pressed by large, heavy irons, each item is returned to its original owner – identified by a hidden mark.

Dharavi slum

A place of extreme poverty but continual hope and hard work, Dharavi, Asia's largest slum is home to more than a million people, many of whom came to Mumbai to seek their fortunes but couldn't afford the city's high rents. A half day tour of the slum is an eye-opening and thought provoking experience. Smelly, dirty and at times disturbing, a visit will provide a unique insight into the reality of life in Mumbai and the incredible enterprise and good humour of people who live in truly staggering conditions. Narrow lanes with open sewers are flanked by tiny huts where residents run a profusion of businesses from pottery and recycling to soap making, embroidery and leather tanning.

We have spent time ensuring we work with a responsible company who understand the sensitivities of exploring an area like this. The tours we offer are run by a not-for-profit enterprise that donates 80% of proceeds to local NGOs.

Welcome to Bollywood

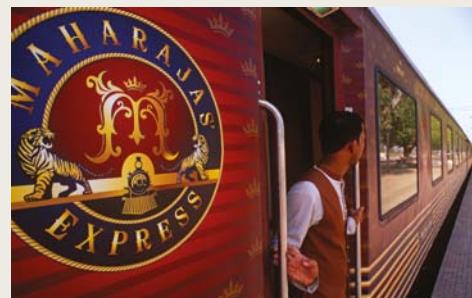
India's film industry churns out movies at almost twice the speed of Hollywood. Spend a day gaining an insight into the studios, stars and stunts that make up this massive homegrown enterprise. About 900 films are made in Bollywood each year and you'll get a behind-the-scenes look at how these colourful movies are made at the Sankraman and Balaji film studios. Have lunch at a local restaurant then visit a post production sound studio and a Bollywood dance workshop. The exact content of the day will depend on the filming schedule but with the sheer volume of films in production at any one time, it's sure to be a revealing experience.



Artist painting a Bollywood poster



Palace on Wheels



Maharajas' Express



Rail journey

Trains & rail journeys

Travelling by train in India is a rewarding, but at times, challenging option. The extensive train system carries millions of passengers each day and joining them offers a unique perspective on this fascinating country. From the moment you step onto the platform with the chai (tea) vendors and smell of freshly-cooked samosas, you'll be immersed in local life in all its frenetic glory. We will provide a representative to accompany you at either end of your trip to help simplify the logistics and you can choose a full day journey to just a few hours on board depending on your preferences and itinerary.

Local trains

India's extensive train system is one of the best ways to get around to experience the country in a whole new light. Private cabins are not available on standard Indian trains but you can reserve your seat and travel in relative comfort. The trains are generally very sociable places and hawkers ply the aisles selling everything from hot food to stationery. Although generally efficient, delays are frequent however, and fog between December and early February can cause havoc with schedules in the north. The short express trains that run between Delhi and Agra offer a great introduction to the Indian rail system as do the historic narrow gauge mountain railways around Shimla, Darjeeling and Ooty.



Local train, Delhi



Palace on Wheels

Luxury trains

There are several luxury trains that operate on set routes allowing passengers to cover large distances and many attractions in a short period of time. Inspired by the trains once used by India's royal families, this is train travel on a grand scale. The sights of Rajasthan and north India are well covered by several of these trains, however the south has fewer options. Journeys usually last seven days and pack in as many attractions as possible so it can be a tiring option and is best combined with a few days of relaxation or a longer itinerary. Luxury trains are not immune to problems however, with group excursions, overambitious itineraries on some routes and cancellations and delays still possible. For this reason we only recommend some operators. Please speak to a specialist for further details.

Palace on Wheels

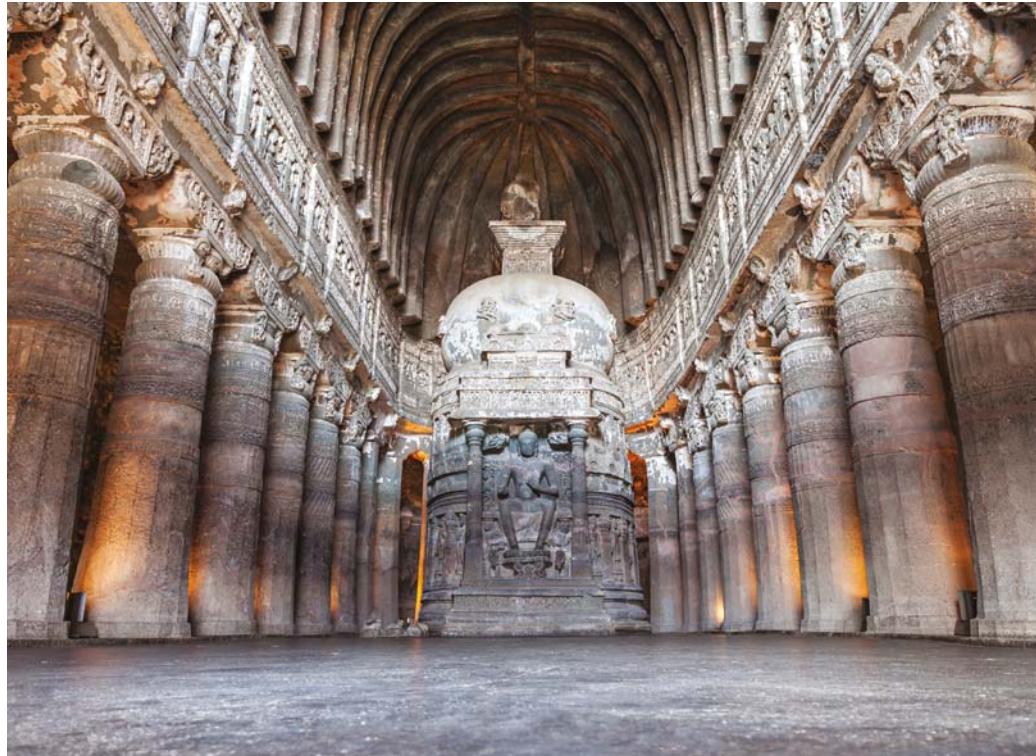
Perhaps the best known of India's luxury trains, the Palace on Wheels covers all of Rajasthan's key attractions from the pink city of Jaipur to the fort of Jaisalmer, Udaipur, the romantic lake city, Ranthambore National Park, Chittorgarh with its famous Rajput architecture and finally the Taj Mahal. Although not quite as luxurious as the Maharajas' Express, it is still a wonderfully nostalgic way to travel and offers air-conditioned cabins with en suite facilities and personal attendants, two restaurants and a lounge car.

Maharajas' Express

One of the world's great train services, the Maharajas' Express is India's most luxurious train. Sumptuous carriages combine traditional Indian design with modern conveniences for an extremely comfortable experience. There are well-equipped cabins, two restaurants, a bar and an observation lounge as well as a well-planned schedule of outings. Journeys generally last a week and cover a variety of routes including Delhi to Mumbai, Bandhavgarh National Park and the fascinating city of Varanasi.



Maharajas' Express



Cave temple, Ajanta



Local market, Hyderabad



Golconda fort, Hyderabad



Bibi-ka-Makbara, Aurangabad



Taj Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad

Aurangabad

Briefly the capital of the last Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, Aurangabad is home to a number of cultural sites as well as being a convenient base for visiting the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Ajanta and Ellora. Aurangzeb built a citadel here in the 17th century and the ruins of many ancient mosques and palaces give this otherwise modern city a strong historical context. Rock-cut Buddhist caves, the tombs of Aurangzeb and other Muslim rulers as well as Deccan and Sufi saints can all be visited, but the most impressive landmark is Bibi-ka-Makbara, the impressive mausoleum of Aurangzeb's queen which was inspired by the Taj Mahal. Several kilometres away, the well preserved 14th-century fort city of Daulatabad, with its numerous lines of defence, stands on a hilly outcrop commanding great views of the surrounding countryside.

Ajanta & Ellora

Abandoned and lost to the jungle for centuries, the elaborate cave temples of Ajanta were rediscovered by a British hunting party in 1819. From around 200 BC Buddhist monks had begun carving out caves in a cliff face above a bend in the Waghore River. The practice continued for 700 years and today, these prayer halls and monasteries with their intricate paintings and sculptures are considered masterpieces of

Buddhist religious art. At Ellora, less than 100 kilometres away, is a second group of magnificent temples, also recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Thought to have been carved from the high basalt cliff by priests and pilgrims using the route, the temples date from around 600 to 1000 AD. There are 34 monasteries and temples devoted to Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism here but the undoubted highlight is the Hindu Kailash Temple, the world's largest monolithic sculpture. Over 200,000 tonnes of rock were removed from the cliff over a period of 150 years to create this awe-inspiring temple.

Hyderabad

Once one of India's wealthiest and most powerful cities, Hyderabad today is a fascinating blend of old and new. Dotted with ancient tombs, palaces, monuments and mosques, it is also a thriving technology hub and home to a new-found wealth which sustains a glut of designer boutiques, trendy restaurants and hip bars. The city is made up of three distinct districts: the old city of Hyderabad, the modern Secunderabad, and the medieval fortress capital, Golconda. The old town is the most interesting area with its rich architectural history including the stately British Residency and the landmark Charminar, an elaborate monumental archway, as well as its colourful bazaars where burqa-clad women shop alongside those in

designer heels. The old fort at Golconda is famed for its acoustics which alerted residents to the faintest hint of attack, but it is south of here in the Kistna Valley, that the state's great wealth was created in the prolific mines that produced some of the world's finest gemstones including the magnificent Koh-I-Noor diamond. In its heyday the valley flooded Hyderabad's markets with precious stones and fuelled the local royalty's fabulous wealth and hedonistic lifestyle.

Taj Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad

Previously the royal guesthouse of local nobleman Nizam Mehboob Ali Khan and the sole preserve of royalty and state guests, the Falaknuma Palace has been meticulously restored and now operates as a luxury hotel. A blend of Tudor and Italian architecture on an epic scale, the 'Mirror of the Sky', is Hyderabad's most elaborate palace and intricate restoration work continues across the property each year. Surrounded by themed gardens and lavishly decorated with Italian marble, French tapestries, Italian chandeliers and Kashmiri furniture, the hotel currently offers 60 guest bedrooms, a variety of Indian speciality and international cuisine as well as a unique sense of history.



Ruins of Hampi

Hampi

Set in an otherworldly landscape strewn with massive boulders and blanketed in banana plantations, the serene ruins of Hampi, former capital of the Vijayanagar Empire, are a magical place to explore. Hampi was an incredibly wealthy place between the 14th and 16th centuries and was renowned for its opulent festivals and huge markets selling luxurious silks and precious stones. The city, which is set on the picturesque Tungabhadra River, was destroyed by an alliance of Deccani sultans in 1665 and its ruined temples, palaces, sculptures and elephant stables are gloriously atmospheric. A small, modern village serves the needs of visitors and it's well worth allowing at least two days here to properly explore.



Banana plantation worker, Hampi



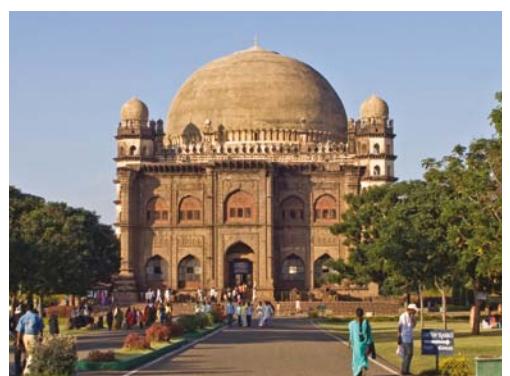
Bidar Fort

Bidar

Few visitors make it to the dusty streets of Bidar, a small city on the Deccan Plateau in northeastern Karnataka, but this historic city is well worth a visit. Capital of the Bahmani Empire, the first independent Islamic kingdom in south India, from 1425 to 1527, Bidar is home to an impressive collection of monuments and ruins from this time. At its heart is the fortified medieval old town with a set of monumental gateways and the imposing remains of the once great Mahmud Gawan Arabic University. Just to the north are the well-preserved remains of extensive Bidar Fort with its towers and triple moat, while to the east are the Bahmani tombs with their vividly painted interiors.

Bijapur

Once an important regional capital, Bijapur is now a minor provincial town which attracts few tourists. A trip here offers a unique look at rural Indian life as well as the chance to visit the architectural gems which adorn the town. A former capital, the town is strewn with palaces and mosques, tombs and fortifications all of which you can enjoy in peace as you are unlikely to encounter many other travellers here. A highlight is an early morning trip to the vast mausoleum of Gol Gumbaz to climb up the narrow staircase to the amazing whispering gallery where the smallest sound will be carried across to the other side of the huge unsupported dome. Also worth a visit are the markets frequented by local women in brightly coloured hand-woven fabrics and the occasional sadhu meditating on a bed of nails.



Mausoleum of Gol Gumbaz, Bijapur



Local man, Bijapur



Flower sellers, Bidar

Badami

Famous for its rock-cut cave temples, Badami is a small village of whitewashed houses surrounding a tranquil lake. Built between two large red sandstone hills, it is a picturesque setting and between the 4th and 8th centuries was a capital of the Chalukyas, whose empire stretched to Goa and Gujarat. Narrow lanes climb from the village's busy bazaar to imposing forts on the northern and southern sides of the town. Around the lake you'll find free-standing temples in a variety of styles, while high on the hills on either side of the town are the elaborate cave temples, similar in style to those at Ellora.



Heritage Resort, Badami



The Boulders of Hampi

The unique boulder-strewn landscape of Hampi attracts travellers to the area but it is the magical atmosphere here that encourages many to stay longer than they had anticipated. The serene riverside ruins are only part of the appeal however, the surreal landscape with its giant granite rocks haphazardly placed is a mysterious place to wander. In places, enormous solitary rocks cling precariously to hillsides, in others you'll find elaborately stacked rock towers and giant heaps of boulders big enough to form hills that poke through the leaves of the

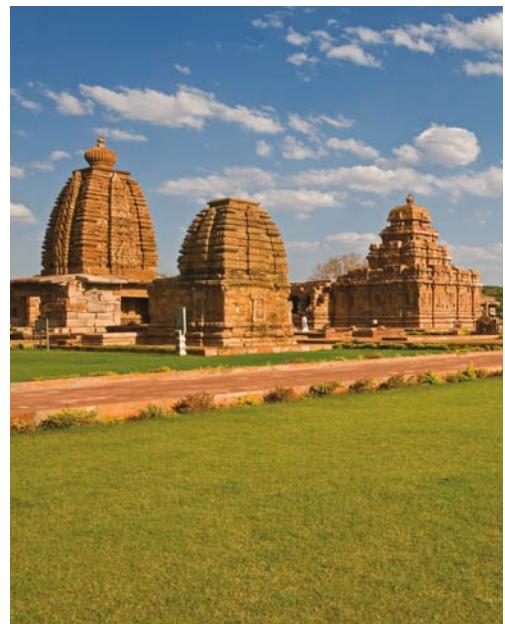
banana plantations. These rocks are some of the most ancient on the planet, shaped by wind erosion over millions of years. Unsurprisingly, this mysterious landscape has inspired numerous myths and legends and was seen as an auspicious place for the capital of the Vijayanagar Empire. For a good overview of the region and a sense of its vast scale, climb to the top of Matunga Hill. Although a popular spot, road conditions around Hampi are poor. You will be accompanied by a dedicated guide to help you get the most from your trip.

Heritage Resort, Badami

A small but attractive property just outside Badami, Heritage Resort has six cottages set in a well-tended garden. The spacious rooms are decorated in a simple, modern style and each has its own outdoor seating area as well as an en suite bathroom. The restaurant is set in a pavilion with open sides and serves a vegetarian menu and although alcohol is not served, you can have a drink in your cottage. There are few additional facilities but the staff here are genuinely friendly and attentive and the atmosphere is very relaxed.

