

Tailor-made **India**

Nepal | Bhutan | Sri Lanka | Maldives

TRANSINDUS.COM



Welcome to TransIndus

The India Travel Company

Welcome to our latest brochure on the Indian Subcontinent, covering India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives.

It's hard to think of any region of the world that encompasses greater cultural and geographical diversity than the one described in the following pages. Nor one offering such rich pickings for travellers.

Just how rich I was reminded of recently when the founder of the Rough Guides series, Mark Ellingham, and his wife Nat, travelled to Rajasthan for the first time on a trip devised and organized by us. In the article he wrote about their journey for the Mail on Sunday, Mark enthused about the 'wonderful aromas' of the perfume shops in Ajmer, the 'hypnotic swirl of sound' created by Qawwali singers in Delhi, and serenity of the Rajput palaces they slept in, where kingfishers darted over the nearby riverbanks at dawn and peacocks strutted insouciantly on sun-dappled lawns. 'An itinerary offering daily wonders' was the couple's verdict on their three-week tour. They're already planning the next one – to Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

That is surely one of the most extraordinary things about the Indian subcontinent: no matter how many times you go, you'll always find a reason to return.

I experienced my own burst of renewed wanderlust recently after quizzing the veteran architectural historian, George Michell, and his partner, archaeologist John Fritz, about their 'favourite places in South India'. Featured on p.62–63 of this brochure, their answers reveal a deep love of beautiful,

forgotten monuments – places that would be national treasures in any European country, but in India languish in charismatic obscurity. Some already feature on our tours, but not all – and I'm greatly looking forward to visiting the ones that we don't yet know so that we can introduce them to our clients.

I'm also looking forward to visiting some of the fabulous new heritage-boutique hotels that have recently opened in the mountains of Bhutan, and making a trip to neighbouring Nepal, where reconstruction work following the earthquake has provided a great boost for local tourism.

A brace of glamorous new beach resorts have also opened in Sri Lanka and the Maldives, requiring serious investigation – well, it's a tough job, but someone has to do it!

Discovering fabulous places, and translating them into enjoyable, well balanced holidays, have always been among the most enriching aspects of our jobs. At TransIndus we take great pride in our expertise. Our consultants have all lived, worked and travelled extensively in their specialist regions, and return regularly to refresh their knowledge. We also place great importance on our standards of personal care and attention to detail – qualities that have repeatedly made us an award-winning travel company.

We hope you'll agree this passion shines through the writing and photography presented in this brochure, and that our efforts will serve to inspire your own unique journeys through these astonishing countries over the coming years.



Amrit Singh
Managing Director



India and beyond

From the time of Alexander the Great’s ill-fated foray across the Indus River in 326BC, the mighty, diamond-shaped landmass beyond the Himalayas has cast a powerful spell on the Western imagination. Christian zeal and the search for pepper brought the first European navigators to its shores in the late 15th century. But it would take another 350 years before the full extent of what its British overlords described as the ‘Indian Subcontinent’ was established by the Great Trigonometrical Survey. Back then, the hardy souls who probed the limits of British India would be gone for months, or years. Many never returned home. Progress through the jungles of the south and snow-covered valleys of the far north was painfully slow and the region must have seemed incomprehensively vast.

These days those same distances can be covered with ease. Even remote corners of the Himalayas, which a century ago took literally months to reach on foot, today, lie within an hour’s flying time of Delhi. In a typical three-week tour, you can combine a cruise down the Ganges with a visit to the Kathmandu Valley, or a camel safari in Rajasthan with a houseboat trip through the Kerlan backwaters. It is possible to marvel at the Chola temples of Tamil Nadu one week, and lounge on the powder-soft beaches of Sri Lanka or the Maldives the next. All of which offers a mouthwatering prospect for the modern traveller . . .

Of course, it is not only us foreign tourists that have taken advantage of this travel revolution. Moving around South Asia today you’ll encounter many domestic visitors enjoying sights and experiences their parents could only dream of. Which has thrown up new challenges for holiday planners. Now, more than ever, the key to putting together an enjoyable itinerary in the region depends on finding places that are a little off the beaten track, where you can sidestep the crowds and relax in a tranquil location, visiting the mainstream sights on day trips rather than the other way around.

In the following pages you’ll find plenty of great discoveries we’ve made where it’s possible to do just that. From sumptuously restored Nabob palaces in rural Bengal to eco-lodges nestled amid the tea gardens of the Sri Lankan highlands, TransIndus researchers have scoured the length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent to find the most rewarding locations and experiences the subcontinent has to offer. Whatever your time frame and budget, our consultants will be able to devise a trip full of variety and inspiration that will really get under the skin of your chosen destinations.

We begin our brochure, naturally enough, with India itself – a modern Republic on a vast scale, made up of innumerable subregions, former princedoms and provinces, many of them with roots dating back to the very dawn of human civilization in Asia. You could conceivably spend years exploring India and not see all of its noteworthy monuments, hill stations, beach resorts and wildlife sanctuaries. And there’s still more to savour in beautiful Nepal, whose combination of ancient town squares, mesmerizing mountain scenery and world-class nature reserves offer a logical follow-on if you’ve explored northern India, or indeed as a stand-alone trip. Next up is Bhutan, a tiny Himalayan kingdom with its own way of doing things, which extends to tourism: despite its remoteness, accommodation of an exceptionally high standard can be availed and forms part of the overall appeal, along with the country’s wonderful Buddhist monasteries and lush scenery. Finally, we head south to the island known in ancient times as ‘Serendip’, in the British era as ‘Ceylon’ and today as Sri Lanka – a byword for exoticism, where you can marvel at some of Asia’s most impressive archaeological remains and unwind on any number of glorious beaches.

Producing this brochure has rekindled some wonderful travel memories for us. We hope, in turn, that the following pages will inspire you to experience the wonders of India and its neighbours for yourself.

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TransIndus tailor-made holidays

Our customers place great value on their holidays, often spending considerable time and effort researching destinations and the kinds of activities on offer. We will be with you every step of the way on this journey, helping you make the best choices at planning stage, and ensuring things run smoothly while you're away.

It all starts with an informal chat – either over the phone, or face-to-face at our London office – in which we'll gain a sense of your precise requirements. We'll then put together an itinerary, taking into account how long you'd like to spend away, your aspirations and what your budget is. This itinerary will then be refined over the course of further conversations until you're completely happy with every detail of your trip.

Flexibility | Travelling tailor-made instead of opting for an off-the-peg tour gives you much greater flexibility. Although every country and subregion has its unmissable highlights, there's rarely a single route around them. You may have specific interests which you'd like to pursue, or a list of less well-known destinations that you'd like to include. This is where our expertise comes in: having explored each destination in depth, often several times over, our consultants will be able to suggest the best order in which to visit them, as well as the most rewarding excursions and hotels.

Smooth Travel | We'll also discuss meal plans with you, and make all your transport arrangements in advance. Chauffeur-driven, air-conditioned cars tend to be our preferred option for most countries in the Indian subcontinent, as they allow you to make more frequent stops along the way – though you

may well need to add some domestic flights to cover longer distances. One of our expert, English-speaking guides will also be assigned to you for day trips to historic and religious sites, markets and other destinations where in-depth local knowledge is desirable.

A critical element we take care of, of course, is your international flight. Experience has shown us the best routings, stopovers and departure times for hubs across South Asia, and we'll be able to suggest the most comfortable, time-saving option for you, whether you're travelling alone, as a couple or in larger family group with children.

Special Places to Stay | TransIndus understand how important accommodation is to one's overall enjoyment of a country, which is why we go to great lengths to find the loveliest hotels and guest houses in all of our destinations. Landmark luxury hotels, particularly those with a colonial-era pedigree, are perennial favourites among our clients, but we also favour smaller heritage and boutique properties where greater emphasis is placed on traditional architecture and interior design, and where the setting of the hotel itself is central to its appeal.

Throughout this brochure, we've highlighted examples of hotels and guest houses that stand out from the crowd, offer exceptional service and represent great value for money. A fuller rundown of our preferred accommodation options appears on our website, and of course, your TransIndus holiday designer will know of other commendable places that may have opened more recently in your chosen destination.



Why TransIndus?

Among the UK's largest and most successful operators of tailor-made tours to Asia, TransIndus features twenty-four different countries in the continent. With decades of experience designing journeys and a wealth of hard-won travel knowledge and local contacts to draw on, we are able to create trips of the highest possible quality, featuring the most desirable destinations and memorable activities. This expertise, backed by gold-standard customer service, has ensured our company consistently generates satisfaction ratings of 99%. Over half our clients travel more than once with us, or else have been referred by family, friends or colleagues.

'Your journey. Our expertise.' | Our goal is simple: to devise holidays that are both relaxing and culturally stimulating, and perfectly tailored for your needs. All TransIndus team members travel regularly to their specialist regions to keep abreast of the latest developments, and are passionate about sharing their discoveries. If a beautiful new heritage-boutique hotel opens in an off-track location, they'll know if it's worth staying there and which its best rooms are. If a particular coastal resort has grown too crowded, they'll be able to suggest a lesser frequented alternative, and the best monuments, nature sanctuaries and lunch stops to pause at en route. Or if you want to spend a few days river cruising, they'll know which of the boats offer the most varied routes and best value for your budget.

Sound Advice | Throughout, 'authenticity' is our watchword. We want our clients to enjoy not just a revitalizing, inspirational holiday, but return home feeling that they have had a genuine insight into the countries visited. We achieve this by recommending destinations that may not feature in guide books, and sidestepping the frequently visited places in favour of lesser known gems.

Whether you're dreaming of a cultural trip highlighting historic monuments and the arts, or a nature-based one with wildlife as its focus, you will find us passionate about our destinations and committed to offering you quality at every stage of your journey.

Financial Protection: Peace of Mind

All our clients are financially protected. When booking with TransIndus, you can rest assured that, should your travel arrangements be disrupted by circumstances beyond your control, you'll be fully refunded. Flight-inclusive holidays are covered by our Air Travel Organiser's License (ATOL 3429), granted by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), while those without flights are protected by our financial bond with the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA V0709). In the unlikely event of an emergency, the CAA and ABTA ensure you will not be stranded abroad. And if you haven't already left the UK, they'll also make sure your money is refunded fully. In addition, we are proud members of the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO), whose 'Client's Charter' assures you of the highest standards of service.



हनुस्तान India

From Megasthenes to Michael Palin, India has enthralled travellers for literally thousands of years and its modern incarnation, home to nearly one fifth of the world's people, remains a country of incomparable fascination – whether you are coming for the first time, or as a seasoned veteran.

The main problem facing any would-be traveller to the subcontinent, experienced or otherwise, is deciding where to start. The answer depends on what kind of holiday you have in mind, of course. But roughly speaking, if this is your first tour of India you'll probably be setting your sights on one of two regions: either the "Golden Triangle" of Delhi (the capital), Agra (site of the Taj Mahal) and Jaipur (India's flamboyant 'Pink City'), with a possible extension deeper into the desert state of Rajasthan; or Kerala and the historic highlights of neighbouring Tamil Nadu in the far south, with their tropical backwaters, towering temples and hinterland of forested mountains.

TransIndus tours to India cover both these popular regions in depth, and pretty much everything in between and beyond, with routes winding into some of the least visited corners of the country. We try to keep air travel to a minimum, which allows you to gain a sense of the changing landscapes and to encounter everyday rural India, where the pace of life

is still often measured by the turn of a bullock cart wheel, and the annual calendar revolves around rituals of temple, mosque and village shrine.

Accommodation has in all cases been chosen for its charm and character, as well as comfort and convenience. Our tours of India may feature stays in Himalayan tea bungalows, Keralan rice barges, Rajput lake palaces, jungle lodges, former royal hunting camps and European merchants' mansions converted into boutique hideaways. You can opt to stay in a remote village, or the thick of a pulsating metropolis.

Whichever itinerary you choose, you can rest assured that every practicality will have been taken care of – checked, and double checked, in advance – to ensure your trip runs smoothly; and that your holiday is memorable for all the right reasons: India's astonishing sights, sounds and aromas; its fabulously spicy cuisine; and extraordinary natural beauty.





Rajasthan & the North

For sheer spectacle, no other region of India compares with Rajasthan and the great Gangetic plains of the north. The so-called 'Golden Triangle' formed by Delhi, Agra and Jaipur holds some of the country's most iconic sights – including the Taj Mahal – while the fringes of the Thar Desert to the south and west feature an irresistible mix of spectacular monuments and a vibrant local culture. This tends to be the corner of the country most first-time visitors concentrate on – and no wonder. If you've come to India to see ornately decorated Mughal-domed palaces, labyrinthine medieval cities, pilgrims bathing in the Ganges, turbans, camels and tigers, you'll be spoilt for choice here.



Highlights of Rajasthan and the North

Jaisalmer | Rajasthan's dreamy desert citadel emerges from the sand flats like a vision from the Arabian Nights. Camel treks, visits to painted-mud villages, rooftop music recitals and star gazing are added attractions.

Udaipur | Watch the transformative effect of the fading light on the serene Pichola Lake and the Rajput palaces of the Sisodia Dynasty as the sun sets behind the majestic Aravalli Hills.

Amritsar | Few buildings in the world evoke a sense of mysticism and religious intensity as vividly as the fabulous Golden Temple in Amritsar – holiest shrine of the Sikh faith, completed in 1604.

Jaipur | Explore the famous City Palace, colourful textile bazaar and jewellery markets of Maharajah Jai Singh's lavish capital, painted in an earthy pink hue. Splendid Amber Fort is only a short drive north.

Delhi | The spectacular remnants of seven cities survive on the banks of the Yamuna River, amid the sprawl of the modern capital, among them Shah Jahan's splendid Jama Masjid Mosque and Red Fort complex.

Taj Mahal, Agra | India's iconic Mughal tomb built by Emperor Shah Jahan for his wife, fully merits its reputation as the world's most exquisite building and the ultimate monument of romantic love.

Khajuraho | Eyebrow-raising erotic sculptures adorn this magnificent temple complex on the banks of the rocky Betwa River in Madhya Pradesh. Visit en route to Varanasi or the tiger reserves further east.

Varanasi | Jump in a boat at dawn to see the rising sun illuminate the crowded bathing ghats of India's holiest city on the Ganges River. A site sacred to inhabitants of the subcontinent for thousands of years.

Travel Information

Time zone: UTC+5.30 hours

Flying time: 8.30 hours

Currency: Indian Rupee

Capital: New Delhi

When to go

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature °C	14	16	23	28	34	34	32	30	29	26	20	16
Rainfall mm	23	18	13	8	13	74	180	173	117	10	3	10
Best to travel	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●

●● The best time to travel

● A good time to travel

● Low season

Be inspired

For help planning your perfect holiday, contact us at the Old Fire Station, Ealing, London.
Tel: **020 8566 3739**
Web: **www.transindus.com**



DELHI

A megacity whose fast pace and jarring contrasts are guaranteed to induce a degree of wide-eyed amazement, India's capital is a compelling point of arrival. The vestiges of at least seven great urban centres rise cheek-by-jowl from the banks of the Yamuna River here, dating back more than 3,500 years.

The most evocative of them is the Jama Masjid, the magnificent sandstone and white-marble 'Friday Mosque' constructed by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in Old Delhi. Climb one of its minarets for a matchless view over the surrounding roofscape to the ramparts of the Red Fort, where the Mughals held court in a hidden world of cusp-arched pavilions and pillared audience halls. From there, travel across town to the grandiloquent centrepiece of the former British capital, Rajpath, then visit the nearby National Museum, with its priceless collection of Indian antiquities, before progressing to Delhi's southern fringes where the exquisitely carved Qutb Minar tower has dominated the skyline since AD 1202.

Evenings may be spent listening to the infectious Sufi rhythms of qawwali at the shrine of Nizammuddin, souvenir hunting in the backstreets of Hauz Khas, or dining in some of India's most sophisticated Mughlai restaurants.

Old Delhi Walks: the Salaam Baalak Trust

One of the most popular excursions among TransIndus guests visiting Delhi are heritage walks around Shah Jahan's Old City. Run by the Salaam Baalak Trust, the walks are guided by former street children who, apart from showing visitors around the historic houses and backstreets, also give a vivid account of what life is like for disadvantaged youngsters in the area.

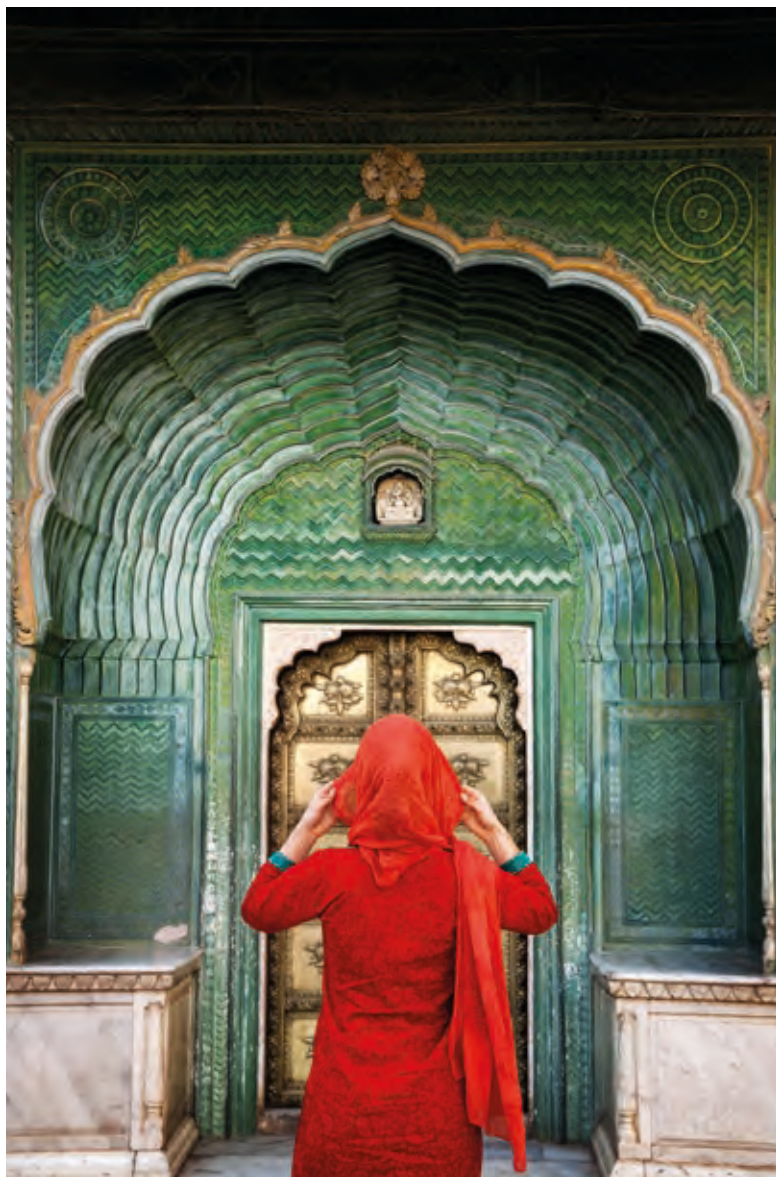


AGRA

Agra's heart-stopping centrepiece needs little introduction. Rising from the brown-ochre river banks on the southeast fringes of the city like a vision of heaven, the Taj Mahal is the world's most ethereal building, and the ultimate monument to romantic love. Having admired the white-marble masterpiece in different lights, venture further north to see the tomb as it would have looked to its creator, the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, whiling away his last years incarcerated in the gilded apartments of Agra Fort.

A welcome respite from the city's frenzied streets is the exquisite tomb of Akbar, on the northern outskirts, which rises from parkland grazed by gazelles and black-faced langur monkeys – like a picture from a Mughal miniature. The ghostly ruins of the palace complex, the great Mughal emperor built, after his conquest of Gujarat, on a ridge 28 miles (45km) southwest at Fatehpur Sikri is Agra's other obligatory day trip.





PUSHKAR & THE CAMEL FAIR

Pushkar, in the heart of Rajasthan, is one of India's

holiest Hindu sites, and among its most scenic. Overlooked by beautiful desert hills, its focal point is a pearl-shaped lake surrounded by bathing ghats (steps), and more than four-hundred temples. This is a town that definitely casts a spell, especially in the twilight of early morning and at dusk, when its ghats are filled with pilgrims and the air charged with incense smoke and the sound of bells and drums from the nearby shrines. Wonderful views over the town and surrounding desert extend from the hilltop Savitri Temple, to the south.

Pushkar really comes alive during the annual mela, or fair, held over the full-moon of Kartik month (which usually falls in November). Hundreds of thousands of Hindu pilgrims pour in from across the region to take a redemptory dip in the holy water, said to cleanse the soul of all sin at this time. But it's the extraordinary spectacle of the livestock market run alongside the religious festival that really captures the attention of foreign visitors. Drove of animals, particularly camels, are traded here by villagers, who take the opportunity to adorn themselves in the most striking traditional clothes and jewellery.

JAIPUR

The capital of Rajasthan, Jaipur, has a markedly different feel from the other two corners of the so-called 'Golden Triangle'. The traffic is no less intense, but amid the chaos of its walled Old City wander the odd painted elephant and camel carts, driven by men in vibrant turbans with handlebar moustaches. The architecture is spectacularly flamboyant. Set in an orderly grid plan by Maharaja Jai Singh II in 1727, the buildings here are painted a regulation salmon-pink colour, forming a mellow backdrop for markets crammed with dazzling tie-dye cloth and mirror-inlaid patchwork quilts.

Blending the Persian-inflected elegance of the Mughals with the Rajput love of flair, Jaipur's palace hotels provide dreamy havens from the bustle of the bazaars outside. Recommended excursions include the trip to nearby Amber, a Rajput palace like something off the pages of the Arabian Nights.



JODHPUR

Capital of the former kingdom of Marwar, Jodhpur owes its prominence to the trade route that once passed its gates, connecting the ports of Gujarat with the cities of the northern plains. The resulting wealth enabled the Marwari rulers to construct one of India's most fabulous forts – Mehrangarh – on top of a near-vertical escarpment. The cuboid houses of the old town below are painted a hundred shades of blue – a practise said to denote the homes of local Brahmins (but which actually derives from attempts to discourage termites by adding copper sulphate to limewash).

Whatever its roots, the custom has created a unique spectacle, best appreciated from the ramparts and royal apartments of Mehrangarh, whose *jharokha* balconies and finely scalloped windows frame wonderful views of the cobalt chequerboard below. Also visible to the south is the enormous bulk of Umaid Bhavan, a palace built in 1929 by the local Maharaja. It is said to have taken an army of 3,000 labourers sixteen years to construct and holds 347 lavishly decorated rooms, some of them in high Art-Deco style.



BIKANER

Bikaner rises from the eastern fringes of the Thar Desert,

its medieval core encircled by rich pink sandstone ramparts. A crop of ancient Jain shrines such as the dazzling yellow-stone Bhandasar temple and eccentric 19th-century havelis cluster in the sand-blown back lanes of the old town, but stately Junagadh Fort with its grand and glittery palaces is the main reason why so many of our guests choose to break the long journey to Jaisalmer here. The citadel, built in the 16th century now houses an atmospheric heritage hotel.

JAISALMER

Jaisalmer is the undisputed jewel of the Thar. A honey-coloured fortress town surrounded by a huge expanse of parched scrub and sand, it lies a long journey west of Rajasthan's main transport arteries, but once the iconic bastions have appeared on the horizon, you'll know the effort has been worthwhile. For centuries an important trade hub for merchants' caravans crossing the desert, the citadel and its surrounding streets hold a unique collection of beautifully carved, ochre-hued havelis and palaces, whose intricate stonework turns a striking molten colour in the light of late afternoon.

One of the most magical experiences Rajasthan has to offer is a sun-downer music session on a flat rooftop up in the fort, with local musicians playing harmonium and tabla. For a still more vivid taste of the Thar, join a camel trek through the immaculately painted, mud-walled villages of the surrounding desert to a luxury tented camp, where you can enjoy a spicy Rajasthani thali cooked on a blazing fire, under the starriest of skies.

Off-track Rajasthan



While Rajasthan's vibrant, crowded cities dominate most itineraries through the northwest, the market towns and villages of the desert hinterland are where many visitors experience the most memorable moments of their trip. Numerous old palaces belonging to the families of former rajas, rawats and thakurs open their doors to paying guests these days. Former royal hunting lodges and luxury tents provide a level of comfort wildlife-seekers seldom experience. Staying in them takes you deep into the rural heart of the

region, yielding glimpses of a more traditional way of life and providing a welcome antidote to the mayhem of the city.

The heritage hotels chosen by TransIndus score highly for their wonderful Rajput-Mughal architecture, and tranquil locations. Many offer birdwatching trips, camel treks to local beauty spots and visits to craft villages and remote shrines, while the evenings may be enlivened with puppet shows, music and dance by local troupes. In short, they're destinations in themselves, quite apart from being lovely places to stay.



Ramathra Fort

On the fringes of the Daang Plateau in eastern Rajasthan, Ramathra Fort occupies a superbly remote location. From a canopied seat on its ramparts, you can gaze across a sweeping expanse of mustard fields, wooded hills and acacia scrub to Kalisil Lake glinting in the distance. The sunrise and sunset views are especially wonderful, and provide a welcome counterpoint to the frenzy of Agra and Jaipur, both only a day's drive away. Accommodation comes in gorgeous suites inside the fort itself – some with private balconies, log fires and their own al fresco bathrooms – or half a dozen luxury hunting tents dotted around the lawns.



Jawai Leopard Camp

Nowhere else in India boasts the density of leopards as this sublimely beautiful landscape in the lap of the Aravalli Hills, midway between Jodhpur and Udaipur. Stay for three nights and you're almost guaranteed sightings, often at close proximity. The camp itself, set in a sandy plot surrounded by the boulder hills where the leopards prowl, provides a perfect base. The resident naturalists are the real deal – cat-crazy experts who know just where to find these leopards. And a matchless attention to detail pervades every aspect of the safari experience, from the quality of the Jeeps to the gourmet food and wine served after game drives.



Malji Ka Kamra

A quaint town, Churu is a delightful getaway into the fresco-filled region of Shekhawati. Generous in its spread of sprawling havelis, many of India's prominent businessmen once lived here in their elaborately designed family homes, each wishing to outdo the other in grandeur and pomp. Malji Ka Kamra – is a restored heritage building with 11 rooms and suites, carefully preserving the elements of the original architecture and aiming to recreate the ambience of yore. Excursions within and around Churu reflect the lifetimes of business families and their inspiration behind constructing buildings, water reservoirs and temples.

Chanoud Garh

Intensely personal and engaging, Chanoud Garh – a family-run heritage homestay with seven suites, is situated between Jodhpur and Udaipur. Relive the history of the Mertia Rajputs, one of the most prominent feudal lords of Rajasthan, as you explore the lovingly restored sections of the palace and acquaint yourself with the land and its people through interesting village walks and excursions. A particularly heady drive is to the expansive salt pans at sunset to learn more about its relevance in the area's ecosystem. Meticulously organized suites with a high sense of detail to comfort and aesthetics, each unique in its design and make-up, are sure to delight even the most seasoned traveller.



Chhatra Sagar, Nimaj

Wake up in your own luxurious Rajasthani hunting tent to sunrise over a serene lake, as flocks of parakeets carren overhead and herds of gazelles graze on the distant bank. Chhatra Sagar is camping as you've never experienced it before. Dotted along the top of a 19th-century dam, the elegant hand-stitched white-canvas tents are furnished with interiors block-printed in traditional floral motifs. Each has its own marble and slate en-suite bathroom and private sitout overlooking the water, where in winter some 250 species of birds congregate. The pillows are plump, the food terrific and views sublime, especially from the nearby hillside where your hosts, Harsh and Shrinidhi Vardhan, take guests for an unforgettable sun-downer.



Ranvas, Nagaur

This fabulous hotel in the little-visited desert town of Nagaur takes the heritage concept to new heights. It occupies the former zenana (womens' quarters) of a magnificent medieval fort, comprising ten interlocking havelis, each with their own walled courtyards. The architecture's a feast of salmon-hued sandstone, sculpted into slender pillars and decorative panels. Bougainvillea-pink silk cushions and indigo-blockprint bedspreads provide splashes of vibrant colour against the whitewashed walls. You can lounge on terraces shaded by pierced *jali* screens, or in a gorgeous courtyard swimming pool. The food is dominated by Mughal-Sufi dishes, and served in a romantic pillared pavilion to a backdrop of tiny oil lamps.

Samode Palace

A pink-ochre palace enfolded by scrub-covered mountains, Samode is the stuff of dreams. From the minute you enter its bougainvillea-filled courtyard, you're transported to the hey day of the Raj, when royal hunting parties would arrive in great trains of elephants to a cacophony of drums and trumpets. The architecture is a classic fusion of Rajput and Mughal, and the painstakingly restored interiors, ornately decorated balconies and fountains are some of the most exuberant in India. You've a choice of two pools to laze beside: a large, marble-lined one on the lower level; a crow's-nest infinity pool on the rooftop, from where the views are breathtaking.



Dev Shree, Deogarh

In the heart of the Aravalli Hills of Western Rajasthan, Dev Shree showcases the local architectural styles and craftsmanship in the area with great aplomb. Replete with intricately carved pillars, deep, airy verandahs, immaculate stonework throughout, stunning, cool marble floors, state-of-the-art impeccable bathrooms, a huge roof terrace (ideal for yoga at dawn and drinks at sunset!), the workmanship is outstanding. The 7 bedrooms are large, lofty, beautifully furnished, and wonderfully comfortable. Whilst at Deogarh, your hosts Shatrunjai and Bhavna will be delighted to take you out exploring the area. A walk through the village of Deogarh is a must – one of the cleanest most friendly and welcoming villages in the state.





UDAIPUR Spread around the shores of shimmering Lake Pichola, Udaipur is the dreamiest of Rajasthan's cities. Its skyline of whitewashed havelis and temple towers, rising to the ochre walls and domes of the Sisodia dynasty's exquisite City Palace, is one of the most recognisable in Asia. Shah Jahan once spent a summer here and it is said he was so taken with the beauty of the architecture that he used it as a blueprint for the Taj Mahal. Today's visitors divide their time between explorations of the warrenous old city, and tours of the City Palace, with its richly ornamented mahals. Udaipur also boasts a bumper crop of breathtakingly beautiful palace hotels, and these provide regal bases for day trips to the many monuments scattered among the nearby Aravalli Hills.

KUMBHALGARH A popular day trip from Udaipur is the excursion to Kumbhalgarh Fort, a spectacular eagle's-nest citadel three hours' drive into the Aravallis. Built by Rana Kumbha in the 15th century, the stronghold presided over the craggy border of medieval Mewar and Marwar, at an altitude of 1,100m (3,600ft), and enjoys a fabulous panoramic view across the surrounding ridges and down to the plains below. The plateau on which the fort rests is encircled by 11km (7 miles) of crenellated battlements, 15ft (4.5m) thick and studded at regular intervals with barrel-sided bastions. The second largest rampart in Asia, it's often referred to as 'India's Great Wall' after its passing resemblance to the one in China.

CHITTAURGARH Chittaurgarh (or 'Chittaur'), in the far southeast of Rajasthan, is famous for its majestic fort – the scene of a succession of medieval sieges and battles between the Rajputs and Mughals. You could easily spend a whole day wandering around its formidable ramparts, which wind along the lip of undulating escarpments to scattered temples, bathing tanks, gardens, ruined palaces and, eventually, the iconic Vijay Stambh, or 'Victory Pillar', which Rana Kumbha erected in 1440 to commemorate his triumph over Sultan Mehmed Khilji. A narrow flight of steps winds to the top of the ornately sculpted tower, where a stupendous view over the plateau is revealed from an upper terrace.



BUNDI Bundi is truly one of Rajasthan's hidden gems, sufficiently far off the region's most popular tourist trails to receive only a trickle of visitors, yet full of traditional atmosphere thanks to the presence, on a hill overlooking the town, of a spectacular multistoreyed palace, which seems about to topple from its seat into the patchwork of flat rooftops and walled havelis below. Inside, the former royal apartments hold a collection of vibrant early-17th-century murals, rendered in rich turquoise, lapis blue, jade green, purple and scarlet. The finest are those of the Chitra Sala, a garden terrace whose paintings depict sensuous scenes of dalliance and dancing from the Krishna story.



RANAKPUR Just down the mountain from Kumbhalgarh lies the famous Jain temple complex of Ranakpur. Built in the 15th century, the shrines here are renowned above all for their richly carved interiors, sculpted from creamy white marble. The painstakingly decorated ceiling domes are held up by 1,444 individually carved pillars.

India's Sacred Geography

Over thousands of years, an elaborate network of pilgrimage routes has evolved in India, inter-connecting the great religious centres of the subcontinent. And thanks to the ease of modern travel, these are more popular than ever. The most revered shrines, such as the temple of Lord Venkateswara at Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, or the Sikhs' golden Harimandir Sahib in Amritsar and the dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer in Rajasthan attract huge numbers of visitors year round.

None, however, command the levels of attention lavished on the Kumbh Mela festivals, held every three years at four locations in rotation: Allahabad, Haridwar, Nasik and Ujjain. An estimated 100 million pilgrims descended on the confluence of the Yamuna and Ganges at Allahabad in February 2013 to bathe, 30 million of them on a single day – the largest gathering of humanity ever known.

Although it is thought that mass bathing events such as this have occurred in India for many centuries, the tradition of pan-Indian pilgrimage really took off in the 8th century AD, after the Hindu philosopher and reformer, Adi Shankaracharya, established the Char Dhams. Identified as the most powerful temples in the country, these 'Four Abodes' at Dwarka (in Gujarat), Puri (in Odisha), Rameshwaram (in the far south) and Badrinath (in the inner Himalayas) became the cornerstones of a pilgrimage circuit forming a perfect square of vast extent.

Char Dhams is also the name of a shorter, but physically arduous route in the Himalayan mountains in northern India. Connecting the temples of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Yamunotri, Gangotri (close to the source of the Ganges), the path is only open in the summer when the high passes separating the holy places are free of snow. The centuries-old trail, paved and stepped for much of the way, is particularly popular among

sadhus, wandering renunciates and ascetics who spend their lives travelling between India's holy places. Since the construction of metalled roads from the plains, however, the temples themselves have become easily accessible to the general population and are now crowded during the short summer season.

But even the Char Dhams at full capacity are mere backwaters compared with the mountain shrine of Lord Ayappan at Sabarimala in the southern state of Kerala. Each year, between mid-November and mid-January, 10 to 50 million men leave their homes and families to trek to this remote temple. Distinctive in their black *lungi* (sarongs) and bare chests strung with sacred *rudraksha* seeds, they travel in packed buses and are a defining feature of the deep south in the winter months.

Regardless of their attire or chosen mode of transport, the one thing all pilgrims following the highways and byroads of the subcontinent have in common is a desire to reach their goal. Visiting the holy places of India, you'll often have the great pleasure of witnessing the moment when weary pilgrims finally arrive at the culmination of their journey, placing their palms together in supplication or prostrating themselves in prayer to receive the blessings of the god or saint in honour of whom the arduous pilgrimage from their home has been undertaken.



AMRITSAR For pure, ethereal beauty, there's only one building in India to rival the Taj Mahal. The Sikhs' holiest shrine, the Golden Temple, in the Punjabi city of Amritsar, casts an undeniably powerful spell. The combined effect of the lustrous, gilded domes, the shimmering reflections in the water and hymns emanating from the shrine are at once humbling and elevating – as befits one of the world's greatest living places of worship.

Once through the entrance archway, join the streams of barefooted pilgrims strolling around the white marble terrace that surrounds the temple. Then follow the walkway to the sacred causeway of the golden Harmandir Sahib itself, where the Adi

Granth, the Sikhs' holy book, is enshrined. Musician-priests keep up a continuous soundtrack of kirtans, devotional songs accompanied by tabla and harmonium.

Another experience not to be missed while in Amritsar are the free, communal meals served in the Guru-ka-Langar, next to the Golden Temple. Sharing food with all-comers, regardless of creed or status, is one of the central tenets of the Sikh faith, and there's no more emphatic reaffirmation of the belief than this huge canteen, where everyday thousands are served meals of simple dal and chapattis, seated at long mats on the floor.





VARANASI | Varanasi, or Benares, is the holiest of Hinduism’s seven sacred cities. It stands on the banks of the Ganges River, where traces of human settlement have been unearthed dating back to around 2,000BC. Rituals begin before dawn, when mist blurs the contours of the sacred ghats, or steps, that the worshippers use to descend to the river. A dip in the Ganges is said to wash away the sins of a lifetime. The best vantage point from which to savour the spectacle is a rowing boat on the water itself. Chanting, drumming and the ringing of temple bells intensifies as the sun rises, casting the holy steps and their backdrop of sanctuary towers, saffron pennants and parasols in a sublime glow.



Ganga Aarti
The offering of light from an oil lamp, accompanied by the singing of sacred hymns, is a traditional act of devotion for Hindus, performed at countless shrines across India each evening. In Varanasi, however, the ritual takes on a larger-than-life form. Teams of young pandits (priests) dressed in saffron silk robes gather on a special stage at Dashashwamedh Ghat to enact a carefully choreographed routine that begins with the blowing of a conch shell, after which incense burners are swung and flaming torches waved in a ceremony synchronized with loud drumming and cymbal crashing.



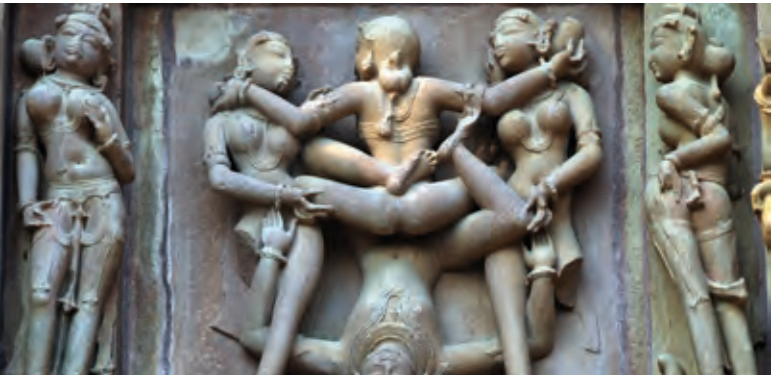
GWALIOR | Ancient inscriptions on shrines carved from the long, steep-sided escarpment soaring above the city of Gwalior, 194 miles (312km) southeast of Delhi, show that the hill has been of religious and strategic importance for many centuries. But it was during the reign of Raja Man Singh (1486-1516 AD) that the fort became one of India’s ‘Great Wonders’. Huge round towers crowned by domed cupolas punctuate the façade of the mighty citadel, embellished with bands of blue-green tiles recalling the sacred architecture of central Asia. Inside, the palace erected by Man Singh for his favourite wife, the Gujari Mahal, is now a particularly well-stocked archaeological museum whose prize exhibit is a sensuous carving of a fertility nymph, or Salabhanjika, dubbed ‘India’s Mona Lisa’ for its enigmatic smile.



LUCKNOW | Lucknow, the congested capital of Uttar Pradesh, in many ways epitomises the problems of modern India. Yet the city is also known for its highly sophisticated traditional culture, refined over centuries in the courts its rulers, the Nawabs of Awadh, (or ‘Oudh’), who left behind a remarkable architectural legacy. With its gilded cupolas, domes, palaces and pleasure gardens, the skyline of 18th-century Lucknow rivalled that of Constantinople and Bukhara for splendour. The Urdu spoken in its courts was the most chaste in the Mughal empire, its cuisine the most elaborate and decadent. Poetry, music, and Kathak dance received passionate royal patronage. Partition in 1947 had a devastating impact on Lucknow’s cultural life, but most of the Nawab’s splendid monuments survive, albeit in a dilapidated state these days. In Lucknow, too, stand the poignant, pockmarked ruins of the British Residency, where around 3,000 Europeans and their Indian servants fought Indian sepoys during the Uprising of 1857.



ORCHHA | Orchha often turns out to be the unexpected highlight of tours across India’s northern plains. Now little more than a sleepy village, the site on the banks of the rocky Betwa River served in the 16th century as the capital of the redoubtable Bundela Dynasty, arch-enemies of the Delhi Sultans. A superb collection of deserted palaces, temples, havelis and cenotaphs remain from this era, most of them in an advanced state of neglect, with weeds growing from their domed cupolas and spectacular sanctuary towers. The defining landmark here is a line of huge *chhatris*, or memorial shrines, whose great towers soar in a line along the riverbank – a particularly wonderful view when water levels are high and reflections of the pale-ochre buildings shimmer between the boulders.



KHAJURAHO | Erotic sculpture adorns many temples in the subcontinent. None, however, depict sexual ecstasy in so many forms and with such consummate skill as the sandstone shrines of Khajuraho. Around twenty ornately carved structures comprise this world-famous archaeological site in Madhya Pradesh, 250 miles (400 km) southeast of Delhi. Great mystery surrounds the buildings. They are known to have been erected between 950 and 1180 by the Chandela Dynasty, but quite why their architects chose to ornament them with such explicit imagery remains a subject of much debate. Although a connection with the Tantric cults that predominated in early medieval India seems likely, underlying the iconography is a sensuousness and delight that transcends time and culture. Writhing across the flanks and bases of the shrines are orgiastic panels showing bejewelled couples locked in amorous embraces, often attended by masturbating cohorts, mythic creatures and troupes of musicians. Celestial maidens rim their eyes with kohl and unknot their robes provocatively.

Places to Stay: Rajasthan and the North

Some of the world’s most romantic hotels are to be found in this region of India. Imagine waking up in a room where once a Rajput queen used to sleep, gazing out of a ‘delicately carved’ window across an expanse of acacia scrub and desert hills, as rose-ringed parakeets screech past and a herd of camel graze in the distance. Or dining in a Durbar Hall that once welcomed a British Viceroy, attended by liveried butlers in impeccably pleated turbans. Standards of service tend to be as impressive as the décor, and most places arrange

The Imperial, New Delhi

Dating from the twilight of the British Raj, the Imperial was intended to be among the world’s very grandest hotels – a position it has retained ever since its gala opening in 1931. From the minute you pull up to its whitewashed, colonial-Art Deco façade, fronted by trademark towering palms, the impression is one of old-world elegance. Pale cream walls offset by Burmese teak dominate the interior, where staff in gold epaulettes breeze over floors of gleaming Italian marble, beneath sparkling chandeliers. The rooms are plush without being showy and the courtyard pool is a welcome haven from the brouhaha of the nearby shopping district.



traditional entertainment – recitals by local music, dance or puppet troupes – for the evenings.

Over the next few pages are featured some of the town and city hotels that have proven most popular in recent years with TransIndus staff and clients (places to stay in rural Rajasthan are profiled on p18-19). New ones pop up each season, which is why it’s always worth talking your itinerary over in detail with one of our experts.

Chandra Mahal Haveli, Bharatpur

This elegant, Mughal-style haveli in the countryside outside Bharatpur, roughly midway between Agra and Jaipur, makes a perfect springboard for trips in the nearby Keoladeo National Park. The mansion, which is ranged around a traditional central courtyard, was built by a Muslim nobleman in the mid-19th century and retains lots of period charm, with numerous onion-domed pavilions and lovely antique furniture. Between bird-spotting safaris in the park, explore the rooftops terraces for great views over the surrounding fields and adjacent village, or simply relax by the pool.



Haveli Braj Bhushanjee, Bundi

With its fairy-tale palace, warrenous old town and easygoing, provincial charm, Bundi is the unexpected highlight of many visitors’ Rajasthan tour, and the *Haveli Braj Bhushanjee* is the best place from which to savour its distinctive atmosphere. The location, directly beneath the palace, is plum: the ornate *jharokha* balconies of the royal abode literally tower above you, while in the opposite direction extends a convoluted, typically Rajasthani roofscape of onion domes and temple towers. Inside the hotel, swirling, multi-coloured murals, cusp-arched windows, carved-wood pillars, ancestral photographs and opulent textiles make you feel like you’re sleeping in a museum.



Usha Kiran Palace, Gwalior

Located a stone’s throw from Gwalior’s famous Jai Vilas palace, this elegant Mughal-style mansion served as the Maharajah’s guest wing and has accommodated British royalty, visiting international cricket teams and numerous other VIPs over its 120 years of service. The Taj Group has given the place a major makeover but it has lost none of its charm and now ranks among India’s most glittering five-star heritage properties. Exclusive garden villas are dotted around 9-acres of lawned grounds, which have their own courtyards and private pools, and there’s a stylishly underlit pool presided over by a pair of recumbent lions.



Oberooi Amar Vilas, Agra

Located just six-hundred metres from the Taj Mahal, the Amar Vilas enjoys the finest views of the tomb of any hotel in Agra – a privilege it exploits to the full. You can gaze at the fabled white domes and minarets from all the rooms, as well as the lobby, lounge and bar. From the outside, the Amar Vilas resembles a miniature Moroccan palace, with a colonnaded entrance of Moorish arches and fountains. To the rear, terraced lawns, reflection ponds and pillared pavilions frame a spectacular pool, which looks especially beautiful after dark when little lamps illuminate the niches and cusp-arched walkways surrounding it.



Rambagh Palace, Jaipur

Lord Louis Mountbatten, Jaqueline Kennedy and Princess Diana are among the VIPs who’ve enjoyed the charms of the Rambagh Palace, one of the world’s most spectacular hotels. ‘Sumptuous’ doesn’t even get close. The building and its interiors were designed – first and foremost – to dazzle and they still do, from the moment you step in the entrance, when turbaned doormen shower new arrivals with a shower of rose petals. Highlights include the arched ground-floor verandah, where guests sip cocktails while gazing though carved marble pillars to the gardens and the exquisite indoor pool, encrusted with elaborate stained glass and stencilled murals.



Rajmahal Palace, Jaipur

One of the most eagerly awaited openings of any hotel in India recently has been that of the Rajmahal Palace in Jaipur. Originally built by the local Maharaja in 1729, the building has had several illustrious owners over the years and each has left their imprint, from the flamboyant Mughal core to the classical Georgian façade of the colonial era and suave Art Deco flourishes of the 1930s. Now, the award-winning Suján hotel group has transformed the interiors into a dazzling mix of Rajput and modern Indian style, featuring vibrant colours and bold patterns. The pleasure gardens have had a spectacular makeover too. In short: cutting-edge Indian luxury in a wonderfully regal setting.

The Leela Palace, Udaipur



The Leela is a modern Indian palace in a magnificent location on the northern shore of Lake Pichola. Its elevated position ensures superb views across the water to the City Palace and Jag Niwas. You arrive by launch and are led by resplendently dressed staff through a courtyard of dazzling polished marble and silver sofas evocative of Mughal style. The rooms are more restrained, furnished in dark tropical woods and coffee-coloured silks, with marigold bolsters. Luxuriate in the tented spa, or beside the giant terrace pool. In the evenings, the place to be is the rooftop restaurant, Sheesh Mahal, which serves refined local cuisine and ranks among one of the finest viewpoints in India.

Serai, Jaisalmer



(complete with fluffy towels and toiletries decanted into little crystal bottles); and even a spa where treatments are conducted by candle light. Be sure to book a camel ride to the nearby Maulana Dunes for high tea, attended by your own butler, and don’t miss the evening performance back at camp by local Manganiyar musicians.

This luxury camp in the desert outside Jaisalmer takes glamorous camping to a whole new level. The tents are fit for a Maharajah: rustic-boutique interiors blending silk with hand-woven local textiles; tissue-wrapped gifts on your pillow each evening; divine bathrooms

Raas, Jodhpur

A fusion of traditional Rajasthani elegance and international jet-set savoir vivre, Raas is absolutely the last word in Indian boutique chic. Its 18th- and 19th-century sandstone havelis, with their carved *jharokha* balconies and sculpted panels, have been beautifully restored, and styled with some ultra-contemporary interiors. But this hotel’s real USP is its location. Lounging by the poolside, you have to literally only crane your neck to see Mehrangarh’s magical fort-palaces encrusting the rim of the escarpment above. A fleet of customized auto-rickshaws with silk cushions are on hand to ferry guests to and from the monument; and jeeps stand at the ready for trips further afield.



Fateh Garh, Udaipur



If you’re the kind of traveller who prefers to gaze at great views rather than be part of them, try this wonderful boutique hotel on the outskirts of Udaipur, which surveys the whitewashed palaces of the lake city from a distant hilltop wrapped in a patchwork of mustard fields. The vistas are loveliest from the hotel’s infinity pool, which is presided over by a trio of garlanded Buddhas. Antique materials salvaged from abandoned havelis were used to construct the main building, where the rooms are in contemporary minimalist style, with contrasting dark woods and pale marbles, Kashmiri rugs and silk upholstery.

Bhainsrorgarh, Kota



Situated in the opium-growing belt outside Kota in southeast Rajasthan, Bhainsrorgarh crowns an escarpment that rises in spectacular fashion above a bend in the Chambal River, where guava orchards fringe water that’s as still and reflective as polished glass. The fort dates from the 1740s, but could be twice that age. Its rooms, furnishings and décor are styled with elegant simplicity, which only serves to enhance the views over the river through the gracefully scalloped windows. Take a boat ride at dawn to watch crocodiles basking on the mud banks, and dine by star light under a domed cuppola on the rooftop.



Suggested Itineraries

Rajasthan and the North

Travel in Rajasthan and the North

As a springboard for the northern region, Delhi, the nation’s capital, is the obvious choice. Only a half-day drive away, Agra’s Taj Mahal forms the pivotal point of any tour of this area, but with a little more time you could make a longer loop down the Ganges to the sacred Hindu city of Varanasi.

We generally recommend itineraries that alternate spells in the cities with forays to lesser known rural locations, where palace hotels, desert camps and boutique guest houses provide memorable bases from which to experience everyday life in villages and local market towns.

Travel is normally by private saloon car. Journeys tend to be long by European standards: 3–4 hours is an average transfer between locations, though there will be no shortage of fascination out of the windows and trips pass quickly and comfortably.

For those on a more flexible budget, another option might be a trip on one of the luxury trains that run weekly around Rajasthan and the North – covered in more detail on p92.

When to Go

The tourist season in Rajasthan and northern India gets under way in October, when the last of the monsoon rains have blown through, and continues until the end of March, when the heat starts to build in earnest. At this time, blue skies, warm sunshine and cool nights are the norm, and the light is delightfully crisp (perfect for photographers). November, when the Pushkar camel fair takes place, is a busy time in the region, as is early January, when the capital, Jaipur, hosts its world-renowned literary festival. By mid-April, daytime temperatures can soar into the 40s and continue to rise through May until the monsoon storms break in early June – a time of mostly grey skies, high humidity and sunny spells interrupted by spectacular downpours.

Itineraries

It would take several months to explore this region in depth, but with careful planning, you can experience its highlights in tours of between ten and twenty days. Take a look at our roundup of accommodation options on pp.24–25, then call us for some personalised advice. The routes outlined here are merely suggested itineraries that can be adapted, extended or shortened depending on your requirements.



ESSENTIAL INDIA

Take a journey based on the popular ‘Golden Triangle’ route through Delhi, Agra and Jaipur and spot a tiger at Ranthambore National Park.

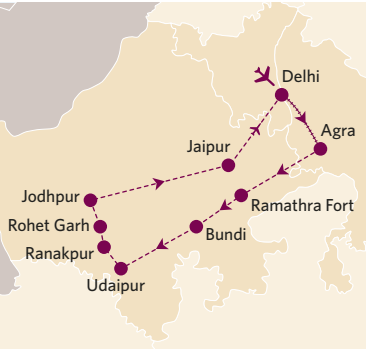
- Day 1** Fly overnight to Delhi.
- Day 2** Arrive Delhi; stay two nights.
- Day 3** Sightseeing in Old & New Delhi.
- Day 4** Take the express train to **Agra**; stay one night. Visit the Taj Mahal at dawn, and Agra Fort later for views over the Yamuna River.
- Day 5** Visit Akbar’s deserted capital at **Fatehpur Sikri**, before taking an afternoon train to **Ranthambore National Park**; stay two nights.
- Day 6** Morning & afternoon game drives in Ranthambore.
- Day 7** Drive to **Jaipur**; stay three nights.
- Day 8** Elephant ride to Amber Fort & visits to the City Palace museum, Hawa Mahal and Jantar Mantar Observatory.
- Day 9** At leisure.
- Day 10** Take an early morning flight to Delhi for your journey back to UK.



ROYAL RAJPUTANA

Visit Rajasthan’s most celebrated sites on this varied two-week trip.

- Day 1** Fly overnight to Delhi.
- Day 2** Arrive Delhi; stay two nights.
- Day 3** Sightseeing of Old & New Delhi.
- Day 4** Take the express train to **Agra** for an overnight stay; visit the Taj Mahal at first light, followed by Agra Fort.
- Day 5** Travel to nearby **Fatehpur Sikri** after breakfast. Later, continue to **Jaipur**; stay two nights in a city hotel or an hour’s drive away in **Samode Palace**.
- Day 6** Visit Amber Fort & City Palace complex.
- Day 7** Drive to the desert town of **Nagaur**; stay one night.
- Day 8** Drive across the Thar Desert to **Jaisalmer** stay two nights.
- Day 9** Guided sightseeing in Jaisalmer; visit the Desert National Park.
- Day 10** Drive to the former princely state of **Jodhpur**, stay two nights.
- Day 11** Visit Jodhpur’s majestic Mehrangarh Fort and Royal Cenotaphs.
- Day 12** Drive to **Udaipur** via Ranakpur; stay three nights in the city or amid the nearby Aravalli Hills.
- Day 13** Visit the City Palace Complex.
- Day 14** Day at leisure for shopping.
- Day 15** Early morning flight to Delhi for your onward journey back to UK.



OFF-TRACK RAJASTHAN

Combined with the ‘Golden Triangle’ and the main cities of Udaipur and Jodhpur, this tour offers an experience of some lesser visited, rural regions of Rajasthan.

- Day 1** Fly overnight to Delhi.
- Day 2** Arrive Delhi; stay two nights. Remainder of the day at leisure.
- Day 3** Sightseeing in Old & New Delhi.
- Day 4** Take the express train to **Agra**; early morning visit to the Taj Mahal, followed by Agra Fort; stay overnight.
- Day 5** Visit **Fatehpur Sikri**; drive on to **Ramathra**, stay two nights.
- Day 6** Explore the village and its surroundings.
- Day 7** Drive to **Bundi** for overnight stay.
- Day 8** Drive to **Udaipur**, visiting the Chittaurgarh Fort en route; stay two nights.
- Day 9** Explore Udaipur’s City Palace Complex.
- Day 10** Drive to **Rohet Garh** (near Jodhpur) via the Jain temple complex of Ranakpur; stay two nights.
- Day 10** Safari to Bishnoi village.
- Day 11** Drive to **Jodhpur**, then on to rural **Khimsar** for an overnight stay.
- Day 12** Drive to **Jaipur**; stay two nights.
- Day 13** Sightseeing of Amber Fort & the city; afternoon at leisure.
- Day 14** Early morning flight to Delhi for your onward journey back to UK.



Tailor-made Rajasthan and the North by TransIndus



NORTHERN HIGHLIGHTS

In addition to the ‘Golden Triangle’, visit the holy city of Varanasi, the temples of Khajuraho and the lake city of Udaipur on this two-week trip.

- Day 1** Fly overnight to Delhi.
- Day 2** Arrive Delhi; stay two nights.
- Day 3** Sightseeing of Old & New Delhi.
- Day 4** Take a short flight to **Varanasi** for overnight stay. Visit Buddhist **Sarnath**.
- Day 5** After an early morning boat ride, take an afternoon flight to **Khajuraho**; stay two nights.
- Day 6** Visit the temples of Khajuraho.
- Day 7** Drive to **Orchha**. Connect with afternoon train to **Agra**; stay two nights.
- Day 8** Visit the Taj Mahal & Agra Fort.
- Day 9** Drive to **Fatehpur Sikri** and on to **Jaipur**; stay two nights.
- Day 10** Sightseeing of Amber Fort & the city; afternoon safari in **Panna National Park**.
- Day 11** Drive to **Udaipur**; stay three nights.
- Day 12** Visit the City Palace Complex.
- Day 13** Day at leisure.
- Day 14** Take an early morning flight to Delhi, for your onward flight back to UK.



CLASSICAL SPLENDOUR

Take a journey through the iconic highlights of the northern Gangetic plain on a tour that also gives you a glimpse of the wildlife of India.

- Day 1** Fly overnight to Delhi.
- Day 2** Arrive Delhi; stay two nights.
- Day 3** Sightseeing of Old & New Delhi.
- Day 4** Take the express train to **Bharatpur**, visit **Fatehpur Sikri**, then onward drive to **Agra**; stay overnight.
- Day 5** Visit Taj Mahal & Agra Fort in the morning, drive to **Gwalior** in the afternoon; stay two nights.
- Day 6** Sightseeing in Gwalior.
- Day 7** Drive to **Orchha**, via the deserted palace of **Datia**, for an overnight stay.
- Day 8** Drive to **Khajuraho**, stay two nights.
- Day 9** Morning tour of the famous temples; afternoon safari in **Panna National Park**.
- Day 10** Short flight to **Varanasi**, stay two nights. Visit Buddhist Sarnath.
- Day 11** Early morning boat ride, then visit to temples and ghats. Attend Ganga *aarti* ceremony in the evening.
- Day 12** Express train to **Lucknow**; stay two nights. Afternoon visit the Residency complex.
- Day 13** Visit monuments in the morning, afternoon heritage walk through the markets.
- Day 14** Take an early morning flight to Delhi for your onward journey back to UK.



Extensions

Consider combining a tour of Rajasthan and the north’s highlights with a trip into the Himalayan regions of Kashmir and Ladakh, or a stay in a boutique mountain lodge in Uttarakhand. Shimla and the alpine beauty of Himachal Pradesh are also only a day’s journey north of Delhi (p30).

India’s impressive domestic air schedule means you can also bolt on a week or more in the far south to any tour of the north. Morning flights leave Delhi daily for Kochi, Kerala’s principal city, from where you can venture into the lush backwaters and tea estates of the interior hills – a spectacular contrast with the deserts of Rajasthan!



The Indian Himalayas

The Himalayan regions of India are in many respects lands apart from the rest of the country. Inaccessible for much of the year, the convoluted valley systems rising from the Gangetic Plains to the gleaming ice peaks of the Great Himalayan range offer a fascinating counterpoint to life at sea level. In the northwest, the states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, and regions of Kashmir and Ladakh, each have their own distinct landscapes and cultural traditions, while in the far northeast, beyond Nepal, Sikkim retains the feel of a traditional Himalayan kingdom. Whether you're flying, driving or trekking into the world's highest mountain range, prepare to enter another world.



Highlights of the Indian Himalayas

- Shimla** | Former summer capital of the Raj, defined by its quirky British architecture, narrow-gauge railway and spellbinding views. It remains a popular holiday destination today, with plenty of excursions on offer.

Dharamsala | This forested spur of the Dhauladhar mountains is famous as the home of the Tibetan spiritual leader in exile, the Dalai Lama. The town is also a springboard for superb treks in the surrounding ranges.
- Ladakh** | India's most remote and culturally distinct province: a high-altitude desert of rural hamlets and Buddhist monasteries, where bare brown, ice-capped mountains form a mystic, ever-present backdrop.

Sangla Valley | This beautiful valley ends abruptly at a spectacular phalanx of snow peaks. A scattering of small guest houses and tented camps provide bases for explorations of this unspoiled, little visited area.
- Aarti** | Euphoric crowds gather on the riverside ghats at Haridwar for evening Aarti, when thousands of floating candles are set adrift on the Ganges, to the accompaniment of saffron-robed chanting priests.

Sikkim | Fabulous Buddhist monasteries, lush forests and views of distant snow peaks are the defining feature of this Tibetan-influenced region which only became a part of India in 1975.
- Darjeeling** | The classic Indian hill station, reached by the steam-driven 'toy train' of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. Hillsides of lush tea gardens and views of the mighty Kanchenjunga add to its charm.

Kashmir | Cradled by snow peaks, the Vale of Kashmir forms a verdant oasis in the lap of the Himalayas. Its spellbinding landscapes and distinctive indo-Muslim culture have long entranced visitors.

Travel Information

Time zone: UTC+5.30 hours

Flying time: 8.30 hours

Currency: Indian rupee

Capital: New Delhi

When to go

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature °C	14	16	20	25	28	28	27	26	25	23	19	15
Rainfall mm	43	56	44	33	59	209	617	613	242	41	6	7
Best to travel	●	●●	●●	●●	●	●	●	●	●●	●●	●●	●

●●

 The best time to travel

●

 A good time to travel

●

 Low season

Be inspired

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Web: [www.transindus.com](#)



SHIMLA Shimla, the ramshackle capital of Himachal Pradesh, straddles a high ridge in the foothills of the Himalaya, a day’s journey north of Delhi. During the Raj era, the entire British administration of British India, with their families and servants, used to travel all the way from Kolkata (Calcutta) to this fragrant, cool spot in the hills to escape the summer heat, and over time, a miniature England sprang up among the cedar trees, complete with Anglican church, bandstand and theatre. The hill station remains a popular holiday destination today. Strolls along the Mall, shopping expeditions in the warrenous bazaar and pony rides through the pine forest are the order of the day. Echoes of the Raj have grown fainter, but are still there for those with eyes to spot them.



DHARAMSALA & MCLEOD GANJ Clustered on a wooded ridge in the Himalayan foothills, Dharamsala – or more accurately the township of McLeod Ganj above it – is internationally famous as the home of the Tibetan spiritual leader in exile, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It’s also the home of a sizeable, and ever growing, number of Tibetan refugees. Visitors come not only to attend public teachings by the Dalai Lama himself, but also to study Buddhist meditation, Tibetan performing arts, crafts and medicine, and to experience the unique atmosphere of this refugee town. Set against the grey, snow-capped crags of the Dhauladhar Range (which here reach a culminating altitude of around 4,600m/15,000ft), the rooftops of McLeod Ganj are strung with fluttering prayer flags. Monasteries and temples house ranks of red-and-gold prayer wheels, visited year round by streams of Tibetan pilgrims from the plains.



PRAGPUR The village of Pragpur nestles in the Shivalik Hills of Himachal Pradesh. A convenient staging post en route to the mountains, it is today renowned above all for its stately manor house, built by a local judge in 1918 and now run as a charming heritage hotel. Once within the walls of the *Judge’s Court* you enter a parallel world reminiscent of a bygone era, where breakfast is served under a mango tree in the garden by liveried staff, and supper is preceded by a leisurely “cocktail hour” on the lawn. The rooms are huge and furnished in period style, with dark wood beds and chintzy touches that wouldn’t have looked out of place in Kipling’s time. After a look around the temples in the village, guests tend to spend the warm afternoons lazing in a wicker chair on the pillared verandah, or lounging under a lychee tree in the adjacent orchard. Made with produce from the manor’s organic farm, meals are a delight.



MANALI Famous for its apple orchards and spectacular alpine setting, Manali sits at the head of the grandiose Kullu Valley, overlooked by cedar forest and shining snow peaks. Holidaymakers from the plains flock here in April and May, but the town is accessible, and much quieter, during the spring melt, when the fruit trees are in blossom, and during the autumn months, when the snow line drops to the edge of the deodar forest.

Although it appears to lie in a giant cul-de-sac of mountains, Manali is also the starting point for one of the world’s great road trips: the Trans-Himalayan Highway to Leh. Some delightful wood-lined hotels and guest houses are dotted around the town’s leafy outskirts. Most have log fires to keep the rooms cosy, and splendid valley views from their balconies.



SPITI In ancient chronicles, the region of Spiti, to the northeast of Kullu, was described as the ‘Middle Land’ for its position between India and Tibet. Locked behind a series of high passes, it’s remote, sparsely populated, and shares a similar Tibetan-influenced culture to Ladakh. The landscape is breathtaking throughout. The turquoise River Spiti snakes through terraces of vivid green barley, below villages perched on natural balconies surveying vast scree slopes. Shreds of snow cling to the jagged peaks that rear on all sides, even at the height of summer – a fabulous backdrop for the numerous Buddhist monasteries that survive in the region. The most striking of these is Kyi, whose conical cluster of red-and-white buildings rise in spectacular fashion above a carpet of terraced fields and silver streams on the valley floor. In late-June/early July, a large festival is staged here featuring traditional *cham* dances and processions.



KINNAUR: SARAHAN & THE SANGLA VALLEY The Sangla Valley in Kinnaur, a long day’s drive northeast of Manali, is regarded by many aficionados as the most beautiful in the Indian Himalaya. Thanks largely to the fact it ends in an impregnable wall of ice peaks (and the Chinese border), it’s also gloriously unspoilt. The road to it from the Sutlej Valley cuts across steep slopes carpeted with pine and cedar forest. Apricot and apple orchards enfold the tiny wood and schist hamlets scattered over the valley floor, each clustered around typically Kinnauri temple towers with steep slate roofs. The best place to break the journey there is Sarahan, overlooking the Sutlej Valley. The village is the site of one of the most picturesque Hindu shrines in the region, the Bhimakali Temple, whose traditional pagoda-style tower is framed by a superb backdrop of high peaks and eternal snow fields.



Kashmir

Although nowadays part of a much larger state, ‘Kashmir’ traditionally refers to the valley cradled by the Pir Panjal and Great Himalayan ranges – a vale of extraordinary beauty eulogized for thousands in Indian poetry. Completely encircled for much of the year by snow peaks, its flat, fertile floor is spangled with glassy lakes, stands of chinar trees and saffron meadows. Kings, prophets, saints, scholars and travellers have throughout the ages sought refuge in this Shangri La, whose natural splendour the Mughals embellished with formal gardens and pleasure palaces. After decades of civil war, a fragile peace once again reigns in this predominantly Muslim region, and visitors from across the world are rediscovering its traditional pleasures: staying on the houseboats of Dal Lake, taking rides in canopied shikaras to the Mughal gardens, and enjoying the breathtaking greenery and views of its mountain resorts.



SRINAGAR Kashmir’s capital, Srinagar, is spread across the heart of the valley, crossed by a web of canals and the Jhelum river. Its numerous wooden mosques, Sufi shrines, Mughal gardens and, above all, houseboats moored on Dal and Nagin Lakes offer a memorable interlude in any Himalayan journey. The markets of Srinagar’s wood-and-stone Old City are a rich source of hand-crafted Kashmiri souvenirs. Admire the traditional architecture and painted wood interiors of the Jama Masjid and Shah-e-Hamdan shrines, and hop in a cable car up for the spellbinding panoramic views over Srinagar and the valley from the Sufi Dargah of Makhdoom Sahib.



PAHALGAM Thanks to the countless Bollywood song and dance sequences that have been filmed in the area over the years, hundreds of millions of Indians are familiar with the spectacular alpine scenery of Pahalgam, a resort in the Liddar Valley, 54 miles (87 km) east of Srinagar. Distinguished by its lush green meadows, the village is flanked by dense pine forests and giant, snow-flecked crags. “A mini Switzerland” is how the scene is often described, though in truth, Pahalgam’s environs have a much wilder edge than the Alps.

GULMARG This famous resort, scattered over the lower slopes of the Pir Panjal, 34 miles west of Srinagar, was first developed by the British as a low-key hill station at the end of the 19th century. Apart from a recently added, French-built ski lift (the highest in the world), Gulmarg’s attractions have changed little since British times. Its focal point is a large alpine meadow on which tourists picnic and take pony rides. Various trails also lead up the mountainside through forests of huge pines to glacial lakes.

Houseboats of Srinagar

Staying on board traditional houseboats is one of the most enjoyable ways to experience Srinagar. The boats provide an opportunity to experience elegant living in beautifully carved boats as you float on the still waters of Dal and Nagin Lakes to enjoy this perfect paradise surrounded by lotus flowers and Himalayan peaks on the horizon. Two of our favourites are the Sukoon, with its five beautifully appointed ensuite bedrooms and a large sundeck that 360 degree views of the lake and mountains – and Mascot, which have a selection of one two boats for a more private and intimate experience.





Ladakh

The Himalayan province of Ladakh is India's most physically remote and culturally distinct region. It only takes an hour or so to fly there from Delhi, but the change of landscape and atmosphere is total. Vast, ice-encrusted mountains of bare brown, ochre and wine-red scree sweep from the floor of the Indus Valley, where the airport and capital city, Leh, are located. As you land, you'll catch your first glimpse of the white-washed Buddhist monasteries that survey the valley floor from crags near the river, and of the pretty Ladakhi villages huddled around them, wrapped in stands of poplar trees and fields of vivid green or golden barley.

LAMAYURU

The defining landmark of the spectacular, two-day journey between Leh and Srinagar has to be the view of Lamayuru (monastery), framed by its hinterland of spikey peaks and eroded mountainsides. Draped over a windblown outcrop of sandstone, the monastery's red-and-white buildings tumble through stands of rustling poplars to a cuboid village of monks cells and farm houses, all resting on a carpet of lush barley terraces.

THIKSEY

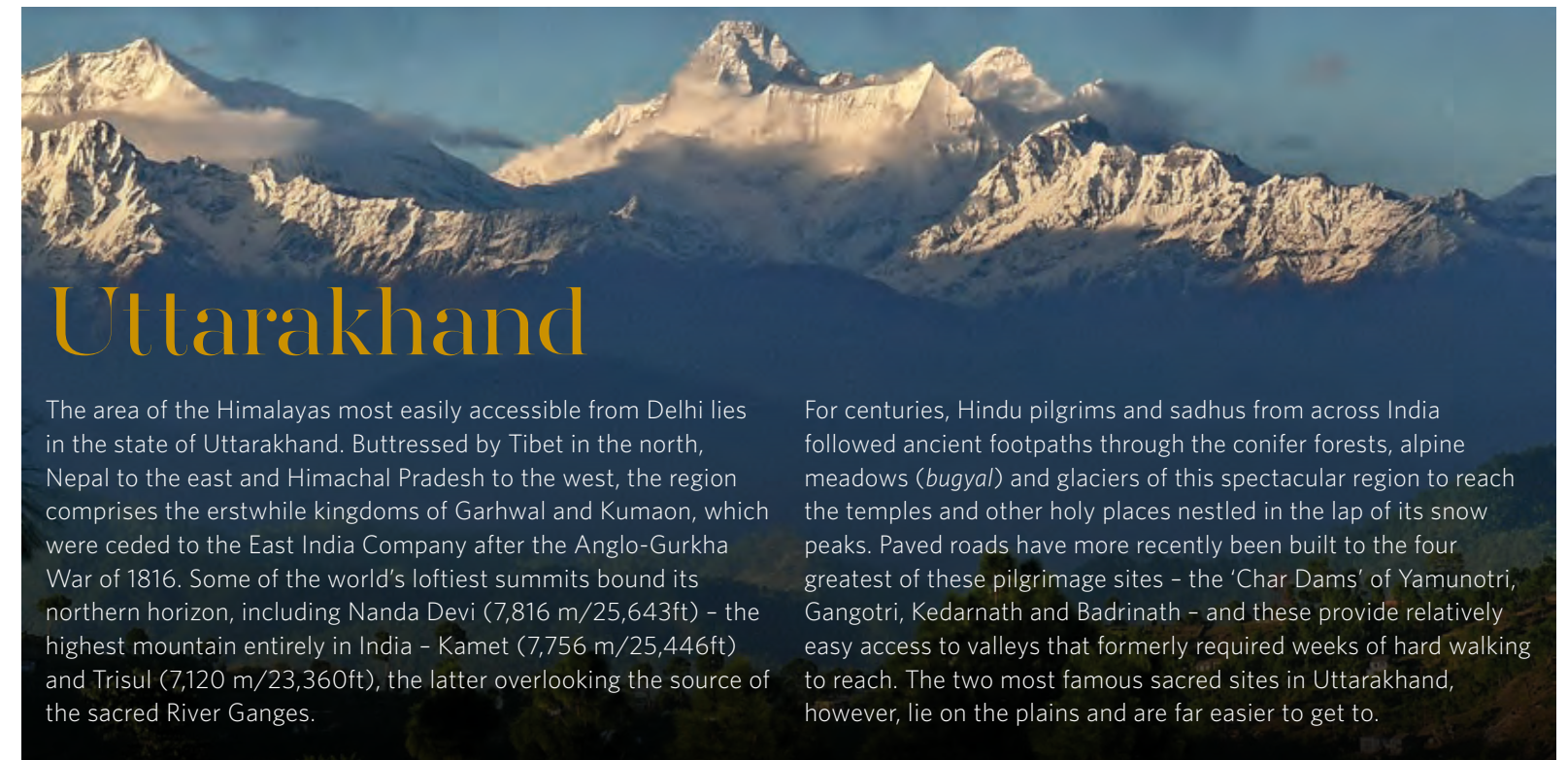
Often said to resemble the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Thiksey Monastery, half-an-hour's drive east of Leh, is the largest *gompa* in Ladakh, and one of the most visually striking. Its whitewashed buildings rise in ranks up the flank of a steep, rocky hill from the floor of the Indus Valley to the sacred halls and apartments at the top of the monastery, painted deep red and yellow-ochre. Inside, a huge golden statue of Maitreya, the Buddha to come, is the show stealer.



Special Places to Stay

Dotted around the outskirts of Leh are several wonderful accommodation options. Aside from Shakti Himalayas beautifully renovated farmhouses, there's Nimmu House, an elegant, Tibetan-style mansion, complete with yak stables and apricot orchards, that was recently converted to a boutique guest house. The interiors, all expertly restored with local materials, are beautiful: large windows, wood floors, limewashed walls and pebbles and terracotta pots as ornaments. No flat-screen TVs here, but glorious Himalayan scenery on all sides.

To the southeast of Leh, meanwhile, The Ultimate Travel Camp run a seasonal luxury encampment at the foot of spectacular Thiksey monastery. Their en-suite tents offer five-star comforts, down to four-poster beds, gilded chandeliers, steamer trunks and polished copper designer wash basins! Seeing is believing, and the location is second to none.



Uttarakhand

The area of the Himalayas most easily accessible from Delhi lies in the state of Uttarakhand. Buttressed by Tibet in the north, Nepal to the east and Himachal Pradesh to the west, the region comprises the erstwhile kingdoms of Garhwal and Kumaon, which were ceded to the East India Company after the Anglo-Gurkha War of 1816. Some of the world's loftiest summits bound its northern horizon, including Nanda Devi (7,816 m/25,643ft) – the highest mountain entirely in India – Kamet (7,756 m/25,446ft) and Trisul (7,120 m/23,360ft), the latter overlooking the source of the sacred River Ganges.

For centuries, Hindu pilgrims and sadhus from across India followed ancient footpaths through the conifer forests, alpine meadows (*bugyal*) and glaciers of this spectacular region to reach the temples and other holy places nestled in the lap of its snow peaks. Paved roads have more recently been built to the four greatest of these pilgrimage sites – the 'Char Dams' of Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath – and these provide relatively easy access to valleys that formerly required weeks of hard walking to reach. The two most famous sacred sites in Uttarakhand, however, lie on the plains and are far easier to get to.



HARIDWAR

One of India's seven most sacred Hindu sites, Haridwar marks the exact point where the choppy, grey-brown waters of the Ganges flow on to the plains of northern India. Hindus regard this as one of the key "crossing places", or tirtha, capable of giving moksha (release from the cycle of rebirth), which explains why streams of pilgrims make their way to Haridwar year round to immerse themselves, and the ashes of deceased relatives, into the river.

The focus of the most intense ritual activity is Hari-Ki-Pauri Ghat, where the famous Brahmakund tank is identified as the precise spot at which the Ganges first reaches level ground. Saffron-clad, dreadlocked sadhus and other ascetics are a common sight on the riverfront ghats. This is also the venue for a particularly charged evening *aarti* ceremony, when priests swing flaming lamps in closely choreographed routines, as thousands of worshippers place diya – little leaf boats holding incense, flowers and candles – on to the water in memory of deceased loved ones.