Pattadakal & Aihole

The Chalukya Empire was made up of three related but individual dynasties, and along with Badami, Pattadakal and Aihole were also ancient capitals of this powerful group. Pattadakal, a Chalukyan capital between the 7th and 8th centuries, is set on the banks of the Malaprabha River and home to an impressive series of Hindu temples as well as a Jain sanctuary. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the temples conform to various styles and the two largest, built to celebrate victory over the Pallava dynasty at Kanchipuram, were designed by one of the Pallava's chief architects with beautifully carved columns depicting scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata.



Aihole temples

Aihole, the first Chalukyan capital, was established in the 6th century and developed over a period of more than 600 years. Regarded as the cradle of Indian temple design, it has about 140 temples set around the small village and the surrounding fields and rocky outcrops. Many have now been converted for other uses but the main sites are enclosed in a well-maintained park. Some of the temples contain beautiful carvings, while the Lad Khan Temple has a pillared porch and large sculpture of a Nandi bull.



Cloth sellers, Goa

Goa

Goa's glorious beaches and charm have made it a popular coastal retreat since colonial times. Beaches range from long stretches of golden sand to pebbly, secluded coves, though in general the northern half of the state is more developed with large resorts, lively nightlife and numerous markets. The south is a little quieter with hotels generally more spread out along the coast. Despite its popularity, Goa remains a magical place with a charming character. Once a Portuguese enclave, Goa is dotted with centuries-old churches, convents and cathedrals, handsome mansions and elaborate monuments. Along with this strong architectural heritage, the music, food and atmosphere here differ from elsewhere in India. The majority of Goa's tasty, fresh cuisine comes straight from the sea and blends fresh seafood with coconut, local herbs, spices and cashew nuts.



Vivanta by Taj – Holiday Village, Goa

The Leela, Goa

A large, lavish hotel set around a tranquil riverside lagoon, The Leela is an Audley favourite offering excellent service and facilities as well as local charm. The hotel is set in extensive gardens and has its own 12-hole golf course, a lovely pool, spa and a choice of four restaurants. There are 186 guest rooms and suites decorated in an elegant contemporary style with some local touches. Each offers plenty of space and facilities while the club rooms have private butler service and an additional swimming pool for the exclusive use of club guests.

Vivanta by Taj – Holiday Village, Goa

A well-established resort surrounded by pretty gardens, the Holiday Village blends Goan and Portuguese influences in its 142 colourful rooms and cottages set along meandering paths through the grounds. The hotel has a choice of restaurants ranging from fine dining to beachside seafood and private meals served under a 300-year-old banyan tree. There's also a large swimming pool with a sunken bar, a spa and access to a sandy beach. The comfortably furnished rooms have private balconies or gardens and include local touches.



The Leela, Goa

Alila Diwa, Goa

Designed in traditional Goan style, the Alila Diwa is modern with stylish contemporary interiors. Set back from the beach but with easy access to the sands, the beautiful main infinity pool overlooks the lush paddy fields that separate it from the coast. There's a range of dining options to choose from and 153 spacious rooms decorated in a simple but elegant style. Diwa Wing guests also have exclusive use of an additional pool and restaurant. A tranquil choice away from the crowds, Alila Diwa is also close to the historic churches and restaurants of Majorda.



Alila Diwa, Goa

Suggested itineraries

Tailoring your trip

The itineraries shown are designed to give you a flavour of what is possible, and are routes that work particularly well. We can use these as a basis to plan your trip or can design a completely different itinerary to suit your tastes and interests. Call one of our India specialists to start planning your itinerary.

T 01993 838 330

Getting around

Daily flights to Delhi and Mumbai allow you to easily connect to your onwards destination using domestic flights. Apart from some luxury, set-itinerary train tours, the rail network here is slow and inefficient making a car and driver the best option for internal travel. We use air-conditioned vehicles with drivers both in rural areas and in Mumbai.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	~	✗	✗	✗	~	✓	✓✓	✓✓

- ✓✓ The best time to travel.
✓ A good time to travel, but there may be some factors to be aware of.
~ Travel is possible, but this is not the best time of year.
✗ Travel is not recommended.

October to March is the best time to travel in this region. Sea breezes moderate the temperatures on the coast (around 32C/90F) but inland the arid rocky landscape can feel much hotter. Christmas and New Year are peak season in Goa when resorts can be very busy. April and May are even hotter (up to and above 40C/104F) and from June to September it is humid and very wet on the coast.

 **Time difference:** GMT+5.5 hours

Prices

We offer trips to cater for a wide range of budgets. You can find up-to-date guideline prices for your trip to Mumbai, Goa and central India on our website, alternatively please call our specialists to discuss your plans.



Colonial architecture, Mumbai



A Journey through central India

Explore the ancient temples, faded Islamic architecture and cities of Central India on this comprehensive tour of this little-visited region.

- Day 1** Fly overnight to Mumbai.
- Day 2** Enjoy a leisurely first day.
- Day 3** Explore Mumbai's markets or Bollywood scene with a local guide.
- Day 4** Fly from Mumbai to Aurangabad and visit Ellora's incredible cave temples.
- Day 5** Take a trip to visit the spectacular Buddhist caves at Ajanta.
- Day 6** Fly to Hyderabad via Mumbai. Explore historic Golconda Fort.
- Day 7** Explore Hyderabad visiting the Salar Jung Museum and colourful bazaars.
- Day 8** Head off the beaten track and drive west into the Deccan Plateau.
- Day 9** Visit the ruins of Gulbarga Fort before continuing on to Bijapur.
- Day 10** Take an early morning tour of Gul Gumbaz with its whispering gallery before exploring some of Bijapur's other Islamic monuments.
- Day 11** Drive to Badami and visit the 6th-century cave temples.
- Day 12** Explore the temples of the Chalukya capitals Pattadakal and Aihole en route to Hampi.
- Day 13** Wander the ruins of ancient Vijayanagar.
- Day 14** Drive through the lush hills of the Western Ghats to Goa.
- Day 15** Explore historic Old Goa or just relax on the beach.
- Day 16** Fly to Mumbai to connect with your onwards international flight.

Stay longer

Add a few days to explore the region south of Hampi to visit the remarkable temples at Belur and Halebid, or the historic city of Mysore.

Train Travel & Backwaters

Combining sights of both north and south India, this itinerary is built around a week-long luxury train journey covering such legendary attractions as the Taj Mahal, Jaipur and Udaipur. This route can also work by road, excluding the rail element.

- Day 1** Fly overnight to Dheli.
- Days 2-3** Arrive in Delhi. Explore with a local guide before boarding the train to Agra.
- Day 4** Visit the spectacular Taj Mahal and some of Agra's other sights.
- Day 5** Take a safari in Ranthambore National Park before enjoying the Pink City of Jaipur.
- Day 6** Continue to Bikaner, a less-visited corner of Rajasthan.
- Day 7** Explore the Mehrangarh Fort and bustling markets of Jodhpur.
- Day 8** Visit the beautiful city of Udaipur, spend time on Lake Pichola.
- Day 9** Continue to Balasinor in the state of Gujarat.
- Day 10** Arrive in Mumbai, disembark and fly on to Cochin.
- Day 11** Explore Cochin and get a feel for its colonial history.
- Day 12** Drive to Alleppey and board a traditional rice barge for a night on the backwaters.
- Day 13** Enjoy the morning on the boat before transferring to Marari.
- Day 14** Relax on the beach for the day.
- Day 15** Return to Cochin for your international flight.

Stay longer

Include the Deccan Plateau to explore ancient ruins, impressive cave temples and the Gol Gumbaz whispering gallery.



Tamil Nadu & Karnataka

SCENICALLY DIVERSE AND RICH IN WILDLIFE, temples and colonial gems, this vast swathe of southern India is a treat to explore. Stretching from the jungle covered hills of the Western Ghats to the Coromandel Coast, it encompasses untouched wilderness as well as frenetic, high-tech cities such as Bangalore. A progressive and cosmopolitan city, Bangalore stands in marked contrast to rural Karnataka and Tamil Nadu with their unhurried pace of life and wealth of cultural treasures. Running along the western border of the two states are the ghats, a mountainous region blanketed in tea and coffee plantations, quaint towns established during the British Raj, and a series of wildlife sanctuaries home to elephants, gaur and tigers as well as abundant birdlife. In southern Karnataka is Mysore, a magnificent ancient city with grand monuments, while further southeast, Tamil Nadu remains a world apart; a distinct region quite unlike the rest of India. Three powerful Hindu dynasties ruled this fascinating state for 1,000 years and the rich cultural heritage and wealth of art and architecture they left behind make it a very rewarding place to explore.

Audley in Tamil Nadu & Karnataka

Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have enough attractions to warrant a standalone visit but are also easy to combine with a tour of Kerala. We suggest using a private driver and guide to get around as it can make access to religious sites easier and offer a wonderful insight into south Indian culture, as well as expert knowledge on local history, architecture and wildlife.

Our specialists will use their detailed knowledge and your preferences to tailor an itinerary to suit. The number of temples in Tamil Nadu can be overwhelming; we will choose the most interesting, in terms of history and location, depending on the length of time you have in the region. We also know the best areas to escape to for relaxing at the end of your trip.

Accommodation

In both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu accommodation varies widely, from luxurious but business-oriented international hotels in the larger cities to simple heritage accommodation in the hills. Functional three star hotels are the norm across the temple towns of Tamil Nadu, though more characterful options are beginning to emerge. Following the success of homestays in neighbouring Kerala, some families in the border areas have opened their homes to guests.

On the quickly developing Coromandel Coast an increasing number of beachfront resorts are available, while the former colonial hill stations and plantations provide some of the region's best boutique options in heritage bungalows, where the spectacular views more than compensate for any lack of hotel-style amenities.



1 Mysore

A historic city with a charming faded grandeur, home to a magnificent Maharajah's palace. See page 59

2 Belur & Halebid

Intricate carvings, wall panels and mouldings adorn these ornate medieval temples justly famous for their Hoysala art. See page 60

3 Blue Mountain Railway

Take a magical journey through eucalyptus forests and tea plantations into the Nilgiri Mountains. See page 61

4 Chettinad

Visit the ornate mansions of India's wealthiest 19th-century merchants. See page 62

5 Madurai

Join thousands of pilgrims at the mesmerising Meenakshi Temple for a glimpse of modern day rites and rituals. See pages 62-63

6 Pondicherry

An evocative colonial town with a distinctly French air and beautiful coastal setting. See page 64

7 Mahabalipuram

UNESCO-protected temples, cave sanctuaries and rock carvings give this laid-back town global importance. See pages 64-65

8 Andaman Islands

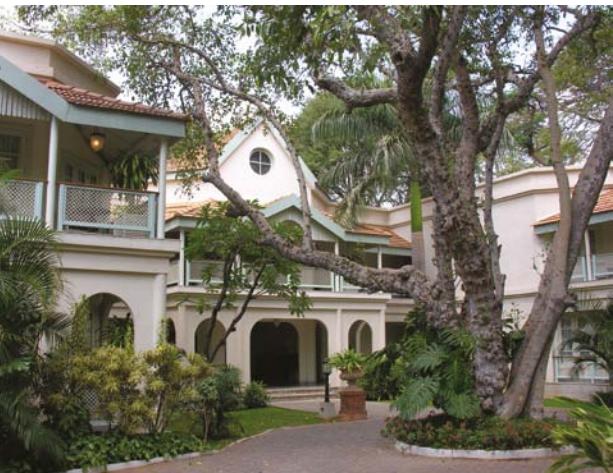
Isolated but idyllic, these stunning islands offer white sands, dense forests and excellent snorkelling and diving. See page 66



Hindu temple decoration, Bangalore

Bangalore

A rapidly expanding business hub with a dynamic and progressive population, Bangalore is one of India's largest and wealthiest cities. It is set on a high plateau with a pleasant year-round climate, and is a booming IT and science centre that attracts the young and educated from all over the country. Chic boutiques, trendy bars and restaurants, and shopping malls open daily but at its core is a well-preserved network of tree-lined streets flanked by ornate temples, colonial-era masterpieces and regal palaces. A chaotic but vibrant place, Bangalore serves well as an insight into the modern face of India and with excellent road and rail links, makes a good city to start or end your trip.



The Taj West End, Bangalore

Mövenpick Hotel & Spa, Bangalore

Conveniently located between the airport and the city centre, the Mövenpick Hotel & Spa affords guests a luxury experience typical of this large Swiss chain. From the vast main reception area to the 198 rooms there is great attention to detail and excellent service on offer. The property is designed in a contemporary international style and the spacious rooms and suites are elegant and sophisticated. There's a large gym and spa, an outdoor pool and a choice of a sports bar, Art Deco lounge or the Sky Brew rooftop beer garden. Enjoy fresh bread from the in-house Swiss bakery, Italian classics in Mezzaluna or global cuisine in My Place.

The Taj West End, Bangalore

Built in 1857 as one of Bangalore's first hotels, The Taj West End retains the period glamour and classical style of the era as well as offering modern facilities and conveniences. The hotel is set in large mature gardens, a tranquil oasis providing 91 contemporary but classically-styled rooms and 26 suites that exude an air of understated elegance. One of Bangalore's finest hotels, this charming property is ideally located close to the city centre and boasts a beautiful pool as well as a choice of restaurants making it an ideal option for your first or last night in India.



The Oberoi, Bangalore

The Oberoi, Bangalore

Although geographically in central Bangalore, this tranquil hotel is set in extensive manicured gardens that shelter it from the hustle and bustle of the city. A large hotel offering from the renowned Oberoi chain, it offers 160 spacious rooms and suites decorated in an elegant classical style. There's an inviting pool in the garden, a spa and well-equipped gym as well as a choice of restaurants. Enjoy contemporary Chinese, Indian, or Thai dishes served in a water garden pavilion, before relaxing with a drink on the lovely courtyard terrace of the Polo Club.



Tipu Sultan's Summer Palace, Srirangapatnam



Local woman at the street market, Bangalore



Painted stork, Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary



City Palace, Mysore

Mysore

One of south India's most vibrant cities, Mysore was the capital of the Wodeyar Rajas who ruled the surrounding area for more than 500 years. Their legacy remains in the grand monuments and stately buildings that line the city streets. The centrepiece is the City Palace, one of India's most opulent buildings, all but destroyed by fire in 1897 and later lovingly rebuilt. The palace looks most magical on Sundays and public holidays when it is illuminated by thousands of tiny light bulbs that pick out its multi-tiered silhouette against the night sky. Equally famous for its beautiful silk, sandalwood and incense, a trip around Mysore's markets is a delight. Outside the centre you'll find Chamundi Hills, the location of India's largest Nandi bull statue and the city's most important temple. Mysore is also a great base from which to visit nearby Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, Srirangapatnam and Somnathpur.



Gitanjali Farm, Mysore



Nandi bull statue, Chamundi Hills

Gitanjali Farm, Mysore

Just outside Mysore, at the foot of the Chamundi Hills, Gitanjali Farm is a warm and welcoming family home offering simple but comfortable accommodation. The ornate Lalitha Mahal Palace is just visible from the lovely gardens around the brick farmhouse, where four spacious rooms accommodate guests. Hosts Dalu and Muthu come from the Coorg region with its distinctive cuisine, and meals here are highly memorable. Evenings begin with a pre-dinner drink in the garden when you'll get a chance to chat to your affable hosts and learn about local life, before sharing some delicious home-cooked food served in the garden or the charming dining room.