RISHIKESH

The holy Hindu town of Rishikesh, 14 miles (22km) north of Haridwar, straddles the Ganges River as it pours out of the Shivalik Hills. The site has been sacred for hundreds, and possibly thousands, of years. It served as a waystage for sanyasins, sadhus and yogis travelling to and from the sacred sites of the Himalayas, and for generations has attracted seekers on spiritual quests, among them the Beatles, who famously spent time here with Maharishi Yogi in 1968.

Rishikesh continues to be an important New Age religious centre. Numerous ashrams overlook the waterfront. When in residence, most of the local gurus and their acolytes attend the evening Aarti ceremony, when scores of floating lamp-boats (diyas) are released into the current. The ceremony begins with the singing of bhajans (devotional songs), prayers, and offerings to Agni, the Vedic fire god. Diyas are then lit and released on to the water, accompanied by childrens' choirs, as a huge statue of Lord Shiva rising from a bank of pebbles in the river looks on.



KALIMPONG Another spellbinding view of the distant Himalayas is to be had from the monastery of Zong Dog Palri Phodrang, whose gilded finials and Tibetan-style upswept eaves crown Rinkingpong Hill, above the hill station of Kalimpong. Unlike Darjeeling, 31 miles (50km) west, the town is neither a major centre for tea production nor tourism. Formerly a waystage on the trade route to Tibet, it has a grittier, more down-to-earth feel than its sibling. The main attractions here are some beautiful market gardens – where orchids, amaryllis, palms, ferns and cacti are cultivated for export – and the unspoilt hill villages and deep river valleys to the south, where predominantly Lepcha communities still lead traditional lives.

DARJEELING It's not hard to understand why the British chose Darjeeling as the site of an army sanatorium back in the early 19th century. Dense oak and *sal* forests cloak the high, undulating ridge on which the hill station was founded, at a refreshing altitude of 2,200m (7,217ft). For much of the year, the skies remain blue and air blissfully cool. Whole hillsides of lush tea gardens cloak the surrounding slopes – man-made additions to a view of breathtaking beauty. Looking north, countless green ridges ripple to the shining white vision on the far horizon of Kanchenjunga (8,586m/28,169ft), the world's third highest mountain. Visitors pour in through the hot season to watch tea pluckers at work amid the manicured terraces, to marvel at the rhododendron flowers and orchids at the Botanical Gardens, and enjoy the old-world atmosphere of the town itself, with its mock-Tudor bungalows and Gothic churches.



Darjeeling Himalayan Railway The perfect preamble to any visit to Darjeeling is the journey up from the plains on the 19th-century 'toy train' of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. Steam locomotives still haul some of the services, which afford wonderful views as the line loops up to its terminus. The very finest panorama in this area, however, is the one at dawn from Tiger Hill, a prominent peak 7 miles (11km) west of Darjeeling town, from where a vast sweep of snowy summits sails about a mantle of mist and cloud.

Places to Stay: The Indian Himalayas

Some truly wonderful places to stay have opened in the Indian Himalaya over the past few years, allowing you to enjoy the superb scenery in great comfort. As well as the grand old landmark properties dating from the Raj days, companies like Shakti Himalaya

have set up small chains of luxuriously renovated farmhouses and camp sites that serve as delightful bases for soft adventure holidays, combining sightseeing with easy walks, river trips and visits to local monuments.



Kalmatia Sangam, Almora

It's hard to imagine a more heavenly location in the Himalayan foothills than the wooded slope occupied by this charming hotel outside Almora. Dotted around a British house dating from colonial times, its widely spaced cottages nestle in the shade of fragrant cedar, cypress, pine and oak trees, with uninterrupted views of the distant snow peaks from their verandas. Inside, the rooms are warmed by cosy wood burners. Early risers are rewarded with one of the finest sunrise vistas of the Kumaon Himalaya.



Haveli Hari Ganga, Haridwar

If you're staying in Haridwar, you will want to be close to the centre of the action near the ghats. And no smart hotel in town occupies a position as plum as this. The covered rear terrace of the marble-lined mansion literally opens straight on to the jade-green waters of the Ganges as they flow across the plains. The ghats, with their constant rounds of ritual activity, are a stone's throw away. The Haveli Hari Ganga is the first choice in this bustling pilgrimage town for traditional atmosphere and modern comforts.



Judge's Court, Pragpur

On the edge of Pragpur village in the Shivalik Hills of Himachal Pradesh stands a stately manor house, built by a local judge in 1918 and now run as a charming country hotel. Once within its walls, you enter a parallel world reminiscent of a bygone era, where breakfast is served under a mango tree in the garden by liveried staff, and supper is preceded by a leisurely "cocktail hour" on the lawn. As a waystage on a long journey north across the Himalayas, or as a last taste of the hills before returning to the plains, Judge's Court offers an elegant, relaxing retreat.



Windamere Estate, Darjeeling

This is a corner of India where the sun has, most resolutely, not set on the Empire. Stepping into the Windamere is like entering a 1940s time warp. The rooms, clad in white-gloss tongue and groove, vary in size and comfort, but retain their pre-World War II furniture and floral fabrics, as well as proper enamelled tubs in the bathrooms – and cosy coal fires. After a relaxing game of Scrabble on the sun deck, repair to the dining hall (another fabulous period piece) for a boarding-school dinner of roast beef and roly-poly pudding, served by uniformed maids in white gloves.



Glenburn Estate, Darjeeling

Established in 1859 by a family of entrepreneurial Scottish planters, Glenburn sits on a hill above a bend in the River Rangeet, its green-roofed bungalows surveying a vista of ethereal beauty. Lying in your teak four-poster, with the French windows wide open and a tray of bed tea at the ready, you can literally gaze across the treetops at the distant snow-clad summit of Kanchenjunga. The light, airy suites, which open on to flower-filled verandahs, are all effortlessly refined, from their toile de Jouy upholstery to white-painted wicker chairs.



Oberoi Cecil, Shimla

The Cecil is the Oberoi Group's flagship hotel in Shimla. Kipling was a regular in his youth, but wouldn't recognize the place today. Although the trademark alpine-style, white-and-green exterior has changed little, the inside has had a total overhaul. Sparkling brass, luxurious hardwood parquet floors, plush carpets and smart upholstery have been added to create interiors that feel modern, yet classically elegant. Most of the rooms open on to green-railed balconies with stupendous views.



Travel in the Indian Himalaya

Long gone are the days when you needed hundreds of ponies, yaks or porters to penetrate the inner reaches of the Indian Himalaya. Nowadays it’s possible to fly beyond the highest peaks to Ladakh from Delhi in less than an hour. Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, also has its own domestic airport, served by daily flights which yield a fantastic view of the mountains en route. With more time, however, overland travel is recommended, as it ensures a more intimate experience of the changing terrain and cultures of the region.

Most of our tailor-made itineraries in the Indian Himalaya are conducted by comfortable 4WD vehicles, which will meet you at the airport on arrival.

Road conditions are highly variable, depending on the time of year and how heavy the preceding monsoon or winter snowfall have been, but rest assured, our ground staff are well placed to decide on the most dependable routes. All our vehicles are also relatively new, and kept in top condition to ensure your safety.



When to Go

The season in the Northwest Himalaya starts in late May or early June, when the passes into Ladakh are generally clear of snow, and lasts until mid- to late-October, when they close again. It is, however, possible to fly into the region at any time of year. Over on the eastern side of the range, March and April, before the monsoon rains strike, is the best time to travel to see the rhododendrons in full bloom. Trekking is also good in September and October.

Itineraries

The following tried-and-tested itineraries have been devised to showcase the contrasting landscapes and cultures of the various Himalayan regions. They may easily be shortened or extended to suit your needs, or completely re-worked. Consult our India specialists for further advice.



WILDLIFE & WALKING IN THE KUMAON HILLS

With terraced fields and snow covered mountains, Kumaon, in Uttarakhand state, is an ideal place to take in the breath-taking beauty of the Himalaya.

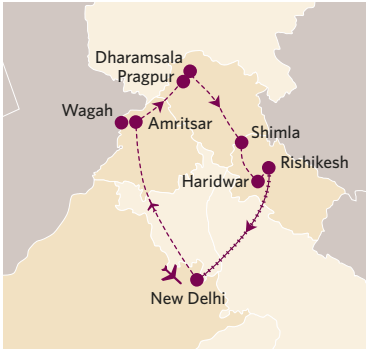
- Day 1** Fly overnight from UK to Delhi.
- Day 2** Arrive mid-morning; stay overnight in Delhi.
- Day 3** Early morning express train Haridwar for a two-night stay. Afternoon, explore the riverfront temples and ghats.
- Day 4** Excursion to Rishikesh to experience the spectacular Ganga Aarti ceremony.
- Day 5** A long drive through the beautiful mountainscape to Corbett National Park; stay three nights.
- Days 6 & 7** Two full days of game drives by jeep and on elephant back.
- Day 8** By road to the hill station of Almora visiting Ranikhet en route; stay three nights.
- Days 9 & 10** Explore this region on foot visiting hillside villages and homes.
- Day 11** Drive to Nainital and onward to Kathgodam for your daytime train back to Delhi; stay overnight.
- Day 12** Fly back to UK, arriving back the same evening.



THE KASHMIR VALLEY

This varied, 12-day trip to the Kashmir Valley takes you to the heart of one of the world’s most beautiful and culturally refined mountain regions.

- Day 1** Fly overnight from UK to Delhi.
- Day 2** Arrive mid-morning; stay overnight in Delhi.
- Day 3** Early morning flight to Srinagar; stay three nights.
- Days 4 & 5** Visit Mughal Gardens; shikara ride on Dal Lake; walking tour of old town Srinagar, visiting local mosques and bazaars, where there are plenty of opportunities to shop for traditional souvenirs and handicrafts, including quality shawls.
- Day 6** Drive to Pahalgam, stay two nights.
- Day 7** Take a pony trek, walk to shepherd’s villages or go fishing.
- Day 8** Drive to Gulmarg; stay two nights.
- Day 9** Take a cable-car ride to Kondoongri.
- Day 10** Drive back to Srinagar, stay overnight.
- Day 11** Afternoon flight back to Delhi, stay overnight.
- Day 12** Fly to UK arriving back the same evening.



GOLDEN TEMPLE & SPIRITUAL HIMALAYAS

This tour focuses on the popular region of Himachal Pradesh, in the Northwest Himalaya, which it approaches via Amritsar, site of the Sikhs’ holiest shrine, the fabulous ‘Golden Temple’.

- Day 1** Fly overnight from UK to Delhi.
- Day 2** Take a connecting flight to Amritsar; stay two nights.
- Day 3** Visit the Golden Temple, afternoon drive to the Wagah border for the changing of the guards ceremony.
- Day 4** Drive to Dharamshala, stay two nights.
- Day 5** Visit McLeod Ganj and the Kalachakra temple.
- Day 6** A long drive to Pragpur; stay two nights.
- Day 7** Explore the medieval village on foot.
- Day 8** Drive to Shimla; stay three nights.
- Day 9** Sightseeing in Shimla.
- Day 10** A day at leisure with an option to see the neighbouring towns of Kufri, Chail & Naldhera.
- Day 11** A long drive to the Hindu pilgrimage town of Haridwar; stay two nights.
- Day 12** Excursion to Rishikesh to experience the spectacular Ganga Aarthi ceremony.
- Day 13** In the afternoon, take an express train back to Delhi, stay overnight.
- Day 14** Fly back to UK, arriving back the same evening.



SIKKIM AND THE DARJEELING HIMALAYAN RAILWAY

Ideal for those seeking the solitude of the Himalaya, this tour offers spectacular mountain vistas, exotic orchids, tea plantations and a chance to ride on the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway.

- Day 1** Fly from UK to Kolkata via the Middle East.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning; stay two nights. Afternoon at leisure.
- Day 3** City sightseeing.
- Day 4** Fly to Bagdogra and drive to Kalimpong; stay overnight.
- Day 5** Drive into Sikkim this morning, stay two nights in Gangtok.
- Day 6** City sightseeing.
- Day 7** Drive to Pelling visiting the Rumtek monastic complex en route; stay two nights.
- Day 8** Visit the Pemayangtse monastery and take a village walk.
- Day 9** Drive to Darjeeling; stay three nights.
- Day 10** Early morning excursion to Tiger Hill; later, the Ghoom Monastery; and possibly a tea plantation.
- Day 11** Visit the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute and take a ride to Kurseong on Darjeeling Himalayan Railway.
- Day 12** Fly back to Kolkata; stay two nights. City sightseeing may include visits to Kali Ghat temple and museum.
- Day 13** Day at leisure.
- Day 14** Fly to UK, arriving back the same evening.





Kolkata & the Northeast

Despite being the former capital of British India, Kolkata – earlier known as Calcutta – has since Independence languished in the shadow of Delhi and the other metropolitan cities. Yet its charismatic colonial architecture, spectacular setting on the banks of the Hooghly River and distinctive Bengali atmosphere make it a compelling point of entry to India’s lesser visited northeast. From beyond the city limits extend the flat, riverine expanses of West Bengal, dotted with the remnants of long disappeared capitals, while further north, pockets of fragile wilderness bordering the Brahmaputra River are a stronghold for tiger, rhino and other endangered species. Disappearing human ways of life form the focus of trips into the remote tribal districts of the Northeast Hill States. Indigenous communities also survive in the forests of interior Odisha, southwest of Kolkata – a state often overlooked by travellers, but which is home to some of the country’s most splendid temples and monuments.



Highlights of Kolkata and the Northeast

- Kolkata (Calcutta)** | One of India’s most compelling destinations, with some grand colonial architecture, well stocked museums and endless fascination on its streets and riverbanks.

Tawang Monastery | One of the greatest road trips in the Himalayas culminates at this far-flung Buddhist monastery, renowned for its relics and ancient manuscripts housed in a huge medieval complex.
- River cruises** | Explore some of the most remote corners of Assam and West Bengal from the comfort of a colonial-style river steamer cruising on the great rivers of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Hoogly.

Nagaland | Touring remote Naga villages you’ll see some fabulous traditional architecture, clothes, weaving, facial tattoos and headgear, especially during the annual Hornbill Festival, held each December.
- Kaziranga National Park** | Track wild tigers and one-horned rhinos on elephant back amid the tall grass, marshes and jungles of the Brahmaputra River in Assam – among the highlights of wild India.

Konark Temple | Staggeringly intricate carving is the hallmark of the resplendent Sun Temple in Konark, Odisha, which prior to its rediscovery in the 19th century lay under a mound of sand.
- The Living Bridges of Meghalaya** | The Northeast Hill State of Meghalaya, officially the wettest place on earth, is known for the bridges fashioned from live tree roots by local villagers.

Bhubaneshwar | Odisha’s state capital holds one of the best preserved crops of early medieval temples in Asia, all of them sumptuously carved, the mighty Lingaraja Mandir among them.

Travel Information

Time zone: UTC+5.30 hours

Flying time: 8.30 hours

Currency: Indian rupee

Capital: New Delhi

When to go

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature °C	16	19	23	24	23	25	24	24	24	24	21	18
Rainfall mm	11	30	35	60	142	288	415	350	285	142	28	16
Best to travel	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●	●	●	●	●●	●●	●●

●● The best time to travel

● A good time to travel

● Low season

Be inspired

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KOLKATA Kolkata, or ‘Calcutta’ as it was known prior to 2001, is the capital of West Bengal state, and India’s third largest city, with a population of over 14 million. Originally founded as a trading post by the East India Company in the 17th century, it served as the country’s capital until 1911, and still preserves much of its colonial architecture, from the crumbling mansions in Chowringhee to the grandiloquent Victoria Memorial, whose marble domes soar above the banks of the Hooghly River.

Kolkata also retains a strong intellectual and cultural tradition, with a wealth of museums and art galleries. Heated debate on the latest Bengali film, novel or political scandal is the order of the day at the famous Indian Coffee House, in the University district, where paddle fans whirl overhead and the waiters all wear ice-cream-wafer turbans.

This is a city where everyday sights often prove the most arresting: pilgrims pouring through the Kali Ghat temple; flower sellers spreading out their wares in the dawn light at Mullick Ghat; wrestlers exercising on the nearby riverside steps; overloaded barges of straw arriving at Kumartuli Ghat, where voluptuous deities are fashioned out of clay for the annual Durga Puja festival; and the endless streams of rickshaws, trucks and pedestrians pouring across Howrah Bridge at rush hours.



BISHNUPUR Some of the most beautiful and richly embellished temples in eastern India are to be found 93 miles (150 km) north of Kolkata at Bishnupur, former capital of the Malla rajas. Made of laterite stone and brick, and faced with finely carved terracotta, the temples take their cue from the form of simple Bengali village huts, whence their gracefully arched *chala* roofs. Tiles around the bases of the shrine depict scenes from the Hindu epic, as well as intricate floral motifs.



SHANTINIKETAN Bengalis place great importance on learning generally, and on the arts and philosophy in particular, and nowhere is this more apparent than at Shantiniketan’s Vishwa Bharati, the university founded by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore in the early 1900s. Tagore’s aim in establishing the campus was to create a kind of crucible where the best of Bengali culture could meld with that of the West.

Visitors are welcome to look around the site, which holds numerous buildings decorated with fine sculptures, paintings, murals and terracotta work by renowned Bengali artists. Classes take place under the trees in the grounds – one of the region’s defining spectacles. The spiritual focal point is the Upasana Griha, a glass-walled chamber that looks especially wonderful on Wednesday evenings when *bhajan*-singing sessions take place inside it. Music is very a much a part of everyday life here, and on Saturday afternoons, after the local market, groups of Bauls – mystic minstrels distinguished by their saffron clothes – gather beside the canal to play and sing.



MURSHIDABAD The flat, riverine countryside of central Bengal to the north of Kolkata holds the remains of numerous lost cities dating from before the time of the British. Grandest of them all is Murshidabad, capital of Murshid Quli Khan, the first nawab of Bengal, who took control of the region after the death of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in the early 18th century. Numerous mosques, tombs and gardens survive on the site, but its crowning glory is the vast, Georgian-style Hazarduari Palace, whose great Neoclassical façade rises in spectacular fashion from the banks of the Bhagirathi River.



The Northeast Hill States

The far northeast of India – comprising the seven Hill States of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Nagaland – is the region least visited by foreigners in the country. Outside the main cities, infrastructure is patchy and the terrain often difficult, with landscapes ranging from dusty riverine plains and flood-prone terai grassland along the Brahmaputra River, to jungle, montane forest and the perennial snows of the high Himalaya.

While some states remain dogged by political instability, the majority are now more peaceful than they have been for decades, offering any traveller with a sense of adventure the chance to experience breathtaking scenery rarely witnessed by outsiders, as well as traditional societies whose ways of life remain, in many cases, radically distinct from the Indian mainstream.

ASSAM Flanked by hills to the north and south, Assam encompasses the mostly flat, low-lying Brahmaputra Valley. As the site of two revered Hindu temples, its rapidly swelling capital, Guwahati, is a major pilgrimage destination, and also the hub of the region’s tea tourism. For foreigners, however, wildlife and wilderness are the two prime incentives to travel here, and the best way of experiencing both are on a river cruise.

A sparse world of sand bars and vast, glassy expanses of water, the bed of the Brahmaputra 12–18 miles (20–29km) wide in some parts of Assam. Cruises on luxury double-decker steamers give direct access to the state’s two world-renowned national parks. Famous for its population of one-horned Indian rhinos, Kaziranga is one of the few places in India you can go on safaris by elephant back, which increases the chances of spotting tigers. West of the capital, Manas, a reserve on the Bhutan border, offers more varied terrain and a much wilder feel.

Culture takes centre stage as you press northwards up the higher reaches of the river. At Majuli Island, visitors can attend mesmeric dance dramas performed by white-turbanned Hindu monks in monasteries set amid a bucolic landscape of rice fields. Established in 15th century, the 22 Vaishnavite monasteries, or sattras, on Majuli are repositories of devotional art forms unique in India.



MEGHALAYA Meghalaya, literally ‘Abode of Clouds’, owes its name to the prodigious humidity drawn over its hills from the Bay of Bengal. The state, sandwiched between Assam and Bangladesh, boasts the highest rainfall of anywhere on earth.

Southwest of the capital, Shillong, the Khasi Hills receives the lion’s share of the downpours: the village of Cherrapunjee is notorious for receiving an average of 12m (40ft) per year – twenty times more than London. It’s worth making a detour to this fascinating, predominantly tribal, Christian region to see the ‘living bridges’ which the locals use to cross the river and its tributaries below Cherrapunjee. By training roots of ficus trees over the water, they’re able to create spans that can withstand the rigours of the Meghalayan climate. A revealing fact is that the bridges take more than a generation to make; responsibility for their upkeep often passes to the eldest daughter in this matrilineal part of the world.



ARUNACHAL PRADESH

‘Land of the Dawn-Lit Mountains’, Arunachal Pradesh is in every sense a frontier state. With borders shared by Bhutan, Tibet and Myanmar, it remained off limits to foreign tourists until the 1990s and is still, despite its extraordinary array of landscapes, wildlife and cultures – a region where, once beyond the capital Itanagar, facilities for travellers are scarce.

In the far west of the state, the remote Buddhist monastery of Tawang is reached via a fragile, unfinished military road that climbs from Bhalukpong, on the Assamese border, through miles of misty foothills and isolated fortress towns to the 4,300-m (14,107-ft) , snow-prone Sela Pass. Renowned for its relics and vast library of ancient manuscripts, Tawang is a suitably spectacular end to this dramatic road journey – a huge medieval complex housing 500 monks, encircled by high mountains.

Elsewhere in Arunachal, the elaborate patchwork of the region’s indigenous, or ‘tribal’, inhabitants provides the main focus. The state holds around 26 major groups, each with its own distinct religious practises, dress and traditions.

In the far northeast, the Namdapha National Park encompasses an extraordinarily rich biodiversity, with some of the world’s rarest orchids, a healthy population of elephants and four species of big cats – tiger, leopard, clouded leopard and snow leopard. Red pandas and hoolock gibbons are also found within its borders.



NAGALAND

The British army took nearly half a century to subdue the notoriously warlike Nagas of the northeast. In the end, it was Bibles rather than bullets that undermined the tribes’ fierce guerrilla resistance to colonial rule, after Baptist missionaries convinced them to give up head hunting and start building churches. Today, the state is said to be more fervently Baptist than Mississippi, and the old way of life has all but disappeared. However, touring more remote Naga villages you’ll see some fabulous traditional architecture, clothes, weaving, facial tattoos and headgear, especially during the annual Hornbill Festival, held each December on the outskirts of the state capital, Kohima.



ODISHA

The coastal state of Odisha (formerly ‘Orissa’) in eastern India is now something of a backwater – very traditional in its outlook, predominantly rural, with a large Adivasi (‘tribal’) minority inhabiting the forests of its hilly hinterland. But between the 7th and 13th centuries, it was the eastern seaboard’s most powerful region – the centre of a trade network extending across the Bay of Bengal to Indonesia and beyond.

Profits from this maritime commerce enabled a succession of dynasties to erect an extraordinary wealth of temples, among them the gigantic Jagannath in Puri, and the resplendent Sun Temple in Konark – two of the great wonders of medieval India. The state capital, Bhubaneshwar, also holds a wonderful crop of intricately sculpted shrines dating from the 5th and 6th centuries – the most impressive of them the mighty Lingaraj Mandir, visited by upwards of 6,000 worshippers each day.

Historical monuments, however, become few and far between once you venture southwest into the remote Niyamgiri hill tract in the interior, homeland of numerous forest-dwelling indigenous groups. Weekly markets provide a great opportunity to mingle with the tribal people, dressed in traditional costumes. With their facial tattoos and distinctive jewellery, the Dongria Kond are among the best known outside Odisha thanks to their ongoing conflict with a British multi-national which intends to mine for bauxite on their sacred mountain, Niyam Dongar.

Places to Stay: Kolkata and the Northeast

Ranging from big city grandeur to ersatz tribal huts in the forest, this region’s varied accommodation reflects its muliti-faceted history and great cultural contrasts.



Lalit Great Eastern, Kolkata (Calcutta)

Located in the heart of Kolkata’s shopping and business district, the Great Eastern is one of the city’s most enduring landmarks. When it closed for renovation in 2005, the hotel had been running without interruption longer than any other in the world. Illustrious guests included the Queen, Ho Chi Minh, Khrushchev and Mark Twain. Now, the Lalit chain has given a lavish refit to the building, which opened to great acclaim in 2013. The city’s oldest hotel once again deserves its epithet ‘the Savoy of the East’.

Oberoi Grand, Kolkata (Calcutta)

The Grand has been a Kolkata institution since it was first acquired by Mohan Singh Oberoi in 1938. Oberoi gave it a glittering facelift, which must have pleased the 3,000 American GIs billeted here during VWorld War II – and come as some surprise to any locals old enough to remember its humble beginnings as ‘Mrs Monte’s Boarding House’. Today, the strident Neoclassical façade and pillared entrance rank among the Bengali capital’s most prominent landmarks, while the hotel itself is regularly named among India’s top three. The rooms are as polished and plush as you’d expect for one of Oberoi’s benchmark addresses.



Mancotta Chang Bungalow, Dibrugarh, Assam

On a working tea estate just outside the town of Dibrugarh, Mancotta is a text-book specimen of a colonial-era “stilted bungalow”, whose design was intended to keep the wildlife out at night. It’s also an utterly delightful place to unwind between trips to Majuli Island and Kaziranga. Owners, the Jalan family, have restored the 150-year-old residence into a characterful homestay, with varnished parquet floors, teak writing tables and low-slung chairs. A team of kindly local staff are on hand to serve delicious Indian meals. Recommended for bird watchers.



Ri Kynjai, Shillong

This is one of the loveliest, most serene places to stay in the Northeast, if not all India. Set on a hillside under pines overlooking Uniam Lake, the hotel takes its cue from traditional Khasi architecture, incorporating grass-thatch roofs and wood lining for the rooms, which are huge and have picture windows that make the most of the spellbinding rural views across the forest and water. In short: a supremely relaxing, homely, peaceful retreat from which to explore this fascinating area around Shillong.



Chandoori Sai



Visitor facilities of any kind are few and far between in Western Odisha, which makes the existence of this wonderful little guest house in Goudaguda village, Koraput district, all the more remarkable. It’s the labour of love of a retired Australian oil worker, who wanted to create a sustainable tourism project for local tribal people. Made from wood, terracotta and local textiles, the accommodation is stylish and full of character. Windows open on to vistas of gardens and hills. Goudaguda is a potter’s village and guests are shown around workshops – a great way to experience the way of life of the area’s indigenous people.

The Mayfair Heritage, Puri



The Mayfair is the smartest option in Puri, Odisha’s principal pilgrimage centre. It’s located right behind the beach, away from the noisy centre of town and has a rather boutique feel, with nice little temple carvings and statues dotted around, and a row of votive terracotta elephants beside the overflow pool. The rooms are spacious and well presented, opening on to breezy balconies. And there’s a path leading through a gateway at the bottom of the hotel straight on to the sand – perfect for watching fishermen at work in the mornings, and catching the sunrise from the Bay of Bengal.

Travel in Kolkata and the Northeast

Kolkata is well connected to other Indian cities by air, and to hubs in the Middle East. There are no direct flights from the UK, but transit times are rarely more than a couple of hours.

Travel around the city itself is quickest on the efficient and clean metro system. However, you’ll soak up more of the atmosphere in a taxi. Kolkata is also the only city left in India that permits hand-pulled rickshaws, and there’s a fleet of old municipal ferries plying the Hooghly for anyone wishing to see the waterfront from river level.

Travelling in West Bengal and Odisha, we recommend a comfortable four-door saloon car and driver. Elsewhere, particularly in Assam and other Northeast Hill States, where road surfaces are often poor, a four-wheel-drive, landcruiser-style vehicle is the best option.

For Darjeeling, daily flights leave Kolkata for Bagdogra airport, 62 miles (100km) south of the hill station, where a car and driver will await your arrival. The regional capitals in the Northeast Hill States are also accessible by air, along with Bhubaneshwar, capital of Odisha.

When to Go

November to April is the ideal season for northeastern India, although Sikkim and the other hill areas can be chilly in December and January. Visibility may be impaired by heat haze from late-March onwards. The monsoon downpours last between May and September, when road travel and air is often disrupted by storms and flooding.



Itineraries

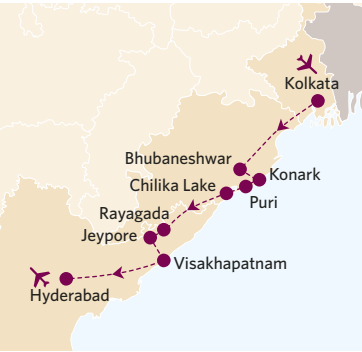
The following suggested routes offer varied itineraries in the three principal regions of the northeast. They can be shortened or extended according to your requirements. Call one of our Northeast India specialists for further advice.



RURAL BENGal

Our Rural Bengal itinerary offers a wealth of sites unique to the state, combining cultural, historical and spiritual legacy.

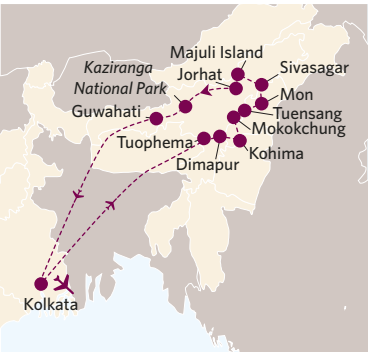
- Day 1** Fly to **Kolkata** via the Middle East.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning, spend the afternoon at leisure; stay two nights.
- Day 3** City sightseeing.
- Day 4** Drive northwards to **Bishnupur** for an overnight stay. Afternoon visit the terracotta temples.
- Day 5** En route to **Shantiniketan**, visit **Bankura** and **Panchmura**. Stay two nights.
- Day 6** Explore Vishwa Bharati University and Kala Bhawan.
- Day 7** Drive further into the countryside to **Tarapith**, stay overnight.
- Day 8** En route to **Berhampur** for an overnight stay; stop to see the impressive Hazardwari (1000 Doors Palace) and other sights in **Murshidabad**.
- Day 9** Visit the sites of **Gaur** and **Pandua** near **Malda**; stay overnight.
- Day 10** Take an early morning train to **New Jalpaiguri**; drive on to **Darjeeling**; stay three nights.
- Day 11** Early morning visit to Tiger Hill and Ghoom Monastery, take a ride on the Darjeeling Heritage Railway to Kurseong.
- Day 12** Visit a tea garden, walk down the busy Mall Road and Chowrasta.
- Day 13** Lunch time flight back to Kolkata, overnight stay.
- Day 14** Fly back to UK via the Middle East, arriving back the same evening.



TEMPLES & TRIBES OF ODISHA

Odisha boasts an abundance of temples built in the high Kalinga style. Away from the main urban centres, weekly rural markets provide opportunities to see local minority people dressed in their traditional finery. The tour ends, by contrast, in the booming city of Hyderabad.

- Day 1** Fly from UK to **Kolkata** via the Middle East.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning; afternoon at leisure.
- Day 3** City sightseeing.
- Day 4** Fly to **Bhubaneshwar**; stay two nights. Afternoon visit the various temples of the city.
- Day 5** Excursion to the Udaigiri, Ratnagiri and Lalitgiri Caves.
- Day 6** Drive to the coastal town of **Puri**, visiting the artist villages of Pipli and Raghurajpur en route; stay two nights.
- Day 7** Excursion to the impressive 13th century **Konark Temple**.
- Day 8** Drive to Barkul, set on **Chilika Lake**, stay overnight.
- Day 9** Morning boat ride to spot flamingos; afternoon drive to **Rayagada** for an overnight stay.
- Day 10** Visit the Dongria Kond market today and later drive to **Jeypore**, stay two nights.
- Day 11** Spend the day visiting the villages and markets of the Bonda, Gadhaba and Didayee tribes.
- Day 12** Visit the Paraja market in the morning; drive to **Vishakhapatnam** in the afternoon for a late evening flight to **Hyderabad**, stay three nights.
- Day 13** City sightseeing.
- Day 14** Visit **Golconda Fort & Qutb Shahi tombs**.
- Day 15** Fly back to UK via the Middle East arriving back the same evening.



NAGALAND & ASSAM

This tour of Northeast India combines Assam, best known for its eponymous tea, and Nagaland, home to many tribes, each with its own traditions, language and attire. It also includes a visit to the Vaishnavite monasteries of Majuli and famous Kaziranga National Park.

- Day 1** Fly to **Kolkata** via the Middle East.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning; afternoon at leisure.
- Day 3** City sightseeing.
- Day 4** Fly to **Dimapur** and drive on to **Kohima**, stay overnight.
- Day 5** Visit the World War II Memorial and later drive to **Tuohphema** village; stay one night.
- Day 6** Drive to **Mokokchung** visiting **Mopongchukit** en route, stay two nights.
- Day 7** Explore the tribal villages around Mokokchung.
- Day 8** Drive to scenic **Tuensang** today; overnight stay.
- Day 9** Drive to **Mon**; stay two nights.
- Day 10** Visit tribal villages around **Mon**.
- Day 11** Drive to **Jorhat** in Assam visiting **Sivasagar** enroute.
- Day 12** Visit **Majuli Island** and drive on to **Kaziranga National Park**; stay three nights.
- Day 13** Elephant and 4WD safaris in the park.
- Day 14** Elephant and 4WD safaris in the park.
- Day 15** Drive to **Guwahati** airport for the short flight to Kolkata; stay overnight.
- Day 16** Fly back to UK via the Middle East, arriving back the same evening.



Mumbai, Gujarat & the West

Though boasting a cultural richness, ancient monuments and wildlife experiences comparable with those of neighbouring Rajasthan, the state of Gujarat receives only a fraction of the number of visitors. Fortune, however, favours the bold. In the course of a fortnight, you could explore Jain hilltop temple complexes, sight wild lion, visit craft villages where nomadic camel herders create fabulous textiles, relax in royal palaces and discover an amazing Muslim ghost city. Travellers generally approach the region through Mumbai, India's most densely packed and dynamic city, and proceed northwards via the ancient cave sites of Ajanta and Ellora. For those coming from the north, the Buddhist remains of Sanchi, ruined Afghan capital of Mandu, and picturesque fortress-palace at Maheshwar on the Narmada River are the recommended waystages on an unforgettable journey through the heart of the country.



Highlights of Mumbai, Gujarat and the West

Mumbai | Gateway of India, Taj Mahal Hotel and Elephanta caves vie for the attention of travellers to this busy, cosmopolitan Maharashtran capital, home to Bollywood – India's record-breaking movie industry.

Ellora | Sculpted from a huge basalt cliff in a now quiet corner of northern Maharashtra are dozens of intricately decorated Buddhist, Jain and Hindu cave temples – a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Shatrunjaya Hill, Palitana | Encrusting a breezy hilltop in southern Gujarat are hundreds of elaborately moulded, whitewashed Jain shrines – a chimeric spectacle reached by scaling 3,200 steps.

Ajanta | The region's other great archeological treasure is this famous cave complex, hewn from the sides of a horseshoe-shaped ravine. Its murals depict life in ancient India in breathtaking detail.

Gir National Park | Last stronghold of the Asiatic lion and a relaxing place to unwind amid timelessly pretty Indian countryside, this reserve in western Gujarat is also home to large populations of leopard.

Mandu | Scattered over a rocky plateau overlooking the Narmada River are the superbly atmospheric remains of a pre-Mughal Muslim capital where Sultans lived sybaritic lifestyles unrivalled in that era.

Kutch | Each of the innumerable castes and minority people who inhabit this pan-handle peninsula in the northwest of Gujarat retain their distinctive dress, mudwork architecture and crafts traditions.

Maheshwar | There's no better place to savour the serenity of the Narmada River than the ghats of Maheshwar in central Madhya Pradesh or from the ramparts of the town's atmospheric Ahilya Fort.

Travel Information

Time zone: UTC+5.30 hours

Flying time: 8.30 hours

Currency: Indian rupee

Capital: New Delhi

When to go

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature °C	24	25	27	29	30	29	28	28	28	29	28	26
Rainfall mm	10	10	10	10	10	560	640	520	320	90	20	10
Best to travel	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●

●● The best time to travel

● A good time to travel

● Low season

Be inspired

For help planning your perfect holiday, contact us at the Old Fire Station, Ealing, London.
Tel: **020 8566 3739**
Web: **www.transindus.com**



MUMBAI | Bombay, or ‘Mumbai’ as it’s officially called these days, has been India’s busiest port and industrial centre since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1969. As famous today for its traffic jams as its record-breaking movie industry, the Maharashtra capital tends not to feature high up most visitors’ ‘must see’ list, but as a point of arrival has a lot to recommend it.

Before the last British troops garrisoned in the country slow-marched past it to board their ships back to Blighty in 1947, the Gateway of India – a huge triumphal arch in the colonial Indo-Saracenic style – was the first landmark most new arrivals from Britain set eyes on. The second was the famous *Taj Mahal Hotel* beside it. Both still stand tall on the waterfront, as emblematic of the city today as they were in Victorian times.

Aside from the landmarks of the British era, Mumbai’s other unmissable sight are the ancient rock-cut cave temples of Elephanta Island, a boat ride across the bay. Hollowed from a hill of brown-black basalt 13 centuries ago, the pillared shrines contain a series of awesome bas reliefs, the most iconic of them the three-headed ‘Trimurti’, representing the three aspects of the God Shiva.



ELLORA & AJANTA | Nowhere else in India does the distant past feel closer to the surface than the rock-cut complexes of Ellora and Ajanta, a day’s journey northeast of Mumbai. Carved from the mountains of the Deccan Plateau between 2nd century BC and 11th century AD, these temples, monasteries and shrines hold a wealth of exquisite sculpture and painting, miraculously preserved in their remote settings.