Srirangapatnam

A place of pilgrimage since the 10th century, Srirangapatnam is an island city surrounded by the meandering waters of the Cauvery River. Just 12 kilometres from Mysore, it was the closest fortified city to the Wodeyar capital and its last line of defence. By the 18th century Haidar Ali and his son Tipu Sultan had made it the de facto capital of their kingdom. Haidar Ali was killed here in a bloody battle against the British which also left the city in ruins. The atmospheric remains of Srirangapatnam give an indication of how powerful this city once was, while the well-preserved Summer Palace of Tipu Sultan, which was left undamaged, is a wonderfully vivid affair.

Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary

A tranquil sanctuary best explored by boat in the early morning or late afternoon, Ranganathittu is just 18 kilometres from Mysore, making a day trip here a fantastic contrast to the city. Set on a group of rocky and wooded islands on the Cauvery River, this small bird sanctuary is a scenic place home to painted storks, kingfishers and cormorants. Although interesting at any time of year, for keen ornithologists, October and November are the best times to visit.



Keshava Temple, Somnathpur

Somnathpur

Exquisitely beautiful and incredibly well-preserved, the ancient Keshava Temple at Somnathpur is one of the most complete Hoysala monuments in existence. Constructed in 1268 by a Hoysala general, it was one of the last important temple complexes to be built and features three shrines, each dedicated to a different form of the god Vishnu. The walls are blanketed in intricate carvings of the Hindu pantheon and episodes from the Ramayana and other epics. As you walk around the temple you can admire the detail and composition of the meticulous carvings of myriad gods, goddesses, elephants, warriors and musicians before pondering over their meaning as you wander about the lovely gardens surrounding the complex. From Mysore, Somnathpur is an easy one and a half hour drive through lush paddy fields and rural villages.



Elephants, Nagarhole National Park

Belur, Halebid & Shravanabelagola

The two remote 12th-century temple complexes at Belur and Halebid feature what is arguably the richest repository of Hindu art and sculpture in India. This region was at the heart of the Hoysala Empire and the richly decorated temple façades feature intricate stone carvings while the interiors are filled with countless filigreed pillars and friezes depicting tales from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Nearby, you'll find the imposing hilltop pilgrimage site of Shravanabelagola with its unmissable sculpture of the naked Jain Saint Gomateswara. Set in a rocky outcrop and reached by 635 steps, the 18-metre-high figure is the world's tallest monolithic sculpture.

Nagarhole National Park

South India's most impressive park and the best place to view wild elephants in the region, Nagarhole's dense forests support a variety of wildlife from tigers and macaques to langurs and a host of exotic birds. Accessible from both Mysore and northern Kerala, visitors can explore by 4x4, coracle or motorboat. Please refer to page 88 in our Wildlife section, or speak to one of our specialists for further details.



Indian peacock, Nagarhole National Park

Coorg

A remote and picturesque region ideal for walking, Coorg is home to a variety of ethnic minority groups and was an independent state until 1956. This lush region, which revolves around the market town of Madikeri, is largely agricultural with great swathes of the verdant hills given up to the cultivation of rice, coffee and spices. The plantations and the surrounding tropical forest are criss-crossed with a network of walking trails affording glorious views over the rolling hills but visitors can also enjoy fishing and golfing in the region. There are also a number of Tibetan villages scattered around Bylekuppe and the Sera Je Monastery is worth a visit if your specialist is able to obtain a permit for you.



Tea plantation, Coonoor



Lilys, Ooty botanical garden



Local lady, Ooty



Train on the Blue Mountain Railway



School Estate, Coorg

Orange County, Coorg

Situated in the heart of Coorg's hills, Orange County is surrounded by beautiful gardens and coffee plantations. The 50 cottages and villas are in clusters around the resort, each designed to give a light and airy feel. There are three restaurants and lots of romantic, private dining options. The hotel hosts a range of activities from walking trails to bicycle rides, and birdwatching by coracle. For the less active, there is a beautiful infinity pool and a specialist Ayurvedic spa.



Orange County, Coorg

School Estate, Coorg

The former home of a colonial-era missionary, the ancient bell on the veranda of this pretty bungalow reminds visitors of the wealth of history in this beautiful hillside setting. Today, the property is home to the Aiyapa family, and is set on a coffee estate and surrounded by flower-filled gardens. There are four quaint but comfortable guest rooms, all with en suite bathrooms, and furnished in a traditional style. The food is a mix of regional Coorgi recipes and international dishes and dinner is a great time to sit with your hosts and learn more about the distinctive local traditions and customs. Guests can relax in the garden with a book, have a picnic by the river or enjoy walks around the estate.

Indira Gandhi National Park

A great place to get off the beaten track and simply enjoy the natural surroundings, Indira Gandhi National Park is a 958-square-kilometre tract of forest on the southern reaches of the Western Ghats. Known locally as Anamalai Sanctuary, from the Tamil meaning 'elephant hills', the reserve is home to wild elephants, lion-tailed macaques, Malabar giant squirrels and sambar, as well abundant birdlife. The park is best explored by 4x4, although walking is also possible in the buffer zones.

Ooty & Coonoor

Refreshingly cool and understandably popular, Ooty is the most well known hill station in the Nilgiri Hills. It was established as the summer headquarters of the British Madras government in the early 19th century with all the essential elements of civilised society including tennis, golf and horse riding. The town sits at an altitude of 2,286 metres and is a major tea growing region as well as a favourite place for locals and visitors to escape the heat of the plains. Nearby Coonoor is a quieter hill station with its own botanical garden and a superb selection of country walks. Lamb's Rock, a spectacular viewpoint, offers sweeping views down the slopes to the central plains.

The most scenic way to reach the hill stations is to take a trip on the wonderfully nostalgic Blue Mountain Railway. Built by the British and completed in 1908, it is one of the oldest and steepest rack and pinion railways in operation. The 45 kilometre journey between Mettupalayam and Ooty winds its way into the hills passing through abandoned stations, numerous tunnels, and bridges on what is a slow but spectacular four hour journey. A steam locomotive pushes passengers for the majority of the journey with a diesel train completing the steeper sections.



Mansion courtyard, Chettinad

Chettinad

Once home to some of India's wealthiest merchants, the small towns and villages of the Chettinad region are home to many temples and exquisitely decorated Nattukottai, the traditional and highly ornate familial homes of the region. The crumbling grandeur of these ancient mansions gives the region a charming, old-world appeal that makes an interesting contrast to the temple towns of Tamil Nadu. Wonderful carved wooden doors conceal vast courtyards and rooms adorned with brightly coloured carvings and huge teak pillars. Along with the atmospheric architecture, this is a good region to explore the local bazaars and markets and visit some of the many artisans who work here. Most evident however, is the renowned local cuisine, wonderfully spicy and aromatic and especially famous for its delicious sweets such as payasam and paal paniyaram.



Visalam, Chettinad

The Bangala, Chettinad

A perfect place from which to explore the towns and villages surrounding Karaikudi, The Bangala, a Tamil pronunciation of 'bungalow', was built by a Chettiar trader over 70 years ago. This beautiful house remains in the same family and offers 12 guest rooms with plenty of local character. Simple but comfortable and decorated with antique furnishings and old family photographs. The house is surrounded by a small, colourful garden with an inviting pool and an outdoor dining area where you can sample the distinctive local food.

Visalam, Chettinad

Get a glimpse of life in a Chettinad mansion at this beautifully restored village property just 16 kilometres from Karaikudi, the main town of Chettinad. The house dates from the 1930s and features Art Deco detailing as well as colonial and south Indian influences. There are 15 spacious rooms furnished in period style with antique furniture, traditional plasterwork and modern en suite bathrooms. A stay here exudes grandeur and guests can try art forms such as rangoli rice powder painting, stick dancing and flower garland making. There's a lovely pool in the gardens and the restaurant serves local dishes with guests welcomed into the interactive kitchen to learn cookery skills.



The Bangala, Chettinad

Madurai

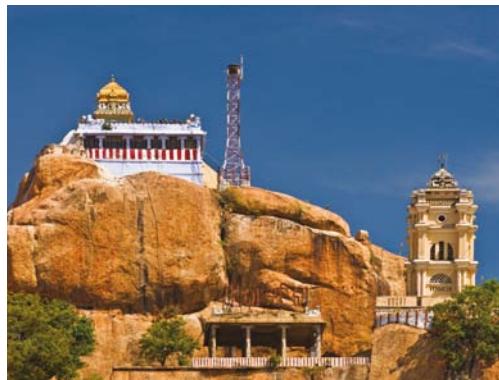
An ancient city home to one of the greatest temples in India, Madurai is a temple town like no other. The city's recorded history extends back over 2,000 years with the Greeks and Romans writing of its splendour. At its centre is the enormous Meenakshi Temple which was built at the same time as the Taj Mahal and is an outstanding example of south Indian Hindu architecture. The temple is still in use today and below its nine magnificent gopurams (entrance towers) pilgrims and priests take part in ceremonies, processions and blessings. A temple elephant gives blessings and on Fridays, the sacred day, the place erupts into a riot of colour and activity. Meenakshi Temple is almost a city in itself but beyond its walls you'll find the interesting Gandhi Museum which chronicles the life of the great Indian leader, as well as markets and faded palaces.



Meenakshi Temple, Madurai



Brihadishwara Temple, Tanjore



Rock Fort Temple, Trichy



Rajakkad Estate, near Madurai



Vegetable market, Madurai

Heritage Madurai, Madurai

A Madurai favourite, this beautiful building designed by renowned Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa has been converted into a luxurious hotel with an air of refined elegance. Although modern in its design, it reflects vernacular style and makes use of many local and reclaimed materials such as decorative pillars salvaged from derelict houses, slabs from an abandoned mill and honey-coloured stone cut from the nearby hills. The 64 rooms are generously proportioned with spacious bathrooms, while the villas are quite palatial in size and have private plunge pools. All are decorated in contemporary style and the choice of accommodation means that this lovely hotel suits a range of budgets. There's also a large sunken pool in the garden.



Heritage Madurai, Madurai

Rajakkad Estate, near Madurai

Nestled in the lush forests and coffee estates of the Palani Hills, Rajakkad Estate is set high in the foothills of the Western Ghats in an area that has changed little over the last century. At the heart of the estate is Pallam Palace, a wooden 18th-century house with a rich architectural heritage. Now a small garden hotel with just seven individually-styled rooms, it is 50 kilometres from the closest town and a wonderful option for those seeking peace and tranquillity. The rooms here are stylish but deliberately simple in their decor with the odd splash of colour or carefully-chosen piece of furniture. There's a restaurant serving delicious food made from ingredients sourced on the estate farm, a wide range of birdlife to observe in the garden, and a choice of walking trails leading across the estate to the coffee-drying yards and the village beyond.

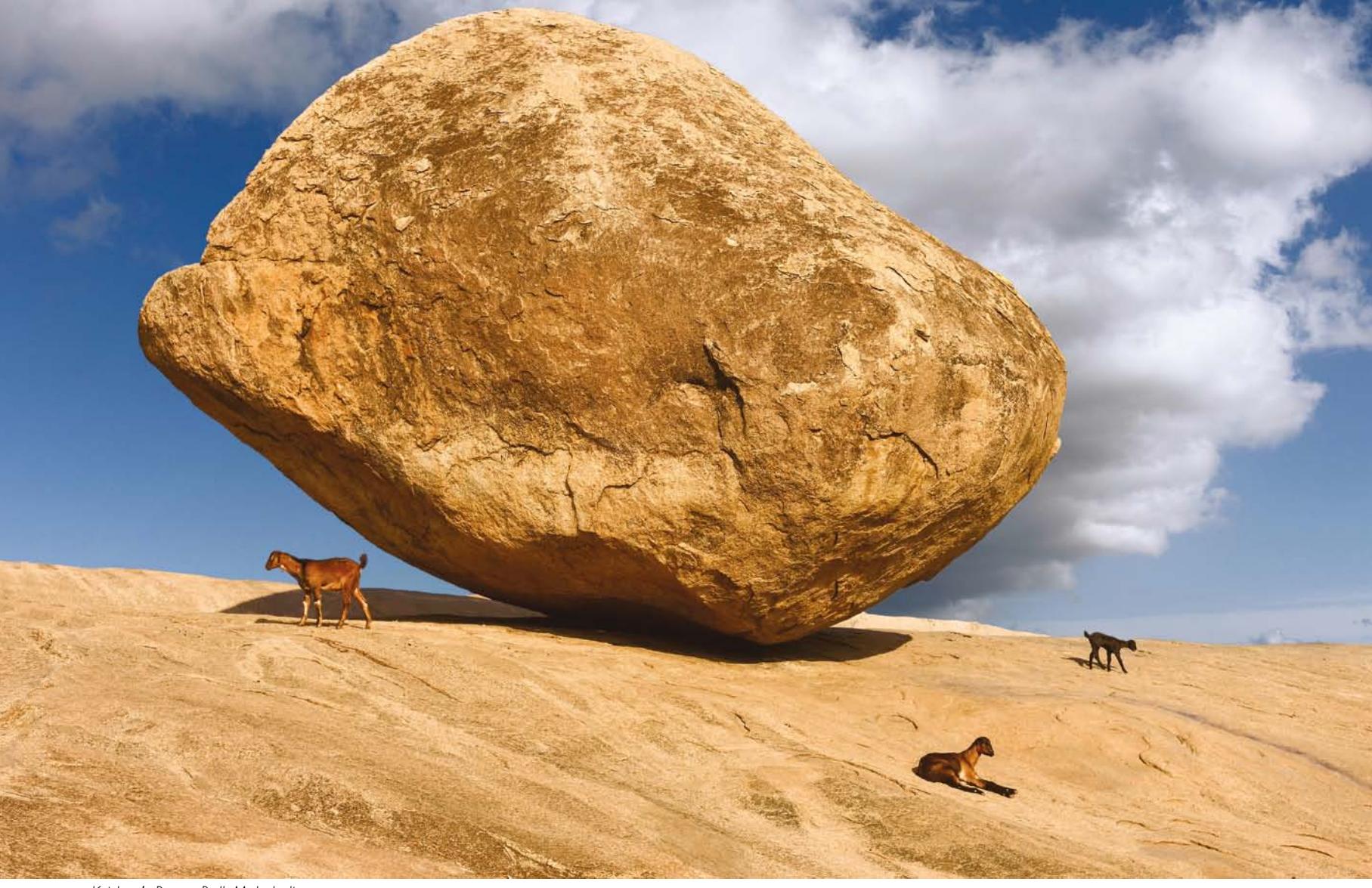
Tanjore

Capital of the great Chola Empire in its heyday and still an important cultural centre today, Tanjore is best known for its numerous temples. At its heart lies the breathtaking 1,000-year-old Brihadishwara or 'Big Temple' built by King Rajaraja I and dedicated to the god Shiva. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, its massive gopurams are covered in elaborate stucco figures while inside, a columned hall

leads to the 60-metre-high inner temple which is decorated with a pantheon on Hindu deities. You'll also find the Rajaraja Museum and Art Gallery here with its fine Chola bronzes and a number of interesting ancient manuscripts and drawings.

Trichy

A bustling modern city, Trichy is built around its Rock Fort Temple, an unmissable local landmark that perches above the city on a large rocky outcrop. The temple is reached by a series of steps but the fort itself is less impressive than the superb views afforded by its lofty position. On a nearby river island at Srirangam you'll find the magnificent Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple, one of India's largest with 49 separate shrines and seven elaborate gopurams. A vast place, it is enclosed by seven concentric walls which in turn define different residential areas for each local caste. Head to the roof for a sense of the scale of this incredible place and for the best views of the brightly painted temple towers with their intricate and sometimes grotesque figures. Follow your visit with a stroll along the riverbanks where locals make offerings or hold ceremonies. Trichy is situated in the heart of Tamil Nadu and makes a worthwhile stop en route to Tanjore.



Krishna's Butter Ball, Mahabalipuram



Church, Pondicherry

Pondicherry

Under French rule until 1954, Pondicherry retains a distinctly Gallic atmosphere and a quaint colonial vibe. In the old town along the seafront subtly coloured period houses with shuttered windows line the streets and men play boules in tree-lined squares. You'll also find restored Tamil merchants' houses and a beautiful promenade with a statue of Gandhi. This tranquil setting has attracted a range of artists and craftspeople over the years which gives the city a slightly bohemian atmosphere, a reflection perhaps of one of the world's most unique communities which is located just outside the city. Auroville, an elaborate experiment in sustainable living, began in 1968 and has almost 2,500 residents who work towards peace and unity and run a range of projects from renewable energy to organic farming.

Palais de Mahe, Pondicherry

Conveniently located for exploring both the French and Tamil quarters of Pondicherry, the Palais de Mahe is built in traditional colonial style with the warm yellow and white plasterwork that is typical of the town. Inside, high ceilings, exposed beams, arched doorways and period charm combine to create a very tranquil, fuss-free environment. The 18 rooms are similarly styled and feature largely antique furniture but modern bathrooms. There's a large swimming pool by the colonnaded terrace, an Ayurvedic spa and a restaurant serving wonderful seafood and south Indian dishes.



Palais de Mahe, Pondicherry



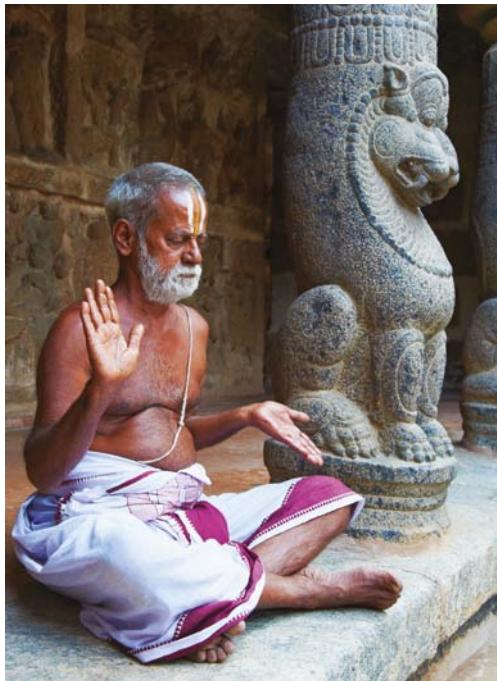
Fishermen, Mahabalipuram

Mahabalipuram

A laid-back town on the Coromandel Coast, Mahabalipuram is home to a large collection of UNESCO-protected temples and sanctuaries carved out from the local rock by the Pallava kings. The town was the Pallava's second city during its heyday from the 5th to 8th centuries, and the kings became patrons of early Tamil culture. The Shore Temple with its interesting sculptures, and Arjuna's Penance, one of the world's largest bas reliefs, are highlights but you can also see cave sanctuaries and rathas (temples in the form of chariots) as well as a natural attraction affectionately known as Krishna's Butter Ball, a giant boulder hanging precariously on a rocky hillside.



Kailasanathar Temple, Kanchipuram



Morning meditation, Kanchipuram

Vivanta by Taj Fisherman's Cove, near Mahabalipuram

Built around the ramparts of a Dutch Fort, Fisherman's Cove is one of the most luxurious beach resorts in Tamil Nadu. A modern place, it still manages to reflect local charm and character and has 88 air-conditioned rooms and cottages scattered around the tropical gardens or overlooking the Bay of Bengal. All are decorated in a minimalist Scandinavian style and the spacious cottages have an outdoor seating area and open-air garden showers. There are three restaurants to choose from serving a variety of dishes, although fresh local seafood is a highlight here. Fisherman's Cove is located roughly halfway between Chennai and Mahabalipuram.



Vivanta by Taj Fisherman's Cove

Sacred art & architecture

For thousands of years successive south Indian rulers demonstrated their wealth and influence by funding the construction of elaborate religious structures, and Tamil Nadu in particular is awash with sacred art and architecture. Early temples were cut directly from the rock but as construction techniques evolved the temples became more elaborate, generally built from stone, and adorned with iconography that conformed to strict rules based on cosmology. Each temple is dedicated to a sacred deity but with varying methods and styles of decoration, no two are the same. For many, medieval Chola bronze figures represent the finest examples of sacred art, and the breathtaking 1,000-year-old Brihadishwara Temple in Tanjore is a fine



Chennakeshava Temple, Belur



Ganesh statue, Halebid Temple

place to see them. Another extraordinary example of religious architecture, the magnificent Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple in Srirangam is one of India's largest and elaborately decorated with brightly coloured figures. In Madurai, the enormous Meenakshi Temple is thronged with pilgrims and a riot of colour and activity, while the 12th and 13th-century Hoysala temples seen at Somnathpur, Belur and Halebid represent one of the richest collections of Hindu art and sculpture in India. One of India's most famous monuments however, is the intricate Mysore Palace, the iconic seat of the Maharajahs of Mysore.



Radisson Blu Resort Temple Bay, Mahabalipuram

Radisson Blu Resort Temple Bay, Mahabalipuram

A large, international hotel overlooking Mahabalipuram's Shore Temple, the Radisson offers surprisingly characterful rooms in a resort packed with modern facilities. On top of this you'll be within easy walking distance of Mahabalipuram's sights and have access to a sandy beach. The hotel is set in extensive landscaped gardens and the 144 rooms vary in style, from rustic sea-view chalets to sophisticated studio suites with private Jacuzzis, and the pool-view suites which feature silk throws and carved granite artworks. There's a choice of pools as well as a small spa and a variety of restaurants.

Kanchipuram

The Pallava capital from the 6th to the 8th centuries, Kanchipuram is one of India's seven Hindu holy cities, full of temples from that time and the later Chola dynasty. Some are still in use and attract throngs of worshippers performing puja rituals every day. The most famous of the town's sights is Kailasanathar Temple, its oldest structure, with its intricate carvings and 58 small shrines. Kanchipuram is also an important centre for silk production with families across the town and in the surrounding villages creating colourful fabrics on hand looms. The delicate saris and shawls created here are sold in many shops in the town and worn throughout India. Kanchipuram can easily be visited from Chennai or Mahabalipuram.



Drying silk yarn, Kanchipuram



Fruit and fish stall, Chennai

Chennai

Although it is India's fourth largest city, Chennai is somehow less overwhelming than its peers. It's noisy and chaotic, but also a friendly place where local life seems more accessible. Just walk on the long beach in the early morning or evening to watch kite flying, hawkers and families, alternatively tour the fish markets or try some street food. The city grew from a small British settlement, eventually embracing surrounding villages and a neighbouring Portuguese settlement. Its old town of Fort St George is home to some fabulous Indo-Saracenic architecture, a beautiful neo-Gothic cathedral and the ornate Kapaleeswarar Temple.

Vivanta by Taj Connemara, Chennai

Chennai's only heritage hotel was built in 1854, remodelled in the 1930s when many Art Deco details were added, and then later extended by Geoffrey Bawa, the famous Sri Lankan architect. A historic but also an extremely charming building, it combines an old-world ambience with modern facilities. The 145 rooms and four suites are decorated in a contemporary style and have high ceilings and spacious living areas, but the premium indulgence rooms have more colonial character. The hotel is located in the heart of the city, with a spa, pool, fitness centre, and a choice of contemporary restaurants.



Vivanta by Taj Connemara, Chennai

Andaman Islands

One thousand kilometres off India's east coast lie a string of idyllic islands fringed by white sands and surrounded by pristine coral reefs teeming with marine life. The Andaman Islands are India's hidden paradise, their remoteness a barrier to mass tourism but their stunning natural beauty and incredible wildlife a spectacular reward for those who make it here. There are about 300 islands in total but only a few are open to travellers. Rare birds, elusive dugongs and kaleidoscopic corals await and the snorkelling and diving are simply superb.

The islands are part of India but geographically closer to Myanmar and Thailand. Flights from Calcutta and Chennai land at Port Blair, the islands' administrative centre, where an overnight stay is usually necessary before travelling on to your resort.

Barefoot Resort, Havelock Island

An eco-friendly retreat set in pristine forest on the edge of a white sandy beach, Barefoot Resort is a tropical island escape. There are 25 tents, cottages and villas here constructed by local craftsmen from indigenous materials such as bamboo, wood and palm leaves. Accommodation varies widely from simple tented cottages to the stylish Nicobari villas, but all rooms are spacious with modern amenities and en suite bathrooms. The resort adheres to principles of sustainable and socially responsible tourism with local staff and eco-initiatives such as rainwater harvesting. Guests can begin their day with a yoga class then follow up with diving, fishing, kayaking or escorted nature walks. Barefoot Resort is the only Andaman hotel Audley recommends as other options are very basic, so it is a good idea to book well in advance if you would like to stay here.



Barefoot Resort, Havelock Island

Suggested itineraries

Tailoring your trip

The itineraries shown are designed to give you a flavour of what is possible, and are routes that work particularly well. We can use these as a basis to plan your trip or can design a completely different itinerary to suit your tastes and interests. Call one of our South India specialists to start planning your itinerary.

01993 838 355

Getting around

There are regular international flights into Bangalore and Chennai from where it is possible to transfer to domestic flights to regional airports. However, most onward journeys can be undertaken by road and are generally more rewarding. We recommend having a private driver and guide throughout your trip, who will plan scenic journeys between destinations, stopping en route at places of interest. Passes in the Western Ghats allow for road crossings into the neighbouring state of Kerala in the west, and there are also trains from Bangalore to Mysore. Travel in the hills can be slow – only at walking pace on the Blue Mountain Railway – but the spectacular views on this historic route should not be missed.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	~	✗	✗	✗	~	✓	✓✓	✓✓

✓✓ The best time to travel.

✓ A good time to travel, but there may be some factors to be aware of.

~ Travel is possible, but this is not the best time of year.

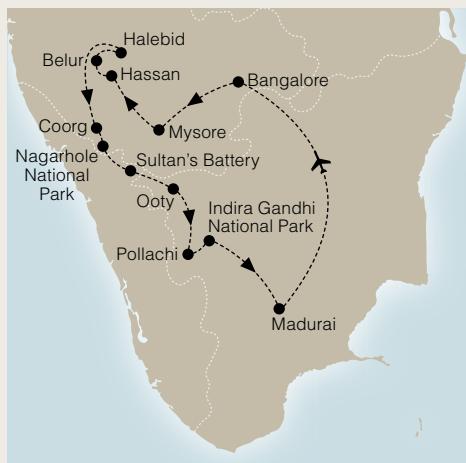
✗ Travel is not recommended.

South India suffers more than the north from the summer monsoon (June, sometimes July through to October) which brings torrential rainfall and makes travel difficult. From November to May it is mainly dry (although Tamil Nadu can still experience rainstorms) with temperatures between 28C and 35C (82F and 95F), but becomes more humid in April and May. The far south and the Andaman Islands are at their best between January and March.

 **Time difference:** GMT+5.5 hours

Prices

We offer trips to cater for a wide range of budgets. You can find up-to-date guideline prices for your trip to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka on our website, alternatively please call our specialists to discuss your plans.



Temples and Backwaters

A culturally rich and rewarding journey across south India, this itinerary combines the historical highlights of Tamil Nadu with time in Kerala.

- Day 1** Fly overnight to Chennai.
- Day 2** Explore the stunning temples, sanctuaries and rock sculptures of Mahabalipuram.
- Day 3** Drive south to Pondicherry for a guided tour of the colonial quarter and a visit to bohemian Auroville.
- Day 4** Continue to Tanjore stopping to visit temples and admire their sacred art en route.
- Day 5** Explore Tanjore with your guide including the staggering 'Big Temple'.
- Day 6** Drive to Chettinad via Trichy and climb to the top of the Rock Temple.
- Day 7** Step into the past and explore Chettinad's abandoned but richly decorated mansion houses.
- Day 8** Head to Madurai and join the thousands of pilgrims in the Meenakshi Temple.
- Day 9** Cross the Western Ghats into Kerala and spend the afternoon on a coffee estate.
- Day 10** Arrive at the backwaters and watch the world go by from your accommodation on the water's edge.
- Day 11** Drive to Alleppey and board your converted rice barge for a cruise along the backwaters.
- Day 12** Disembark your houseboat and drive to Cochin for a guided tour of the fort.
- Day 13** Transfer to the airport to connect with your international flight.

Stay longer

Explore some more of Tamil Nadu's numerous temples for a more comprehensive overview of the differing styles. Alternatively, hop on a plane to the blissful Andaman Islands.

South India Explored

This comprehensive itinerary offers an overview of south India's cultural and natural treasures with visits to temples, ancient palaces and colonial gems as well as several days exploring the region's national parks and sanctuaries.

- Day 1** Fly overnight to Bangalore.
- Day 2** Afternoon guided tour of Mysore and the eclectic City Palace.
- Day 3** Visit the Ranganthittu Bird Sanctuary before exploring the ruined city of Srirangapatnam and Tipu Sultan's Summer Palace.
- Day 4** Drive to Hassan visiting the giant Jain statue at Shravanabelagola and the temples at Belur and Halebid.
- Day 5** Ascend into the hills of the Coorg region.
- Day 6** Enjoy the mountain scenery with a walk through the plantations.
- Days 7-8** Explore Nagarhole National Park with a 4x4 or boat safari.
- Days 9-10** Final morning game drive before transferring to Sultan's Battery, where you can relax or visit the prehistoric Edakal caves.
- Day 11** Head to the hill station of Ooty and enjoy views from the Blue Mountain Railway.
- Day 12** Get off the beaten track in Pollachi for an afternoon of bird spotting in Indira Gandhi National Park.
- Day 13** Descend to Madurai to explore the stunning Meenakshi Temple.
- Day 14** Explore vibrant markets by cycle rickshaw before flying to Bangalore.
- Day 15** Connect with your international flight.

Stay longer

Spend more time in the beautiful Western Ghats to explore the many trails and discover the wonderful wildlife of the region.



Kerala

ONE OF INDIA'S MOST BEAUTIFUL STATES, Kerala is fringed by sandy beaches to the west and the cool, lush mountains of the Western Ghats to the east. In between lies a network of meandering backwaters, verdant rice paddies and spice plantations renowned for their languid charm and natural beauty. An intoxicating place that seems a world apart from the colourful chaos in other states, the unhurried pace of life here is gloriously relaxing, making this an ideal place to sit back and unwind. Although Kerala may be short on historical monuments, this state more than makes up for it with a rich culture, strong arts heritage and fascinating festivals. The people here are warm and welcoming, the food is superb and accommodation options are some of the most memorable in the country – it's no wonder the locals call it 'God's own country'. Whether you explore the colonial charm of Fort Cochin, ramble along the backwaters in a houseboat, track wild elephants, laze on a beach or enjoy some wonderful walking in the hills, Kerala is a feast for both the soul and the senses.

Audley in Kerala

Kerala's natural beauty, welcoming people and laid-back vibe make it a popular destination, although it continues to maintain its original charm and character. From the quieter backwater spots in the north to the best beaches and recommending how to spend your free time, our specialists know the state inside-out; including all the people who ensure you are well looked after from the moment you arrive. For some, Kerala is perfect for relaxation, perhaps after exploring another part of India, either on the beach, a houseboat or getting to know the local pace of life staying in a homestay. For others, it's ideal for exploring; from walking in the tea hills, soaking up the historic sites in Fort Cochin or searching for elephants in Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary.