Ellora’s crowning glory, rising from the centre of a 1.2-mile-long (2-km) escarpment, is the Kailash Temple. The towering edifice looks as if it was built in blocks, but is in fact a megalith scraped laboriously from the bare rock over several decades.

Ajanta’s wonders are a more modest in scale, but no less thrilling. Cut from the flanks of a horseshoe-shaped ravine, its caves are renowned above all for their ancient murals. The tempura paintings, created between 150 BC and 650 AD, depict a rich cross-section of life in the ancient world, from court scenes to processions, markets, great rituals, battles and boudoirs.



AHMEDABAD | Inconspicuous on its traffic island amid the chaos of central Ahmedabad, the diminutive mosque of Sidi Sayyid encapsulates the flawed charms of Gujarat’s largest city. Blink and you could miss it. But the building holds some of the greatest architectural treasures of medieval Hindustan. Lining the walls of the mosque are ten semicircular windows filled with pierced-stone screens. A closer look reveals designs of unimaginable delicacy: twisting trees with branches unfurling into a profusion of tendrils and flowers; slender palms with gracefully tilting tops; and square panels of symmetrical motifs as complex and uniform as any in the Alhambra or Taj Mahal.

The mosque is merely one among many Indo-Islamic gems buried amid the teeming streets of modern Ahmedabad – a fast-paced metropolis of over 7 million people which, in the 15th century, was the capital of Sultan Ahmad Shah I. Elsewhere in the city, the famous Calico Museum of Textiles contains the largest collection of antique saris, Kashmiri shawls, embroidered tents and traditional Indian clothing ever assembled.



CHAMPANER | Champaner succeeded Ahmedabad as the seat of the local sultans in the 16th century, before Akbar swept through to annex Gujarat for the Mughals. Inscribed with exquisite calligraphy and elaborate Hindu-inflected motifs, its ruined mosques, palaces, fortified gateways and tombs are scattered over 4 miles (6.5km) of scrubland – now classed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Above it loom the sandstone escarpments of jungle-covered Pavagadh mountain, on whose summit a whitewashed Kali temple affords a stupendous view of the surrounding plains.

KUTCH | This remote region in the far northwest of Gujarat has long been a land apart from the rest of India. A pan-shaped island sandwiched between Indian Saurashtra and Pakistani Sind, it used to be cut off for months on end by monsoon floodwaters and wind-blown tides, though now the gleaming white salt flats these leave in their wake – the Ranns of Kutch – are crossed by modern causeways.

Traditionally a refuge for minority peoples from across the northwest, the region is famous primarily for its many ethnic groups, distinguished by their dazzling costumes of mirror-inlaid embroidery. Visitors are welcome to tour numerous minority villages, where they can admire spectacular mudwork architecture, and the traditional clothing and crafts traditions of the locals, most of whom make a living from handicrafts sales these days. The best base from which to explore the region is the capital, Bhuj, whose 18th-century palace Aina Mahal, with its famous Hall of Mirrors and exquisite tiled pleasure chamber, was a miraculous survivor of the devastating ‘Independence Day Earthquake’ of 2001.



The Tribes & Textiles of Kutch

Although traditional ways of life are fast disappearing across India, they are proving more tenacious in the arid west of Gujarat. Travelling across the flatlands of Kutch, for example, you'll still encounter families of nomadic Rabari herders following their flocks, the women dressed in elaborately embroidered or tie-dyed veils, long pleated skirts shot through with gold thread, and heavy silver and bone bangles stacked up their arms, while the men wear bulky scarlet turbans, handlebar moustaches and old-style cotton pyjamas gathered at the ankles. Such attire is not so much a matter of personal style, as part of the complex language of caste, religion and community in remote areas. For local people, the way a man ties his turban, the tattoos on a woman's forehead, the designs adorning a headscarf or motifs on a camel-leather shoe may reveal not just whether a person is Hindu or Muslim, but which specific district or village they come from and what their occupation is. For historians and anthropologists, the outfits also carry the imprint of a community's distant origins, revealing connections with Persia, Sind or Baluchistan.

Tribes and Castes | Quite when, and why, the many and varied ethnic groups present in the Kutch today first crossed the great salt flats, or Ranns, surrounding the peninsula is a subject of much debate. What's more certain is that they were attracted by the benevolent regime of the local rulers, the maharao of Bhuj, and the prosperity that flowed through the region, which in past centuries lay on major trade routes.

The various groups, or 'tribes' as they're often referred to, brought with them a great spectrum of art and crafts traditions – most visible in their respective styles of dress, but also in the way they built their houses, adorned their animals and furniture, and in their respective customs.

An astonishing wealth of these survive today, although modern life is bringing about rapid changes, particularly to the nomadic herders, whose traditional grazing pathways across central India are becoming fenced off, forcing many onto the margins of cities.

Some 45 different 'tribes' are officially recognized in Kutch. In practise, each of these has several sub-castes with its own styles of dress, which vary according to region. Among the most numerous are the Gharasia Jats, a Muslim cattle-breeding caste descended from Baluch tribes of the Indus Delta in Sind, Pakistan. The Krishna-worshipping Ahirs, of which there are five sub-castes in Kutch, are also cow herders that once sold milk and ghee but who have since diversified into other businesses such as salt transport.

More widespread are members of the lowest castes, or Harijans, traditionally leather workers from Marwar in Rajasthan. Harijan women wear some of the most eye-catching, colourful and elaborate costumes, often borrowing patterns and motifs from their Muslim neighbours.

Textiles | For anyone interested in textiles, Kutch is a wonderland. In most villages women of all ages spend much of their day sewing, weaving and doing embroidery – to make clothes for themselves and their families, to provide pieces for bridal trousseaux or temple festivals, or to create items for sale.

Numerous villages around Bhuj are well set up to receive visitors, and sitting on a shady verandah, sipping hot tea while the women unfurl intricately sewn bedspreads, patchwork quilts and appliqué panels is a great way to shop and meet local people. As well as embroidery, you'll also be shown fine tie-dye and mirror-inlay work.

These amazing designs differ greatly between the various groups. Creating them requires years of practise and painstaking attention to detail – the geometric patterns are counted on the warp and weft of the cloth, and sewn using silk thread worked from the back. Such labour can take its toll on a woman's eyesight. Women are usually unable to embroider into middle age, when they progress to patchwork, which is easier to stitch.

Bhungas | The Kutchi tribal peoples' love of adornment extends to their homes too. In the Banni grasslands lining the great Ranns, the exteriors of thatched bhunga round houses are covered with colourful murals, while the insides harbour elaborate panels of mud-work, painted white and inlaid with hundreds of glinting mirrors. This technique is used to create beautiful surrounds for alcoves. Excellent examples of embroidery and woodcarving can also be found decorating the interiors. The circular style of the standalone Bhungas has proven itself remarkably resilient especially in the face of serious storms and tremors when other more modern structures have crumbled.





JUNAGADH | Hindu and Jain pilgrims from across India come to Junagadh in Saurashtra to climb Mt Girnar, Western India's holiest mountain. Over the week of Shivratri in February–March their ranks are swollen by tens of thousands of naked, dreadlocked Hindu ascetics, who mass at the base of the hill in a huge encampment, preparing to complete the sacred circuit around it by smoking prodigious quantities of hashish. In the town itself, a rock edict dating from 250 BC and a particularly exuberant Nawab's tomb, the Maqbara of Vizir Sahib Baka-ud-din Bhar, are the main sights.

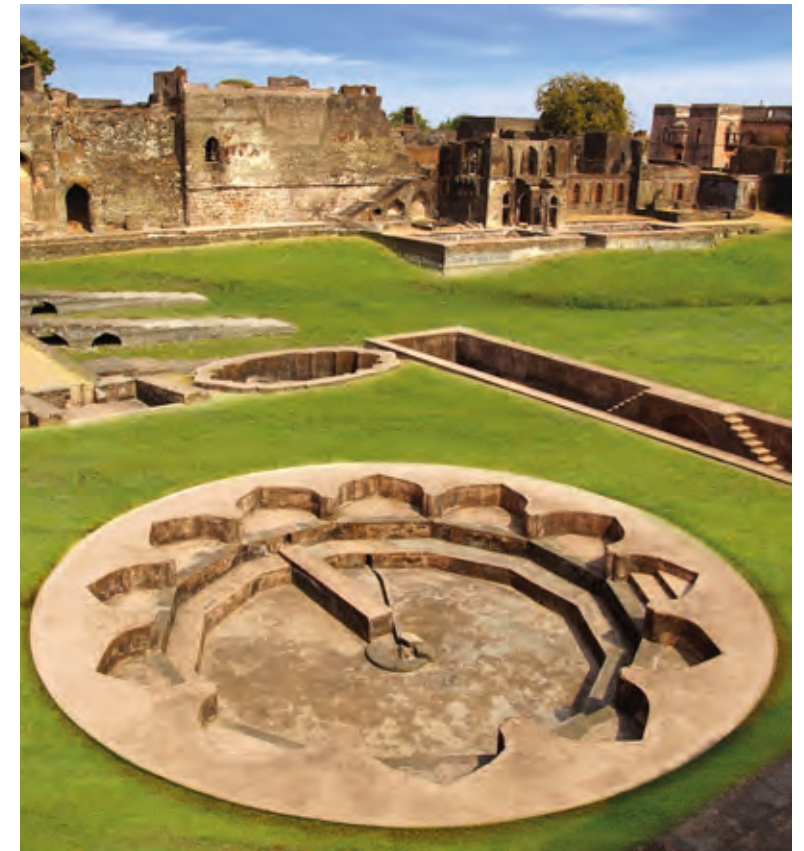


SHATRUNJAYA HILL, PALITANA | Some 3,200 steps have to be scaled to reach the top of Shatrunjaya Hill, the holiest pilgrimage site in India for Svetambara Jains. Extravagantly carved towers rise from the sacred complex, where around one-thousand walled shrines seem to float in the heavens above the Gulf of Cambay. At least one visit here is deemed essential by Jains in order for the soul to be fit for Nirvana. For non-believers, the sublime view, across the Saurashtran Plains Gulf of Cambay, is incentive enough to make the climb.

BHOPAL | The capital of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal, is infamous for the appalling industrial disaster of 1984 when an American-built pesticide plant leaked poisonous gas into the city, causing death and injury on an unprecedented scale. But don't let the shadow cast by the tragedy deter you from visiting this fascinating capital, whose antique core holds a wonderfully traditional bazaar and some remarkable Islamic buildings. They date from the 19th century, when Bhopal was ruled by a succession of Begums, or 'queens', who lavished considerable funds on improving the infrastructure and appearance of their capital. The begums' *pièce de résistance*, dominating the skyline to the southwest, is the massive Taj-ul Masjid, one of the largest mosques in India.



SANCHI | Less than an hour's drive northeast of Bhopal lies one of the country's most evocative archeological sites, dating from the very dawn of Indian history in the third century BC, when most of the subcontinent was ruled by the Mauryan Dynasty. After his conversion to Buddhism, the Mauryan emperor, Ashoka, married a woman from this district and in her honour founded a Buddhist stupa site on a low hill near the town of Besnagar, which over the centuries grew to be among the largest of its kind in Asia. The ruins of Ashoka's Great Stupa and its lesser siblings still rise from the hilltop, surrounded by fragments of railings and gateway arches elaborately carved with some of the finest stonework surviving from the ancient world.



MANDU | The ruins that are evocative all date from the 14th and 15th centuries, even though there are much older tombs. They are all that remains of a Muslim capital which flourished on a far-flung plateau above the Narmada Valley in the era before the rise of the Mughals. The scores of cracked tombs, dilapidated palaces and pleasure pavilions scattered across the rocky terrain barely hint at the sybaritic lifestyles led by the Sultans who ruled from here, one of whom – Ghiyath Shah (1469–1500) – is said to have boasted a harem of 15,000 courtesans, protected by a bodyguard of 1,000 Abyssinian women.

The harem was enclosed inside a splendid complex whose main building was the Jahaz Mahal, or 'Ship Palace' – an elegant pile of domed pavilions and courtyards with beautiful geometric bathing tanks.



Places to Stay: Mumbai, Gujarat and the West

Chosen for their character, location, standards of service and overall atmosphere, the following are our pick of the places to stay in Maharashtra, Gujarat and southern Madhya Pradesh.



Vivanta by Taj, Aurangabad

This is the top hotel in Aurangabad, springboard for the famous caves at Ellora and Ajanta. It's located on the northern limits of the town, and conveniently situated for quick getaways in the morning. In a large modern building whose arched windows and spectacular central onion dome lend to it the feel of a contemporary Indian palace, the rooms are beautifully furnished with touches of local colour and framed prints of Ajanta murals on the walls. And there's a huge garden pool.



Ahilya Fort, Maheshwar



It's hard to imagine a more evocative spot for a candle-lit dinner than the roof terrace of Ahilya Fort, on the banks of the Narmada at Maheshwar, in Madhya Pradesh. Dating from 1766, the citadel's blackened sandstone walls fall sheer to the river, half-a-mile (800-m) wide at this point and as still as oil – a spellbinding spectacle just after sunset. The son of the last Maharaja of Indore still lives here with his American wife, and the couple have transformed the place into a guest house that's a masterpiece of understatement and traditional style: antique doors open on to plant-filled courtyards, beautiful antique furniture and cusp-arched *jharokha* balconies suspended over the water.

The Taj Mahal Palace and Tower, Mumbai (Bombay)

Ever since it opened in 1903, the Taj has been one of the world's finest hotels. Its popularity with the city's glitterati and visiting VIPs made it a target in the 2008 jihadist attacks. Since then, however, a massive refurbishment has restored it to its former glory; recent guests included Barack and Michelle Obama. The historic interiors are more resplendent than ever – book a sea-facing room if you can, for great views over the harbourfront.



Rann Riders, Dasada, Kutch

This little eco resort, situated a couple of hour's drive northwest of Ahmedabad, is the best base from which to explore the Little Rann of Kutch. Round thatched cottages resembling local *kooba* huts provide the accommodation. Their interiors are true works of art, featuring adobe moulding, mirror inlay and woven textiles made by local artisans. Owner Malik breeds beautiful Marwari horses and leads trips by camel and jeep around the Rann, stopping at crafts villages, temples, mosques and Jain shrines en route.

Jehan Numa Palace, Bhopal



The *Jehan Numa* occupies one of the Begum of Bhopal's former residences – a grand palazzo-style residence in elegant with colonial mould, with a whitewashed Neoclassical façade and walkways swathed in bougainvillea. It sits astride Shamla Hill overlooking Upper Lake, and is well placed for sightseeing excursions around the nearby city centre. The rooms are five-star standard; some have verandahs facing the pool; others look on to the riding track where you can watch the syces put the hotel's thoroughbreds through their paces each morning. Evocative Raj-era photos hang in the corridor, and there's a choice of restaurants.

Travel in Mumbai, Gujarat and the West

Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport is the busiest in the country. Direct overnight flights from Heathrow make for a streamlined start to your holiday, and there are plenty of connections from the regional cities of Ahmedabad (Gujarat) and Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh), allowing for balanced, varied, out-and-back itineraries that return to Mumbai by air rather than road.

With the fabled metro system still years away from completion, travel in the Maharashtra capital tends to be a stop-and-start affair, best conducted in a comfortable air-conditioned car, outside peak times. Elsewhere in the region, the roads are relatively uncongested and in good shape – though journeys can be a little long by European standards.

When to Go

The optimal time to travel in the west of India is from October to April, before humidity levels become oppressive ahead of the southwest monsoon in early June. From then on, torrential downpours frequently disrupt travel by road and air, though the Western Ghat mountains and Deccan countryside become beguilingly green and pleasant under grey skies, which is why this rainy period tends to be the most popular among Indian holidaymakers.

Itineraries

The distribution of ancient sites, religious centres and minority regions with their own distinct cultures allow for some particularly eclectic routes in western India. The following tried-and-tested itineraries are sketched to show what can comfortably be seen over a 12- or 16-night trip. They may easily be shortened or extended to suit your needs, or completely reworked. Feel free to consult one of our India specialists for further advice.



MANDU & CAVE TEMPLES OF MAHARASHTRA

Arguably one of the finest tours of the country, taking you off the beaten track to experience stunning views, striking architecture and some of India's finest hotels.

- Day 1** Fly from UK to Mumbai on an overnight service.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning, take a connecting flight to Aurangabad; stay two nights.
- Day 3** Visit the Ellora Caves and Daulatabad Fort.
- Day 4** Early start for a tour of the Ajanta Caves; in the afternoon drive on to Maheshwar; stay three nights.
- Day 5** Explore this charming holy town set beside the Narmada river.
- Day 6** Day at leisure (or visit Ujjain, an important Hindu pilgrimage town).
- Day 7** Drive to Mandu, for a tour of its medieval Muslim ruins; then on to Indore for an overnight stay.
- Day 8** Leave for Bhopal this morning; stay two nights. Afternoon visit Bhimbetka's rock shelters & Bhojpur en route.
- Day 9** Visit the Great Stupa and other Buddhist monuments in Sanchi.
- Day 10** Take a morning flight to Mumbai, stay two nights. Afternoon city sightseeing.
- Day 11** Cruise to the Elephanta Caves; afternoon heritage walk in the old Fort district.
- Day 12** Fly back to UK, arriving back the same evening.



GUJARAT

This comprehensive tour features a bit of everything: wonderful monuments, breathtaking landscapes; unique wildlife viewing, and the chance to experience vibrant, traditional ways of life at close quarters.

- Day 1** Fly from UK to Mumbai on an overnight service.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning, transfer to your hotel for an overnight stay.
- Day 3** Early morning flight to Bhavnagar (Gujarat); stay two nights. Afternoon, visit the 3,500-year-old remnants of Lothal, one of India's foremost archeological sites.
- Day 4** Full day excursion to the Jain temple complex on Shatrunjaya Hill, Palitana.
- Day 5** Drive to Gir National Park for an overnight stay. Afternoon safari in the park.
- Day 6** Morning safari in the park, drive to Gondal stopping to see the Uparkot fort in Junagadh; stay two nights.
- Day 7** Sightseeing in and around Gondal.
- Day 8** A long drive west to the Great Rann of Kutch; stay three nights in Bhuj.
- Day 9** Explore tribal villages.
- Day 10** Explore tribal villages.
- Day 11** A long drive through the Rann to Dasada, stay two nights.
- Day 12** Morning and afternoon jeep excursions into the Little Rann to see wild ass.
- Day 13** Start early for Ahmedabad, visiting the towns of Modhera and Patan en route, stay three nights.
- Day 14** Heritage Walk in the old city, visit the Calico Museum & Gandhi Ashram.
- Day 15** Day at leisure (or visit Sarkhej Roza and the stepwell at Adalaj).
- Day 16** Fly early morning to Mumbai for your onward connecting flight to UK, arriving back the same evening.





Deccan & the South

The southern half of peninsular India has a completely different feel from the north. Stepping off a plane in Chennai (formerly 'Madras', capital of Tamil Nadu), you're struck by the intensity of the light, the greenery and prevalence of traditional dress. Equally emblematic of the South's distinctiveness are the huge temple gateways, or gopuram, which tower above the entrances to Hindu shrines in the region. The mightiest of these towers were those erected by the Vijayanagar kings, the ruins of whose resplendent stand among a boulder-strewn landscape of surreal beauty at Hampi in central Karnataka. Further north, among the volcanic outcrops of the great Deccan plateau, are to be found a string of other superb monuments dating from eras when this region's sultanates and kingdoms ranked among the most culturally sophisticated in the world.



Highlights of Deccan and the South

Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram) | This coastal village just south of Chennai is littered with a superb collection of ancient, stone-carved monuments, as well as sculpture workshops.

Mysore | Famed for its Maharaja's palace built in quintessentially Raj-era Indo-Saracenic style and local markets, Mysore forms a traditional counterpoint to its more modern neighbour Bengaluru (Bangalore).

Puducherry (Pondicherry) | A faintly Gallic ambience persists in the old quarter of this former French colony, famed for its colour-washed heritage buildings, with louvred windows and Neoclassical facades.

Hampi | Evocative remnants of the Vijayanagars' 14th- and 15th-century capital are scattered among boulder hills and banana groves – one of Asia's most atmospheric archeological sites.

Thanjavur | This busy town in the Kaveri Delta region of central Tamil Nadu is home to the greatest surviving monument of all those erected by the mighty Chola dynasty: the Brihadeeswarar temple.

Bijapur | Former capital of the Deccan's mightiest sultans, Bijapur retains the grandest Islamic buildings in the region, including the splendid Jama Masjid and the graceful Ibrahim Rauza tomb.

Madurai | The soaring, multi-coloured gateway towers of Madurai's Meenakshi temple utterly dominate the skyline of a fascinating city that has attracted pilgrims since the days of ancient Rome.

Hyderabad | The sprawling modern capital of Telengana and Andhra Pradesh once served as the seat of the fabulously wealthy Nizams, whose tombs and palaces are today its principal visitor attractions.

Travel Information

Time zone: UTC+5.30 hours

Flying time: 8.30 hours

Currency: Indian rupee

Capital: New Delhi

When to go

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature °C	25	23	16	16	22	21	20	23	19	25	22	20
Rainfall mm	12	22	19	8	48	48	90	132	132	275	350	215
Best to travel	●●	●●	●●	●●	●	●	●	●	●	●●	●●	●●

●● The best time to travel

● A good time to travel

● Low season

Be inspired

For help planning your perfect holiday, contact us at the Old Fire Station, Ealing, London.
Tel: **020 8566 3739**
Web: **www.transindus.com**



HYDERABAD

As with any Indian megacity, the prosaic reality of modern Hyderabad can seem a far cry from the tales of its exotic past. But the legacy of the Nizams, and the highly refined, hybrid Indo-Muslim culture their rule gave rise to, endures in a wealth of historic buildings, not to mention one of India's finest regional cuisines.

The starting point for any city tour has to be the Char Minar – a splendid late-16th-century mosque featuring a quartet of identical minarets supported by four grand arches.

The diamond trade was the root of the Nizams' staggering wealth, most vividly reflected in the splendour of their palaces. Recently restored at vast expense by the Taj hotel chain, the Falaknuma is a prime example, with hundreds of lavishly decorated rooms and halls blending Italian Baroque extravagance and Palladian grandeur with Indo-Saracenic flamboyance. A priceless collection of paintings, jewellery, manuscripts and furniture is displayed inside.



GOLCONDA FORT

The ruined city of Golconda, the largest and most impressive stronghold of the Deccan region, rises from scrubland 8 miles (11km) west of Hyderabad. Encircled by massive crenellated ramparts, the fort served as the capital of the Qutb Shahi kings from 1518 until it was conquered by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb 169 years later, after a protracted eight-month siege.

Tier upon tier of high walls and arches rise up the flanks of the 122-m (400-ft) hill on which Golconda rests, creating a striking spectacle from below. Inside its three lines of defences lay a self-contained town containing royal apartments, assembly halls, harems, mosques, magazines, stables, hammams and granaries. Golconda's treasury included the legendary Kohinoor diamond, now part of the British crown jewels.



HAMPI (VIJAYANAGAR)

A landscape of surreal beauty provides the setting for the ruins of Vijayanagar, the once glittering capital of southern India, which was laid to waste in 1565 by invading armies from the Sultanates of the northern Deccan. Only the city's temples survived the onslaught, although with one notable exception they now lie deserted, their pyramidal gateway towers and weed-infested walls rising against a backdrop of red-brown granite boulder hills and banana groves.

Hampi is one place where it pays to wander. Jump on a coracle across the Tungabhadra River to reach the hilltop 'Monkey Temple' – a fabulous viewpoint – or follow sandy tracks east through fields scattered with chunks of carved masonry and discarded colonnades to discover forgotten cave shrines and reliefs sculpted from giant boulders.

BADAMI

A thousand years before Vijayanagar reached its zenith, the Chalukya Dynasty carved a series of beautiful capitals from the rugged sandstone hills of northern Karnataka. Although far less well known than Hampi, the ruins of ancient Badami fully warrant the long journey north across one of the emptiest regions of the Deccan.

Ranging from rock-cut cave shrines to structural temples and forts, Badami's monuments are scattered across a gorge between two steep, rocky hills, divided by a large water tank. The cliffs provide an epic backdrop to the Bhuthanatha Temple, the town's poster piece, whose finely carved towers and pillars are reflected in the green waters at its feet.

BIJAPUR

The grandest Islamic buildings in the Deccan region are to be found in Bijapur, capital of the Adil Shahi Dynasty. Fuelled by its monopoly over the trade in Arabian horses through Goa, the sultanate became a major centre of commerce, education and culture between the 15th and 17th centuries.

The vast wealth bagged by the defeat of the Vijayanagar empire in 1565 financed an unparalleled building boom, in which the mighty Golgumbaz mausoleum was added to the city's skyline. It was followed by splendid Jama Masjid, widely regarded as one of India's finest mosques, and the graceful Ibrahim Rauza tomb, the high watermark of Deccani Muslim architecture.

Dozens more amazing monuments still stand in this old walled city, whose architectural legacy has earned for it the epithet "Agra of the South".





A lifetime of discoveries

George Michell & John Fritz

For aficionados of Indian monuments, architectural historian George Michell and his archaeologist partner, John Fritz, need no introduction. For the past forty years or so, the pair have been documenting ancient sites across the country, and writing about them in a series of landmark books. Their guide to Hampi (2004) is regarded as the definitive work on the Deccan's greatest ruined city, while George's Blue Guide to South India is the Bible for anyone exploring off-track regions such as Chettinad – the subject of his latest, lavishly illustrated coffee-table tome.

TransIndus caught up with the pair over lunch at a French bistro near their home in Covent Garden recently, and asked them for their top South India travel tips. It will come as no surprise to fans of their work that all the places they picked lie in Karnataka . . .

Hampi, Karnataka (John) | We've spent 22 years mapping every square metre of ground at India's greatest ruined city, which from the moment I first went there with George in 1980 resonated with a romantic view of archaeology I'd gained from reading books in my childhood. To date we've identified 35,000 features. One of my favourites is a sacred shrine on a ridgetop just northeast of the famous Elephant Stables in the Royal Enclosure. A flight of stone steps leads to ledge from where you get a spectacular view over the lush, irrigated valley below.

Mudgal, Karnataka (George) | This circular hilltop fort, overlooking a remote village three hours' drive south of Hampi, makes a delightful day trip. Its walls and bastions are remarkably well preserved and the surrounding landscape is magnificent. If it were in France, the monument would be a three-star site in the Michelin green guide, but in India is almost completely forgotten.

Taj Madikeri, Coorg, Karnataka (John) | We once led a tour along India's southwest coast, which veered inland to visit the little known enclave of Coorg. This Taj hotel, in the hills outside the region's main town, Madikeri, offered a perfect spot to unwind. Being a keen swimmer, I particularly loved its huge pool, which afforded far-reaching views over the surrounding coffee plantations.

Mahakui, near Badami, Karnataka (George) | Few travellers make it to Badami in northern Karnataka, and fewer still to nearby Mahakui, a tiny, forgotten pilgrimage spot featuring a spring-fed bathing tank and cluster of 6th and 7th century Hindu temples – a heavenly oasis that remains 'out of time' where worshipers can be anointed in the holy waters.

Kavale Durga, near Shimoga, Karnataka (George) | This is one of the most fantastic, romantic, unknown hillforts in southern India. You reach it via a winding path through the jungle and when you get to the top are rewarded with a beautiful 17th-century Nayak shrine featuring two slender lamp columns.

Bidar, Karnataka (George) | You have to travel a long way to reach it, but Bidar is the most spectacular medieval city surviving in India. The old streets retain many centuries-old facades, some with traditional wooden balconies. And, best of all, a resplendent fort whose highlight is a wonderful palace retaining some fine, original woodcarving.

Hasta Shilpa Heritage Museum, Manipal, Karnataka (George) | Brainchild of a retired banker named Vijayanath Shenoy, Hasta Shilpa comprises a vast collection of traditional houses, palaces and treasuries which have been painstakingly reconstructed and furnished in authentic style. They're laid out along a street. It really is an extraordinary collection. The highlights for me are the life-sized wooden folk deities, the horde of extravagantly framed and bejewelled Tanjore paintings, and the impressive exhibition of Ravi Varma prints.

Kanakagiri, Karnataka (George) | Every now and again in India, something utterly remarkable comes to light in a completely far-flung spot, which may once have been an important regional capital but is now the middle of nowhere. This was the case in Kanakagiri, where archaeologists recently uncovered a hitherto unknown Buddhist stupa complex, dating from 2,000 years ago. Among the remnants were 70 or 80 richly carved stone slabs, still crisp, dating from the Shunga period – one of the biggest finds of ancient art in Indian history, yet still completely unpublicized.



BENGALURU (BANGALORE)

Bangalore, renamed ‘Bengaluru’ in 2006, is the go-ahead, trend-setting capital of Karnataka state. As the home of India’s own Silicon Valley, the city has been at the forefront of the country’s IT revolution for the past two decades or more, and has a noticeably upbeat feel, with a high-rise skyline of glass-sided towers to match.

Traces of Bengaluru’s pre-colonial past include a scattering of splendid medieval temples, among them the 800-year-old Dharmarayaswamy near the centre. Known as the Garden City in British times, Bengaluru also has some pleasant parks where you can escape the traffic. Created in 1760 by Sultan Haider Ali and later enlarged by experts from Kew, the Mughal-inspired Lalbagh Botanical Gardens hosts regular flower shows in its giant glass house, modelled on London’s Crystal Palace.



MYSORE

Mysore, former capital of the Wadiyar Rajas, is far and away Karnataka’s most popular visitor destination. Unlike Bengaluru, the city seems to have been largely bypassed by the dotcom revolution and retains plenty of traditional charm, particularly in its markets, which serve as important centres for the trade in sandalwood, incense and hand-woven silk.

The stand-out sight here, though, is the Maharaja’s Palace – a lavish, fairytale confection in the quintessentially Raj-era Indo-Saracenic style. Clad in 18-carat gold, hundreds of Mughal-style domes and Rajasthani cupolas crown the complex, which is illuminated every Sunday with 100,000 electric bulbs. It was built in 1912 on the site of an old wooden palace and boasts sumptuous interiors, including the famous ‘Thousand Pillar Hall’.



KODAGU (COORG)

A hidden world of verdant hills, dense forest and spectacular waterfalls, the Kodagu region due west of Mysore – known in British times as ‘Coorg’ – is among the last truly unspoilt corners of south India. Wild elephant and tiger still roam the teak jungles and savannah grasslands of Nagarhole National Park, on its southern flank. Towns are few and far between. And the pace of life is a world away from the rat race of Bengaluru, which is why increasing numbers of screen-weary professionals from the city are travelling here to recharge their batteries these days.

A handful of exclusive hideaways, set on remote coffee and cardamom plantations high in the hills, provide luxurious bases for forest safaris, hill treks, birding trips and kayaking expeditions.



CHENNAI (MADRAS) AND MAMALLAPURAM

The capital of Tamil Nadu, Chennai is India’s fourth city – a fast-paced, traffic-filled metropolis of 4.7 million people. This strip of the Coromandel Coast first rose to prominence in 1640s, after the East India Company constructed Fort St George, the sloping-walled citadel where Robert Clive and his fellow company servants fended off repeated attacks from the French and the Sultans of Mysore.

A fascinating museum in the fort holds a selection of lithographic prints and other colonial memorabilia that vividly evoke the feel of the times, when new arrivals would have to brace themselves for an often inelegant transfer from their ship by native boat, pitched headlong by rolling breakers on to the beach. Nowadays, sleek five-star hotels such as the Art Deco-style Taj Vivanta and Leela Palace ensure a somewhat softer landing.

Thousands of years before the British first landed on the Coromandel Coast, merchants’ ships were setting sail from a city further south to ports as far afield as the Malacca Straits. Known as Mamallapuram (or ‘Mahabalipuram’), the town was praised by both Periplus and Ptolemy for its wealth and sophistication. Marco Polo enthused about the ‘Seven Great Pagodas’ that rose from its shore, a skyline hewn from solid granite by the Pallava Dynasty in the 7th century AD.

Numerous vestiges of this golden era survive amid the giant humpback boulders looming above the modern village. Ranging from shrines sculpted in the form of *rathas* (temple chariots), to *mandapas* (cave sanctuaries) and giant open-air reliefs, they include the world-famous Shore Temple.

As well as being filled with superb antiquities, Mamallapuram is also a great place to unwind. A string of small resort hotels facing the beach make the most of their breezy location under the palms, while local restaurants do a brisk trade in fresh lobster, tiger prawns and other fresh seafood.



PUDUCHERRY (PONDICHERRY)

Puducherry, also known as Pondicherry or Pondi, a half-day’s drive south of Mamallapuram, served as France’s principal stronghold on the Coromandel during the Carnatic Wars of the 17th century, and remained a colony until 1962. Typically French houses with louvred windows and colour-washed Neoclassical facades line the backstreets of the former Ville Blanche, and other echoes of the Gallic era abound, from the red képis worn by local policemen to the games of *pétanque* played on the palm-shaded seafront square.

There’s no better way to immerse yourself in the faded French ambience than by staying at one of Pondi’s delightful heritage hotels. As you’d expect, freshly baked croissants, fragrant coffee and *coq au vin* are also on the menus of local restaurants, several of which are run by French expats.



THANJAVUR (TANJORE)

The Kaveri (Cauvery) Delta of central Tamil Nadu was the heartland of the mighty Chola Dynasty, whose towering temples stand as south India’s defining monuments. One of the greatest of these giant shrines is Brihadeeswarar temple in the town of Thanjavur (Tanjore) – a soaring pyramid of granite, exquisitely constructed and embellished with inscriptions and carvings of deities which look almost as fresh today as they must have during the reign of Rajaraja I (985-1014AD), who commissioned them. Elsewhere in this bustling Tamil town, the impressive Durbar Hall of the Royal Palace Complex stands as a reminder of the glory days of the Nayak Kings of the 16th and 18th centuries, while in the same compound, the town’s Art Gallery holds an extraordinary collection of Chola bronzes.

CHETTINAD

Roughly midway between Trichy and Madurai, on a plain studded with granite boulder hills and groves of palmyra palms, lies the Chettinad region. This rural backwater is famous for its eccentric 19th- and 20th-century mansions, which were built by the Chettiars, a prosperous banking and mercantile community who made their fortunes during the time of the British Raj. The grand houses they built in their homeland reflected the Chettiars’ cosmopolitan lives. Think ‘English stately home’, with a dash of Loire château, crazy polychrome colour schemes and a riot of ornate Mughal domes and Rajasthani cupolas. Several landmark properties have been turned into luxurious heritage hotels where, in addition to an intimate experience of the region’s quirky architecture, guests may sample the region’s famously spicy, peppery cuisine.



TIRUCHIRAPPALLI (TRICHY)

Among the most memorable panoramas to be had in the south is the one from the terrace of Trichy’s Rock Fort, where an old stone temple dedicated to Vinayaka (Ganesh) crowns the top of the near-vertical sided granite outcrop. The view north extends over the Kaveri River to the vast Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple. Built on an island in the river, the shrine is that greatest of all those devoted to Vishnu in south India, and officially the largest functioning Hindu temple in the world. It is made up of seven concentric courtyards, encased by 4.5 miles (7km) of perimeter walls and crowned by spectacular gateway towers – the largest of them more than 230ft (70m) tall.



MADURAI

For sheer visual impact, no Hindu temple in South India can match the magnificence of the Meenakshi Sundareswarar in Madurai. The gigantic, multi-coloured *gopuram* towers of the ‘Fish-Eyed Goddess’ rise 151ft (46m) above the city’s streets, writhing in stucco figures of gods, saints, demons and mythical monsters. The great pyramids, however, are merely an overture to the wonders enclosed below, where a labyrinth of richly carved pillared halls, colonnaded walkways and interlocking courtyards host a never-ending round of rituals. Although now a sprawling modern city with a population of over one million, this atmospheric town, with its lively covered bazaars area and traditional *udipi* restaurants, remains one of the India’s undisputed highlights.

Places to Stay: Deccan & the South

Southern India holds an exceptionally wide choice of quality hotels. The following selection, which includes grand five-stars, hill resorts and

Hampi Boulders, Hampi

This quirky eco-lodge is located 4.5 miles (7km) upriver from the World Heritage archaeological site of Vijayanagar, near the village of Hampi. Its troglodyte cottages, made of local granite or carved into the riverside boulders of this sublime waterfront site, have their own distinctive style and are comfortably furnished throughout. The real attractions here though are the serene situation among the eroded rocks, rushes and reed beds of the Tungabhadra River, and a lovely swimming pool carved from natural rock.



The Serai, Chikmagalur

Minimalist modern architecture is notoriously hard to blend with a natural setting, but the architects of the Serai at Chikmagalur have triumphed. Set on a working coffee plantation, the property boasts seamless floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking an uncluttered vista of trees and distant hills. Water flows from an infinity pool through a central axis. Natural materials predominate. Each of the villas have their own private, stone-lined plunge pools. Meals can be enjoyed in a beautifully designed dining room, or outdoors on a terrace lit with lanterns strung from an old banyan tree.



heritage properties, will give an idea of the kind of options available. Discover lots more by having a chat with one of our South India experts.

Lalitha Mahal Palace, Mysore

The Maharaja of Mysore built this enormous whitewashed palace on a hill, overlooking the outskirts of the capital, to accommodate his most illustrious guest: the British Viceroy. It’s fronted by a grand, double-storeyed façade of Corinthian columns surmounted by a central dome said to have been inspired by St Paul’s Cathedral in London. The interiors are no less opulent, with lashings of ornamental plasterwork and chintzy furnishings. Everything’s beautifully kept and full of period atmosphere, down to the huge oval pool in the rear garden.



The Gateway Hotel Pasumalai, Madurai

Madurai’s long-established hotel benefits from an unrivalled location on its own exclusive hilltop surveying the city. Its centrepiece is a gracious colonial-era mansion that once belonged to a British textile mill manager. The rooms are large, with bay windows, wooden floorboards and verandahs looking across 62 acres of landscaped gardens to what must rank among the most distinctive skylines in Asia, dominated by the gopuram towers of the Meenakshi temple. Peacocks, monkeys and mongooses regularly appear on the lawn, and there’s a pleasant outdoor pool.



Visalam, Karaikudi (Chettinad)



The wonderful CGH chain have created another exquisite heritage hotel in the Chettinad region of Tamil Nadu, just north of Madurai. Centred on a colonnaded courtyard, the old merchant’s mansion itself has been painstakingly restored in earthy, understated style. But the architecture is only part of the experience. Take a stroll through the local market to watch weavers, stone carvers and jewellers at work. Visit ancient temples, clan shrines and antique shops in the town, or learn the secrets of the region’s famously spicy cuisine on a three-day cookery course. In short, *Visalam* provides an atmospheric retreat deep in a traditional, rural heartland of the far south.

Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad



Floating on a hilltop above the city like an acropolis, the Falaknuma Palace was the residence of the sixth Nizam of Hyerabad, in his day the richest man in the world. No expense was spared in the construction of his former seat, and none in its refurbishment by Taj Group. You arrive in an open carriage, and proceed up sweeping marble staircases surveyed by alabaster nymphs and Greek urns through vast banquet and Durbar halls decorated in lavish Louis XV style, with glittering Venetian chandeliers and acres of priceless Chinoiserie, gilt and silk brocade. The guest rooms are more understated, and but no less beautifully furnished and have palatial bathrooms.



Orange County, Coorg

The scent of cardamom and coffee blossom pervades the beautiful Orange County Resort, in the uplands of Coorg (Kodavu). Its location, on a 300-acre working plantation close to the Kaveri River, is inspirational, with the wildlife-rich forests of the Dubare Reserve literally on your doorstep. Accommodation comes in spacious planters'-style cottages or more swish private pool villas. Coorgi architectural styles predominate throughout: the interiors are all honey-toned woods, warm terracotta floors and open fireplaces, with deep verandahs smothered in glossy banana leaves. If you can tear yourself away from the fabulous infinity pool, join a guided forest trek or coracle ride on the river.



Ideal River View, Thanjavur (Tanjore)

After a day touring the Chola wonders of Thanjavur and Trichy in the sweltering Tamil heat, you need a cool, calm, relaxing haven to retire to, and this modern hotel on the outskirts of town is just that. Located beside the River Kaveri, it is set in lush lawned gardens dotted with palms. The rooms are huge, with balconies front and back, and so is the pool, which for once is large enough for a proper swim. The food served in the multi-cuisine restaurant gets rave reviews, as do the smiling staff.



Kurumba Village, Hillgrove, near Coonoor

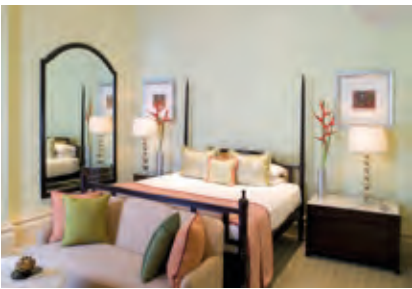


Kurumba Village is one of a new breed of hill resorts in India, providing havens for screen-weary professionals from the city, and foreigners wishing to experience the unique atmosphere of the high Nilgiris without the hustle and bustle of Ooty. Accommodation comes in tribal-inspired, pyramidal thatched cottages with areca-wood-railed balconies and huge picture windows framing expansive valley views. Though light and airy, they're completely private and romantic. Guided walks in the woods and to nearby viewpoints tend to occupy the days, and there's a delightful overflow pool to lounge in during the midday heat.



Taj West End, Bengaluru

One of India's smartest hotels, the Taj West End manages to achieve the perfect balance between old-world elegance and 21st-century luxury. It's housed in a colonial-era mansion, enfolded by wonderful grounds famous for its flowering trees and palms. Reclined on a wicker chair on your own private verandah, you'll find it hard to believe you're only 2.5 miles (4km) from its heart of one of India's busiest cities: a Carnatic flute player serenades guests at breakfast time, and monkeys and birds climb through the branches of 150-year-old rain tree that's grown here since the building was a homey guest house called 'Mrs Bronson's West End'.



Palais de Mahé, Puducherry (Pondicherry)



Palais de Mahé is the pick of the crop of heritage properties in this former French colony. Situated a stone's throw from the seafront in the thick of the old quarter, this elegant, double-storeyed mansion sports a distinctive yellow-ochre and white colour scheme. Its rooms are huge, with high ceilings, dark-wood furniture and doors that open on to a deep, stone-floored terrace overlooking the courtyard pool. Everything is beautifully finished and refined, and the location perfect.

Vivanta by Taj - Connemara, Chennai



Chennai's only proper heritage hotel is a mid-19th-century palace, formerly belonging to the Nawabs of Wallajah. It's had a few facelifts in its time - most notably one in the 1930s when the interiors were upgraded in sumptuous Art Deco style - but the place today looks and feels every inch an international five star. Some of the rooms on the ground floor open directly on to the secluded courtyard pool, swathed in tropical greenery - a perfect haven from the brouhaha of the nearby shopping district (Chennai's Spencer Plaza mall is only a short walk away).

Travel in the Deccan and South

Thanks to British Airways' direct services to Hyderabad, Chennai and Bengaluru, getting to the south of India from the UK has never been easier. Once there, we recommend travel by chauffeur-driven car, with a domestic flight or two where convenient to cut down on long hauls overland. Road surfaces in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have improved greatly over recent years and now make for generally comfortable journeys, even on the tortuous, rain-prone 'Ghat roads' of the mountains.

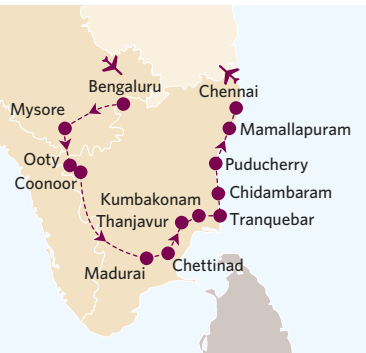
The one train journey we urge clients to experience in the south is the trip from Coimbatore on the famous, British-built Nilgiri Mountain Railway, which lumbers through forest and tea estates of western Tamil Nadu to the 'Queen of Hill Stations', Ootacamund, or 'Ooty' as it was known in the days of the Raj. En route, pause for a night or two at the ramshackle plantation and bazaar town of Coonoor.

When to Go

South India has two monsoons. The first starts in late May or early June and peters out in September. The second - so-called 'northwest' or 'retreating' - monsoon is lighter and affects the region in October and November. This explains why the prime season for visitors is quite short, lasting from December until April, when the skies are dependably blue and the weather not too hot and sticky. Up in the hills along the Kerala border, night-time temperatures from December through March can fall low enough to require a blanket, and even a hot water bottle!

Itineraries

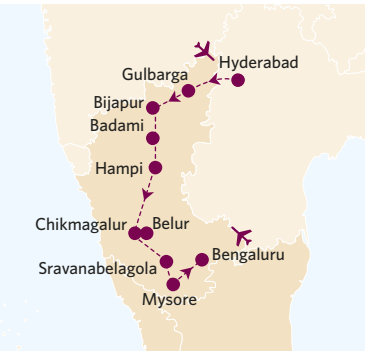
The astounding variety of sights in South India allows from some of Asia's most compelling, diverse routes. Here are three of the best.



TEMPLES AND TRADERS OF TAMIL NADU

Dominated by colonial trading centres and the great Chola temples of Tamil Nadu, this culturally rich tour takes you through a succession of interesting towns and winds up with a relaxing spell on the beach.

- Day 1** Fly into **Bengaluru (Bangalore)** on an overnight service from UK.
- Day 2** Arrive early morning, drive to **Mysore**; stay two nights.
- Day 3** Sightseeing in Srirangapatnam and Mysore.
- Day 4** Drive to **Ooty**; stay overnight. Visit the Botanical Gardens in the afternoon.
- Day 5** Enjoy a ride on the Nilgiri Mountain Railway to **Coonoor**; drive on to **Madurai** for two nights.
- Day 6** Visit the Meenakshi temple this morning, a World Heritage Site.
- Day 7** Drive to **Chettinad**, stay two nights.
- Day 8** Explore this fascinating region; visit local temples and merchant homes.
- Day 9** Drive north to **Thanjavur** to see the impressive Brihadeshwara temple; stay one night.
- Day 10** Drive to **Tranquebar** visiting the **Kumbakonam** temples en route, stay two nights.
- Day 11** Explore this former Danish colony on foot.
- Day 12** Drive up the coast to **Puducherry (Pondicherry)** via **Chidambaram**; stay two nights.
- Day 13** Walking tour of the French quarters; visit Auroville.
- Day 14** Drive to **Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram)** to see the ancient Shore Temple and other monuments; stay two nights.
- Day 15** Day at leisure (or sightseeing in **Chennai**).
- Day 16** Take an early morning flight back to UK arriving back the same day.



THE DECCAN PLATEAU

This fortnight-long tour cherry picks the highlights of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, including world-class heritage and archaeological sites seen by few foreign visitors.

- Day 1** Fly to **Hyderabad** on an overnight service from UK.
- Day 2** Arrive early morning; stay two nights. Afternoon visit the Salar Jung Museum.
- Day 3** Full day sightseeing of the city and Golconda Fort & Tombs.
- Day 4** Drive to **Bidar** to see the ruins of the once mighty Bahmani Kingdom and then on to **Gulbarga** for an overnight stay.
- Day 5** Drive to **Bijapur** ('Agra of the South') for one night to see the impressive Gol Gumbaz and other superb Islamic monuments.
- Day 6** Travel south to the village of **Badami**; stay two nights. Visit ancient cave temples.
- Day 7** Visit the Chalukyan archaeological sites of **Aihole** and **Pattadakal**.
- Day 8** Drive to the ruined Imperial city of Vijayanagar at **Hampi**, beside the Tungabhadra River; stay three nights.
- Day 9 & 10** Sightseeing in Hampi.
- Day 11** Drive to the plantation town of **Chikmagalur**, stay two nights.
- Day 12** Visit the Hoysala dynasty temples of **Belur** and **Halebid**.
- Day 13** Drive via the Jain colossus of **Sravanabelagola** to **Mysore** for a two-night stay.
- Day 14** Sightseeing in Tipu Sultan's former capital Srirangapatnam, & Mysore.
- Day 15** Drive to **Bengaluru (Bangalore)**, for a short overnight stay.
- Day 16** Take an early morning flight back to UK arriving the same day.



EXPLORING THE WESTERN GHATS

Follow this winding route through the lush mountains of south India, with their coffee and tea plantations and spectacular views, with a foray across the Tamil plains to finish.

- Day 1** Fly to **Bengaluru (Bangalore)**.
- Day 2** Arrive and transfer to a hotel for an overnight stay; afternoon at leisure.
- Day 3** Short flight to **Coimbatore**; ascend the Nilgiri hills to **Coonoor**; stay two nights.
- Day 4** Scenic walks and local sightseeing.
- Day 5** Take the toy train to **Udhagamandalam (Ooty)**, and onward drive into the plantation district of **Wayanad**, stay two nights.
- Day 6** Visit the **Edakkal Caves**, coffee plantations, relax.
- Day 7** Drive to **Nagarhole National Park**; stay three nights.
- Day 8 & 9** Explore the park by jeep safari and boat rides.
- Day 10** Drive to **Kodagu (Coorg)**; stay two nights.
- Day 11** Local sightseeing.
- Day 12** Drive to **Mysore**; stay two nights.
- Day 13** Sightseeing in **Srirangapatnam** and Mysore.
- Day 14** Express train to **Chennai (Madras)**; transfer to **Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram)** for two nights.
- Day 15** At leisure.
- Day 16** Take an early morning flight back to UK, arriving the same day.





Food in India

So many and such varied cuisines have evolved in the subcontinent over the centuries that it's almost impossible to generalise about food in India. The one thing that can be said with certainty is that for anyone accustomed to the kind of dishes served in British curry houses, the sophisticated, multilayered flavours of authentic Indian cooking can come as a revelation.

Discovering regional specialities is one of the great joys of travelling around the country. In Delhi, Turko-Persian influence is very much to the fore. Refined in the courts of the Mughal emperors, Mughlai cuisine tends to be as complex and elegant as Indo-Islamic architecture. Mutton, lamb and chicken – ground into kebabs with subtle blends of spices, served in creamy sauces made with powdered cashews, almonds and dried fruit, or flash-baked in a traditional clay tandoori oven – are the mainstay, along with aubergines, okra (lady's fingers) and more-ish dals made using a variety of different pulses. To mop these delicious concoctions from the plate, piping hot nan breads or thinner rotis or chapatti are never far away.

After a selection of milk sweets or rice-based desserts flavoured with sugar cane and saffron, a paan is the usual digestive. An arcane blend of condiments and nuts folded into a betel leaf with a delicate wrap of silver leaf, this explosion of pungent, exotic flavours is like imbibing the intensity of India in a single mouthful.

Down south, rice forms the basis of most meals. In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, it is traditionally served on a waxy green banana

leaf, along with a dozen or more preparations, each based on a different vegetable, meat or fish, and distinctive blend of spices. In addition to cumin, coriander and turmeric, fresh curry leaves, cardamom and the sour overtones of tamarind supply the signature tastes.

Certain regional styles are popular nationwide. Hyderabad and Lucknow are both famous for their elaborate, Persian-inspired dishes, such as biryanis, keemas and pulaos, while the Bengalis are known for their river fish, served in mustard-rich sauces. In Kerala, the backwaters provide tasty fish such as karimeen (pearlspot), and duck is popular among the region's Syrian Christians. Seafood lovers will also find plenty to get excited about in Konkani restaurants, specialising in the cuisine of the southwest coast, where tiger prawns, crabs and succulent kingfish or pomfret are prepared in fiery red sauces made with coconut milk and sour kokum.

Wherever you travel, rest assured that the hotels chosen by TransIndus all serve the finest local cuisine – and plenty of Continental options for those times when you've had your fill of spicy dishes.





Kerala

Since the time of ancient Greece, Europeans have been seduced by the fecundity, vibrancy and cultural sophistication of India's far southwest - an intensely tropical region known to outsiders as the 'Malabar', and to its inhabitants as simply 'Kerala' - 'Land of the Chera Kings'. Black pepper was the reason foreigners originally came here. Now it's Kerala's dreamy beaches, serene backwater lagoons, forested mountains and abundant wildlife that are the prime incentives, along with the chance to experience one of the oldest and most traditional cultures in Asia.



Highlights of Kerala

Cochin | A cultural melting pot for more than five centuries, Cochin served as the hub of India's spice trade and retains the largest crop of early colonial buildings in Asia, many of them converted into hotels.

Ayurveda spas | Try fragrant oil massages, steam baths, herbal decoctions or other more arcane Ayurvedic treatments in one of the many designer spas attached to luxury hotels and eco retreats.

Houseboat cruises & the backwaters | Glide through the canals and lagoons of the Kuttanad backwaters region in a *kettu vallam* - rice barge made of oiled jackwood and canopies of plaited palm leaves.

Beaches | Some of Kerala's loveliest hotels and guest houses nestle in the palm groves behind the state's beaches. Watch fishermen in the evening as they prepare their boats for the night's trip out into the waters.

Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary | Wild elephants and other large mammals graze in healthy numbers amid teak forest and bamboo groves in this popular park, whose focal point is a convoluted reservoir in the centre.

Ritual theatre | The outlandish costume of the Kathakali hero has become emblematic of the state, but the form is only one among many elaborate types of ritual theatre that can be experienced in the region..

Munnar | Watch teams of tea pluckers at work against a magnificent backdrop of rolling hills and pale-grey peaks. Trekking routes to the high ground offer adventurous escapes from the valley floor.

Wayanad | Stays in remote coffee, tea and spice plantations is a great way to experience the beauty of this plateau in the mountains of northern Kerala and to encounter elephants and bison in the wildlife sanctuaries.

Travel Information

Time zone: UTC+5.30 hours
Flying time: 8.30 hours
Currency: Indian rupee
Capital: New Delhi

When to go

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature °C	27	28	28	30	29	27	26	27	27	27	28	18
Rainfall mm	32	24	40	100	270	615	516	330	283	422	135	40
Best to travel	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●

●● The best time to travel ● A good time to travel ● Low season

Be inspired

For help planning your perfect holiday, contact us at the Old Fire Station, Ealing, London.
Tel: **020 8566 3739**
Web: **www.transindus.com**



FORT COCHIN For centuries the hub of India’s spice and tea trade, Fort Cochin occupies the northern tip of a peninsula dividing the mouth of the Vembanad Lake from the Arabian Sea. Its low-rise, red-tiled skyline bears the imprint of its former colonial residents: Lusitanian chapels, Jewish synagogues, Dutch burghers’ houses, Armenian mansions, and British bungalows and godowns (warehouses) all survive in the Fort’s grid of narrow lanes – the largest collection of early colonial buildings in Asia.

Visitors can savour the atmosphere of bygone eras by staying in one of the beautiful heritage hotels that have opened around the waterfront. Watch the container ships, oil tankers and local fishing boats chug past the famous Chinese fishing nets over a gin-and-tonic on your own verandah, then dine on spicy Keralan coastal cuisine in some of South India’s finest restaurants.

The mountains of inland Kerala, which run the entire length of the state, are one of the world’s biodiversity hotspots. Tea, coffee and spice plantations dominate many areas, but abundant forest also survives, and the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary encompasses one of the most easily accessible of these. Centred on a flooded valley system, the park is among the largest in India, famous first and foremost for its herds of wild elephant, which can routinely be spotted from the water. A fleet of boats set out on safaris at dawn, but visitors can increase their chances of sightings by opting for less intrusive rafting trips, or treks on foot through the forest to remote viewing platforms.



MUNNAR Munnar, in east-central Kerala, is the epicentre of the state’s tea industry. Plantations of neatly manicured bushes cloak the slopes soaring above this ramshackle town, overshadowed by south India’s highest peaks. Visits to tea gardens are popular day trips, and the more energetic may trek to the high, grassy ridges overlooking the valley for a glimpse of a Nilgiri tahr, a rare mountain goat endemic to this area.



WAYANAD Encircled by seven mountains, Wayanad, in northern Kerala, boasts some of southern India’s most superb upland scenery, and a climate that’s ideal for the cultivation of tea, coffee and spices. Plantation stays in the outlying forests provide the perfect springboard for safaris to the region’s pair of wildlife sanctuaries – Muthanga and Tholpetty – where encounters with herds of wild elephant and Indian bison are virtually assured.



Houseboats and the Keralan Backwaters

Up until the 1980s, large barges made of oiled jackwood and canopies of plaited palm leaves were used throughout the Kuttanad region of Kerala to transport rice and other produce through the backwaters. Now, trucks do the haulage work, but the boats – known as kettu vallam in Malayali – have been put to more lucrative uses, taking visitors on cruises around the canals, rivers and lagoons of this fascinating region, where most of the population still live in island villages.

A far cry from the oily craft of old, kettu vallam are today fitted with comfortable en-suite bathrooms, air-con bedrooms, galleys, and viewing decks from which you can watch the watery world slip past. Four-course meals are served by uniformed staff.

One thing that changes little over time, however, is everyday life in the backwaters. Villagers still bathe and wash their clothes from steps on the riverbanks, and travel around in canoes. Floating duck farms with thousands of birds being herded by a man paddling a dugout are a common sight, as are locals fishing by torch light for crab, karimeen and the other backwater delicacies that make Kuttinadi cuisine one of the most varied and succulent in India.



VEMBANAD LAKE AND KUMARAKOM Between Cochin and the town of Alappuzha (Alleppey) on the low-lying coastal strip of central Kerala stretches a vast, shimmering saltwater lagoon known as Vembanad Lake. As well as being a prime fishing ground for inhabitants of the surrounding backwaters, the 77-sq-mile (200-sq-km) body of water is also an important nesting site for migratory wetland birds, for whom a sanctuary has been set aside at Kumarakom. Species such as the darter, white-breasted water hen and pelicans are commonly sighted between November and March, when the glassy surface of the lake is speckled with dozens of stately houseboats cruising between the resorts located in the area.



THALASSERY (TELLICHERRY) Although something of a provincial backwater today, Thalassery was a major trade hub in the early colonial era, when it was better known as ‘Tellicherry’. The British gained a firm foothold here in the late 17th century, constructing a huge square fort on the bluff overlooking the beach. Approached via a gabled gateway sporting figures of European gentlemen in Elizabethan dress, St Joseph’s Fort remains amazingly well preserved and provides a fine vantage point over the town and coastline. Nearby, the wonderful *Ayisha Manzil* homestay (see p78) is reason enough to travel this far north in Kerala. Hosts, the Moosas, arrange popular cookery courses and tours of local sights, such as the fish market and deserted coves in the area. This is also a good base from which to make forays inland in search of Kerala’s arcane ritual theatre forms, including *theyyam* – a spectacular masked dance tradition performed at local temples.



Ayurveda, yoga & spa retreats

India’s traditional system of medicine – Ayurveda – draws on the healing power of plants to restore balance in the mind and body. Its treatments have evolved over thousands of years and remain popular throughout the country, particularly for chronic conditions with which conventional Western medicine has little success.

In recent decades, Ayurveda has also experienced a new lease of life as a rejuvenation therapy: treatments such as full-body massage, steam baths and herbal decoctions are used to promote deep relaxation and a sense of well-being. Most high-end hotels in India these days have special spa wings attached to them where you can pamper yourself with a range of Ayurvedic therapies, along with the usual skin treatments, reflexology, hydrotherapy, aromatherapy and meditation.

Simple, un strenuous forms of yoga are also practised alongside Ayurveda treatments to encourage the body’s natural healing potential. Most hotels today offer early morning yoga sessions to guests, often al fresco in dreamy yoga shalas, or covered platforms open to the breezes and views. There’s no better way to greet the new day in India than a cycle of surya namaskar – literally ‘salute to the sun’ – one of the most perfect all-over body workouts ever devised.

Wildflower Hall, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh | Looking across the deodar cedar forest to the snow-capped Himalayas, the spa at Oberoi’s Wildflower Hall outside Shimla has a Jacuzzi with a view to die for.

Ananda in the Himalayas, Rishikesh, Uttarakhand | Ayurveda, yoga and meditation feature prominently on the menu of therapies offered at this award-winning spa resort in the lap of the Himalayas.

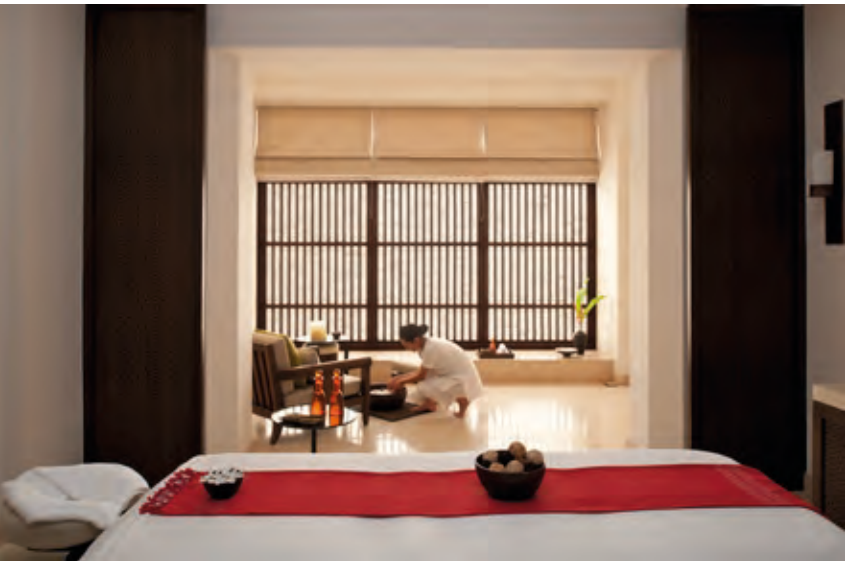
Kaya Kalp – the Royal Spa, Agra, Uttar Pradesh | Voted “the world’s best spa” by Tatler magazine, this Mughal-inspired place is staggeringly opulent – a scene fit for Scheherazade.

Sereno Spa, Park Hyatt, Goa | Sea-facing pavilions are a feature of the spa voted by Condé Nast readers as the “World’s Number One”. An indulgent range of Ayurveda massages and skin and body treatments are offered.

Coconut Lagoon Spa, Kumarakom, Kerala | Gaze over the glassy expanse of Vembanand Lake as expert masseurs soothe away your travel aches and pains with baths of fine Ayurvedic oils. The spa centre here is open to the breezes off the water; delightful butterflies flit through at regular intervals.

Swaswara, Om Beach, Gokarna, Karnataka | Only an unsurfaced track leads to this idyllic hideaway on sun-drenched Om Beach – a sacred cove near the pilgrimage town of Gokarna. The emphasis here is on seclusion and wellness. The high quality Ayurveda treatments, yoga and meditation classes are complemented by superb tropical scenery.

Ila Spa, RAAS Devigarh, Udaipur, Rajasthan | With its signature blend of Rajput panache and cutting-edge cool, RAAS Devigarh is among India’s most stylish hotels. Ila Spa offers exotic, special treatments and a Healthy Food Menu.



Places to Stay: Kerala

Boutique homestays on spice plantations, luxury houseboats, guest wings in ancestral mansions in the backwaters, and tropical beachside hideaways made from antique farmsteads – Kerala has reinvented upscale accommodation in India. The choice and quality are superb across the length and breadth of the state. Most of our favourite

Brunton Boatyard, Fort Cochin



to beat the mid-afternoon heat. And there's a gourmet restaurant specializing in seafood whose terrace looks across water to Vypeen Island.

Dominating Fort Cochin's iconic waterfront with its arcaded galleries and red-tiled roofs, CGH Earth's Brunton perfectly captures the grandiloquence of the late-colonial era, when the port served as the headquarters of South India's leading tea and spice exporters. The rooms are all furnished in-period and most face the sea (ships literally chug past your window and the Chinese fishing nets are just a stroll away). A breezy harbour-side pool, with palm-shaded terrace, is the perfect place

Malabar House Hotel, Fort Cochin

This exquisite boutique hotel in the heart of Fort Cochin's heritage district juxtaposes old South Indian style with modern designer elegance – to stunning effect. Keralan antiques, modern art pieces and luminous Indian textiles decorate the rooms, which open on to a stone-lined courtyard where sunlight sparkles off a gorgeous little pool. The restaurant, serving fusion food to match the decor, is among the city's finest.



Philip Kutty's, Vembanad Lake

Philip Kutty's farmstay is literally a world apart from the rest of the state. Occupying its own tropical islet in the backwaters, the property can only be reached by boat. Anu and her family's warm hospitality define the experience from the moment you step ashore and are shown to your pretty, Keralan-style waterfront villa, which opens to spacious, cool, airy, open-plan interiors. After a tour of the exotic crops grown on the estate (vanilla, banana, cocoa, pepper, nutmeg and other spices) there's not much to do beyond observing backwater life drift past from the comfort of your verandah – and look forward to the wonderful meals served at a large round table in the communal dining hall.



Aanavilasam, Periyar

Getting lost in the jungle was never so stylish and enjoyable as here at Aanavilasam, a boutique plantation stay set on a 7-acre working estate in the Western Ghat mountains. Only a short drive from the famous Periyar National Park, it's well placed for wildlife trips, though tearing yourself away from the gorgeous rooms, with their suave colour schemes and striking black-and-white art prints on the walls, isn't easy. Opt for a suite and you can relax in your own private garden tub, savouring the racket from the tree frogs and birds singing in the curtain of foliage that enfolds the property.

Tranquil, Sultan Battery



Soak up the distinctive tropical atmosphere of the Wayanad region at Tranquil, a high-end plantation stay overlooking a carpet of treetops, where cardamom and vanilla are cultivated alongside coffee and other crops. Victor Dey and his family are gracious hosts, offering old-school hospitality in a large, immaculate, colonial-style planter's bungalow set in 400 rambling acres, with its own pool and manicured grounds. Mornings are spent on wildlife safaris in the nearby reserves, spotting wild elephants and bison. Supper is a semi-formal, sociable affair at the bungalow.



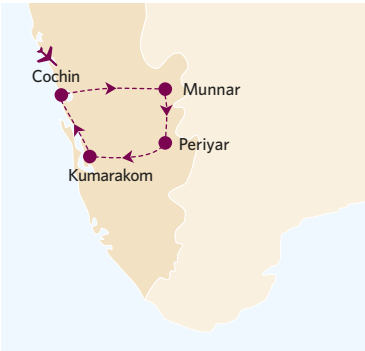
Ayisha Manzil, Thalassery

This is a gem of a heritage homestay. Built by a British official in the 1860s, the colonial-era mansion crowns a wooded hilltop on the outskirts of Thalassery town in northern Kerala, close to where the East India Company established its first cinnamon plantation. With its original wood floors, high-beamed ceilings, family heirlooms and antique four-posters, the house's interior feel like stepping into a bygone era. The temple-style pool is equally delightful, but it's the hospitality of hosts, the Moosas, that makes this place really special.



Travel in Kerala

Apart from an interlude on a houseboat, nearly all your travel in Kerala will be conducted in a private, air-conditioned saloon car with driver. The only time you're likely to want to catch a train is if you're travelling from Cochin or Trivandrum in the south to towns such as Thalassery or Neeleshwar in the far north, in which case tickets may be booked as part of your tour. The roads, though congested on the main state highways, are generally in excellent condition, even up in the mountains. Down at sea level you'll be glad of the air-conditioning all our vehicles come with.



CLASSIC KERALA

Our Classic Kerala itinerary offers the perfect first taste of this exotic, tropical region in the far south.

- Day 1** Fly to Cochin via the Middle East.
- Day 2** Arrive in **Cochin**; stay two nights, evening Kathakali dance performance.
- Day 3** Explore the old port town on foot and by auto rickshaw; evening harbour cruise.
- Day 4** Travel up the Western Ghats to the tea growing region of **Munnar**; stay two nights.
- Day 5** Visit a local tea factory and the Tea Museum.
- Day 6** Drive to **Periyar National Park**; stay two nights.
- Day 7** Full day of activities inside the park: walking, bamboo rafting, cruise on Lake Periyar.
- Day 8** Head to the picturesque backwaters near **Kumarakom**; stay two nights.
- Day 9** Experience life on the myriad waterways unique to this area.
- Day 10** Travel back to Cochin for flight to UK via the Middle East.



COASTAL KERALA

This extended tour covers the highlights of coastal Kerala, from south to north, with a foray into the fragrant Cardamom Hills, whose tea plantations and cool weather provide a welcome counterpoint to the tropical heat of the lower elevations, and a welcome wind down on the beach at the end.

- Day 1** Fly to **Trivandrum** via the Middle East.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning; stay two nights.
- Day 3** Visit the local sights and the Padmanabhapuram Palace.
- Day 4** Drive northwards to **Periyar National Park**; stay two nights.
- Day 5** Full day of activities inside the park: walking, bamboo rafting, cruise on Lake Periyar.
- Day 6** Drive through the Western Ghats to tea country in **Munnar**; stay two nights.
- Day 7** Visit a local tea factory and the Tea Museum.
- Day 8** Journey to the picturesque backwaters near **Kumarakom**; stay two nights.
- Day 9** Experience life on the myriad waterways unique to this area.
- Day 10** Drive to **Cochin** and explore this colonial town on foot; stay overnight.
- Day 11** Take an express train to **Thalassery**; a colonial town in northern Kerala; stay two nights.
- Day 12** Visit local sights and enjoy spicy Malabari cuisine.
- Day 13** Drive to **Nileschwaram** for two nights; relax on the tranquil beach.
- Day 14** At leisure.
- Day 15** Drive north to **Mangaluru (Mangalore)** airport, for a short flight to **Bengaluru (Bangalore)**; stay overnight
- Day 16** Travel back to UK on an indirect service via the Middle East.



When to Go

The early part of Kerala's tourist season falls in October, over the tail end of the so-called 'Northwest Monsoon', when rainy interludes are frequent but rarely long lasting. By December, the skies are blue and clear and humidity levels low, while the nights are cool enough to sleep without the air-con. The heat starts to build again in late March, peaking in late May, while the famous Thrissur Puram festival is full swing and ahead of the Southwest Monsoon's spectacular arrival in early June. Its first, cataclysmic storms herald the start of four months of torrential downpours.

Itineraries

These suggested tried-and-tested itineraries show what can comfortably be seen over a 10- or 16-night trip. They may easily be shortened or extended, or completely re-worked – whatever works best for you. Consult one of our India specialists for further advice.





Beaches of India

At some point, most travellers touring India look forward to a well-earned break on a palm-backed beach, and there are plenty to choose from. Beautiful resort and boutique hotels have appeared in even the most remote corners of coastal India these days, providing comfortable bases from which to enjoy the surf and tropical weather. This is somewhere it really pays to pick your spot and seek our consultant’s advice. They can help you pinpoint the ideal size, style and location of resort and book it for you.

Goa | The former Portuguese colony on India’s Konkan Coast, in the southwest, is where beach tourism first took root in India in the 1970s. Today the sands and wild coves beloved of backpackers have changed beyond recognition with a wide ranging array of clean and simple hotels to large, elegant, super resorts dotted all along the Konkan coast.

Kerala | Kerala’s tropical coastline offers a fabulously exotic backdrop for beach breaks with plenty of local character. Stroll along it around 4pm and you’ll rub shoulders with fishermen from the nearby village as they prepare their boats for the night’s trip out into the waves. Kovalam, close to the capital Trivandrum, is one of the most popular; Varkala, a seaside temple town sits atop huge red cliffs; Marari on the outskirts of Cochin holds rank for its ultra-luxurious, five-star resorts while Bekal in the north makes an ideal spot to rest for trekkers in the northern hills of Kerala.

Tamil Nadu | The Coromandel coast overlooks the Bay of Bengal and provides a unique opportunity to stay at some of the quietest, least populated beaches in India. A stone’s throw from the ancient shore temples of Mahabalipuram and tiny fishing villages, the beach at Covelong is among the most popular. Walk along the coast and you will come across young children studying in their classrooms, fishermen and women busy at work.

The Andaman Islands | A two-hour flight east of Chennai or Kolkata, across the Bay of Bengal, the Andaman Islands is a remote, tropical archipelago off the coast of southern Myanmar which the British used as a penal colony until 1947. Covered in pristine forest and ringed by coral reefs, its islands are mostly wild, inhabited by Tamil settlers and tribes of aboriginal hunter-gathers, some of whom live in complete isolation from the wider world.

Some of our favourite resorts in these locations are:

Leela Beach Resort, Kovalam | The quintessential beach resort where each room overlooks the Arabian Sea and the beach below. A luxury five-star property that offers a private club wing for those who crave a little more privacy.

The Travancore Heritage, Chowara, Kovalam | A 150-year-old mansion recently converted and expanded to a beautiful beach resort. The resort offers independent thatched cottages set amidst manicured lawns or beachfront rooms with balconies overlooking the sea.

Niraamaya, near Kovalam | An ultra-chic boutique resort overlooking a pair of golden-sand coves. Pounding surf and shimmering palm leaves are the only sounds you’re likely to hear ensconced in your exquisitely styled Kerala-style cottage.

Marari Beach Resort, Mararikulam | Extensive Kerala-style complex located behind a shimmering expanse of white sand, close to Alappuzha and the backwaters. Visitors love the hotel’s huge central pool and spacious pool villas, which have their own private Jacuzzis and ‘open-to-sky’ bathrooms.

Beach Symphony, Mararikulam | A small privately owned property right on the beach with just 4 rooms that provides a real Kerala experience. The resident hosts ensure guests experience is second to none with complete privacy and personal service.

El Oceano Beach Villas, Mararikulam | A beachfront resort with a strong ethos of Ayurveda offers accommodation in Kerala Heritage style rooms situated on a small private beach. Each of the 12 rooms incorporates architectural elements of traditional Kerala granaries that have been judiciously relocated to create this beautiful resort.

Neeleshwar Hermitage, Neeleshwaram, Bekal | A hot contender for the loveliest beachside resort in south India. Located on a gloriously unspoilt stretch of coast, its traditional gabled Malabari cottages are dotted around the palms and lawns, with a pool right next to the sands. Many of our clients wind up here at the end of a tour, and wish they could stay longer.

Kannan Beach | A small private traditional style property in the north of Kerala is located just 3 km from the nearby backwaters of Kottappuram. The resort allows visitors to relax at the beach and experience Kerala’s backwaters on a day cruise.

Leela Beach Resort, South Goa | A rank contender for India’s best run and smartest beach resort, this property provides everything a visitor expects from an exclusive beach including a spa, choice of restaurants, several pools, a state-of-the-art spa and its own, private 18 hole golf course.

Taj Exotica, Benaulim, Goa | This large five-star resort sprawls over the breezy dunes and palm groves on the edge of a Goan Catholic fishing village. A particularly good option for young families.

Alila Diwa Majorda, Goa | Alila Diwa Goa brings a refreshingly unique resort experience to Majorda. A sanctuary of contemporary elegance inspired by traditional Goan design – steeply pitched roofs, ceiling high columns, cool verandas and tranquil courtyards, setting it apart from other luxury hotels in Goa.

Ahilya by the Sea, Panjim, Goa | The former home of the Ahilya Royal family, this tiny, five-bed property clings to the coastline just north of Panjim. An exclusive boutique style retreat for those who want to relax in luxury while also exploring the cultural heritage of the Portuguese territory.

Casa Boutique hotels, Goa | A section of three-star properties dotted around Goa rank high among the value for money options in Goa. Each offers access to the beach, pool, a choice of dinning, all with modern, comfortable en-suite rooms.

Fisherman’s Cove, Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu | A sprawling five-star beachfront immaculately maintained and run the Taj Group of hotels. An excellent base for visiting Chennai or the Shore temples at Mahabalipuram the resort offers private cottages along the beachfront for those seeking quiet privacy. and a more modern wing close to the pool and restaurants for those who enjoy a lively atmosphere.

Ideal Beach Resort, Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu | Family-owned resort hotel close to the world-famous Shore Temple. The rooms are in lovely, double-storey villas – one on the ground floor and one above. They’re spacious and cool, and there’s a large heated pool to relax in if the surf is too rough.