Accommodation

Throughout Kerala accommodation is varied, however, the backbone of the region are its small, boutique properties built in the vernacular style. Providing a highly personal stay and a warm welcome, they range from simple guesthouses to colonial bungalows and converted houseboats. In Kerala's relaxed cities and in the lush tea hills you'll find heritage hotels set in colonial-era properties that offer charming period living with modern amenities. Elsewhere, the features of traditional Keralan tharavads (homesteads) such as wooden pillars and decorated doors with brass locks have been incorporated into the design of boutique hotels, and rice barges have been tastefully converted into houseboats which provide a unique way to explore the backwaters. To truly get an insight into life in this region, opt for a homestay. If you would prefer a larger property with more facilities, options range from eco-friendly resorts to luxurious, modern hotels with international standards and styling.



1 Fort Cochin

A serene and wonderfully atmospheric city where the crumbling grandeur of Portuguese, Dutch and British colonialists lines the narrow back streets. See page 70

2 Munnar

A former colonial hill station in the stunning tea-covered Nilgiri Hills, Munnar is the perfect base for leisurely walking. See page 71

Homestays

Experience the warm hospitality for which the region is famous and get a glimpse of everyday family life. See pages 74-75

Cuisine

Keralan cuisine is rich and complex in flavour but easily discovered on a cookery course or demonstration. See page 73

Backwaters

Kerala's lifeblood, these rivers, canals and lagoons support a bucolic lifestyle best discovered from a traditional houseboat. See page 76

Beaches

With a long, palm-fringed coastline, Kerala's beaches make a perfect place to relax and unwind.

Ayurveda

A wonderfully indulgent way to relax, try a traditional, holistic herbal massage or take a course of treatment for improved health and well-being.



Chinese fishing nets, Cochin

Cochin

The spice trade brought Chinese, Roman, Portuguese, Syrian and Muslim traders to Cochin for hundreds of years and in their wake the Dutch and British, all keen to make their fortune and lay their mark on the wealthy state. Today, Cochin is a serene and atmospheric city, set on a series of islands and promontories linked by bridges. Its colonial treasures cluster around old Fort Cochin, an area lined with the mansions of wealthy spice traders and tea brokers, the churches, synagogues and mosques of the faithful, and a host of colourful shops, galleries and cafes. On the waterfront ingenious Chinese fishing nets are fixed to the shore and fishermen show off their daily catch. Cochin is the main entry point to the state for most visitors and a wonderful place to spend a few days strolling the pleasant streets, taking a sunset cruise around the harbour or experiencing Kathakali dance theatre, a vibrant local tradition.



Eighth Bastion, Cochin

Old Harbour Hotel, Cochin

One of Cochin's most stylish accommodation options, the Old Harbour is set in a 300-year-old mansion built in Dutch colonial style. There are just 13 tranquil rooms and suites in this charming heritage hotel, all with high ceilings, hardwood floors and beautiful antique furniture. The decor is simple and restrained with four-poster beds in the suites and open-air showers in the garden cottages. Set around a series of fountain-filled courtyards, the building is decorated with contemporary Indian and Sri Lankan art and also features a gorgeous pool and spa. The hotel is located close to Fort Cochin's harbour front and fresh seafood is a highlight on the menu, though there are many other dining options close by if you wish to explore.

Eighth Bastion, Cochin

A small, modern property combining contemporary interiors with colonial style, Eighth Bastion has a convenient location in the heart of Fort Cochin. The 19 spacious rooms here are bright and modern with air-conditioning and private balconies as well as excellent bathrooms. Guests can relax around the pool in the central courtyard or enjoy a convivial drink here in the evenings before a meal in the sophisticated restaurant serving traditional regional dishes in a modern style.



Old Harbour Hotel, Cochin

Brunton Boatyard, Cochin

Set in a former Victorian-era boatyard, this charming hotel exudes an air of 19th-century refinement from its setting right on the waterfront of Cochin's old town. The generous communal areas and 26 guest rooms feature high ceilings and an eclectic mix of antiques and curios with British, Portuguese and Dutch themes. Enjoy a cookery demonstration on the terrace, a treatment in the spa, or a dip in the pool. The hotel's main restaurant has an excellent reputation and serves a menu of fusion foods that reflect the many nationalities that once called Cochin home.



Brunton Boatyard, Cochin



Kathakali performer, Cochin



Tea plantations, Munnar



Ambady Estate, Munnar



Freshly picked tea, Munnar



Fisherman drinking tea, Cochin

Munnar

Home to some of the world's highest tea growing estates, Munnar is a former British hill station where clipped tea plants blanket the slopes and mist often clings to the hillsides. The town is located in the Western Ghats at an altitude of 1,524 metres and the weather here is refreshingly cool and ideal for walking. With superb views and a host of trails, you can take leisurely strolls or full day hikes to discover this lush region. A trip to the town's tea museum reveals the history of the area and explains how tea was first introduced and cultivated here. Munnar is easily accessible from both Cochin and Periyar as well as Madurai in Tamil Nadu.

Ambady Estate, Munnar

Conveniently located just outside Munnar, this small property offers simple accommodation in a series of eight spacious bungalows. The split level interiors feature a living area as well as a bedroom with timber ceilings, comfortable furniture and rustic decor. With friendly hosts and excellent service, this is a good base for walking in the local area with a large cardamom plantation on the doorstep and pepper, coffee and tropical fruit growing in the grounds. The restaurant is built from a variety of natural materials found on the estate and serves hearty local food.



Casa Del Fauno, Munnar

Casa Del Fauno, Munnar

Set in a remote location surrounded by a tea estate and cardamom plantation, Casa del Fauno has just seven large rooms and offers peace and tranquillity as well as incredible views. Meals are served in the charming dining room with traditional recipes dominating the set menu. Outside, the garden provides views of mist-shrouded hills stretching into the distance and, if you'd like to explore, your host can guide you along trails in the surrounding area for an insight into the history of the region. Casa del Fauno is located an hours' scenic drive along winding roads from Munnar.

Windermere Estate, Munnar

Exuding an easy old-world charm of days gone by, Windermere Estate is a warm and relaxed country retreat that has long been an Audley favourite. The property is just a short drive from Munnar and is surrounded by rolling tea hills and set in extensive grounds where you'll find pepper trees and cardamom plants. A series of traditional bungalows around the main house contain the 18 guestrooms. Expect high ceilings with exposed beams, handmade teak or maple beds, lovingly embroidered linens, framed cross-stitch art and stunning views. Meals are served in the dining room in the main house where you can share stories with other guests or retire to the tranquil reading room. A local naturalist guides informative afternoon walks from the estate, which provides a breathtaking 360 degree view from a lookout point.



Windermere Estate, Munnar



Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary

Thekkady & Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary

A popular resort and spice trading town, Thekkady is a good base for exploring the surrounding spice plantations as well as the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary. A guided plantation walk is an excellent way to learn about crops such as pepper and nutmeg and how they are grown and harvested. Periyar by comparison is far wilder, a place of steep hills and dense vegetation where elephants, gaur and deer roam freely. An early morning walk is highly rewarding as the forest comes to life with the calls of birds and monkeys, though a longer day trek may be needed to spot larger mammals. Alternatively, take a boat trip on Lake Periyar to see animals drinking at the water's edge.

Shalimar Spice Garden, Periyar
Constructed in the style of a jungle lodge with thatched roofs, wide verandas and a canopy of lush vegetation, Shalimar Spice Garden is a tranquil, rural retreat close to Periyar. There are 18 rooms and cottages, individually decorated in a simple, modern style which fuses traditional Indian concepts with Western comforts. Each has a terrace overlooking the gardens where a variety of birds can be spotted. There's a pool and an Ayurvedic centre, while the restaurant serves a range of Indian and continental dishes made using spices from the garden.



The Wildernest, Periyar

The Wildernest, Periyar

A modest but comfortable bed and breakfast with extremely spacious rooms and personal service, The Wildernest is a great base for exploring Periyar. Exposed stone and brick, tiled floors and fresh colour schemes lend the ten rooms some local character and each has its own private terrace or garden to relax in. Although breakfast is the only meal served here, The Wildernest is just a two minute walk from the town of Kumily with its selection of hotels and restaurants and staff are happy to offer advice on where to eat.



Shalimar Spice Garden, Periyar

Spice Village, Periyar

The use of natural materials, from elephant grass roofing to locally crafted furniture, give the Spice Village a very simple, elegant charm that allows it to blend seamlessly with its surroundings. The 52 guest rooms and cottages are scattered across the hillside grounds. There is a choice of restaurants with all produce sourced from the local area, as well as evening cookery classes should you wish to learn how to recreate the dishes on offer. Guests can also enjoy the pool and Ayurvedic centre, talks on wildlife, guided walks through the spice garden, and paper-making courses. Best of all though, it's just 500 metres to Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary.

Serenity, Vazhoor

A former planter's home built in the 1920s and surrounded by rubber estates and spice gardens, Serenity lives up to its name and provides a charming place to relax and unwind. This lovely heritage hotel has six guest rooms decorated with period furniture, local curios and modern artworks. All rooms have a private veranda and guests can also relax by the pool, in the spa or yoga pavilion. Guided walks, cycling tours and cooking demonstrations are available. Guests dine together in the dining room or on the outdoor terrace. Serenity is three hours by car from Periyar.



Spice Village, Periyar



Serenity, Vazhoor



Elephant, Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary



Fishermen on Bekal Beach, near Neeleshwar



Bekal Fort, near Neeleshwar



Nilgiri langur, Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary

Neeleshwar

Kerala's unspoilt northern coast is less-visited and less-developed than the south and exudes a wonderful laid-back charm. Neeleshwar, with its small shops, mosque and colourful temple still serves the needs of the local fishing community more than those of any traveller and offers an authentic insight into rural life in the region. The beautiful beaches here remain quiet and undisturbed and traditional culture thrives in a series of colourful festivals. Two of the finest celebrations are Theyyam, the 'dance of the gods', which is performed at local temples by elaborately dressed and made-up dancers, and the Snake Festival where the central performers are women from the local fishing communities. Just to the north of Neeleshwar on a promontory into the Arabian Sea are the ruins of Bekal Fort which make an interesting trip.

Neeleshwar Hermitage, Neeleshwar

This luxurious retreat set right on a long, unspoilt beach is a beautiful place to unwind. The 16 spacious rooms are in thatched cottages, modelled on fishermen's huts but built by master craftsmen. High ceilings and teak floors combine with handmade furniture and original art in a stylish but unfussy way, while the bathrooms are beautiful, partly open to the skies and with solar-powered showers. A large infinity pool overlooks the beach and Ayurvedic spa treatments, yoga and meditation are all available. The hotel has two restaurants as well as running a series of cultural programmes and cookery classes. The owners also operate their own luxury houseboat which plies the quiet northern backwaters should you wish to explore further.



Neeleshwar Hermitage, Neeleshwar



Keralan Cuisine

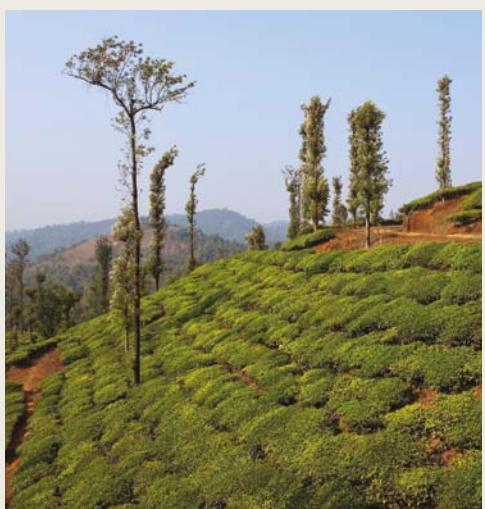
The aromatic food for which the region is so well-known has been influenced by years of trading and the plethora of fresh produce growing right on its doorstep, making it arguably some of the best food in the country. Coconut, rice and a whole gamut of spices, from pepper and cloves to cardamom, ginger and cinnamon, give most dishes their distinctive flavour, with fish from both the ocean and the backwaters providing a change from traditional vegetarian options. A visit to any local market unearths a bounty of ingredients best sampled in the presence of a local chef who can then guide you through a cooking demonstration or lesson to reveal the secrets of the region's distinctive dishes.



Local lady, Thattekad

Homestays

For an authentic glimpse of family life in rural India and a taste of welcoming Keralan hospitality, nothing beats a homestay. The concept was first developed in Kerala, although its success and popularity means it has now spread right across India. Local families welcome visitors into their homes and share their meals with them, creating a very personal and highly memorable experience for travellers. Although facilities can be limited, the homestays we recommend offer guest rooms with en suite bathrooms. Depending on the property, rooms may be in the family house, in a separate annexe or in detached cottages. The food served is traditional, with local dishes often made from homegrown ingredients.



Tea plantation, Wayanad



Shopping with Moosa from Ayesha Manzil, Tellicherry

Wayanad

Remote and unspoilt, mountainous Wayanad is Kerala's least populated district and one of its most beautiful. Set high in the Western Ghats in northeast Kerala, the terrain here is rugged but the steep slopes are covered with terraced paddy fields, and coffee, cocoa, cardamom and pepper plantations. Wide open panoramas offer gorgeous views of tiered hills strung with ribbons of early morning mist, and the travellers who make it here are rewarded with wonderful walking along ancient trade routes that spread from the high mountains to the coast. Along one of these routes you'll find the fascinating prehistoric Edakkal Caves with their rare Stone Age petroglyphs. Alternatively, take a jeep safari in Muthanga Wildlife Sanctuary where spotted deer, wild boar, gaur and a variety of birdlife are commonly seen. A biodiversity hotspot, this transition zone between the northern and southern Western Ghats is home to over 500 bird species and 139 mammals.

Tranquil Hideaway, Wayanad

Offering hotel quality service but the intimacy of a homestay, Tranquil is an Audley favourite where hosts Ajay and Nisha welcome guests as part of their extended family. The house is built in traditional style and set in a large coffee plantation, with an annexe providing eight spacious and comfortable guest rooms. There are also two wonderful tree houses, perched high above the ground and offering panoramic views of the surrounding valley. There's a small pool in the flower-filled garden and a series of way-marked trails leading through the plantation. Meals are generally shared with the family and offer a taste of authentic local cuisine as well as the chance to learn more about the area, its history and the challenges it faces today.



Tranquil Hideaway, Wayanad



Arriving at Dewalokam, Kodikulam

Tellicherry

Kerala's unspoilt northern coast was once the thriving centre of the spice trade and Tellicherry played a significant role in India's history during colonial days. The imposing town fort was built by the British in 1708 to protect their assets and its massive walls and carved doors are a reminder of the strategic importance this town once held. Tellicherry is now far quieter, the rowdy fish market being the most vibrant part of town. Flanked by a long beach ideal for leisurely walks, though not so good for swimming, visitors can also enjoy watching local weavers at work on their ancient handlooms, and bedi, the local cigarettes, being made by hand. Between November and March energetic Theyyam dances involving elaborate costumes and colourful masks are performed at local Hindu temples.



Ayesha Manzil, Tellicherry

Ayesha Manzil, Tellicherry

Step back in time and enjoy the faded grandeur of colonial living at this British cinnamon planter's mansion filled with antiques and family heirlooms. There are six guest rooms at this homestay, full of charm and character and harking back to days gone by, although for some, perhaps a little too authentic. The house overlooks the Indian Ocean and has its own pool but the real joy here is the warm welcome and the delicious food. Host Moosa and his wife Faiza share their love of great produce and spicy Mopillah cuisine, and Faiza is happy to offer guests the chance to learn about local dishes and ingredients in her cosy kitchen.