Radisson, Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu | A beautifully maintained modern four-star property with a large pool that snakes around the resort offering almost every room with direct access to it. Excellent value for money.

Barefoot, Havelock No7 Beach, Andaman Islands | Voted as the ‘finest in Asia’ by TIME magazine for its brilliant turquoise water, coral sand and pristine setting, No7 is the jewel in the crown of the Andaman Islands’ beaches. Barefoot Resorts do a stylish, eco-boutique property comprising of pretty, thatched villas.

Jalakara, Havelock Island | The newly opened Jalakara resort on Havelock island is a beautiful 12 room property tucked away in the shady lush tropical rainforest of Havelock Island. With direct access to Radhanagar beach and the facilities of the Barefoot Jungle Resort just 15 minutes away.





Wildlife in India

For most of India's history, the vast tracts of forest, terai grassland, jungles and mountains in the subcontinent supported a prodigious array of wildlife. A century of relentless population growth and habitat destruction have diminished this abundance, but thanks to

the national parks and sanctuaries designated by the Indian government since Independence in 1947, it's still possible to sight tiger, one-horned rhino and wild elephant – as well as numerous other species of mammals, reptiles and birds – in their native environments. Moreover, you can do so from the comfort of some world-class safari lodges and camps, many of them located in or alongside pristine wilderness.

Whether you're a confirmed enthusiast following a wildlife-focused itinerary, or merely someone hoping for a once-in-a-lifetime glimpse of a tiger as part of a more varied holiday, a taste of India's wild side is certain to redefine your image of the country.



RANTHAMBORE NATIONAL PARK

Everyone wants to see a tiger when they visit India, but for a chance to sight one sprawled on a lakeside domed pavilion or against the backdrop of a Rajput castle, there's only one option: Ranthambore, in Rajasthan. The park lies on the margins of the Aravalli range of hills, amid a tract of dry deciduous forests and grassland. Nilgai, sambar, chital, hyena and boar are regularly spotted here, but it's because of its tigers that Ranthambore is famous. Around forty currently survive in the reserve – each named, and the subject of numerous documentaries – and your chances of seeing one are better than average.

Because safari routes are allocated by the park authorities to individual lodges, you can increase your chances of good wildlife viewings by your choice of accommodation – which is why we only send our clients to places with dependable contacts within the park administration.

BANDHAVGARH & KANHA NATIONAL PARKS

Boasting the highest tiger density of any park in the world, Bandhavgarh is currently India's premier reserve. Sightings, though still not guaranteed, are frequent and, moreover, often spectacular. Former hunting reserve of the Maharaja of Rewa, the sanctuary encompasses an area of dry deciduous sal forest, craggy hills and open *maidans* (grasslands) in the remote northeast of Madhya Pradesh state.

Tiger sightings at Kanha, a day's journey south of Bandhavgarh, are only marginally less frequent. Set amid tracts of sal forest, the park holds several large grassy maidans which have grown up in the fields of abandoned villages. The long grass provides perfect grazing for the sambar, chital and other deer and antelope on which tigers prey. Both parks boast an abundance of wonderful accommodation, set on the fringes of the forest.

KEOLADEO NATIONAL PARK

Midway between Agra and Jaipur on the 'Golden Triangle' circuit, Keoladeo is India's foremost birding hotspot. It formerly served as the private duck shooting reserve of the maharaja of nearby Bharatpur and is centred on a shallow lake and surrounding marshland, to which 190 species migrate each winter, joining the 230 kinds of resident birds. They include pelicans, painted storks and the majestic Saras crane. Safaris are conducted on foot or by bicycle, following a network of sandy, tree-lined paths across the marshes.





PANNA NATIONAL PARK | As well as offering a decent chance of a tiger sighting, Panna is one of the region’s most enjoyable parks to visit. In addition to wildlife safaris (the reserve’s 23 tigers share their domain with chital, chinkara and sambhar deer, and more than 200 species of birds, including king vultures and blossom-headed parakeets), guests can go for memorable trips on the river in the early morning mist, explore hidden gorges containing prehistoric murals, and visit remote forts, tombs and waterfalls. Moreover, the erotic temples at Khajuraho lie within range of a day trip. One of our favourite safari lodges in India, *Sarai at Toria* (covered on p88), provides a wonderful base for trips into the park.

PENCH NATIONAL PARK | With its miles of teak and bamboo forests, and open meadows of tall, bleached grass, the landscape of Pench National Park is straight off the pages of Rudyard Kipling’s Jungle Book. The reserve flanks the southern border of Madhya Pradesh and northern border of Maharashtra, encompassing a wild, uninhabited zone bisected by the Pench River. The tiger population is stable and sightings occur daily here – although not for everyone. Touring the park’s pot-holed roads in Jeeps, you’re more likely to come across packs of wild dogs and striped hyena, and herds of deer and antelope as well as the odd gaur (Indian bison) or two lumbering through the forest.



SATPURA NATIONAL PARK | The craggy, forested peaks of the Satpura (or Mahadeo) mountains form a romantic backdrop for safaris in this remote park in southern Madhya Pradesh. Tiger sightings here are not as frequent as at other parks in the state – this is somewhere people come more for a relaxed experience of unsullied wilderness rather than the charged atmosphere of the famous reserves further north. Satpura ranks among the few sanctuaries in India where you can undertake safaris on foot. Wardens and guides lead visitors on wonderful treks through the sal, teak and bamboo groves, and further afield to far-flung prehistoric rock-art sites in the depths of the forest. The nearby hill station of Pachmarhi makes another worthwhile excursion in this area.

TADOBA-ANDHARI TIGER RESERVE | The Taboba-Andhari Tiger Reserve is the largest and oldest national park in Maharashtra, and sufficiently off-the-beaten track to have escaped the attention of the hordes, despite boasting one of the highest tiger density figures in the country. Its name derives from that of a goddess worshipped by the indigenous people who inhabit its densely forested hills, deep valleys, meadows and wetlands. Nearly 87% of the reserve is covered in beautiful dry deciduous forest – a renowned storehouse of rare trees and medicinal plants. Over 60 tigers live within and around the park borders, along with leopard, wild dog, striped hyena, gaur, nilgai, sambar, chital, civet cats, marsh crocodiles and nearly 200 species of birds.

JIM CORBETT NATIONAL PARK | Corbett National Park is the oldest sanctuary in India. Lying only a day’s journey away from Delhi in the foothills of the Himalayas, it’s also one of the most popular. The name derives from that of the legendary British hunter-turned-conservationist who killed 33 man-eating tigers in the area – a tally that earned him great respect and gratitude among the local villagers. Thankfully, enough survived to form the basis of a viable breeding population. Today’s tigers are somewhat elusive thanks to the dense undergrowth that is a feature of the park, but sightings are nonetheless frequent. Huge herds of wild elephant, a couple of hundred strong, are a trademark of the park. The river is also teeming with crocodiles, and a staggering 586 species of bird have been recorded here.



GIR NATIONAL PARK | This reserve in western Gujarat is internationally renowned as the last stronghold of an animal that once roamed free across southern Europe, North Africa and Asia, but which now only survives on the Saurashtra peninsula in the far west of Gujarat: the Asiatic lion. The local maharaja was responsible for setting up the reserve a century ago, after it was realized the local population of lions had been reduced to a mere 15. Today, over 400 inhabit the jungle, grasslands and acacia scrub of the Gir National Park, and good sightings are almost guaranteed. In addition to its lions, the park also supports large populations of leopard, as well as deer, antelope, sloth bear and around 300 species of birds. The park is served by safari lodges to suit most budgets. A rundown of itineraries on p91 shows how it may be tied into longer trips in the region.

THE WILD ASS SANCTUARY | The great salt flats lining the coast of the Kutch peninsula in the far west of Gujarat are among India’s signature landscapes – vast, shimmering expanses of white desert, dappled with pools of milky brine, where flocks of pink flamingos and pelicans float in the mirage at midday. This otherworldly terrain is the last place in the country where herds of wild ass are still to be found in significant numbers. The animal, which resembles a fawn-coloured donkey with a cream underside, is renowned for its strength and resilience. Herds graze on the tiny ridges and mounds called *bets* which stand proud of the Rann of Kutch, forming little islands when the surrounding mud and salt plains lie under water. They’re incredibly fast on the hoof – speeds of up to 50mph (80kmph) have been recorded – and can easily outrun a Jeep.



KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK Tracking tigers on elephant back is a cliché of Indian travel, but there are only a few parks these days where you can enjoy this magical experience. The most famous of them is Kaziranga, on the banks of the Brahmaputra River in Assam. Encompassing a tangle of water courses, marshes, huge tracts of long terai grass and semi-evergreen forest, the reserve boasts one of the highest tiger densities of any in India. The stars of the show here, however, are undoubtedly Kaziranga’s one-horned rhinos. The park accounts for around two-thirds of the world’s population of this highly endangered mammal, which was nearly rendered extinct by the 1990s by poaching.



NAMERI NATIONAL PARK Nameri National Park in Assam is located along the foothills of the eastern Himalayas, in a district that was for many years a major centre for the timber industry. In colonial times, the Jai Bharali River which flows through it was also renowned as an angling hotspot – a source of abundant golden mahseer. These wonderful fish, dubbed the “tigers of the Himalayan rivers”, have sadly long been poached out but a breeding programme was recently set up to restock the area. Today, Nameri National Park is best known for its large herds of wild elephants, and for its prolific birdlife. Safaris are conducted on foot and on early morning boat trips along the river. One of the great things about this park is that it only attracts a relatively small number of visitors.



ORANG NATIONAL PARK “A mini Kaziranga” is how Orang National Park in Assam is often dubbed, and indeed, the two share similar habitats. Its elephant grassland, cut by numerous streams, rivulets and marshes along the northern banks of the Brahmaputra River, is also a stronghold for one-horned rhinos. Tiger sightings are rare, but there are decent numbers of elephant and the critically endangered Pygmy hog. Other mammals resident here include the Gangetic dolphin, pangolin, otter and three species of wild cat. Accommodation is simple by the standards of Indian nature reserves, but the pay off is low visitor numbers, even in peak season, which many find enhances the overall wilderness experience.



SUNDARBANS NATIONAL PARK Stretching from the mouth of the Hooghly River to the Bangladeshi border, the Sundarbans is the world’s largest mangrove forest – a vast labyrinth of tidal waterways, mudflats and forested islands formed by silt swept down from the Himalayas. Millions of people live in this ecologically fragile region on the Ganges Delta, but it also holds over 250 tigers. The big cats have developed unique strategies to cope with the distinctive habitat, among them extraordinary swimming skills that enable them to cross rivers in search of prey and mates. The park was created in the 1970s to protect the local tiger population, but it also supports thriving numbers of saltwater crocs, Olive Ridley turtles, Gangetic dolphins and huge horseshoe crabs. Trips into the reserve are mostly conducted on diesel-powered, double-decker launches which chug between special island compounds where visitors may browse exhibitions on local flora and fauna, and stroll along fenced walkways lining the fringes of the mangrove forest. Crocodiles basking on the mudflats and deer grazing *dhani* grass at the water’s edge are a common sight, but your best chances of spotting a tiger will be if you catch one midstream swimming between islets in the river – the iconic sight of the Sundarbans.



NAGARHOLE NATIONAL PARK The best places to spot wildlife in southern India is the Nagarhole National Park, in the Western Ghats mountain range of western Karnataka. Created from the private hunting reserve of the Maharajas of Mysore, the sanctuary encompasses a tract of jungle-clad hills and the banks of a reservoir fed by the Kabini River. When water levels are low between February and March, elephants are enticed out of the trees to drink, along with herds of deer and antelope, and the predators that prey on them: striped hyena, dhole (wild dog) and even the occasional tiger. In addition to towering teak trees, Nagarhole’s forest protects jungles of rosewood, silver oak and, most highly prized of all in this part of the world, sandalwood, which is used to make incense. Birdlife is also prolific, with 270 species recorded, among them the endangered Oriental white-backed vulture, Greater-spotted eagle and three kinds of hornbill.



ERAVIKULAM NATIONAL PARK The mountains looming above the tea station of Munnar in Kerala are the highest in peninsular India, and a spectacular sight from the valley floor. Giant grey-brown crags rising above slopes of lush grass, *shola* (tropical montane) forest and tea plantations, the range culminates at Ana Mudi (8,842ft/2,695m), a summit that falls within the heavily protected Eravikulam National Park. Trekking on the mountain is forbidden due to the presence on its flanks of a rare sheep called the Nilgiri tahr, which graze here in herds of up to 700 individuals. But you can admire the fine panorama over the world’s highest tea plantations, and have a close encounter with the tahr, by travelling to the park in one of its dedicated buses, which drop visitors at a small interpretation centre from where you can follow a short, level walk to a spectacular viewpoint.



PERIYAR NATIONAL PARK High in the hills of inland Kerala, the famous Periyar National Park hugs the border with Tamil Nadu. Its focal point is a convoluted reservoir on whose muddy shores herds of elephant, wild buffalo, gaur (Indian bison) and boar make frequent appearances. Visitors tour the lake morning and evening in crowded double-decker launches, but they’re noisy and you’ll greatly increase your chances of getting close to the wildlife by joining one of the quieter bamboo raft safaris run by the park. Better still, spend a night or two at the wonderful Lake Palace, a 19th-century maharaja’s hunting lodge situated deep inside the sanctuary. Only reachable by boat, the waterside location is second to none and perfectly placed for wildlife viewing. It’s not unusual for guests to spot herds of elephant literally from the comfort of their own verandah, and some guests have even sighted the odd tiger or leopard padding along the muddy shoreline from the hotel grounds.



KUMARAKOM BIRD SANCTUARY Vembanad Lake is the largest of Kerala’s backwaters, a vast 77-sq-mile (200-sq-km) lagoon that in calm weather is so still its horizon merges imperceptibly with the milky tropical sky. Houseboats gliding across its glassy surface appear to be floating on thin air, and flocks of birds on the wing are pursued by perfect mirror images of themselves on the water below. The eastern shore of the lake, where the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary protects 14 acres of prime nesting territory, is a particular haven for birdlife. Local fishermen punt visitors on canoes through the shallow water each morning and evening to admire the flocks that congregate on the water’s edge and surrounding trees. Among the migratory species who descend on these wetlands each winter are a small number of rare Siberian cranes, renowned for their high-altitude flights across the Himalayas.

Wildlife and Safari Lodges in India

India has a long tradition of creating luxury in the wilderness. The Mughals, British and 19th-century maharajas travelled in great style in even the most inhospitable corners of their empires, and today’s wildlife entrepreneurs have taken this know-how to new heights, drawing on the best practise of countries such as Kenya and South Africa to craft some of the world’s most fabulous safari experiences. Getting to these remote hideaways can often involve long journeys, but the opportunity to explore wild India – seeing tigers, rhinos,

Diphlu River Lodge, Kaziranga National Park

The best accommodation available in Kaziranga, Diphlu comprises a dozen stilted, thatch-roofed bungalows ranged around a lotus pond on ground overlooking the river. Warm-toned local textiles add a homely feel to the wood-and-bamboo interiors, where you can lounge on comfy beds, or on airy balconies overlooking the adjacent mustard and rice fields. Meals are served in a large, open-sided dining hall, the Machan (literally ‘watchtower’), whose bar and river-facing verandahs make pleasant spots for swapping wildlife stories after supper. Elephant bathing sessions, displays of Assamese dance and visits to local villages are also on offer between game drives.



bison, leopard and numerous other species in their native habitat – is one well worth travelling for. For more cost-conscious wildlife enthusiasts, the country also holds a wealth of mid-range lodges offering more simple accommodation in wonderfully natural settings, with easy access to the national parks. The following are some of our TransIndus specialists’ favourite wildlife-oriented places to stay in India.

Shergarh, Kanha National Park

This gem of a lodge is located just a short drive from the entrance to Kanha National Park. Comprising half a dozen tents dotted around a clearing in the forest beside a small spring-fed lake, it offers stylish comfort in a refreshingly understated style. The tents are well spaced for privacy, and beautifully set up inside, with fragrant grass mats on the floor and cool terracotta tiles overhead to keep the heat out in the day and the warmth in during the night. The spacious, brick-built en suite bathrooms all have piping hot water and individual wood burners which the staff keep well stoked. Owner-managers Katie and Jehan live on site with their children, and are generous, hands-on hosts.



Tiger Trails, Tadoba-Andhari

Tiger Trails is sensationally located on the edge of the core zone at Tadoba. Simple air-conditioned en suite rooms provide a comfortable base for visits into the park. The property itself encompasses three waterholes, fitted with camera traps that add considerably to levels of excitement. From the verandahs of the upper-floor rooms, you get uninterrupted views over the adjacent grasslands, where honey badger, gaur (Indian bison), porcupine and sloth bears are regularly spotted. Wholesome food is cooked fresh for each meal at this lodge whose guests are very well looked after by a father and son team who are passionate about wildlife.

Sarai at Toria, Panna National Park

Set on a low rise overlooking the serene River Ken, this six-cottage eco lodge is the creation of husband-and-wife team, Raghu and Joanna. She’s a Northumberland-born wildlife writer and photographer; he’s a renowned conservationist from Madhya Pradesh. Sustainable as well as stylish, their delightful thatched cottages have large open verandahs, thick mud walls (so no need for energy-hungry air-con) and elegantly designed interiors that favour locally made textiles. Safaris to the adjacent reserve are a must, but you can also enjoy bird-spotting trips on the river by rowboat and excursions to nearby forts, tombs, prehistoric rock art sites and waterfalls.



Samode Safari Lodge, Bandhavgarh

Set in 11 acres (4.5ha) of pristine grassland and woods, Samode offers an exceptionally luxurious safari experience in Bandhavgarh National Park, India’s number one tiger reserve. Built using hand-moulded bricks and terracotta tiles, the cottages look rustic from the outside but like smart English country boltholes within. Each has its own private verandah lit by hurricane lamps in the evening, but the real show stopper here are the bathrooms, where you can shower al fresco in a walled pebble garden, or soak in a deep, roll-topped tub. Canopied daybeds by the lodge’s serene infinity pool make perfect retreats for those sultry hours between safaris.



Hideaway, Corbett National Park

The Hideaway provides a comfortable, convenient base for safaris in the nearby Corbett National Park. Its USP is a fabulously leafy setting, under giant mango and guava trees, amid gardens full of vibrant azaleas and hibiscus blooms. Over fifty red-tiled cottages are dotted around the grounds in dappled shade, with contemporary interiors and relaxing sitouts where you can listen to the sounds of the forest after dark. There is also a curvy pool on site, and a large wood-panelled lounge to relax in.



Khem Villas, Ranthambore



Khem Villas describes itself as a ‘luxury jungle camp’, but it’s much more than that. Brainchild of Ranthambore legend Goverdhan Singh Rathore and his wife, veggie chef Usha, the venture provides delightful accommodation close to the tiger reserve. You can stay in individual thatched cottages with air-con, colonial-style interiors, private plunge pools and verandahs; in luxuriously equipped Rajasthani hunting tents; or in conventional rooms. Either way, personal service and fine forest views are guaranteed. Meals are served al fresco; everything’s vegetarian and delicious, made from ingredients grown in the camp’s organic garden.

Denwa Backwater Escape, Satpura

The Satpura National Park is one of the unsung gems of central India, and thanks to this recently opened lodge overlooking a dam on the Denwa River, you can experience its wilderness in great comfort. Spread across ten acres of riverine woodland, the property consists of just eight cottages and two tree houses – all spacious and beautifully furnished, with high pitched roofs and exposed beams. Local textiles and steamer trunks add dashes of character to the interiors, whose picture windows open on to the water and distant views of the Pachmarhi Hills. Stay a few days and you’ll have time to do one of their signature night safaris in the buffer zone, or trek on elephant back through the adjacent forest.



King’s Lodge, Bandhavgarh



King’s Lodge is the epitome of modern safari chic. Its creators have hit just the right balance between style, comfort and harmony with the surrounding sal forest. The cottages are stone built and the honey-hued furniture chunky and rustic, but the beds and bathrooms reassuringly luxurious. Each of the dozen or so cottages and stilt houses have deep verandahs with expansive views if you feel like privacy, while the central dining and lounge area, ranged around a blazing fire, is more sociable. There’s also a very pretty pool.

Chambal Safari Lodge



A wonderful eco lodge set on a 19th-century estate camp which the present owners, Ram Pratap Singh and wife Anu, inherited in the 1990s and transformed into a country retreat with a difference. Set in 35 acres of rambling grounds, the old buildings have been immaculately restored and furnished in period. Accommodation is offered in the former estate block, where spacious suites have their own enclosed gardens, or individual tiled cottages whose verandahs open on to the forest. Meals are sociable affairs, beginning with chat around the bonfire before a generous buffet is served made entirely from organic ingredients grown on the farm.

Jamtara Wilderness Camp, Pench

This is a shining example of a new breed of luxury tent camp in India that places great emphasis on proximity to nature. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest levels of comfort (king sized beds, chic decor, en suite bathrooms, gourmet meals and impeccably trained staff). But the real joy of staying here is the chance it affords to experience the feel of the forest at night (you can even opt to sleep on a tree platform, under a mosquito net) and stargaze under skies with zero light pollution. The location, close to a local village, means you also get to see rural life at close quarters, while the fact you’re on the far, quiet side of the national park means no queues to enter the reserve – and more frequent tiger sightings.



Sherbagh, Ranthambore



Twelve wonderfully comfortable luxury tents of this Relax & Chateaux property are arranged in a semi-circle around a garden and tented pavilion and camp fire. Each has its own verandah with comfy chairs and the interiors are stunningly decorated with exquisite ‘campaign’ furniture and excellent linen. Even with the addition of exquisite bathrooms, the tents manage to retain the stylish simplicity and authenticity of original ‘shikar’ tents. When not out game viewing, explore Ranthambore Fort, relax by a camp fire, drink fine wine, feast on delicious food, enjoy a pampering massage, flop by the pretty pool, or find a secluded, shady area and lie back on a day bed, looking across the fields and woodland; heavenly.



Travelling to the Parks

With a few notable exceptions (Ranthambore and Keoladeo in Rajasthan are two) India’s national parks are in remote areas. Domestic flights can take you some of the way, but to access the last remaining swathes of real wilderness in the subcontinent invariably means a long overland journey – either by rail or road, or a combination of both. Not that this need be onerous: the vehicles we use are all modern, with air-con and great suspension; and the views out of the window of rural and small town life endlessly compelling.

Once in situ, game drives are mostly conducted in a variety of open 4WD vehicles with drivers and naturalist guides. Vehicle and staff quality may vary greatly depending on the lodge that employs or contracts them, but with decades of experience arranging wildlife trips across a spectrum of budgets we can ensure the most enriching and enjoyable safari experience possible, whatever the location.

When to Go

The dry season from late February through April, when water holes in the core zones of parks dry up forcing the larger mammals towards the edges of reserves, is the best period for sighting tigers and other wildlife. However, from mid-March onwards the weather can be very hot in the middle of the day. The most comfortable times are earlier in the season, between November and February, and sightings in that period are only marginally less frequent, though you may need an extra blanket on your bed. Temperatures can be surprisingly chilly at night and during early morning game drives.

Most of the parks close for the duration of the monsoon, between June and September. Down south, the so-called retreating monsoon can also bring grey skies and showers through October and November.

Itineraries

The three following itineraries offer contrasting experience of India’s wild regions. With more time, you might also consider a foray northeast to Kaziranga in the northeast, stronghold of the one-horned rhino. Contact our Indian wildlife specialists to discuss ways to shorten, extend or combine these routes with others in different regions.



TIGER TRAIL: THE PARKS OF CENTRAL INDIA

This exhilarating journey strings together northern India’s three most famous national parks, giving you the best possible chances of sighting a tiger.

- Day 1** Fly from UK to **Delhi** on an overnight service.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning; stay one night. Afternoon at leisure.
- Day 3** Early morning train to Sawai Madhopur; transfer to **Ranthambore National Park**; stay two nights.
- Day 4** Full day of safaris.
- Day 5** Full day of safaris; overnight train to **Katni**.
- Day 6** Arrive, transfer to **Bandhavgarh National Park**; stay two nights. Afternoon safari.
- Day 7** Full day of safaris.
- Day 8** Drive to **Kanha National Park**; stay three nights.
- Day 9** Full day of safaris.
- Day 10** Full day of safaris.
- Day 11** Drive to **Nagpur**; stay overnight.
- Day 12** Fly to **Mumbai**, and take a connecting flight to UK arriving back the same evening.



OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

This tour focuses on the lesser visited, emerging wildlife parks visits Pench, Satpura and Tadoba which offer exceptional birding experience as well as good chances of spotting tiger and leopard in the wild – without the crowds of the busier parks.

- Day 1** Fly from UK to **Mumbai** on an overnight service.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning; take a connecting flight to **Nagpur**, stay one night.
- Day 3** Drive to **Tadoba Tiger Reserve**; stay three nights. Afternoon game drive.
- Day 4** Full day of safaris.
- Day 5** Full day of safaris.
- Day 6** Drive to **Jamtara** on the fringe of **Pench National Park**; stay two nights.
- Day 7** Full day of safaris.
- Day 8** Take a long drive through the Seoni and Pachmarhi hills; stay three nights in **Satpura National Park**.
- Day 9** Full day of safaris.
- Day 10** Full day of safaris.
- Day 11** Drive to Bhopal airport; fly to **Mumbai**, stay overnight.
- Day 12** Fly back to UK on a day flight, arriving the same day.



SOUTHERN WILDLIFE

The Western Ghats retain magnificent forests with some of the most impressive biodiversity on the planet and contain a string of sanctuaries teeming with wildlife, allowing visitors access to these heavily protected areas, where tiger and elephant still roam wild.

- Day 1** Fly from UK to **Bengaluru** (Bangalore) via the Middle East.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning; drive to **Mysore**, stay two nights.
- Day 3** Sightseeing at **Srirangapatnam** and **Ranganathitoo Bird Sanctuary**.
- Day 4** Drive to **Nagarhole National Park**; stay two nights. Afternoon safari.
- Day 5** Enjoy morning and afternoon game drives.
- Day 6** Drive to **Bandipur National Park** for an overnight stay. Afternoon game drive.
- Day 7** Drive to **Ooty** to see the Botanical Gardens and then board the Nilgiri Mountain Railway to Coonoor; stay two nights.
- Day 8** Explore this picturesque area.
- Day 9** Drive to **Madurai**, stay overnight. Evening visit the Meenakshi temple.
- Day 10** Drive to **Periyar National Park**; stay two nights.
- Day 11** Full day inside the park: wildlife walk, bamboo rafting and boat ride.
- Day 12** Drive to **Cochin**; stay overnight. Afternoon sightseeing of Fort Cochin.
- Day 13** Transfer to **Kumarakom**; stay three nights.
- Day 14** Morning visit the bird sanctuary; afternoon at leisure.
- Day 15** Day at leisure.
- Day 16** Fly back to UK via the Middle East arriving the same day.

Luxury trains

Before Independence in 1947, the rulers of Rajputana, Gujarat and Hyderabad states, along with the British viceroy and vicereine, used to travel around India in a specially converted train. A red carpet would be laid across the platform to its carriages, which included sumptuously decorated cabins, dining car and servants’ quarters for the legion of turbaned attendants required to service the royal passengers. Upon arrival, garlands of marigolds were offered to them, troupes of liveried musicians serenaded them and caparisoned elephants waited at the station exit to transport them to their destination. With the demise of the princely states, however, the train was relegated to a siding in Delhi. But in the early 1980s, Indian Railways had the bright idea of resurrecting it for use as a rolling, five-star hotel on which guests could re-live the romance of travel in the colonial era.

The first refitted train – the ‘Palace On Wheels’ – has proved enduringly popular ever since, and has spawned several other luxury locomotives covering different regions of the country. Travel by luxury train is a novel and hugely enjoyable way to see the country: guests are treated like VIPs onboard – and during the daily sightseeing excursions to palaces, forts and other monuments along the route. Elephant polo matches and high tea with local maharanas also feature on some routes! Around half a dozen luxury trains currently operate in India. All work to more or less the same formula. The travelling is generally done at night, while you’re fast asleep in your own en suite cabins. Meals are served in a richly decorated dining car by courteous uniformed staff. Each cabin also has a dedicated turbaned butler. For prices and further details on the trips, contact one of our India-specialist consultants.

Maharaja’s Express – ‘Indian Panorama’ | This is the crème de la crème of India’s royal train rides, featuring the most luxurious cabins and modern rolling stock. Its 7-night/8-day ‘Indian Panorama’ tour takes in the benchmark sights of the ‘Golden Triangle’ before heading across the Ganges plains to Varanasi via Orchha and the erotic temple complex at Khajuraho.

Palace On Wheels | Launched in 1982, the Palace on Wheels travels through the royal capitals of Rajasthan to the desert citadel of Jaisalmer, deep in the Thar desert. Its itinerary includes a stop at the tiger reserve of Ranthambore National Park, a visit to Udaipur’s dreamy lakeside palaces and a safari at the famous bird reserve of Keoladeo near Bharatpur – as well as tours of the Taj Mahal and other highlights of the Golden Triangle.

Deccan Odyssey – ‘Maharashtra Splendour’ | The rock-cut caves of Ajanta and Ellora are the cultural highlights of this long looping ride from Mumbai, which weaves a path through the craggy Western Ghat mountains, via the vineyards near Nasik, and includes a short sojourn on the palm-fringed Konkan coast at Goa. The most remote point reached, however, is the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve – a national park that sees far fewer visitors than many because of its far-flung location.

Golden Chariot – ‘Pride of the South’
Golden Chariot – ‘Southern Splendour’ | The two itineraries undertaken by the Golden Chariot train cherry pick the finest sights of southern India, ranging from the fabulous Chola Temples of the Kaveri Delta to the wildlife parks of the Western Ghats, and Kerala’s tropical backwaters region.



River cruising in Eastern India

Travel in India doesn’t necessarily have to mean “trains, planes and automobiles”. In the east of the country, the great rivers of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Hooghly – for thousands of the years the principal transport arteries of the subcontinent – provide perfect routes for leisurely cruises through some of the most remote and rarely visited parts of the country.

Operated by the pioneering Assam-Bangal Navigation Company (ABN), three colonial-style steamers ply these ancient waterways, pausing at the historic sights, wildlife parks and cultural centres that line the riverbanks. The perspective yielded by these journeys is unique. The rural areas traversed have changed little in essence since the days of the East India Company, several of whose ruined trading posts rise from the paddy fields and sandbars as you glide across the silty water.

Quite apart from being elegant craft in themselves, the boats are handsomely furnished and extremely comfortable throughout. The cabins are air-conditioned and en suite. A wood-lined bar and dining room provide comfortable spaces in which to relax under cover, while a large canopied deck is perfect for watching life drift past on and alongside the water – all in all, a wonderfully relaxing way to experience parts of world rarely visited by outsiders.

ABN offer a wide choice of cruises, offering different mixes of landscapes and experiences. Speak to one of our India-specialist consultants to find out more.

Cruises on the Brahmaputra | Stretching from the erstwhile army town of Dibrugarh through the state of Assam to Dhubri on the Bangladesh border, the mighty Brahmaputra river winds beside wildlife parks, historic towns and cultural sights – the perfect mix for a fascinating cruise. Guided visits to tea plantations and walks along riverside villages feature on their varied itineraries. Mid October to end March is usually the best season to take these 4, 7 or 10 night cruises.

Cruises on the Hooghly | The Hooghly river, a side stream of the Ganges, is dotted with historic sites, from Kolkata at its southernmost tip to Jangipur in the north. As you proceed up or downstream on these 7-night trips, you pass a string of former European capitals – abandoned cities of colonial empires with impressive buildings. Between tours of the

monuments, take a cycle rickshaw ride into a local village and a leisurely stroll around Mughal gardens and tombs. Available around the year, these cruises afford an experience of off-track areas not accessible by any land-based itinerary of West Bengal.

Cruises on the Ganges | Offering an insight into rural Bengal and neighbouring Bihar, the cruises on the Ganges are 6 nights downstream or 8 nights upstream from Patna or Farakka – or vice versa. Explore ancient Buddhist sites at Nalanda and Bodh Gaya, the Mughal ruins at Rajmahal as well as the East India company relics at Monghyr and Patna. Available during the winter months only, these cruises combine well with the ones on the Hooghly to make for an exciting voyage through totally undiscovered territory.





Nepal

Sandwiched between the Gangetic plains and Tibetan plateau, Nepal encompasses an extraordinary spectrum of landscapes, culminating in the vast wall of ice peaks along the Chinese frontier to the north – the legendary Himalaya, or ‘Abode of Snows’. At the heart of the country is cradled a lush, fertile valley that has been a centre of sophisticated urban civilization for more than 2,500 years, where an unparalleled wealth of medieval palaces, Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples survive intact. To walk through the Durbar Squares of the Kathmandu Valley is to experience a world as unique as it is exotic to foreign eyes. The architecture is fabulous, the many and varied cultures of its people compelling and the Himalayas, whether glimpsed from the comfort of a palace hotel window or through the flap of a tent on a week-long hill trek, are quite simply breathtaking.



Highlights of Nepal

Kathmandu | With its spectacular medieval buildings and squares, Kathmandu makes an enthralling first landfall in Nepal. Numerous temples, shrines and monasteries line its narrow cobbled backstreets.

Bhaktapur | Some of Nepal’s finest Newari craftsmanship adorns the monuments of Bhaktapur’s traffic-free old quarter. Wandering the pretty cobbled streets around Durbar Square makes for a perfect day trip.

Swayambhunath | Climb the 365 steps leading to this spectacular gilded stupa on a hilltop overlooking the western outskirts. Its much-photographed eyes stare knowingly down on the Nepali capital.

Pokhara | Close to the Annapurna range, Pokhara is Nepal’s pre-eminent mountain resort – a great place to unwind and enjoy the fabulous views of Machhapuchhre, the ‘Fish Tail’ mountain.

Pashupatinath | Pilgrims and sadhus come from all over the country to worship at Nepal’s holiest Hindu temple on the banks of the Bagmati river, a perfect setting for those interested in photography.

Chitwan National Park | Stronghold of two of the world’s rarest mammals: the one-horned rhinoceros, and the still more elusive Bengal tiger. Elephant safaris are the big selling point of this fabulous park.

Boudanath | A spectacle as exotic as any you’re likely to set eyes on, Nepal’s largest stupa complex stands on the northeastern fringes of the capital, once the last place of worship for those arriving from Lhasa.

Trekking | Trekking is the main reason most foreign visitors come to Nepal. The two most popular trails are the long-distance routes around the Annapurnas and to the Everest base camp region in the east.

Travel Information

Time zone: UTC+5.45 hours
Flying time: 12 hours
Currency: Nepalese rupee
Capital: Kathmandu

When to go

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature °C	9	12	16	20	22	23	22	22	22	20	15	11
Rainfall mm	13	14	10	29	70	129	325	239	175	67	7	8
Best to travel	●●	●●	●●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●●	●●	●

●● The best time to travel ● A good time to travel ● Low season

Be inspired

For help planning your perfect holiday, contact us at the Old Fire Station, Ealing, London.
Tel: **020 8566 3739**
Web: **www.transindus.com**



PASHUPATINATH

Not far from Boudanath,

on the banks of the Bagmati River to the east of Kathmandu stands Pashupatinath, Nepal’s holiest Shiva temple. Hindus from across the country converge here during important festivals, when the cremation ghats in front of the shrine are illuminated by hundreds of flickering butter lamps. Dreadlocked sadhus smoking hashish pipes, musicians playing devotional songs, and orange-robed priests performing *aarti* provide great photo opportunities. Local sadhus also often agree to pose for photographs.



KATHMANDU

A sprawling modern city of nearly a million inhabitants, the Nepali capital can feel overwhelmingly crowded and chaotic on first impressions. But head for its ancient core, where the Shah and Malla kings erected their resplendently gilded stupas, palaces and carved wood pagodas, and things improve dramatically. Durbar Square

forms the epicentre of this superbly atmospheric quarter. More than fifty temples, 106 monastery courtyards (*bahals*) and countless shrines line its narrow, cobbled backstreets. Settle on to one of the terraced platforms of the Manju Devul tower to watch exotic bustle of marigold sellers, saffron-clad sadhus, stray cows and pigeons - a scene little changed in centuries.



BOUDANATH

Another memorable trip out of Kathmandu is the one to Boudanath, whose whitewashed stupa, with its trademark piercing eyes and strings of prayer flags fluttering from a spectacularly gilded tower, is the largest in Nepal. The monument stands 7 miles (11km) northeast of the capital on the site of an ancient trade route from Tibet – the last place of worship for travellers arriving in Kathmandu from Lhasa. Today, the area around the stupa serves as an important enclave for Tibetan refugees.



SWAYAMBHUNATH

On a hilltop overlooking the western outskirts, Swayambhunath (colloquially known as ‘the Monkey Temple’ for its resident population of macaques) has been sacred since the beginning of written history – and probably well before. A magnificent stupa, with gilded tower and pair of huge, all-seeing eyes, forms its iconic centrepiece. Early morning or late evening, when smoke from incense offerings and dozens of yak butter lamps fill the air, are the best times to visit.

NAGARKOT AND DHULIKHEL

Kathmandu itself doesn’t boast noteworthy Himalayan

views – mainly because of its location in a hill-rimmed valley. So unless you’re prepared to hike among or fly by the great mountains, the best option is to stay at nearby Nagarkot. Situated in a strategic ridgetop location at around 1,950m (6,397ft) (there used to be a fort here guarding the eastern portion of the Kathmandu Valley), this pine-shrouded hill station is renowned for its mountain vistas. The looming Langtang range and the Ganesh Himal are almost always visible and on clear days you’ll also glimpse Everest, most likely at sunrise from a specially built viewing tower. Aside from those peaks, it’s a good place to relax away from the capital’s hustle and bustle and there are plentiful options for walking and biking.