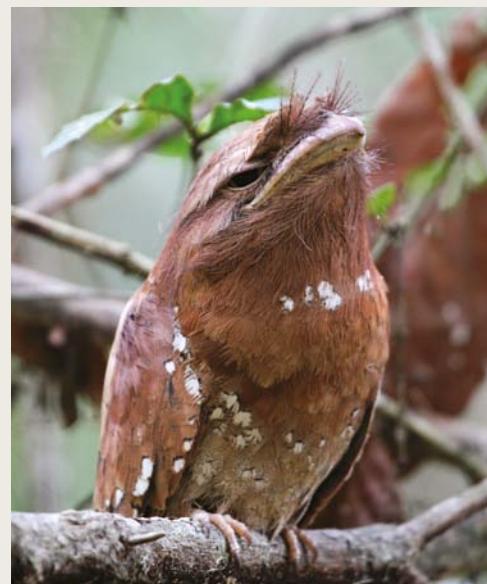
Dewalokam, Kodikulam

Dewalokam, Kodikulam

Set on an organic farm on the banks of the Kannadipuzha River, Dewalokam is a lovingly maintained and managed property that has become a firm and consistent favourite with Audley travellers. There are eight air-conditioned rooms in the main house and three further rooms in a traditional cottage in the forest, all of which are simply but elegantly decorated and have en suite bathrooms. The food here is superb, with ingredients coming from the farm, and cookery lessons are available should you wish to recreate dishes at home. Most of all though, guests feel warmly welcomed into this extended family with hosts Jose and Sinta providing real attention to detail and their dedicated local staff offering extremely friendly and attentive service. There's a small pool on the property as well as a host of free activities including guided walks, village and school visits, or helping out on the farm to milk cows, collect honey or simply learn about the holistic way of life here.



Theyyam dancers on the beach, Tellicherry



Sri Lanka frogmouth, Thattekad Bird Sanctuary

Thattekad Bird Sanctuary

One of the richest bird habitats in India, this small reserve is home to 270 species of birds in its 25 square kilometres. Thattekad Bird Sanctuary covers a region of evergreen low-land forest woven with small streams and tributaries of the Periyar River. A bird lover's haven, rare species such as the mottled wood owl, spot-bellied eagle owl, Malayan night heron, Sri Lanka frogmouth and the Nilgiri wood pigeon can be seen here. The sanctuary is also home to an interesting variety of other wildlife including elephants, sambar and deer, macaques, wild boar, giant squirrels and the rare Travancore flying squirrel.

Mundackal Plantation Homestay, Thattekad

Set in a beautiful plantation home which blends colonial and Keralan architecture to great effect, this lovely homestay is a tranquil base from which to explore the local area. The four rooms are simple but comfortable and convivial owners Jose and Daisy are wonderful hosts. Daisy takes great pride in her food and is happy to offer cookery lessons to interested guests. Beautiful gardens surround the house and attract a host of exotic birds in the early morning, while beyond this, the original rubber plantation still exists and guests can learn about rubber tapping as well as pepper and coconut harvesting on guided walks. The property is within easy reach of Cochin and just 12 kilometres from Thattekad Bird Sanctuary.



Mundackal Plantation Homestay, Thattekad



Houseboats on the backwaters

Backwaters

Kerala is dominated by its backwaters, a labyrinth of palm-lined rivers, canals and lagoons that lace through forests, villages, plantations and paddy fields. The lifeblood of farmers, fishermen and villagers across the state, many of these waterways lead off Lake Vembanad, and all offer a glimpse of everyday life in the area as fisherman haul in their catch, women wash pots or clothes, and schoolchildren take a canoe to class. In places, temples and churches line the banks, in quiet spots wading birds, kingfishers and fish eagles build their nests and everywhere you go life continues with a slow, unhurried charm. Drifting along the backwaters in a converted rice barge or staying in one of the many hotels in the region is a very alluring and rewarding way to travel, and although the backwaters have become much more popular in recent years, it is still possible to get away from it all to experience this unique area in all its glory.



Philip Kuttu's Farm, Backwaters

Olavipe, Backwaters

The ancestral family home of a prominent Syrian-Christian family, this beautiful heritage house was built in the 1880s and retains much of its period charm. The lush greenery of Olavipe Island surrounds the house and its large estate where coconut, nutmeg and vanilla are cultivated. Explore the plantations and learn about the crops, stroll through the village or watch prawns being farmed. Alternatively, explore the backwaters with a boatman or canoe across the tranquil estate lagoon. The nine rooms here are decorated in simple, period style and the excellent food makes the most of local produce and fish.

Philip Kuttu's Farm, Backwaters

A gorgeous property set on an island and accessed by canoe, Philip Kuttu's Farm is a memorable homestay offering stylish accommodation in an incredibly tranquil location. There are just five cottages here furnished with antiques and finished with beautifully carved and crafted doors and windows. Each has a private veranda overlooking the waterway, although the best views are from the covered pavilion. The property's farm provides ingredients for the delicious meals served under an old mango tree in the small courtyard.



Olavipe, Backwaters

Kumarakom Lake Resort, Backwaters

Designed and furnished in traditional Keralan style, this wonderful waterfront resort sits in landscaped gardens on the edge of Lake Vembanad. The beautiful cottages here are set between meandering canals and modelled on village homesteads but inside, their traditional heritage decor recalls an opulent period in India's history. Many of the 59 rooms feature private courtyards and plunge pools, although there is also an infinity pool with Jacuzzi set right on the banks of the lake. Guests can make the most of ancient healing techniques at the Ayurvedic centre and enjoy the magnificent Ettukettu restaurant, which serves ethnic Keralan food as well as a broad range of international dishes. Activities include a houseboat cruise, a visit to nearby Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary, or enjoyable cultural performances such as Kathakali.



Kumarakom Lake Resort, Backwaters



Fishing boats on the backwaters



White-throated kingfisher

Alleppey

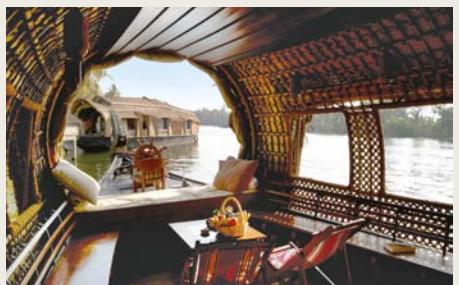
Once an important British trading post on the Malabar Coast, Alleppey is at the centre of a network of criss-crossing canals, backwaters and lagoons and is a popular staging point for departing houseboats. The town is now a centre for coir making and you'll get the greatest sense of its illustrious past in the old quarter where the narrow streets are lined with colonial-era houses. Lord Curzon, a former Viceroy of India, once called Alleppey the 'Venice of the East' but today its charm lies in the relaxed pace, lively markets and numerous silk shops. The long beach is a great place for an evening stroll or a game of cricket with the locals before departing to explore the mesmerising backwaters in more detail.



Vismaya, Backwaters

Houseboats

The backwaters have been important trade routes since ancient times and traditional wooden hulled boats with thatched roofs were used to transport rice, spices and other goods around the region. Many of these traditional boats now operate as ketuvallam or houseboats, built in the original style but converted to carry passengers rather than goods. A trip on one of these houseboats is a wonderful way to explore this region with cruises lasting anything from a few hours to several days. The boats vary considerably in size and standard and generally have one or two cabins with en suite showers. Accommodation is fairly simple but the food is generally excellent with dedicated dining



Houseboat interior

and seating areas shaded by woven palm blinds and an uncovered sun deck on the bow. Cruising the backwaters has become a very popular part of a Keralan itinerary and you can expect to see quite a few boats plying the waters around the main cruising hubs. The longer your cruise, the further your boat can venture away from the busy areas to give you a taste of tranquillity.



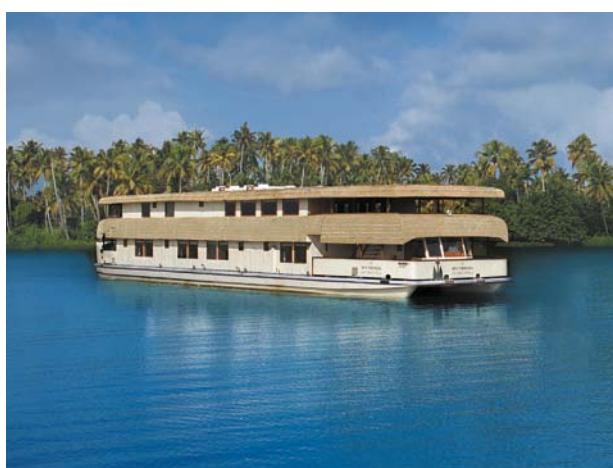
Houseboat on the backwaters



Vegetable seller, Alleppey

♪ M/V Vrinda, Backwaters

A luxurious option for exploring the backwaters, the M/V Vrinda is an extremely well-appointed vessel operated by the renowned Oberoi hotel chain. With just eight cabins, on board service is personal and attentive, and the accommodation itself is bright and relatively spacious with large windows, teak flooring, king size beds and en suite bathrooms. A lounge and bar on the upper deck offer panoramic views while the restaurant serves a choice of international and south Indian dishes. The vessel operates a three-day cruise which allows enough time to get deep into the tranquil rural backwaters and away from the well-travelled routes. Regular stops allow passengers to see a variety of sights en route.



M/V Vrinda, Backwaters



Beach near Marari

Marari

Set on a sliver of land between the sparkling waters of the Arabian sea and the tranquil expanse of Lake Vembanad, sleepy Marari is a small village just 11 kilometres north of Alleppey. A long stretch of sandy beach skirts the coastline with just a handful of hotels and guesthouses catering to the small number of travellers who make it here. Stretch out in a hammock and read a book or watch as traditional Keralan fishing boats come ashore, explore the quiet lanes on a bicycle or indulge in an Ayurvedic treatment. Whatever you choose to do, Marari is an idyllic place to unwind after a trip around the region.

A Beach Symphony, Marari

This beautiful boutique property has just four traditionally built villas with distinctive pitched roofs, decorative archways and carved pillars edging a shaded veranda. The spacious interiors blend the best of traditional Keralan design with contemporary European style and show great attention to detail. Private gardens with swaying hammocks await, or you could venture down to the quiet beach for a stroll along the water's edge. Everything is set up to maximise your privacy and relaxation and meals are made to order, your chef recommending the catch or produce of the day and serving you on your veranda.

Marari Beach Resort, Marari

A laid-back escape, Marari Beach Resort is set along a near-deserted beach and modelled on a traditional coastal village. Winding paths lead through the gardens dotted with lotus ponds to a series of whitewashed thatched cottages that offer comfortable, uncluttered accommodation. Floor-to-ceiling windows bathe the 62 rooms in light, open-air bathrooms offer a sense of the exotic and the rustic furniture lends the simple rooms a touch of local character. Several cottages come with their own pool, though all have access to the beach and the large central swimming pool. The impressive, traditionally built restaurant serves a range of local dishes with a strong emphasis on seafood supplemented with produce from the resort's organic garden.



A Beach Symphony, Marari



Marari Beach Resort, Marari

Abad Turtle Beach, Marari

A good value option along this lovely stretch of coast, Abad Turtle Beach offers 29 comfortable cottages designed and decorated in a simple modern style with high ceilings, crisp linens and neutral colour schemes. There's a lovely pool in the well-tended gardens and excellent Western and Keralan food in the open-sided restaurant. The hotel is a tranquil place to relax with good access to the beach and a warm and welcoming atmosphere however, it has fewer facilities than some of the neighbouring hotels.



Abad Turtle Beach, Marari



Fishermen bringing in their net, Kovalam



Travancour Heritage, near Kovalam

Kovalam

In contrast to Marari's quiet sands, Kovalam is a livelier, more developed beach resort with a broad choice of hotels, restaurants and small shops. The resort is just half an hours' drive from Trivandrum airport making it a convenient spot to relax after a trip around South India. Although it is busier than Kerala's other coastal resorts, rather than having just one beach to choose from, there are a series of small bays divided by rocky headlands and if you walk along the shore you'll soon leave the busier sands behind. Many of the hotels here specialise in Ayurvedic massage or yoga and offer complete health and relaxation packages that are a wonderfully mellow way to end your trip.

Travancour Heritage, near Kovalam

Set around an exquisite 120-year-old palace adorned with decorative timbers, Travancour Heritage brings new life to vintage Kerala in a series of traditional buildings rescued and rebuilt around the landscaped grounds. This atmospheric property sits high on a cliff overlooking the ocean and offers 90 rooms and villas which represent good value for money. Choose from beautiful free-standing villas with private pools, charming heritage cottages or more modern accommodation blocks with simple, comfortable furnishings. The main restaurant overlooks the pool and offers a good choice of dishes with local flavours and seafood is a speciality. You'll also find a beachside grill and a separate Ayurveda restaurant.

Travancour Heritage sits above Chowara Beach, 20 minutes from Kovalam.



Vivanta by Taj, Kovalam



Man in a canoe, Kovalam



Lady outside her shop, Kovalam



The Leela, Kovalam

The Leela, Kovalam

A sleek and sophisticated option located on a headland above Kovalam, The Leela is luxurious and has excellent facilities. The 182 rooms are contemporary in style with chic furnishings and some subtle local touches. Each has a private sundeck or terrace and many have ocean views. The property sits in extensive grounds and has its own sandy cove for guest use as well as an inviting infinity pool. There is a choice of refined dining options, as well as a spa, library lounge and living room.

Vivanta by Taj, Kovalam

North of Kovalam on a quieter stretch of beach, this resort stretches across a lush hillside and offers a varied choice of accommodation that blends traditional charm with modern style. The 59 hillside cottages are set in Balinese-style landscaped gardens with colourful exotic plants, water features and traditional sculptures. Thatched with elephant grass and built in a traditional style, the spacious and comfortable suites and villas blend in with their surroundings but are largely contemporary inside and have large French windows opening onto private balconies. There's a pool, a spa and a choice of three restaurants including one on the beach which is reached by a 15 minute stroll or golf buggy transfer.



Beach on Bangaram Island



Blue surgeonfish, Bangaram Island



Fishing off Bangaram Island

Lakshadweep Islands

A string of coral islands geologically connected to the Maldives, the Lakshadweep Islands sit in the Arabian Sea 300 kilometres off the Keralan coast. Fringed with powdery-white beaches and swaying palms, this remote paradise is little-developed. Only ten of the thousands of islands are inhabited and only three of these accept foreign visitors. Island life is highly traditional and the government here is very protective of its people, their culture and the unique landscape of the islands. The beaches remain pristine with warm water lagoons giving way to superb coral reefs teeming with marine life including sea turtles, dolphins, lionfish and sharks. A blissful retreat with excellent snorkelling and diving, the Lakshadweep Islands are normally reached by flight from Cochin but the administration has temporarily suspended visitor permits and the islands remain closed to foreign visitors at this time. We hope this situation will soon change so please speak to your specialist for the latest update.

Bangaram Island Resort, Lakshadweep Islands

An uninhabited island surrounded by white coral sands and turquoise waters, Bangaram is a low-key resort with simple but comfortable accommodation. This idyllic destination offers blissful relaxation as well as excellent diving and snorkelling and in order to preserve its natural beauty all buildings are made from locally-sourced materials. Deliberately rustic in style, Bangaram has no TVs or air-conditioning but has a beautiful restaurant and bar overlooking the endless sea. This remote spot is reached by boat from the main island Agatti, but is currently closed, please speak to our specialists for the latest permit information or for suggested alternatives in South India.