A similar alternative slightly further from the capital is Dhulikhel. For centuries this village was an important trading centre on the ancient route between Nepal and Tibet. Today’s visitors come not just for the mountain views – best admired from a hilltop just above town – but for its well-preserved old quarter. Slender, traffic-free streets thread through a traditionally-planned settlement at least five centuries old, in which fine old multi-storeyed Newari houses boast beautifully carved wooden windows, lattices and doors – all notable examples of traditional Newari craftsmanship.

A clutch of lovely temples still used daily by locals add much to the town’s charm and atmosphere. In addition, a 30-minute climb to a hilltop above the town takes you to a Kali shrine and panoramic terrace from where the mountain views are breathtaking.





THE KATHMANDU VALLEY: PATAN & BHAKTAPUR

Separated from Kathmandu by the Bagmati River, Patan (also called Lalitpur or Manigal) is the Kathmandu Valley's second largest town, boasting an even greater concentration of religious monuments than the capital. Most of them are grouped in the streets around Durbar Square – one of the world's most beautiful piazzas – where the Royal Palace of the Malla kings houses a wonderful museum dedicated to Nepal's sacred arts.

Bhaktapur, further down the valley but easily reachable in a day trip, boasts another impressive concentration of medieval palaces, *bahals* (monastery courtyards) and monumental squares – all in high Newari style. Despite being Nepal's third city, it's a much more easygoing destination thanks to the absence of traffic from its historic core. Wandering the pretty cobbled streets around Durbar Square, you'll see traditional potters', weavers' and wood-carvers' workshops, and local people spreading raw rice to dry in the sun.

BANDIPUR

Newari traders from the Kathmandu Valley established Bandipur as a hub on the Indo-Tibet road in the late 18th century, bringing with them the rich architectural heritage which endures in the town to this day. Bypassed by the main Pokhara-Kathmandu highway, its core of brick-and-wood shop-houses and temples, beautifully embellished with traditional metalwork and wood carving, has remained miraculously unsullied by concrete. Moreover, superb views of the distant Himalaya are to be had from hilltop viewpoints around the town, reached via easy trails through the surrounding terraced fields and deciduous forests.



TANSEN

Former capital of the powerful Magar kingdom, Tansen (also known as Palpa) is a medieval crow's-nest town clustered on a hilltop beside the Kali Gandaki river in south-central Nepal. The splendid architecture of its old quarter – a warren of narrow, steep streets lined with temples and old-fashioned Newari shop-houses – is the main reason to come, but you can also watch metalworkers and weavers in action, and climb to nearby villages and viewpoints for sublime panoramas of the high peaks to the north. The Madi Valley, below the town, can look particularly picturesque in the autumn, when a pall of mist hangs over its verdant floor - which explains why to the locals it is known as 'White Lake'.



POKHARA Pokhara is the only town in Nepal that could be described as a ‘resort’. Lying 123 miles (198km) west of the capital along the Prithvi Highway, it owes its popularity to the magical view of Machapuchare (literally ‘Fish Tail’) reflected in the glassy waters of the adjacent Phewa Tal lake. Soak up this famous icy profile in a cafe on the lakeshore, or from the water on an evening boat cruise. Better still, climb to the Shanti Stupa (Peace Pagoda) overlooking the town for a truly jaw-dropping panorama of the Himalayan giants to the north, which soar from 3,280ft (1,000m) to 24,600ft (7,500m) in less than 30 km.

Wildlife in Nepal

Nepal’s ten national parks, three wildlife reserves, six conservation areas, 12 buffer zones and, surprisingly, one hunting reserve – collectively about 23% of the country’s total area – help support a surprising array of fauna. In global terms, the country hosts nearly 4% of all mammalian species and, mainly because of its location along seasonal migratory routes, an astonishing 9% of birds (of which around half can be spotted in the hills and forests of the Kathmandu Valley alone).

Most wildlife inhabits the rich lowland terai region adjoining India. The one-horned rhinoceros is almost emblematic of this area, which it shares with a handful of wild (as opposed to domestic) elephants, crocodile, buffalo and bison. Deer, such as the spotted and swamp varieties along with sambar, are ubiquitous but there are also antelopes, elusive tigers, leopards, hyenas, sloth bears and jackals. A handful of Gangetic dolphins survive in the Karnali River. Deeper into the hills, bears, boars and the almost fox-like red panda eventually give way to several high-altitude dwelling goats and the Himalayan tahr. Rarest and arguably the most beautiful of all is the snow leopard.



LUMBINI Nepal’s most important historical site and one with profound religious significance is Lumbini, birthplace of Prince Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. Just shy of the Indian border and well within the steamy terai, Lumbini is one of Buddhism’s cardinal pilgrimage sites, with temples and retreats established by several Buddhist nations, extensive gardens and most of the facilities required by a constant influx of modern visitors.

Yet despite the modern, if not slick veneer, it’s also a UNESCO World Heritage Site: excavations have revealed the remains of long-documented structures such as the Shakya Tank (where Buddha’s mother bathed before giving birth), the 3rd-century BC Maya Devi Temple, ancient viharas, or monasteries, and most notably, the sandstone Ashoka pillar marking the famed Indian emperor’s visit in around 245 BC.



CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK Elephant safaris are the big selling point of the fabulous Chitwan National Park, in the far south of Nepal near the Indian border. Sitting astride a swaying, soft-footed pachyderm, you’ll stand a much better chance of getting close to the Jurassic-looking rhinos that are the park’s big stars, as well as the more elusive tigers inhabiting its core zone. Sightings of Gangetic dolphins and gharial crocodiles are almost guaranteed, and be sure to visit the critically important breeding centre for vultures, which have declined to the point of extinction over the past fifteen years or so but survive here in healthy numbers. The *Barahi Jungle Lodge* (covered on p104) is one of our preferred accommodation choices close to the park. For the kind of itineraries you might consider through the region, see p105.



EVEREST FLIGHTS Undoubtedly the easiest and quickest route to the world’s highest mountain summits is by flying to them. At the crack of dawn each morning during the tourist season, a fleet of small, 16-seater aircraft depart Kathmandu’s airport for a scenic 45- to 60-minute flight

(often called ‘Everest Flights’) which, weather permitting, yield unforgettable views of many massive and celebrated peaks, including Mt Everest. All passengers have a window seat and for many this is the only practical way of getting up-close to some of the most magnificent scenery in the entire Himalayan range.

BARDIA NATIONAL PARK Bounded by the Karnali River and the Churia range of the Siwalik Hills in south-western Nepal, parts of the 374-sq-mile (968-sq-km) Bardia National Park were originally a royal hunting reserve. Today it’s the largest and most undisturbed protected area in the terai. Watered by the Babai River, its combination of magnificent sal forests and extensive grasslands makes an ideal habitat for a variety of fauna around 53 species of mammals and over 400 birds. Bardia’s stars include the endangered Royal Bengal tiger and the vulnerable one-horned rhinoceros but there are plenty more elephants, black buck, swamp deer, and two species of crocodile. With patience and luck, visitors might also glimpse the rare Gangetic dolphin in the Karnali.



SUKLA PHANTA WILDLIFE RESERVE In Nepal’s far south-western corner bordering India, the 118-sq-mile (305-sq-km) Sukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve is another region of open grasslands, forests, riverbeds and tropical wetlands and marshes. These are some of the world’s tallest and best-conserved floodplain grasslands and, like Bardia, were once a favoured royal hunting ground. Swamp deer – the world’s largest congregation – crown a list of 46 mammals which includes tiger, leopard, jackal, nilgai or blue bull (a large Asian antelope) and sloth bear, while reptiles include crocodiles, pythons, cobras and monitor lizards. Around 423 species of birds have been recorded. The park authorities have setup basic camps inside the reserve for visitors; otherwise, nearby Mahendranagar is the easiest base.



Adventure in Nepal

Nepal's awe-inspiring scenery provides an inspirational backdrop for outdoor pursuits of many kinds, ranging from soft day treks to full-blown climbing or rafting expeditions in the Inner Himalaya. Whatever your dream adventure, with decades of experience arranging trips in this part of the world, TransIndus can make it happen. In partnership with local experts on the ground, we'll advise on the best route and accommodation options, arrange any permits or equipment that may be necessary and hire tried-and-tested, professionally trained staff to accompany you if required, leaving you free to enjoy the remarkable scenery and Nepali hospitality unencumbered by logistics.



WALKING AND TREKKING

The Annapurna region in the west and Everest region in the east are Nepal's principal trekking areas, attracting walkers from across the world in spring and autumn, when visibility and weather conditions are optimum. The scenery in both is in a league of its own, though requires considerable time, effort and levels of fitness to enjoy to the full. As a consequence, TransIndus also offer a range of more leisurely routes, ranging from one day to a fortnight in duration. As well as being less physically strenuous, these avoid the problems associated with altitude that complicate and extend itineraries to higher regions. Our favoured low-altitude routes are also served by some particularly comfortable, beautifully situated accommodation. The best way to settle on the most suitable route for you is to discuss your requirements with one of our specialists in the London office. Whatever your chosen itinerary, rest assured all our treks are accompanied by experienced guides, cooks and porters, and that we conform to the guidelines set out by the International Porter Protection Group, limiting the weight carried by porters and ensuring fair wages.

IN THE ANNAPURNA REGION

The mighty Annapurna Himal, nearly 25 miles (40km) across and with nine massive peaks, virtually bisects the vast 2,945-sq-mile (7,629-sq-km) Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) which has long been home to some of the country's most popular treks. Its benchmark route is the strenuous Annapurna Circuit, traditionally a 2- to 3-week extravaganza with a very high pass and an incredible range of scenery. The shorter Annapurna Base Camp trek takes hikers into the heart of the amphitheatre-like Annapurna Sanctuary, while the little-visited (and once quasi-independent) region of Mustang, a Buddhist area adjoining Tibet, hosts the wonderful Mustang Trek, essentially a spur off the main Circuit up to the old walled town of Lo Manthang.

Other shorter and far less demanding treks include Poon Hill, west of Pokhara, and the Siklis and Royal Treks north and east of Pokhara. Adjoining the ACA, the Manaslu Conservation Area and its classic 2-week Manaslu Circuit trek looks set to become increasingly popular with its fantastic scenery and varied terrain and culture. An added incentive to venture into the Annapurna region are the luxury lodges operated by the firm Ker & Downey. Dotted at half-day intervals around the Conservation Area, each overlooks pretty, slate-roofed mountain villages and enjoys fabulous views of the snow peaks. The rooms are beautifully furnished with comfy beds, traditional textiles and down quilts warmed each evening with hot water bottles; and each also has its own en suite bathroom.

MOUNTAIN BIKING

Nepal's extremes of terrain, from the pancake-flat terai to its muscular foothills and beyond, lends itself to both easygoing and spectacular mountain biking. The hills around Kathmandu and Pokhara generally attract fitter and more physical bikers, and some of these might even have cycled to and from India and Tibet. Whatever the itinerary, biking is an excellent way to explore the country and makes for a more relaxed or thrilling experience rather than just the checklist of formal sights. An organised tour of days or weeks ensures good, well-maintained equipment, maximisation of precious holiday time and, above all else, a well-planned itinerary where the more arduous stages can be driven rather than ridden.



IN THE EVEREST REGION

Nowhere else in Nepal attracts the same level of attention as the Everest (or Solukhumbu) region northeast of Kathmandu, home to the world's highest summit, Mt Everest, known to most Nepalis as Sagarmatha, and to the local Sherpa people who inhabit the beautiful valleys near the great mountain's foot as Chomolungma, 'Mother Goddess of the World'. The famous Everest Trek usually 2- to 3-weeks is the second most popular one in the country. Essentially, the route involves either a five- to six-day walk in (great for acclimatisation and fitness) or a short flight to the mountain airstrip of Lukla before hiking into the high mountains stretching north of the Sherpa 'capital' of Namche Bazaar. Beyond here, the route options and staggering views multiply, with detours to side

valleys, additional knee-cracking passes and the serenely beautiful lakes at Gokyo. Everest Base Camp is often the ultimate target but fuller mesmerising views are to be had from Gorak Shep and nearby Kala Patthar, a ridgeline prominence at around 5,600m (18,372ft) - likely the highest point to which most visitors will ever walk in their lives. Our Nepal specialists in the TransIndus office will be happy to discuss route options for the Everest region with you, and help identify the most suitable itinerary for your level of fitness and experience. Given the extreme terrain in this part of the country, it's essential to employ experienced teams of sherpas and cooks, which is why our ground staff are hand-picked and treated according to the protocols set out by the International Porter Protection Group.



RAFTING

From the mighty Himalayas descend several vigorous rivers so it's no surprise that Nepal has some of the world's best white water rafting. The post-monsoon swell of early autumn followed by the late spring/early summer snowmelt mean most rivers have two prime white water seasons each year. Trips typically range from a day or two on the particularly warm Seti River near Pokhara to up to twelve days on the Karnali River near Bardia National Park. The Trisuli River between Kathmandu and Pokhara is probably Nepal's most popular rafting destination while the thunderous and cold Bhote Koshi running by the highway from Tibet offers the country's hardest and most adrenalin-filled run.



PARAGLIDING

In recent years, Pokhara has emerged as Nepal's paragliding centre. Today it is reputedly one of the world's top five tandem locations for the sport. The easy charms of Phewa Lake and generally reliable, stable thermals anchored to jaw-dropping scenery make it a natural choice. Sarangkot, a lofty village north of the lake, is the main launchpad for flights which typically orbit the lush hillside before heading over to Pokhara town and landing beside the lake.

Places to Stay: Nepal

Created by liberal use of local handicrafts and architecture, together with world-class views, the distinctive atmosphere of Nepal’s hotels and lodges contributes in no small part to the enduring popularity of the country. With a few notable exceptions, the properties themselves tend not to be as well maintained as those in neighbouring countries – hardly surprising given the logistics involved in many cases – but the few rough edges you’ll encounter here do not extend to the Nepalis themselves, whose smiling courtesy makes travelling in this country such a pleasure. Nor, these days, need you forsake your creature comforts when trekking in the mountains. Thanks to the proliferation of stylish, well set up lodges, a hot bath, delicious meal and comfy bed are now obtainable even in the remote villages of the Annapurna range.

Dwarika’s Hotel, Kathmandu



Dwarika’s is by far the most traditionally elegant hotel in Kathmandu and, despite lacking a view or a swimming pool, is a must for anyone with a penchant for traditional Asian interiors. A feast of high Newari style, its design incorporates pieces of wood carving, stone sculpture and brass work salvaged from antique buildings in the 1960s and 1970s. They now frame a succession of courtyards made of mud bricks with temple-style fountains spouting beneath pagoda roofs. Four-poster beds and floaty mosquito nets create a classy colonial ambience in the rooms, which are huge and crammed with old furniture and sacred art.

Begnas Lake Resort, Pokhara



The majority of visitors to Pokhara congregate around Phewa Lake, but Begnas, further east, is much more peaceful. A perfect option for anyone wishing to savour the views of Machapuchare and the other Annapurnas from a truly serene setting, this resort nestles on a terraced, wooded hillside on the far shore, reached via a 15-minute Jeep ride followed by a 25-minute paddle across the water. Once installed, marvel at the panorama from your cottage balcony, laze by the pool in the butterfly-filled garden, or join one of the guided day walks arranged by the smiling staff.

Barahi Jungle Lodge, Chitwan

Located on the banks of the Rapti River, the lodge is set in the small village of Tharus and offers splendid views of the National Park from its stand-alone river-facing cottages. The architecture and interiors blend seamlessly with its surroundings, with generous use of bamboo and sustainable wood in the decor. Game drives on elephant back in search of one-horned rhinos and tiger are Chitwan’s must-do, but guests here may also go on croc-spotting trips in dugout canoes, and breezy ox-cart rides to local villages. The culinary experience at the lodge, in particular its Nepalese cuisine, garners effusive praise from our clients.



Travel in Nepal

Most journeys in Nepal are conducted in a comfortable private car with driver. To avoid longer road trips, or to reach remote mountain regions that would otherwise only be accessible on foot, you can also opt for a range of internal flights. Weather permitting, these often yield fabulous views of the mountains.

When to Go

November to December, after the rains have cleared the dust from the atmosphere and the air is crystal clear, and March to April, when the rhododendrons are in full bloom, are the best months to travel in Nepal. In January and February, come prepared for chilly nights at altitude and foggy mornings in the Kathmandu Valley – though rest assured that all of the hotels, lodges and tea houses we use have adequate heating, and plenty of extra blankets! During the monsoon season between June and September, grey skies obscure the fabled vistas, and transport is frequently disrupted.

Itineraries

The following tried-and-tested itineraries are sketched to show what can comfortably be seen over a 12 to 17-night trip. They may easily be shortened or extended to suit your needs, or completely re-worked. Feel free to consult our Nepal specialists for further advice.



TREASURES OF NEPAL

Explore the beautiful monuments of the Kathmandu Valley on this short introductory tour of Nepal.

- Day 1** Fly from UK to Kathmandu via the Middle East or India.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning; stay three nights. Afternoon visit Durbar Square and temples.
- Day 3** City sightseeing.
- Day 4** Visit Bhadgaon and Patan.
- Day 5** Take a short flight and then drive to Chitwan National Park; stay two nights.
- Day 6** Explore the park by Jeep and on elephant back.
- Day 7** Drive to Pokhara, amid the foothills of the Annapurna range; stay two nights.
- Day 8** Relax by the lakeside or take a short trek.
- Day 9** Drive to the Newari town of Bandipur; stay two nights.
- Day 10** Explore this medieval hill town on foot.
- Day 11** Drive to Kathmandu; stay overnight.
- Day 12** Travel back to UK via the Middle East/India.



WILDLIFE OF NEPAL

Nepal’s expansive national parks are particularly rich in flora and fauna and protect one of the largest stretches of tiger habitat in the world.

- Day 1** Fly from UK to Kathmandu via the Middle East/India.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning; transfer to Bhadgaon; stay two nights.
- Day 3** Take a walking tour of this medieval city. Afternoon sightseeing of Kathmandu.
- Day 4** Short flight to Nepalganj; transfer to Bardia National Park; stay three nights.
- Day 5** Explore the national park by Jeep and on elephant back.
- Day 6** Another day of safaris in the park.
- Day 7** Take a long drive to Tharu village; stay two nights.
- Day 8** Partake in community activities or go on a birding walk.
- Day 9** Drive to Chitwan National Park; stay two nights.
- Day 10** Explore the national park by Jeep and on elephant back.
- Day 11** Fly back to Kathmandu for a final night.
- Day 12** Travel back to UK via the Middle East/India.



NORTH INDIA & NEPAL

Combining the vibrant culture of these neighbouring countries, this tour features some of the most compelling sights of the Indian subcontinent.

- Day 1** Fly from UK to Delhi.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning, stay two nights.
- Day 3** Sightseeing of Old & New Delhi.
- Day 4** Take an express early morning train to Jaipur, stay two nights.
- Day 5** Sightseeing of Amber Fort and the city.
- Day 6** Drive to Agra, via Fatehpur Sikri, stay one night.
- Day 7** Visit the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort; take an overnight train to Varanasi.
- Day 8** Arrive early morning; stay two nights, afternoon tour of the Buddhist site of Sarnath and evening excursion to see the spectacular Ganga aarti.

- Day 9** Early morning cruise down the Ganges and a walk through the temples and ghats.
- Day 10** Fly to Kathmandu this morning, stay two nights. Afternoon visit Durbar Square.
- Day 11** Visit Bhadgaon and Patan.
- Day 12** Take a short flight and then drive to Chitwan National Park, stay two nights.
- Day 13** Explore the park by jeep and on elephant back.
- Day 14** Drive to the foothills of the Annapurna range to the hill station of Pokhara; stay two nights.
- Day 15** Relax by the lake side or take a short trek.
- Day 16** Short flight to Kathmandu; stay overnight.
- Day 17** Travel back to UK via the Middle East/India.



Karnali Jungle Lodge, Bardia

A venture by the Tiger Tops company, Karnali is a small, boutique safari lodge whose emphasis is on service as much as style, ensuring a calm, relaxing experience that does justice to the wonderful setting on the edge of the Bardia National Park in western Nepal. Expect soft, natural colour schemes, floating flowers and fresh, healthy food grown in the property’s own organic gardens. Tiger Tops is guided by a strong ethos of sustainability: the lodge is mostly solar powered, built with local materials and supports various schemes to improve the life of villagers in the area, including agricultural training and handicraft revival programs.



Ker & Downey Mountain Lodges



K&D’s beautiful lodges in the Nepali highlands are the crème de la crème of trekking accommodation. Dotted at convenient half-day intervals around the Annapurna Conservation Area circuit, each has spellbinding views across the slate rooftops of neighbouring villages to gleaming snow peaks in the distance. Handwoven rugs and other local textiles adorn the spacious rooms, which all have their own en-suite bathrooms with tubs and running hot water. The colour schemes are dominated by exposed stone, warm-toned woods and rich Buddhist reds and maroons. After a day on the trail, guests can also enjoy carefully prepared, wholesome meals served in a traditional-style dining room, followed by sociable gatherings on open terraces lit by log fires where conversation with your Gurkha guides will enrich your day’s experiences and prepare you for another day on the trail.



Bhutan

While Bhutan is nowhere near as isolated from the mainstream of South Asian life as it used to be, the country certainly comes closer to the old 'Shangri-La' myth than any other. Buttressed on three sides by high peaks, this small, thinly-populated mountain kingdom the size of Switzerland has maintained its traditional way of life to a degree that's unique in the eastern Himalayas – and in a style that's fabulously idiosyncratic. Where else in the world are men obliged by law to wear Argyll socks and knee-length, cross-buttoned tunics? And which other country can claim as its national symbol an animal that looks like a cross between a cow and a goat (the 'takin')? Or which has archery as its national sport, has banned foreign television and tobacco, and measures its success not merely in terms of economic growth, but GNH – 'Gross National Happiness'?... a scale on which Bhutan scores very highly.



Highlights of Bhutan

Thimphu | One of the world's most prettily sited capitals, and certainly its most intriguing, being without any traffic lights. It has impressive *dzongs* (fortress-monasteries), and a Buddhist painting school.

Chimi Lhakhang | Small but extraordinary monastery featuring paintings of erect penises over its carved wooden doorways, it is said to fulfil the desires of female pilgrims wishing to conceive.

Dochu La Pass | This high pass to the east of the capital, en route to Punakha, yields astonishing views of distant snow peaks. 108 memorial stupas mark the pass and is adjacent to the Royal Botanical Park.

Punakha | The capital before Thimphu, Punakha offers visitors their first real taste of rural Bhutan. Beautifully sited at the confluence of two rivers, its *dzong* ranks among the country's most famous monasteries.

Bumthang | Picturesque Buddhist monasteries and typical Bhutanese hill villages punctuate this crossroads-like alignment of four valleys in the heart of the country, collectively known as Bumthang.

Paro | The country's international gateway is renowned for the circular watchtower above its dzong housing Bhutan's National Museum – home to a fabulous array of Himalayan treasures.

Phobjikha Valley and Gangteng | Stronghold of the rare black-necked cranes, rare migrants that roost on the valley's marshlands in winters. To welcome their arrival, the monastery holds a festival each November.

Paro Taktsang | Wedged in a lofty cliff, nearly a vertical kilometre about the valley, Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) Monastery with its golden pagoda roofs is one of the defining sights of the eastern Himalayas.

Travel Information

Time zone: UTC+6 hours

Flying time: Overnight halt.

Currency: Bhutanese ngultrum

Capital: Thimphu

When to go

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature °C	6	7	9	15	18	22	22	21	20	16	13	8
Rainfall mm	15	41	23	58	122	246	373	345	155	38	8	3
Best to travel	●	●	●●	●●	●	●	●	●	●●	●●	●●	●

●● The best time to travel

● A good time to travel

● Low season

Be inspired

For help planning your perfect holiday, contact us at the Old Fire Station, Ealing, London.

Tel: 020 8566 3739

Web: www.transindus.com



PARO Shops, restaurants and offices in richly carved traditional buildings line the main street of Paro, a couple of hours' drive from Thimphu, where two of eastern Bhutan's main rivers meet. Approached by a spectacular flight path, which only a handful of Bhutanese pilots are qualified to undertake, the town's airport is Bhutan's principal arrival point for foreign travellers, but locals know it above all for the splendid Rinpung Dzong, reached via a covered cantilever bridge. The fortress-monastery's most valuable possession is a giant embroidered tapestry, or *thondrol* (*thangka*), depicting the founding father of the *dzong*, Guru Rinpoche; the treasure is unrolled only once a year on the morning of the annual *tsechu* (festival), attended by thousands of locals in colourful traditional dress. On the hill behind rests the National Museum in a beautifully restored watchtower, the Ta Dzong, built in the 1650s to guard Paro's *dzong*.

TAKTSANG (TIGER'S NEST) Several other sights lie in and around town but further up the valley (towards Tibet) lies what is arguably Bhutan's most iconic picture-postcard monument – the Taktsang Monastery. Commonly known as the 'Tiger's Nest', it is wedged into a lofty cliff nearly a vertical kilometre above the valley. Rock-cut steps and rickety bridges connect the four wings, whose golden pagoda roofs, fluttering prayer flags and distempered walls are dwarfed by the vista of forested hills and snow-capped mountains unfolding on all sides – this spectacle alone is worth the journey to Bhutan! This fabulous site has long been sacred. Some of Tibet's most illustrious sages and saints meditated here from the 8th century. The monastery is reached by a marvellous, though strenuous, uphill walk enlivened throughout by increasingly grand vistas.

THIMPHU Thimphu became the capital of Bhutan in 1961, since when it has swollen to a town of around 80,000 people. TransIndus tours typically pause a couple of nights here – long enough to take in its impressive *dzongs* (fortress-monasteries), the King's Memorial *chorten*, Buddhist painting school and national folk museum, made of rammed earth to resemble a traditional farmstead. Look out too for local delicacies such as jellied cow skin and fried fern on sale the weekly market, and don't miss the chance to touch a takin, Bhutan's national animal, which looks like a cross between a cow and a goat and survives in the nearby Mothitang Reserve. The town's other claim to fame is that it remains the only world capital without traffic lights. Some were installed but had to be removed after the locals complained they were impersonal!



PUNAKHA Around 15.5 miles (25km) east of Thimphu, Punakha and its gorgeous valley typically offers visitors their first real taste of rural Bhutan. Built in around 1638 and beautifully sited at the confluence of two rivers, its *dzong* ranks among the country's most famous monasteries. It is a veritable showcase of Bhutanese craftsmanship, with a particularly impressive assembly hall featuring fine clay statues and intricate murals. The *dzong* also hosts a well-known festival, during which an enormous thondrol – an extraordinary appliquéd sacred banner – is unfurled, conferring merit on all who see it.



DOCHU LA PASS On the road to Punakha from Thimphu lies the Dochu La Pass, at 3,100m (10,170ft). 108 memorial stupas adorn the pass, arranged in three concentric circles. The vast expanse of the snow-clad mountain peaks of the Himalayas lies to the east, among them the 7,158-metre (23,484-ft) Mt Gangkar Puensam, the highest in Bhutan. Notoriously foggy, best views are to be had by those willing to brave the cold between October and February. Late February into March, the pass rewards visitors with a splendid spectacle of rhododendrons and magnolias scattered on the hillsides.

Tshechus

Bhutan's religious festivals form a particularly important part of the local and tourist calendar. The best known are *tshechus*, typically three- to five-day events staged at different times of the year by every village in honour of Guru Rinpoche, a popular 8th-century sage credited with bringing Buddhism to the region. The Bhutanese have elevated *tsechus* into a distinctive combination of social gathering, morality play and spiritual instruction. It is a time for locals to dress in their finest clothes, eat, drink and be merry, but at its heart it remains a profoundly spiritual event overseen by senior monks, nobility and officials. Traditionally, mere attendance at a *tshechu* is believed to bring merit. The riotous colour – in particular the fantastically-attired masked dancers – and general atmosphere of bonhomie tempt many foreign visitors to time their itineraries to coincide with the two biggest *tshechus* at Thimphu (typically September or October) and Paro (typically March or April). Extravagantly-named dances, or *cham*, such as 'The Dance of the Fearsome Deities' and 'The Dance of the Four Stags' not only entertain but serve varying purposes. And perhaps the oddest aspect of these gatherings are their notably bawdy 'clowns' whose slapstick antics lighten proceedings.





BUMTHANG VALLEY

Situated in the heart of the country, a crossroads-like alignment of four valleys is collectively known as Bumthang. Until the 1970s, when a road was finally constructed through it, this region remained isolated and relatively undeveloped. Today, with its many stories and legends, religious associations, abundant temples and monasteries, it is regarded as a kind of cultural heartland and a great place to leave your car parked up for a couple of days and take to the footpaths. A succession of picture-book villages line its lower reaches, home to some of Bhutan's oldest and most revered monasteries, as well as the brewery responsible for the kingdom's own brand of beer, 'Red Panda'. The eponymous bear lives in temperate forests above 1,525m (5,000ft), where it spends the day sleeping in trees.

GANGTENG & PHOBJIKHA VALLEY

The 17th-century *dzong* at Gangteng is this awesome valley's prime religious monument, although most visitors come in search of black-necked cranes, rare migrants that roost on the valley's marshlands between October and March. To welcome their arrival, the monastery holds a festival each November in which local children wear specially made crane masks. The other major event here is *tsechu*, which usually falls in October, when monks perform traditional cham dances in the monastery courtyard, watched by crowds from the surrounding villages. Preserved in one of Gangteng's inner shrines is one of the country's more gruesome relics: the hands of a British army officer killed in a battle with Bhutanese forces in 1864.

CHIMI LHAKHANG

A 20-minute uphill walk through the rice and mustard fields surrounding Sopsokha village leads to the famous Chimi Lhakhang monastery. Along the way, you can't fail to notice the pink, red and blue ejaculating penises painted in formal Buddhist style over local housefronts, a legacy of this area's veneration of the 15th-century poet and Tantric luminary, Drukpa Kunley, who blessed the site and built a stupa here. The monastery houses its greatest treasure - the original ten-inch wooden phallus brought by Kunley from Tibet, in an ornately appointed altar room dominated by a statue of the "Divine Madman" himself. It's now an object of great veneration in Bhutan, notably among women wishing to conceive, who are blessed by being tapped on the head with it.



SAKTENG WILDLIFE SANCTUARY: 'LAND OF THE YETI'

Tucked away in the far east of Bhutan adjoining the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, the Sakteng Valley forms the heart of the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary. A remote region even by Bhutanese standards, it is home to approximately 6,000 semi-nomadic, mainly yak-herding Brokpa people who have preserved a centuries-old way of life, along with their own dialect, customs and distinctive sheepskin and yak-wool clothing. Only recently opened to foreign tourists, the sanctuary was established in 2002, ostensibly to protect one creature – the yeti, or as it's more commonly known in Bhutan, the migo. Local belief in the creature is strong (even if such belief has generally declined in Bhutan since the 1960s when a set of stamps depicting the yeti were issued), with claims of frequent sightings on nearby passes. It is a region rich in biodiversity too: 35 out of Bhutan's 46 species of rhododendrons are native to the area, along with black bear, leopard, musk deer and jungle cat.

Trekking in Bhutan

Bhutan's thickly forested valleys, open ridges and often remote high-mountain country offer some of the best trekking in the Himalayas. Surprisingly few visitors to the country actually come to walk; those that do are often delighted to find they have all but the most popular routes almost to themselves. Unlike Nepal, trekking here always involves camping. Many, if not most treks traverse remote and often sparsely inhabited regions. For practical reasons all trekkers need to be largely self-sufficient in food and fuel. Typically, then, walkers will be accompanied by a crew comprising pony men, a cook with an assistant or two, and, of course, a guide. The ponies transport tents, equipment, supplies and provisions not just for clients but for the crew, too. It may seem like a lot of people but there's something exhilarating about the almost expeditionary feel of trekking here. Crews generally have about them an easy camaraderie and (since many speak good English) often give an added insight into regular Bhutanese life and people. Above all, though, are Bhutan's especially beautiful and pristine wilderness, and the awareness that you are walking through regions that see significantly fewer visitors. Trekking in Bhutan is confined to around seventeen prescribed trails, some of which overlap or can be joined to form longer trips, ranging from just two days in the Punakha Valley to the demanding 25-day epic 'Snowman' trek. The best way to decide which of them is most suitable for you is to talk through the options with one of our Bhutan specialists. On the ground, we use only highly competent, well-equipped crews with years of experience leading foreigners on treks through this beautiful country.



Places to Stay in: Bhutan

Tourism has always been tightly regulated by the Bhutanese government, which has severely limited the number of hotels in the country. The resulting dearth is most noticeable at the middle of the range. Highend and budget options are more plentiful, but bookings are often hampered by a ruling which prohibits reservations more than 60 days in advance. Rest assured, however, that TransIndus

Amankora

Since it opened in 2004, this chain of five luxury lodges has set new standards in Himalayan hospitality. Laid out at strategic points on a circuit through the central and western valleys, each is a masterpiece of fusion architecture, blending cutting edge contemporary design (by Australian architect Kerry Hill) with traditional elements such as rammed-earth, limewashed walls, wood-panelled interiors and vegetable-dyed Buddhist murals. The overall effect is as heavenly as the landscape, which you can savour through the floor-to-ceiling picture windows, while soaking in a teakwood tub infused with forest herbs. Bukhari stoves crackle cosily in the rooms, which are styled in earthy colours. Should you tire of lazing around, try out one of Aman's signature experiences: poppy treks, archery lessons, or guided trout fishing.



has had decades of experience handling the quirks of Bhutanese travel and is well placed to ensure a smooth holiday experience, whatever your budget. Ask any of our Bhutan experts for more details on the following standout properties, or others in our tried-and-tested hotel portfolio. Accommodation on treks to more remote corners of the country may consist of tents or spare rooms in family farmsteads!

Uma Paro, Paro



Set on a pine-clad hillside overlooking the beautiful Paro Valley, the Uma Paro is one of the country's benchmark hotels, blending modern five-star luxury and traditional Himalayan style to create something that's both homely and a bit decadent. The scent of cedar and lemongrass pervades its light, off-white rooms, where primary-coloured, swirling Bhutanese murals adorn the walls and floor-to-ceiling windows open on the valley. But if you can stretch to one of their gorgeous, stone-roofed, wood-lined villas, you won't regret it – they're like having your own mountain chalet, complete with Bukhari stove, private spa and butler.



Taj Tashi, Thimphu

This is the capital's top hotel – a spectacular five-star built in lavish *dzong* style. The exterior, with its Bhutanese wood-carved windows, pagoda roofs and yellow ochre walls, is as easy on the eye as the interior décor, which is every inch as lavish as you'd expect from India's gold-standard chain, featuring hand-painted Buddhist cloud murals, luxurious Himalayan rugs and lashings of brocaded silk. The Bhutanese food served in the hotel restaurant is fit for a king, and there's a gorgeous spa offering hot-stone baths and massages – though not a pool.



Gangtey Goenpa Lodge, Gangtey

'Nirvana!' was how one of our guests recently described this mountain lodge in the Bhumang Valley region of Bhutan – and with good reason. Simply put: it's an extraordinary place in an extraordinary location, with oodles of Himalayan atmosphere. Styled in pastel hues and warm fabrics that reflect that cultural heritage of the area, each of the eight rooms have huge picture windows revealing spectacular panoramas of the valley, which you can enjoy while soaking in the roll-top bathtub or curled up next to a cosy fire. The service is superb, and managers Chris and Patti founts of knowledge on Bumthang and its footpaths.



Lingkhar Lodge, Trashigang



The Lingkhar is a relatively new property in the east of Bhutan – a region where decent accommodation was hitherto in short supply. It gets rave reviews from our clients for its prime location, a short drive out of Trashigang town. Set amid orange orchards, the blocks of rooms overlook terraced fields. They're spacious and attractively designed in Bhutanese style. The site is blissfully quiet, beds fabulously comfortable, and hosts Mingur and Deki perfect hosts.

Travel in Bhutan

Flights to Bhutan leave from Delhi, Kolkata, Kathmandu and Bangkok. A number of overland routes are also possible from India, allowing you to knit the country into a tour of the Northeast Hill States.

In Bhutan itself, travel for tourists is conducted almost entirely by private vehicle with a driver. Government rules insist you also have a guide with you at all times, and TransIndus has identified a handful of really good ones who will enrich your holiday experience.

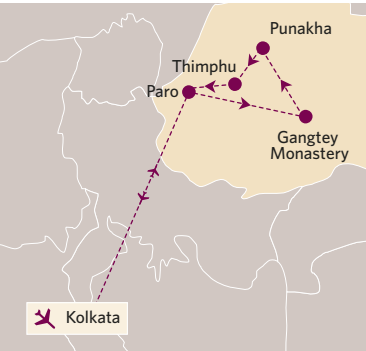
Journeys invariably rely on the main east-west highway, known locally as the 'Lateral Road', which was originally constructed in 1962 and is single-track for much of its length. The route crosses a number of high passes, but none likely to cause any problems with altitude sickness. Driving in Bhutan, like much of life, tends to be a leisurely affair, with speeds rarely exceeding 30 mph (48 kmph).

When to Go

Autumn, from September to November, and spring, from March through April, are the best months to travel in Bhutan. Winter weather can be very cold at higher elevations, especially at night. From June, the views are regularly obscured by cloud and mist as the country receives the bulk of its 5.5m (18ft) of rainfall during the annual monsoon. Flights are frequently disrupted and roads blocked by landslides at this time too.

Itineraries

The following itineraries are intended to give an idea of what is possible to see and do in Bhutan over trips of between 12 and 16 days. For those with more time and a sense of adventure, we can also arrange longer tours in the more remote and less travelled far east of the state; contact our office to discuss the options with one of our Bhutan specialists.



BHUTAN HIGHLIGHTS

Discover the magic and mystery of Bhutan on this short tour, covering the rich sights of Paro and Thimphu and taking in the amazing fortified monastic *dzong* at Punakha. Also included is the beautiful valley of Gangtey, famous for the migrant black-necked cranes, and an excellent base for walks.