Bangaram Island Resort, Lakshadweep Islands

Tailoring your trip

The itineraries shown are designed to give you a flavour of what is possible, and are routes that work particularly well. We can use these as a basis to plan your trip or can design a completely different itinerary to suit your tastes and interests. Call one of our South India specialists to start planning your itinerary.

01993 838 355

Getting around

Kerala has three international airports offering regular flights. Once here, the small state is easy to get around and most journeys can be comfortably undertaken by road. Roads in lowland areas are generally in reasonable condition but the narrow winding roads in the hills means that journeys can take longer than you might expect. We arrange an air-conditioned car and driver for your convenience and your specialist will factor in journey times to all itineraries. A scenic train line runs along the coast and through the mountains that separate Kerala from Tamil Nadu and is an appealing alternative for long journeys. Travelling along the backwaters in a converted rice boat is a wonderfully tranquil way to explore the vibrant inland waterways. We also offer a host of cycling and walking tours from a variety of homestays.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	~	✗	✗	✗	~	✓	✓✓	✓✓

✓✓ The best time to travel.

✓ A good time to travel, but there may be some factors to be aware of.

~ Travel is possible, but this is not the best time of year.

✗ Travel is not recommended.

The best time to visit Kerala is from November to March when skies are clear and humidity is lowest. Temperatures at this time fluctuate between 20C and 35C (65F and 95F), with sea breezes moderating the heat on the coast and high altitudes making the hills refreshingly cooler, though this region can be quite cold at night. Between May and October the westerly monsoon winds arrive, bringing high rainfall to the region making it a less favourable time to visit.

Time difference: GMT+5.5 hours

Prices

We offer trips to cater for a wide range of budgets. You can find up-to-date guideline prices for your trip to Kerala and South India on our website, alternatively please call our specialists to discuss your plans.

Suggested itineraries



Classic Kerala

This itinerary provides a great introduction to Kerala and covers many of its highlights. Explore the colonial port town of Cochin before heading inland to the Western Ghats for some time walking in this beautiful mountain region. Follow it with a few days in the backwaters with a stay on a traditional rice barge or relax on the beach.

Day 1	Fly overnight to Cochin.
Day 2	Arrive in Cochin and have the afternoon to stroll along the waterfront, see the Chinese fishing nets and get a feel for the town.
Day 3	Take a guided tour of colonial Cochin and discover the history.
Day 4	Drive up to Munnar for a walk through the pleasantly cool tea plantations.
Day 5	Soak up Munnar's scenery on a short walk or visit the tea museum before driving on to Periyar.
Day 6	Set off early for a guided jungle walk followed by a visit to the region's famous spice plantations.
Day 7	Drive to Alleppey to board your houseboat for a cruise along the backwaters.
Day 8	Transfer to your backwaters accommodation where you can punt a canoe, bird watch or simply sit back and watch the world go by.
Day 9	Drive to Marari Beach for the day, stroll along the beach or relax under a palm tree with a book.
Day 10	A second day in Marari to try an Ayurvedic massage or hire a bicycle to explore the quiet lanes.
Day 11	Transfer to the airport to connect with your international flight.

Stay longer

Extend your trip with a scenic rail trip through the mountains to Tamil Nadu. Visit Madurai to see the towering Meenakshi Temple, one of the most vibrant and colourful temples in India.



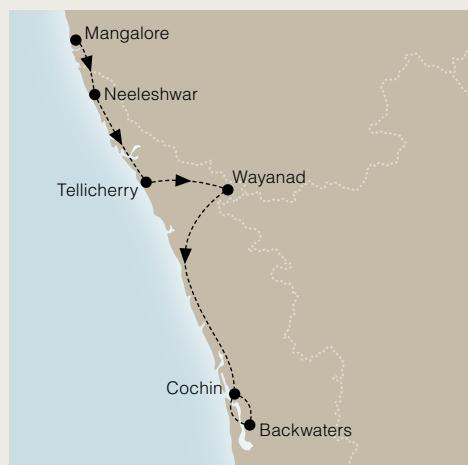
Western Ghats to Coast

Explore Kerala's varied landscapes, travelling from the central city of Bangalore west across the mountains, ending at Kerala's beautiful coastline. See the incredible palaces of Mysore, travel on the toy train through the Nilgiri hills, absorb Cochin's colonial heritage all before relaxing along the backwaters and on the beach.

Day 1	Fly overnight to Bangalore.
Day 2	Arrive in Bangalore and make the journey onwards to Mysore.
Day 3	Explore the impressive sites of Mysore before visiting the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary.
Day 4	Continue to explore the colonial town of Ooty nestled in the Nilgiri hills.
Day 5	Relax in the tea hills before taking the Blue Mountain toy train to Mettupalayam.
Day 6	Another train journey today taking in the scenic route to the Malabar coast and south to Cochin.
Day 7	Enjoy a guided tour of Fort Cochin including St Francis Church and Santa Cruz Basilica.
Day 8	Travel to the backwaters before boarding your traditional houseboat for the night.
Day 9	Disembark the boat after breakfast and head to the coast at Marari.
Day 10	Spend the day relaxing on beautiful beaches.
Day 11	Head back to Cochin to connect with your onwards international flight.

Stay longer

Head into the hills for a few days in Munnar, home to some of the world's highest tea plantations, for leisurely walking and spectacular views, or fly to the Maldives for powder-white beaches and turquoise seas.



A Journey Through Kerala

An overview of Kerala's cultural and historical sights, this itinerary begins in the less-visited north of the state with a few days on the beach. Once settled, travel to Tellicherry before heading into the cooler hills for some walking. Continue south to the fortified fort of Cochin before a final few days on the meandering backwaters.

Day 1	Fly overnight to Mangalore via Bombay.
Day 2	Arrive in Mangalore and drive to Neeleshwar for an afternoon on the beach.
Days 3-4	Spend time relaxing, join a yoga class or visit nearby temples.
Days 5-6	Continue to Tellicherry to visit the fort, shop in the market or enjoy a cooking demonstration.
Day 7	Drive to the refreshingly cool Wayanad hills and enjoy some walking through the plantations.
Day 8	Visit Wayanad's prehistoric caves or take a jeep safari around Nagarhole National Park.
Day 9	Descend to the coast and take the train south to Cochin for a sunset harbour cruise.
Day 10	Explore Cochin with your guide and watch an evening performance of Kathakali dance-drama.
Day 11	Drive to the backwaters for your cruise on board a houseboat.
Day 12	Meander along the waterways watching a colourful world pass by.
Day 13	Enjoy a final day in the backwaters.
Day 14	Transfer to Cochin airport for your onwards international flight.

Stay longer

Start your itinerary in Bangalore instead of Mangalore and travel west to the ancient city of Mysore known for its ornate monuments.



Wildlife in India

A VAST COUNTRY ENCOMPASSING A DIVERSE RANGE of landscapes and a huge array of habitats, India is home to some of the world's most spectacular wildlife. From the towering peaks of the Himalaya through the vast river plains of the north and on to the tropical south, India's habitats are protected in a series of 112 national parks and over 500 wildlife sanctuaries. The elusive big cats are the biggest drawcard for many visitors, with about 70% of the world's wild tiger population here, as well as the world's only Asiatic lion population. However, the plethora of elephants, bears, deer, birds and reptiles are equally impressive, and far easier to see. With so many parks there's an incredible variety of experiences on offer from game drives and walking safaris to leisurely cruises and cycle tours. Along the way you're likely to encounter a fascinating selection of animals, spectacular plant life and a host of former royal hunting lodges and ruined forts.

Audley in India's National Parks

We know that advance planning and a passionate and professional guide can make the difference between a good trip and an outstanding one. And when you've come to see the wildlife, these considerations are crucial. India is a complex destination for travel but our wildlife team is extremely experienced with years of travel and research here, and is well placed to advise you on all aspects of your trip. From hand-picked accommodation to an intimate knowledge of what each region or park has to offer, their advice will guide you from the moment you start planning your trip.

Our guides are chosen on merit and they ensure that every game drive is as rewarding as possible, whether you're on the trail of the elusive big cats or interested in the spiritual and healing powers of the ancient banyan trees. Although a sighting of a wild Bengal tiger is unforgettable, not even the best guide can guarantee this. To maximise your chances, follow your guide's advice, wear dark clothes, carry binoculars and allow enough time to spend a few days at your chosen destination.

Accommodation

India offers a broad range of accommodation options from simple family-run guesthouses to luxurious jungle lodges. We have personally chosen a selection of lodges and camps in each park to cater for a range of tastes and budgets but we have a preference for smaller properties where personal service, attention to detail and excellent in-house naturalists can be guaranteed. For an unrivalled jungle experience, we also offer a range of authentic safari camps and treetop lodges that place you in the heart of the forest close to nature and the wildlife that abounds here.



1 Ranthambore

One of the most accessible national parks with a good population of tigers.

See page 84

2 Kaziranga

Renowned for its one-horned rhinos, this is one of India's most remote national parks.

See page 85

3 Sasan Gir

The little-visited home of the rare Asiatic lion.

See page 85

4 Bandhavgarh

Healthy numbers of tigers, jackal, sambar deer and wild boar make this a rewarding park to visit.

See page 86

5 Kanha

A beautiful park of grassy meadows and lush forests home to tigers, sloth bears, leopards and wild dogs.

See page 87

6 Satpura

A stunning but extremely quiet park, the rugged gorges and ravines can be explored on rewarding walking safaris.

See page 88

7 Tadoba

A hidden gem in central India, this park sees few visitors but has high tiger densities.

See page 89

8 Nagarhole

Dense forests and marshy swamps here make the perfect habitat for wild elephants.

See page 88



Elephants, Corbett National Park



Indian peacock, Ranthambore National Park



Khem Villas, Ranthambore

Ranthambore National Park

Easy to access and known for its tiger population, Ranthambore is one of India's most popular national parks. The beautiful landscape here was a royal hunting ground enjoyed by the Maharaja of Jaipur and at its heart is a wonderfully ornate 10th-century fort which sits high on a rocky outcrop as if surveying the forests below. Ranthambore was included in the first phase of Project Tiger, a government initiative to safeguard the country's tiger population, and traffic here is restricted. You'll need to join a shared early morning or late afternoon game drive along a set route if you want to visit, but the tiger population seems habituated to this regular traffic and sightings are still frequent. In addition, a whole host of other species can be seen including deer, antelope, monkeys, hyenas and over 300 bird species.

Khem Villas, Ranthambore

An Audley favourite, this deceptively simple camp offers charming but sophisticated accommodation in a series of eight luxury cottages and 13 tents just outside the park limits. Beautifully styled with teak furniture, local fabrics and romantic open-air baths, the cottages and tents are well spaced and allow plenty of privacy. Four further rooms are available in the main house and have similarly stylish decor. There's a small freshwater plunge pool to cool off in as well as a choice of excellent traditional vegetarian food. The owners also run a variety of conservation programmes and guests can see their work first-hand on a visit to local schools or villages.

Tiger Den, Ranthambore

Just five minutes from the park entrance gates, this conveniently located hotel offers 50 rooms, suites and cottages surrounding a large inviting pool. Basic but comfortable, each air-conditioned room is tastefully decorated and has a private en suite shower room. The hotel is set in landscaped gardens and offers a range of talks and films on Ranthambore and its wildlife, as well as a library of local reference books. You can relax in the pool or steam room, enjoy a spa treatment or sip a drink under the stars. The restaurant serves a choice of Indian, Chinese and Western food and after dinner, guests gather outside for drinks around the fire.

Corbett National Park

India's oldest national park, Corbett sits majestically in the foothills of the Himalaya. Renowned for its birdlife, over 650 species have been spotted here including great pied hornbills and the rare ibisbill. Elephants are another major draw, wild herds emerge from the forests to drink at the river, where marsh crocodiles and gharial, a rare fish-eating crocodile, dwell. Although Corbett was one of the first parks to become part of Project Tiger, the dense vegetation and inaccessibility of many parts of the park mean that sightings are rare. Although a popular destination, accommodation options here are still basic and limited.



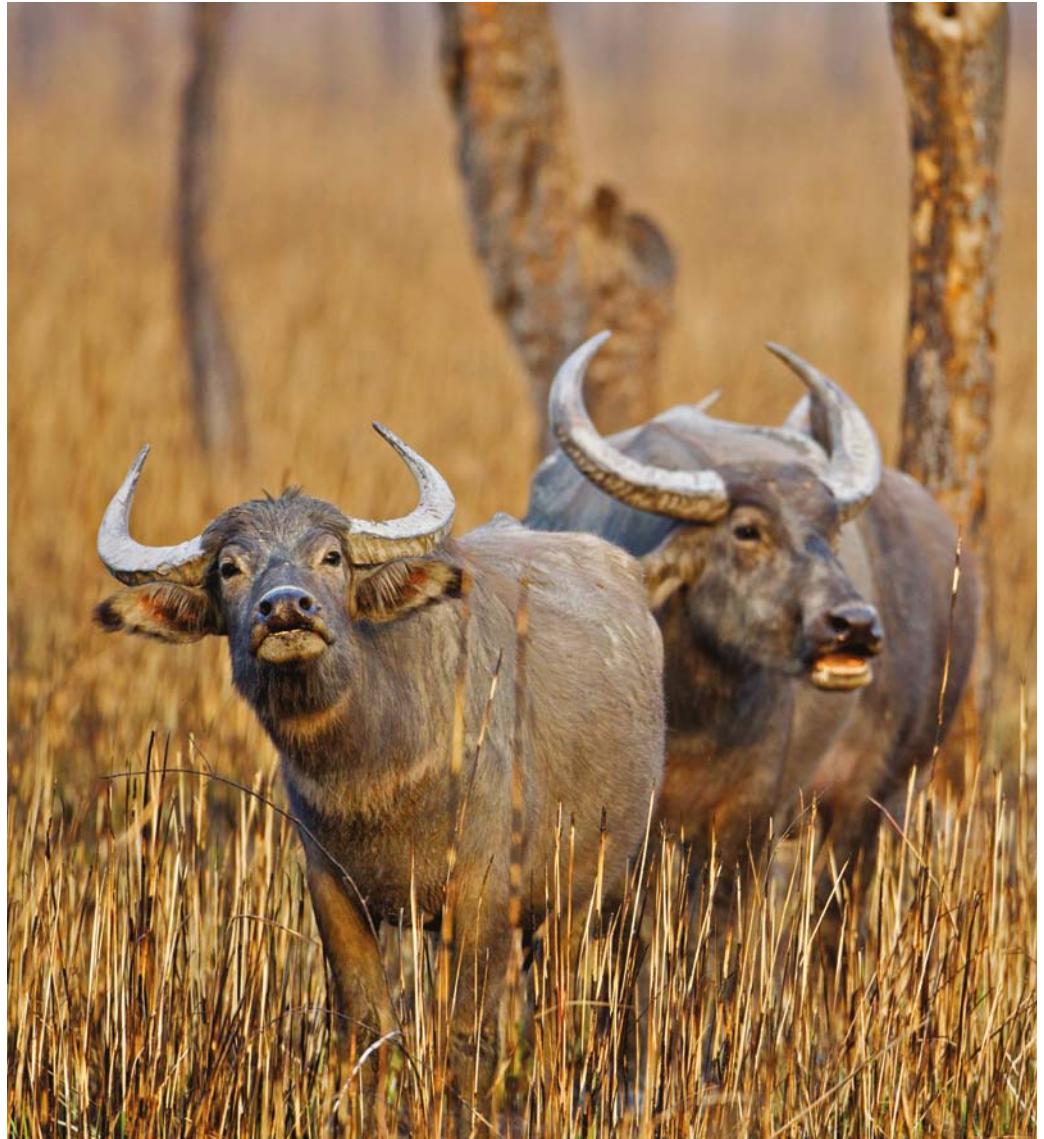
Tiger Den, Ranthambore



Elephants, Corbett National Park



Indian roller, Kaziranga National Park



Wild buffaloes, Kaziranga National Park



Asiatic lion, Sasan Gir National Park

Sasan Gir National Park

One of the most important protected areas in Asia, Sasan Gir National Park is home to the rare Asiatic lion. This sub species is found nowhere else on Earth and the teak forests of this former royal hunting ground provide an ideal habitat for these magnificent big cats. The park was established in 1965 on the Saurashtra Peninsula in Gujarat and stretches over almost 1,500 square kilometres. Infrastructure here is basic and visitor facilities are not as well developed as in other parts of the country. Although this means fewer creature comforts, it also results in lower visitor numbers so you can enjoy this great park in relative isolation.

Little Rann of Kutch Biosphere

The last refuge of the Indian wild ass, the salt marshes of Little Rann of Kutch have been protected since 1973. A flat and often featureless expanse of wilderness, this unique landscape is truly remarkable and bursts into life in the monsoon. Coarse grasses, acacia and scrub spring up and offer a seasonal feast for the chestnut coloured asses that can be seen grazing in the early morning or late afternoon. Little Rann of Kutch combines well with a visit to Sasan Gir, giving adventurous visitors a glimpse of some of India's rarest wildlife.

Kaziranga National Park

One of India's most remote and beautiful parks, Kaziranga is known for its one-horned rhino and is home to two thirds of the world's population of these impressive beasts. The park is set on the banks of the mighty Brahmaputra River in Assam and features a combination of dense tropical forest, towering elephant grass and swampy marshland. Although there is also a high density of tigers here they are rarely seen but elephants, water buffalo and barasingha (swamp deer with impressive antlers) are commonly spotted. Birdlife is also spectacular with plenty of water pools attracting fishing birds such as pelicans and Pallas's fish eagle.

Diphlu River Lodge, Kaziranga

A delightful sustainable tourism venture set on the banks of the Diphlu River, this rustic yet luxurious lodge is the best accommodation in the region. Situated just a short journey from Kaziranga, it is surrounded by lush forest and farmland, its 12 cottages offering gorgeous views. The thatched main lodge and cottages are built from local materials and designed to blend in with nature. All are raised on stilts to allow for seasonal flooding and decorated in rich, warm tones with local handicrafts and artefacts providing a charming character. Each cottage has a seating area, writing desk and en suite shower room as well as large folding glass doors which open onto a balcony overlooking the river or paddy fields. The staff here all come from the local community and are passionate about the project's success. The food is hearty and plentiful with Indian, Assamese and Continental cuisine featuring rice, vegetables and mustard from the garden.



Diphlu River Lodge, Kaziranga



Tiger, Bandhavgarh National Park

Panna National Park

A picturesque park just 45 minutes from the ornate temple complex at Khajuraho, Panna is an easily accessible wilderness home to chittal and sambar deer, langur monkeys and the marsh mugger crocodile which lives on the banks of the River Ken. You'll also find an abundance of birdlife here and the park is an excellent place to see birds of prey such as eagles and vultures. Panna has been a tiger reserve since 1994 but its proximity to urban centres has meant pressure from an expanding population and the unwanted attention of poachers. Sadly, by 2009 its tiger population had been entirely wiped out. Since then tigers have been reintroduced from other areas and the park has had some success with its breeding programme.



Kings Lodge, Bandhavgarh

Bandhavgarh National Park

Once the hunting grounds of the royal family of Rewa, Bandhavgarh sits in the northern Satpura Hills in Madhya Pradesh. The thick sal and bamboo forest here is interspersed with open marshland and makes an ideal habitat for a wide range of wildlife including tigers, wild boar, macaques, jackal and sambar deer as well as the less commonly seen gaur, or Indian bison. A variety of birdlife can be seen here too, including steppe eagle, hornbills and bee-eaters. Game viewing in the park is well organised with wardens monitoring the sizeable tiger population day by day, increasing the chances of spotting these graceful creatures. Consequently, this is a very popular park with game drives departing in the early morning and late afternoon.

■ Kings Lodge, Bandhavgarh

A much loved property set just ten minutes from Bandhavgarh's Tala gate, Kings Lodge blends beautifully with the surrounding landscape. There are eight cottages and ten stilted rooms, simply but elegantly decorated with hand-crafted furniture and local artworks. All have modern, en suite bathrooms and the stilted rooms have the addition of a balcony. There is also a library, a swimming pool and an excellent restaurant but the real charm lies in the fantastic staff and passionate naturalist team. The lodge is firmly committed to conservation

of the area, and trains villagers as naturalists and camp staff in the belief that they are the true guardians of the local forests and their wildlife.

■ Mahua Kothi, Bandhavgarh

Built in traditional local style with timber beams and handmade roof tiles, Mahua Kothi is a rustic but lovingly crafted place that is firmly rooted in its environment. The 12 kutiyas (jungle village huts) are richly decorated with local fabrics and are extremely comfortable. Each has its own courtyard with a shaded seating area as well as bicycles to borrow, yoga equipment and traditional games. The main lodge features high ceilings and terracotta floors, a wide veranda and an open kitchen where guests can watch butter being churned, spices ground and roti being cooked. Escape the heat in the swimming pool, relax in the library, or enjoy a drink under the stars.



Mahua Kothi, Bandhavgarh



Rhesus macaque, Bandhavgarh National Park



Plain tiger butterfly, Pench National Park



Barasingha, Kanha National Park



Shergarh, Kanha

Kanha National Park

Legend has it that the lush sal and bamboo forest and tall meadows of this park, along with nearby Pench, provided the inspiration for Rudyard Kipling's treasure *The Jungle Book*. The wilderness here is no less impressive today, and is home to a healthy tiger population as well as the rare barasingha, deer, antelope, wild dogs, macaques and almost 300 bird species. Leopards and sloth bears also reside here but are difficult to spot. Kanha covers over 940 square kilometres but game drives can take you deep into the forest where sightings of the big cats are common, although by no means guaranteed. There are multiple entry points, including Kisli and Mukki. There's a choice of accommodation near both entrances and it's a good idea to combine a visit with Bandhavgarh or Pench to experience contrasting parks and reduce journey times.

Shergarh, Kanha

This rustic camp on the quieter side of Kanha National Park is the kind of place that enriches the local community as well as all those who visit here. Built by a local naturalist and his English wife, the emphasis is very much on providing memorable wildlife experiences that are both sensitive to the local environment and the community. With excellent guiding, river and hill walks, cycle rides and visits to tribal markets,

you'll get a considerate and insightful glimpse into life in this part of India. The atmosphere is warm and relaxed with the owners personally looking after their guests. The six comfortable, well-spaced tents are simply but elegantly furnished with solid mud tile roofs and spacious bathrooms crafted using local building methods and materials. Meals are shared communally in the main house and an evening drink on the veranda overlooking the central water reserve promises views of kingfishers, cormorants and egrets.

Flame of the Forest, Kanha

With just four beautifully-crafted cottages set on the banks of the Banjar River, Flame of the Forest provides a wonderfully intimate location to relax and explore the wildlife of Kanha. The camp is just ten minutes from the Kisli gate and run by an experienced naturalist and his Swiss wife who provide a highly personal service. The simple cottages are built from gober, a mixture of mud, water and cow dung, in traditional style and feature outdoor showers, and large doors that provide superb views over the river and surrounding countryside. The central lodge is the place to enjoy a communal dinner or you can retreat for a candlelit bush meal under the stars. There are no TVs or swimming pool here but the excellent jeep safaris often led by the owner, Karan, are some of the best around.



Flame of the Forest, Kanha



Tiger Corridor, Pench

Pench National Park

Another region visited by Rudyard Kipling, Pench is one of Madhya Pradesh's least known parks. The teak forests here support a huge variety of wildlife from jungle cats and spotted deer to langur monkeys and a large population of tigers, although sightings are less common here than in other parks. An expert naturalist can take you through the buffer zone on an unforgettable journey that reveals a totally different aspect of the Indian wilderness, and the chance to see the unusual flying squirrel. Pench is just a two-hour drive from Nagpur airport but visitor numbers are low and the experience here is tranquil and authentic.

Tiger Corridor, Pench

A luxurious camp in the Pench buffer zone, Tiger Corridor overlooks the Banjar River and offers a chic retreat from the wilderness. The lodge has eight air-conditioned cottages and eight spacious tents, colonial in style with elaborately carved beds, silk drapes, ornate wooden chests, antique furniture and claw-footed baths. The lodge has a private tented lounge along with a well-stocked bar and dining room serving Continental and Indian cuisine. You can relax by the pool in the heat of the day, indulge in an Ayurvedic treatment in the spa, watch wildlife presentations or sit back and enjoy tribal folk dances in the evening.



Elephants, Nagarhole National Park



Reni Pani, Satpura

Satpura National Park

Little-visited Satpura is an extremely rugged place of beautiful sandstone peaks, narrow gorges and ravines, and densely forested hills. Combined with the adjoining Bori and Pachmarhi sanctuaries it protects a large swathe of the unique Central Indian ecosystem and supports an array of mammals including tigers, leopards, chital, nilgai, chinkara, bison and wild boar. It's a particularly good place to see the elusive sloth bear and a wide range of birdlife. One of the most exciting aspects of the park is the range of ways to explore. Jeep safaris provide access to some areas but others are best seen on foot or by canoe or kayak. This is the only one of Central India's national parks that allows such trips and with so few visitors it can feel like you have the whole wilderness to yourself.

Reni Pani, Satpura

A classic wildlife camp built from local materials, Reni Pani has a clear focus on conservation yet also manages to provide chic and charming accommodation in a superb setting. There are 12 cottages, situated by the seasonal nallahs (streams), in the woodland or on the hilltop which provides mesmerising views of the forest canopy and the mountains beyond. All the cottages are decorated in a rustic but elegant style and have private decks. There is also a pool to cool off in, a well-stocked library and a restaurant. Meals are served in the communal dining room, by a fire under the stars or in a number of romantic locations in the grounds. The lodge has four resident naturalists who offer private jeep safaris and walks through the buffer zone, though you may well spot wildlife in the camp's grounds.



Orange County, Nagarhole

Nagarhole National Park

Dense forests, marshy swamps and rolling hills surround the huge reservoir in Nagarhole National Park. Renowned for its wild elephants, sightings are frequent, but you'll also have the chance to spot tigers, leopards, gaur, macaques, langurs and an abundance of birds. Game drives can be taken in a shared jeep or by motorboat or coracle (a traditional round paddle boat) to observe elephants and crocodiles. Nagarhole is in Karnataka and is the best place to view wildlife during a tour of southern India.

Orange County, Nagarhole

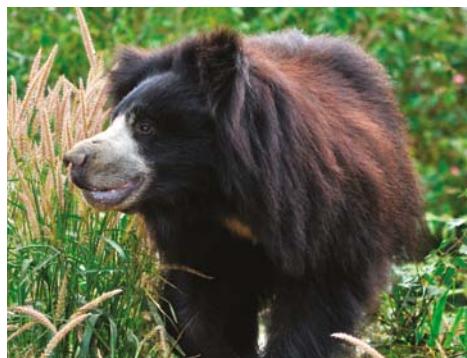
Inspired by the design of local villages, Orange County sits in a prime location on the banks of the Kabini River, close to Nagarhole National Park. Although environmentally sensitive and constructed from local materials, the lodge is extremely comfortable with stylish finishes and an air of understated luxury. The 30 spacious suites blend traditional materials with contemporary style and feature handcrafted furniture, private courtyards and either Jacuzzis or pools. There are two restaurants to choose from and guests can also dine in a romantic pavilion by the water's edge or on a candlelit boat. Days can be spent exploring the national park or visiting local villages, while after dark you can join a guided night walk around the property or enjoy performances by tribal dancers.



Leopard, Satpura National Park



Little green bee-eater, Nagarhole National Park



Sloth bear

Tadoba National Park

Central India's hidden gem, this little-visited park is situated in the Chandrapur district of Maharashtra, a region of dense, tropical deciduous forest. Safaris here are very special as the lack of visitors gives the impression of exploring in complete wilderness. The wildlife here is not accustomed to vehicles and can be skittish, but your guides will tailor your drive accordingly. It's worth allowing a few days here if you hope to see the tigers, leopards or sloth bears but as you track the larger mammals you're likely to encounter a rich variety of birdlife as well as gaur, wild dogs, striped hyenas, jungle cats and chousingha (the four-horned antelope), while in the southwest of the park, Tadoba Lake is a haven for mugger crocodiles.



Tiger, Tadoba National Park

Suggested itinerary

Tailoring your trip

The itinerary shown is designed to give you a flavour of what is possible, and is a route that works particularly well. We can use this as a basis to plan your trip or can design a completely different itinerary to suit your tastes and interests. Call one of our India wildlife specialists to start planning your itinerary.

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Getting around

The sheer size and scale of the Subcontinent means that getting around it involves long distances and a variety of transport methods. The national parks are scattered around the country and accessibility, infrastructure and facilities vary considerably from place to place. Some parks are just a short drive from urban centres, others are more remote. In many cases the distance between parks is huge and road conditions are generally poor. Despite this, travelling with your private driver is often the only option. It is easy however, to combine a visit to any of the parks with a cultural tour of the north or south. To combine the parks of Central India with those in the far south or in the northeast would require a mix of road and domestic air travel.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	~	✓✓	✓

- ✓ The best time to travel.
- ✓ A good time to travel, but there may be some factors to be aware of.
- ~ Travel is possible, but this is not the best time of year.
- ✗ Travel is not recommended.

The best time to experience India's wonderful wildlife is between November and April when the weather is warm and generally dry. As water sources begin to dry out in March and April, animals congregate at the few remaining waterholes making sightings more frequent, however temperatures at this time of year reach 40C (104F) and some tented accommodation will be closed. With monsoon rains turning the parks to muddy quagmires during the summer, most national parks close from July to October. India has a variety of weather patterns however, so please speak to your specialist as they can offer advice on the best times, places and activities for you.

⌚ Time difference: GMT+5.5 hours

Prices

We offer trips to cater for a wide range of budgets. You can find up-to-date guideline prices for your trip to India's national parks on our website, alternatively please call our specialists to discuss your plans.



India's Wildlife Treasures

Experience a range of scenery, wildlife and activities on this comprehensive tour of Central India's national parks. Search for tigers in popular Bandhavgarh, get off the beaten track deep in the forest at Kanha, experience a night drive in little-known Pench or canoe, kayak or explore on foot in ruggedly beautiful and little-visited Satpura.

Day 1	Fly to Nagpur via Mumbai.
Days 2-4	Make the short drive to Pench, one of the region's least known parks, where you will explore the teak forests and stunning meadows on morning and afternoon jeep safaris in search of tigers, langur, spotted deer and jungle cats.
Days 4-7	Enjoy a final morning game drive before continuing by road to vast Kanha for jeep safaris deep into the park, village visits and birdwatching walks along the Banjar River.
Days 7-9	Take a morning drive in Kanha then continue on to Bandhavgarh National Park with its healthy tiger population and imposing hilltop fort.
Days 9-12	Drive to Jabalpur then take a short train journey to Pipariya. Transfer to serene Satpura National Park to enjoy walking the rugged valleys and boat safaris on the Tawa Reservoir.
Day 12	Final morning safari before you transfer to Bhopal to connect with your international flight via Mumbai.

Stay longer

To extend your stay, you could opt to see India's cultural highlights in the Golden Triangle, visit the holy city of Varanasi or explore the ornate temples in Khajuraho. Alternatively, get off the beaten track with a visit to Tadoba National Park and include a few days on the river in Chambal in search of the Gangetic dolphin.