- Day 1** Fly from UK to **Kolkata** via the Middle East.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning; stay two nights.
- Day 3** City sightseeing.
- Day 4** Take a short flight to **Paro**, drive to **Thimphu**; stay two nights.
- Day 5** City sightseeing.
- Day 6** Drive to **Gangtey**; stay two nights.
- Day 7** Explore the **Phobjikha Valley** and visit the black-necked crane visitor centre.
- Day 8** Drive eastward to **Punakha**; stay overnight. In the afternoon, visit Punakha Dzong.
- Day 9** Drive to **Paro**; stay two nights.
- Day 10** Sightseeing in and around the town includes a visit to the **Tiger's Nest Monastery**.
- Day 11** Fly to Kolkata; stay overnight.
- Day 12** Travel back to UK via the Middle East.



MOUNTAIN KINGDOMS OF NEPAL & BHUTAN

Take an exciting journey through towns and cities rich in Buddhist tradition and culture on this interesting tour of the mountain kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan.

- Day 1** Fly from UK to **Kathmandu** via the Middle East.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning; stay three nights.
- Day 3** City Sightseeing.
- Day 4** Visit **Bhaktapur & Patan**.
- Day 5** Take a short flight to **Paro**, drive to Thimphu; stay two nights.
- Day 6** City sightseeing.
- Day 7** Drive to **Trongsa**, stay two nights.
- Day 8** Visit local sights around Trongsa.
- Day 9** Drive to **Bumthang**, the gateway to Eastern Bhutan; stay two nights.
- Day 10** Explore the scenic valley; visit local temples and villages.
- Day 11** Drive to **Gangtey**; stay two nights.
- Day 12** Explore the **Phobjikha Valley** and visit the black-necked crane visitor centre.
- Day 13** Drive to Paro; stay two nights.
- Day 14** City sightseeing.
- Day 15** Return to Kathmandu by air; stay overnight.
- Day 16** Travel back to UK via the Middle East.



EASTERN BHUTAN

Explore rural Eastern Bhutan on this fascinating tour that takes you well off the beaten track to remote towns, scenic valleys and villages as well as the main visitor highlights further west.

- Day 1** Fly from UK to **Delhi** on an overnight service.
- Day 2** Arrive in the morning and take a connecting flight to **Paro**; stay two nights.
- Day 3** Sightseeing in and around the city includes a visit to the **Taksang (Tiger's Nest) Monastery**.
- Day 4** Drive to **Thimphu**; stay two nights.
- Day 5** City sightseeing.
- Day 6** Drive eastward to **Punakha**; stay overnight. In the afternoon visit **Punakha Dzong**.
- Day 7** Drive to **Gangtey**; stay two nights.
- Day 8** Explore the **Phobjikha Valley**; calling at the black-necked crane visitor centre.
- Day 9** Drive via **Trongsa** to **Bumthang**, the gateway to Eastern Bhutan; stay two nights.
- Day 10** Explore the valley – one of the most scenic in the country – and visit local temples and villages.
- Day 11** Take the road to **Mongar** driving through the Trumshingla Pass, the highest motorable road in Bhutan; stay overnight.
- Day 12** Drive to **Trashigang**; stay two nights.
- Day 13** Explore the local market and take a scenic drive through the outlying areas of town.
- Day 14** Drive to the border town of **Samdrup Jangkar**, where you cross the frontier into India and drive to **Guwahati**; stay overnight.
- Day 15** Fly to Delhi on an afternoon service; stay overnight.
- Day 16** Fly back to UK, arriving the same day.



Sri Lanka

Curling into the Indian Ocean like a tear drop from the tip of south India, the island known to the ancients as ‘Serendip’, and until 1972 as ‘Ceylon’, fits most people’s idea of what a tropical idyll should look like: golden-sand beaches, coconut groves and forested uplands sporting hats of fluffy cotton wool clouds.

Although sand and surf provide the principal focus for many of today’s visitors, a wealth of extraordinary sights lie only a morning’s drive inland. The misty slopes around Nuwara Eliya are carpeted with neatly cropped tea plantations, while Kandy is the site of the Temple of the Tooth, Sri Lanka’s most revered Buddhist pilgrimage site. Further north, the remnants of former capitals include famous archaeological centres where you can gaze at giant Buddhas, huge whitewashed stupas and caves painted with ancient murals. Wildlife enthusiasts will also find plenty of inspiration in the island’s national parks, whose savannah and forests shelter populations of wild elephant and – the star attraction – elusive leopards.



Highlights of Sri Lanka

Sigiriya | Scale this dramatic rock outcrop, surging above the jungle canopy of Sri Lanka’s Central Province, to see ancient murals and ruined water gardens dating from the reign of King Kasyapa (477–495 AD)

Yala National Park | The country’s oldest and most popular national park is best known for its leopards, although the prolific birdlife, herds of roaming elephant and the elusive sloth bear are no less intriguing.

Anuradhapura | Towering stupas and ancient monastic complexes are just some of the impressive vestiges of the Sinhalese city and former capital of the island that flourished here 2,000 years ago.

Bentota | This tropical paradise is the premier downtime destination in the country, offering sun-soaked golden beaches, Ayurveda, watersports, and a vast selection of world-class resorts and boutique hideaways.

Polonnaruwa | Sri Lanka’s finest ancient Buddhist art and architecture is laid around the well-preserved vestiges of an immense late-12th-century city, the most compelling of the country’s ancient capitals.

Kandy | The country’s cultural capital, and second largest city in Sri Lanka after Colombo, is home of the revered Temple of the Tooth. It also plays host to one of the island’s most vibrant religious festivals, Esala Perahera.

Nuwara Eliya | Fragrant tea estates carpet the slopes of this former British hill station, an area of verdant valleys and countless plantations where you can stay in some charismatic heritage properties.

Galle | Sri Lanka’s best preserved colonial-era fortified city is encircled by imposing Dutch ramparts. The old quarter inside now holds an enthralling crop of smart boutiques, cafés, restaurants and hotels.

Travel Information

Time zone: UTC+5.30 hours

Flying time: 10.30 hours

Currency: Sri Lankan rupee

Capital: Colombo

When to go

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature °C	27	27	28	28	28	28	28	28	27	27	27	27
Rainfall mm	75	75	70	185	140	130	125	110	155	265	296	196
Best to travel	●●	●●	●●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●●	●●	●●

●● The best time to travel ● A good time to travel ● Low season

Be inspired

For help planning your perfect holiday, contact us at the Old Fire Station, Ealing, London.
Tel: **020 8566 3739**
Web: **www.transindus.com**

COLOMBO | Colombo, Sri Lanka’s capital and international gateway, is a large, modern metropolis with roots as a medieval port. Its streets were laid out by Dutch colonialists in the 1600s and expanded by their British successors, with the city quickly becoming the island’s commercial and transport hub, which it has remained ever since.

Despite a lack of formal ‘must-see’ sights, Colombo is a satisfying place to book-end an itinerary. The banking enclave known as the ‘Fort’, the original Dutch and Portuguese hub, is a curious blend of modern offices and 19th-century streets occupied by hotels and stores. Alongside it, Pettah is a busy knot of streets, forming an atmospheric market area dotted with churches and mosques. There’s more refined shopping at the dainty boutiques and upmarket shops of Kollupitiya and Bambalapitiya, making this is a great way to conclude your holiday.



ANURADHAPURA | Anuradhapura, the vast Sinhalese capital that endured for nearly a millennium from around 377 BC, remains a sacred city simply because it was Buddhism’s initial home on the island. The famous Tooth Relic, a canine of the Buddha retrieved from his funeral pyre, reputedly came first to what is now the Isurumuniyagala Monastery, a small but charming temple hollowed out of a dark, boulder-strewn hillock around a sunken water pool.

Today, Anuradhapura retains great appeal for both tourists and pilgrims. It is the sheer scale of its *dagobas*, or stupas, which impresses most. While Sri Lanka is dotted with these typically bell-shaped and whitewashed memorials, but the largest and most impressive are found here.

POLONNARUWA | Standing alongside the shimmering expanse of a vast artificial lake, Polonnaruwa is the most compelling of Sri Lanka’s ancient capitals. From the 11th to 13th centuries, a succession of ambitious kings developed an immense city here. Enclosed within three concentric walls were fabulous gardens, imposing palaces, temples and thriving monasteries – an astonishing urban creation to which the famous Tooth Relic was brought both as a kind of talisman.

It is at its best at sunrise and early morning when, tinged with soft amber light, the site is patrolled by troops of foraging monkeys. Five distinct clusters of monuments demand attention but the Royal Citadel, Quadrangle and Northern groups suffice for most visitors. The ethereal statues, finely sculpted architectural detail, ancient frescoes and murals, colossal Buddha images and immense stupas lend to the site a magical atmosphere.



SIGIRIYA | In the very heart of Sri Lanka, a massive flat-topped, sheer-sided rock rises abruptly from the plains. It is a striking sight and a remarkable one due to the presence on its summit of an unusual fortress built in the 5th century. About halfway up the great rock, recessed into a kind of niche, are a series of celebrated frescoes depicting women often referred to as *apsaras* – celestial nymphs, or ‘cloud maidens’ – but possibly depicting the king’s wives and courtesans bathing or tending flowers. Exhilarating stairs and precipitous catwalks complete the final haul to the summit, which is rewarded with marvellous views across the serene countryside. For many visitors, this is understandably the country’s top cultural attraction.



NUWARA ELIYA | Nuwara Eliya, the country’s principal hill station, lies at the heart of an extensive and commercially important tea-growing region – an area of verdant valleys and slopes contoured by the mosaic-like swirls of countless plantations. The best way to reach it is aboard the charming highland railway from Kandy, which still feels much like a Raj-era toy train – craning out of the observation car’s windows, you might well decide the tracks were laid back in the 1880s as much for pleasure as for practicality.

The legacy of British times endures here in numerous ways. Horse racing, flower shows and hotels with names like The Grand, Windsor and St Andrew’s are still going strong. Nuwara Eliya is the sort of place you almost feel obliged to take lashings of marmalade at breakfast, cake at tea time and hearty puddings smothered in custard for supper. Visitors who venture up here straight from sea level, however, should come prepared for cooler weather. In January and February, you’ll need a couple of extra blankets on the bed at night, and maybe even a hot water bottle!

KANDY | The prominence of Kandy, Sri Lanka’s highland capital and second largest city, rests on its role as repository for the famous ‘Tooth Relic’ of the Buddha, one of Asia’s most sacred objects. The holy canine is enshrined in the illustrious Temple of the Tooth, built in the 1700s, and a fabulously atmospheric place to visit if your arrival coincides with one of the numerous rituals that take place here throughout the day.

Each year during the summer, the shrine also plays host to one of the region’s greatest spectacles, *Esala Perahera*, during which exuberant processions fill the town for eleven days and nights. Hundreds of dancers cavort to the furious rhythms of even more drummers, and brightly caparisoned elephants march trunk to tail. At its climax the leading tusker bears a canopy shading a gleaming casket, a replica of the one which cocoons the acclaimed ‘Tooth Relic’.

The town’s pretty lake, attractive streetscapes and pleasant climate combine to make it a charming halt. Nearby excursions include Peradeniya, the city’s superb botanical gardens, the serene hilltop temple of Gadaladeniya and the fascinating Ceylon Tea Museum established in a former 1920s tea factory.

TRINCOMALEE | Blessed by one of the world’s finest natural harbours, Trincomalee (or ‘Trinco’ as it’s commonly known) was contested for centuries by European powers. Its strategic importance on the island’s northeastern coast saw it evolving into a vital British naval base during the Second World War. The recent ‘peace dividend’ (resulting from the demise of the Tamil Tigers) means Trinco and adjoining regions finally seem set to leave behind their ethnically-fraught recent past.

The island’s dry east coast has always been sparsely populated and something of a world apart. Yet here stretch some of Sri Lanka’s emptiest and most idyllic beaches, among them Nilaveli which, at around 5 miles (8km), is among the longest on the island. Accessible by boat, nearby Pigeon Island provides added interest for snorkelers and divers. In the town itself, the 17th-century Portuguese fort (now called ‘Fort Frederick’), Swami Rock and a cliff-side temple along with the views from Orr’s Hill provide plenty of agreeable distraction from days of endless relaxation on the beach.

GALLE | Jutting like a small peninsula into the Indian Ocean from Sri Lanka’s southwestern tip, Galle is a gorgeous, colonial-era fortified city acclaimed as the finest of its kind in Southeast Asia. Although it has been a port since ancient times, it expanded rapidly under the Portuguese and later, in the 18th century during the Dutch era, curtain walls, bastions linked by splendid ramparts and a pair of solid gateways were added. These can still be enjoyed today, and form a charismatic backdrop for easy ambles around the old town, which preserves an almost village-like atmosphere rather at odds with that of its modern avatar on its landward side.

Galle’s grid-planned streets are lined with lovely colonial-style houses and mansions, their arched verandahs and shuttered windows offering much-needed shade against the hot tropical sun. Among them lie a charming jumble of cafes, shops and guest houses. In recent years, several of Galle’s old buildings have also been converted by foreigners for use as boutique hotels, complete with antique furniture and fixtures.



Beaches of Sri Lanka

Although the island is loaded with cultural attractions, for many visitors, Sri Lanka is all about its beaches. Resorts that were little more than backpacker hideaways before the end of the civil war have grown rapidly over the past few seasons. However, plenty of unspoilt corners remain. Whether you're looking for a laid-back break somewhere tranquil, an inspirational snorkelling or diving centre close to a coral reef, or the bright lights of a fully fledged five-star on the sand, you'll be spoilt for choice.

Sri Lankan beaches come in many and varied forms. While the coast around Galle in the southwest is dominated by archetypal palm-backed paradise coves, the wilder, windier east and northwest are more wave-lashed, with generally longer stretches of sand and less development. Accommodation is also varied, ranging from large, international-style resorts to pretty boutique places in off-track locations. And of course, with a constant supply of seafood landed fresh each morning on the beaches, the food is wonderful. Here's a rundown of our favourites:

Tangalla | A picture-perfect stretch of Sri Lankan coast, featuring idyllic white-sand coves, turquoise waters and thousands of tilting palm trees leaning towards the sea.

Arugam | This remote east-coast beach is popular among surfers for its world-class waves. It also has a host of other wildlife and cultural attractions nearby, including majestic elephants, beautiful mangrove forests and hidden jungle monasteries.

Uppuveli & Nilaveli | Miles of sleepy and utterly unspoilt beach, book-ended by temple-topped Swami Rock and tiny Pigeon Island, home to some of Sri Lanka's best snorkelling.

Kalpitiya | A string of pristine and still largely undiscovered beaches fringe the beautiful Kalpitiya peninsula, north of Colombo, complete with Sri Lanka's finest cluster of eco lodges, top-class kite surfing and spectacular pods of spinner dolphins.

Bentota | Bentota's huge expanse of palm-backed, spray-soaked golden sand is home to some of the island's top beach hotels, ranging from five-star palaces to boutique hideaways, plus loads of water sports and boat trips on the Bentota Lagoon.

Unawatuna | Sri Lanka's party beach, Unawatuna is far from pristine but remains an enjoyable place to while away a few days, with plenty going on at all times of the day and night, from yoga classes and diving trips to beach barbecues and full-moon parties.

Mirissa | Small but perfectly formed beach, especially pretty after dark when its lantern-lit waterfront restaurants get going, serving up some of the island's finest seafood. It's also the best place to go whale-watching in Sri Lanka, with majestic blue and sperm whales regularly sighted just a few miles out to sea.





Wildlife in Sri Lanka

Ranked amongst the world’s great biodiversity hotspots, Sri Lanka is arguably the best destination in Asia for viewing wildlife. Its isolation, copious rainfall generated by two distinct monsoons, and notable range of altitude and terrain lend a biodiversity typical of a much larger continent. Most of its fauna is endemic and mammals alone number 113 species. Even the most casual visitor is likely to relish its renown as one of the world’s best places to watch and photograph wild elephants and leopards.

Without doubt, the secret of the island’s success as a wildlife haven are the numerous sanctuaries that exist here. For over two millennia Sri Lanka’s royalty created nature reserves as an

expression of the Buddhist tenets that revere all forms of life. Today approximately 26% of the country’s land is classed as ‘protected area’, encompassing numerous sanctuaries, national parks and forest reserves.

Aside from elephants and leopards, other notable species include sloth bears, jackals, flying foxes (or fruit bats), lorises, palm civets, mongooses, pangolins, mugger (or marsh) crocodiles, water monitors, and a great many snakes (which invariably remain out of harm’s way). Bird life, too, is prolific with over 400 species, 26 of which are endemic.



HORTON PLAINS NATIONAL PARK

Horton Plains National Park is – at around 2,200m (7,200ft) – the island’s highest and most isolated plateau. Covered by montane forest and undulating moor-like grassland, it forms the headwaters of three major rivers. The area is rich in biodiversity, particularly birds, but while you’re likely to spot sambar deer, much of the other wildlife is elusive.

The main reason to come here is to walk: a well-trodden trail winds south to the edge of the plateau and Little World’s End perched on the side of a sheer cliff. It is a terrific prelude to ‘World’s End’, about a kilometre further along. Here, the precipice reveals a spectacular, vertigo-inducing, 900-m (2,950-ft) with far-reaching views across the southern hills. Walkers typically loop back past the 20-m (66-ft) high Baker Falls. On clear days you might notice a distant pyramidal hill – Adam’s Peak, sacred to Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims, is one of Sri Lanka’s most spellbinding pilgrimage sites.

Named after a former British governor, the



YALA NATIONAL PARK

When it comes to spotting Sri Lanka’s leopards, the dry woodlands and scrub of 377-sq-mile (978-sq-km) Yala National Park are unsurpassed. It is the country’s oldest and most popular reserve with lovely varied landscapes encompassing forest, parkland, rocky outcrops, small lakes and lagoons. Despite the prolific birdlife, herds of roaming elephants and opportunities to glimpse the elusive sloth bear, the chance to spot Yala’s leopards is why most people come here. The park currently has around 35 leopards – among the highest population densities anywhere in the world. Sightings, however, remain a matter of luck. A typical jeep safari with an obligatory tracker covers just one section of the park and the best sightings tend to be along the rougher, less-used tracks.

When it comes to spotting Sri Lanka’s leopards, the dry woodlands



MINNERIYA NATIONAL PARK

For visitors exploring the ruined cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, nearby Minneriya National Park makes an excellent change of pace and scenery. At its heart stands the large Minneriya Tank, a huge 3rd-century reservoir (for this region lies in the island’s ‘Dry Zone’). Its habitats are surprisingly varied, with forests, scrublands, grasslands and wetlands. Elephants – and safaris to see them at fairly close range – are the main attraction, particularly during the famous ‘Gathering’ of August and September when hundreds of pachyderms migrate to the park to graze and bathe in its cool waters.

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SINHARAJA FOREST RESERVE

In complete contrast to the more arid country to its east, the 34-sq-mile (88-sq-km) Sinharaja Forest Reserve is the country’s last viable area of primary tropical rainforest. The hilly area has long featured in local legends and lore. Its name (literally ‘lion king’) is believed to be a reference to its former fame as the last redoubt of the now extinct Asiatic lion.

Damp, dense and extraordinarily fecund, it is best visited in the relatively dry months of August and September, and January to April. Birders should note the striking phenomenon of mixed species of foraging bird flocks, with up to an astonishing 48 species noted on occasions. Several nature trails, ranging from gentle walks to strenuous full-day hikes, offer a wonderfully intimate, if not soggy, experience of this special forest.

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Places to Stay: Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is justly famous for the quality and variety of its highend hotels, which range from über-stylish boutique hideaways tucked away in the palm groves to lavish city centre five-stars with all the trimmings. The profiles below will give you a sense of the kinds of places on offer. In addition, TransIndus works closely with the John Keells Group, whose award-winning *Cinnamon* and *Chaaya* hotels offer benchmark luxury at key locations around the island. As ever, our Sri Lanka specialist consultants are the best source of information on the latest hot properties on the island.



Vivanta by Taj, Bentota

India's premier hotel group picked a plum spot for their beachside complex at Bentota. Overlooking the Indian Ocean, this large, modern hotel enjoys direct access to the sand: you can literally hear the sound of crashing surf while lazing in the infinity pool. The rooms are spacious and beautifully furnished, the food is top notch and facilities as slick as you'd expect from one of the world's leading luxury chains.



The Grand, Nuwara Eliya

Slip back to a more genteel era, when tea was taken on the lawns at 4 o'clock sharp, as the mist rolled up the mountains. Set amid elegant gardens at the heart of Sri Lanka's tea growing district, the *Grand* is a textbook mid-18th-century mansion, built to house the British Governor of the island in suitably flamboyant mock-Tudor style. Sumptuously restored, it now serves as the island's foremost heritage hotel – a popular retreat for the city's top brass as well as foreigners seeking a taste of bygone eras.

Thilanka, Kandy



On a hillside overlooking the city, Thilanka is a stylish haven away from the heat and traffic of Kandy. Its rooms are long, spacious and cool, with framed antique garments, Kandyan textiles, wood carvings, traditional painted headboards and temple paraphernalia adding an evocative counterpoint to the clean lines of the modern, minimalist interiors. For a refreshing dip, there's a good sized kidney-shaped pool that's underlit after dark. Meals are served indoors, or al fresco on a stone-lined terrace against a backdrop of tropical trees and rooftops tumbling to the lakeside. In short: a five-star experience at three-star prices.

Vil Uyana, Sigiriya



In the shadow of Sri Lanka's great rock-fortress nestles this gorgeous eco resort, where guests stay in double-storeyed stilted cottages in the middle of a man-made lake. Boasting teak floors, king-sized beds on plinths and bath tubs as large as plunge pools, the units are huge and well-spaced, offering exceptional levels of privacy. They are wonderfully atmospheric places to lounge in, especially after dark when the sounds of the tropical forest fill the night air. This is an option particularly recommended for wildlife lovers as the surrounding paddy fields and marshland are teeming with exotic birds and butterflies. Also on site is a luxury spa specialising in Ayurveda treatments.

Uga Bay, Passekudah

Passekudah – a serene curve of translucent blue water and golden sand – is the loveliest of the beaches on the east coast. A small cluster of mid-sized resorts have sprung up behind it since the end of the war, but they're low-key and Jet Wing's *Uga Bay* is the pick of the crop. Crossing mostly open paddy fields and palm groves, the drive down from Trincomalee is a delight, and the studios themselves cool, stylish hideaways. Most enjoy uninterrupted sea views; some have direct access to the sand from their private sun decks. Meals are served in a cosy communal restaurant or on your own terrace, only a stone's throw from the waves – the perfect wind-down after a tour of the island's cultural treasures inland.



Tea Trails Bungalows

Life on a Sri Lankan tea plantation has its own unhurried pace and distinctive vistas, and the perfect way to savour both is a stay in one of this quartet of converted planters' bungalows high in the Hill Country overlooking Castlereagh Lake. Say what you like about their impact on the local forest, the island's 19th-century tea pioneers certainly knew where to site a house. Each of these four immaculately restored period properties have spectacular views from their verandahs. The interiors have been richly refurbished, but retain a colonial-era feel, with luxuriously upholstered suites, wingback armchairs and claw-foot tubs in their bathrooms – as well as a manager, chef, butler and team of liveried room boys on hand to ensure your comfort. The only features that would have looked out of place in the 1930s are the glorious spring-fed swimming pools in the grounds.



Serene Pavilions, Wadduwa

It's hard to imagine a more idyllic first landfall in Sri Lanka than this small, wonderfully chic boutique place on Wadduwa Beach, just south of the capital, Colombo. Shaded by tall coconut palms, its 12 exclusive villas offer great privacy and comfort. Each has its own plunge pool, sun terrace, marble-lined bathroom, Jacuzzi and walled garden, and the interiors are out-of-this-world, with their fusion of Sri Lankan and Balinese style. A dedicated butler is assigned to each property, ensuring top service day and night. Secluded, yet open to the breeze straight off the ocean, Serene Pavilions lives up to its name.

Jetwing Lighthouse, Galle



A stylish tropical retreat with rooms looking straight over the waves crashing on the rocks below, the *Jetwing Lighthouse* offers a luxurious, five-star base on the outskirts of Galle. The water's a bit rough for swimming on the beach adjacent to the hotel, but there's a dreamy infinity pool instead, and another beach a short walk away that's safe to bathe from. Many of our clients choose the *Lighthouse* for a relaxing wind-down at the end of their tour – its dreamy location and chic ambience are a seductive combination.

Leopard Safari Camp

This award-winning safari outfit was one of the first to come up with the concept of luxury tented accommodation as a springboard for wildlife viewing in Sri Lanka, and it still sets the benchmark, thanks to the enthusiasm of the staff, and superb siting of the tents on the fringes of Yala National Park. Sleeping under canvas allows you to experience the heart of the island's wilderness without sacrificing creature comforts such as a king-sized bed, hot shower and your own loo. Game drives, conducted by the camp's team of resident naturalists, are conducted in state-of-the-art Toyota Jeeps that allow you to get really close to the leopards and other wildlife – a great way to experience this pristine natural environment.





Travel in Sri Lanka

Although renowned the world over for its tropical beaches, Sri Lanka holds a geographically varied and culturally fascinating hinterland that makes for a wonderful touring holiday. After a spell recovering from your journey in a beachside resort outside Colombo – point of arrival for all international flights – we recommend you explore the riches of the Cultural Triangle before heading up to the Hill Country, and returning finally to the coast for a spot of R&R.

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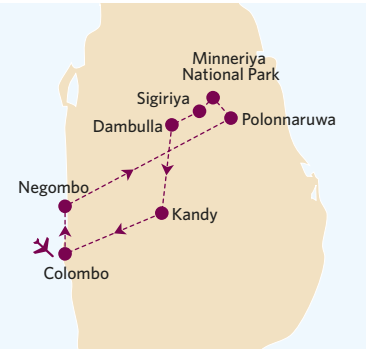
When to Go

The main tourist season in Sri Lanka lasts from November until early April, when the south and west coasts – home to the island’s principal beach resorts – are mostly dry. The rainy season here lasts from May until August (the so-called ‘Yala’ monsoon), although there may be short periods of wet weather in October and November. Up in the drier north and east, the main ‘Maha’ monsoon sweeps in from October through January.

The island’s tropical climate ensures warm, balmy weather most of the year, with average temperatures of 27°C (80° F), except in the Hill Country around Nuwara Eliya, where the nights can be chilly enough to require a blanket.

Itineraries

The following tried-and-tested itineraries are designed to show what can comfortably be seen over trips of between 9 and 16 nights. They may easily be shortened or extended to suit your needs, or completely reworked. Consult our Sri Lanka specialists for further advice.



THE CULTURAL TRIANGLE

This short, introductory tour to Sri Lanka is ideal for first-time visitors.

Day 1 Fly from UK to **Colombo**.

Day 2 Arrive in the afternoon, transfer to **Negombo**, just north of the capital; stay one night.

Day 3 Drive to **Habarana**; stay three nights.

Day 4 Visit the ancient ruins of **Polonnaruwa**, followed by **Minneriya National Park**.

Day 5 Visit **Sigiriya** rock fortress.

Day 6 Drive to **Kandy** in the Central Highlands visiting the Dambulla Caves en route; stay two nights.

Day 7 Visit the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens this morning. In the afternoon visit the Temple of the Tooth and experience a Kandyan cultural show.

Day 8 Drive back to **Colombo** in the morning. Afternoon city sightseeing. Stay one night.

Day 9 Fly back to UK, arriving the same evening.



SRI LANKAN WILDLIFE

Especially designed for wildlife enthusiasts, this tour explores the national parks of southern Sri Lanka, and includes an boat excursion from Mirissa to spot blue and sperm whales.

Day 1 Fly from UK to **Colombo**.

Day 2 Arrive in the afternoon; transfer to **Galle**; stay two nights.

Day 3 Galle sightseeing.

Day 4 Drive to **Mirissa** for an overnight stay.

Day 5 Whale watching trip in the morning; in the afternoon drive eastward towards **Yala National Park**; stay two nights.

Day 6 Enjoy a full day of game drives inside the park.

Day 7 Drive to **Udawalawe National Park**; stay two nights.

Day 8 Enjoy a full day of game drives inside the park.

Day 9 Drive to the **Sinharaja Forest Reserve**; stay two nights.

Day 10 Morning and afternoon walks in this tropical rainforest.

Day 11 Drive to Colombo in the morning; tour of the city; stay overnight.

Day 12 Fly back to UK, arriving the same evening.



SRI LANKA IN STYLE

Experience the best of Sri Lanka on this leisurely tour that offers a mix of the main sights as well as a few off-track locations, staying in some of the finest accommodation in the country.

Day 1 Fly from UK to **Colombo**.

Day 2 Arrive in the afternoon; transfer to a country estate for an overnight stay.

Day 3 Drive to **Sigiriya**; stay three nights.

Day 4 Visit the ancient ruins of **Polonnaruwa**, followed by **Minneriya National Park**.

Day 5 Visit **Sigiriya rock fortress & Dambulla Caves**.

Day 6 Drive towards the eastern coast near **Passekudah**; stay three nights.

Day 7 Day at leisure on the beach.

Day 8 Day at leisure on the beach.

Day 9 Drive to **Kandy**; stay two nights.

Day 10 Visit the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens this morning. In the afternoon visit the Temple of the Tooth and experience a Kandyan cultural show.

Day 11 Drive towards tea country; stay three nights.

Day 12 Visit a tea plantation and enjoy a walk through colonial **Nuwara Eliya**.

Day 13 Excursion to the **Horton Plains National Park**.

Day 14 Drive along the coast to **Galle** for a relaxing couple of days on the beach.

Day 15 Day at leisure.

Day 16 Fly back to UK, arriving the same evening.





Maldives

Athatched ocean cottage resting on stilts above a lagoon of such crystalline, turquoise water it takes your breath away when you see it from your pillow in the morning ... Days spent lazing on palm-backed beaches of fine, sugar-white sand, with nothing more to think about than what to have for lunch, or whether to spend the afternoon dhoni cruising, snorkelling off the reef or enjoying a massage in the spa . . .

If this sounds like your idea of a perfect holiday, then the Maldives are for you. The formula couldn't be simpler. This is life stripped back to basics: no distractions, no culture shock to contend with or shopping to quicken the pulse. Just sublime sea water, pristine sand, blissfully blue skies, gently swaying palm trees and coral reefs filled with kaleidoscopic fish – quite literally on your doorstep. TransIndus holidays in the Maldives feature the pick of the archipelago's island hideaways. Each has its own unique location and style, whether classic-five star sparkle or understated eco-lodge chic.



Highlights of Maldives

- Seaplanes |** Transfers from the international airport at Male to many resorts, deserted island and sandbars are conducted by seaplane – amphibious light aircraft – great for bird's-eye views of the atolls.

Deserted islands | Most of the 1,190 islands comprising the Maldives are uninhabited, leaving plenty of scope for trips to pristine beaches untouched by humans. Overnight stays are possible on some.
- Seafood |** Fish and crustaceans from the surrounding seas form the cornerstone of the Maldivian diet, and every resort has a supply of the freshest local seafood, usually cooked in gravies of coconut milk.

Local culture | A trading post on the ancient seaways across the Indian Ocean, the Maldives supports a population with roots in South Asia, Africa and Arabia, which has given rise to a fascinating hybrid culture.
- Diving & Snorkelling |** The combination of transparent water, abundant coral and free-flowing tides make this one of the world's top sub-aqua destinations. Manta rays are its most iconic species.

Sea safaris | A trading post on the ancient seaways across the Indian Ocean, the Maldives supports a population with roots in South Asia, Africa and Arabia, which has given rise to a fascinating hybrid culture.
- Dhoni cruises |** Resembling Arab dhows, dhonis are traditional wooden Maldivian boats with a motor or lateen sails, commonly used for excursions from resorts to nearby deserted islands and sandbars.

Spas | Most resorts these days have luxury spas on site, some offering their visitors traditional gandhakolhi leaf and sand massage treatments by local hakeembe (healers), besides the more mainstream ones.

Travel Information

Time zone: UTC+5 hours

Flying time: 10.30 hours

Currency: Maldivian rufiyaa

Capital: Male

When to go

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temperature °C	28	29	29	30	29	29	28	30	28	28	28	28
Rainfall mm	110	35	75	122	218	165	150	175	195	195	230	215
Best to travel	●●	●●	●●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●●	●●	●●

●●

 The best time to travel

●

 A good time to travel

●

 Low season

Be inspired

For help planning your perfect holiday, contact us at the Old Fire Station, Ealing, London.
Tel: 020 8566 3739
Web: www.transindus.com

Maldives Resorts

An archipelago of 1190 islands spread over 90,000 sq km, the Maldives is one of the most dispersed countries in the world and therefore can offer offers a wide variety of secluded private island resorts – ideal places to unwind and relax. Detached from the hustle and bustle of daily life, the country’s world-class resorts come in varied shapes and sizes, from minimalist, eco-friendly hideaways with thatched cottages to luxurious five-star properties boasting water villas that float over the ocean. With transfers offered by either seaplanes or luxury motor boats from Malé these are, quite simply, among the most desirable island retreats in the world.

Whether you seek to celebrate your honeymoon in style, a special occasion in blissful surroundings, want a perfect family retreat away from the distractions of modern life or are hoping for the adrenalin rush of an active diving and sporting holiday, the Maldives can offer you a holiday that’s just right for you. Here is a small selection of some of the most popular resorts, but do speak with our consultants who will be happy to discuss your needs and help you find the one that is a perfect getaway for you.



Six Senses, Laamu

An über-luxury resort conveniently located south of Malé, Six Senses Laamu offers 97 private beach and water villas. Facilities include a choice of bars and restaurants serviced by an organic garden, a wine cellar boasting 500 labels and ever changing menu featuring freshly caught fish.

Distractions, if needed, include snorkelling with a resident marine biologist, diving on untouched reefs, windsurfing, canoeing, catamaran sailing, wakeboarding, waterskiing and private picnics on deserted islands. The much loved open-air Jungle Cinema is an ideal way to unwind after dinner. The Six Senses Spa offers award-winning signature treatments apart from reflexology, acupressure, reiki, shiatsu, yoga and a beautifully equipped gym.



Four Seasons

Located amid a remote natural wilderness in the UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve of Baa Atoll, just 30-minutes by seaplane from Malé, this luxury resort comprises thatched bungalows nestling among palm-trees or over the lagoon’s turquoise waters. All villas are beautifully furnished; some have their own private pools. An extensive choice of Italian, Japanese and Arabian cuisine is on offer at the restaurant.

Apart from a full complement of water sports, including a PADI-approved dive centre, the resort is well placed for dolphin watching trips. The island also holds an Olympic-size pool with a swim-up bar, seawater and children’s pools, a gym, floodlit tennis courts and a spa specializing in Ayurveda and yoga.



W Resort

W is a small, ultra-hip resort offering a choice of overwater villas fitted with partial glass floors, or double-storey Beach Oasis Villas with their own private plunge pools and sun decks. The design is cutting edge, clean and sleek. Gourmet dining options include the seafood-oriented Kitchen restaurant, which serves sushi and boasts a modern beach barbecue. You may wish to round off the evening on the dance floor of the resort’s chic subterranean bar, fifteen steps below beach level!

Activities include the island staples of diving and snorkelling around the house reef (regarded as one of the best in the archipelago), fishing, windsurfing, a spa with a wide range of treatments on an overwater pavilion.



Baros

Accommodation at Baros Maldives is in elegant thatched villas, some of which are built over the water with steps leading directly into the lagoon. Others are set amid the tropical vegetation lining the white-sand beach. All provide undisturbed privacy. Shaded paths lined with coconut trees, hibiscus and bougainvillea link the villas to the main buildings, restaurants and bars.

Facilities include a water sports centre and a spa. Snorkelling and diving is great on the island’s own reef. The resort’s own dive centre also runs PADI courses and offers access to dozens more world-class dive sites around the North Malé Atoll.



Adaarn

An island of lush tropical vegetation, fringed by beautiful beaches and the sparkling blue waters of the Indian Ocean, Adaaran Select Hudhuranfushi on beautiful Lhohifushi (“White Gold”) Island is a retreat catering for a range of tastes. Whether you’re seeking total relaxation, an activity-based stay or a mix of both, you’ll be well catered for here. Choose a Beach Villa on the sand or one of the luxurious overwater Ocean Villas, which all enjoy prime locations on the outline of the atoll. Savour superb food and cool drinks in a choice of restaurants and bars. There’s also an indulgent spa where you’ll be able to unwind, and first-class surfing facilities for those seeking an adrenaline hit. Popular excursions include the Island Hopping trip to a string of nearby, deserted islands!



Taj Exotica

One of the closest resorts to Malé and among the longest established of the luxury properties in the Maldives, the Taj Exotica on idyllic Emboodhu Finholu Island offers an array of arrestingly beautiful villas made of local palm thatch and wood. Some are located on a beach of powder-soft sand, while others perch over the region’s largest lagoon. The delectable gourmet food served here is particularly commendable.

Honeymooners and romantics will particularly enjoy this exceptional resort, which offers a high degree of privacy, in addition to a top-notch spa and water sports facilities.



Kuredu

Reached in 45 minutes by seaplane, Kuredu Island Resort & Spa prides itself on its top-class facilities (especially the snorkelling and diving) which sit alongside a varied selection of bungalows, villas and overwater suites. Divers from all over the world come to enjoy the marine life at the resort’s home reef. Unusually for the Maldives, there is also a golf facility, plus a wealth of other sporting activities. The island has a spa, spread over two locations, one of which sits above the ocean providing soothing glimpses of sea life as you enjoy your massage! Standard four-star accommodation is on offer if desired; however, we love the higher-grade villas and suites, which enjoy superb beach or overwater locations.



Bandos

Conveniently located just 7km from Malé International Airport, Bandos has a total of 215 rooms, sumptuous dining opportunities and a wealth of leisure options – a perfect setting for a romantic getaway or peaceful escape.

Guests have the benefit of a state-of-the-art dive centre with professional staff, as well as a dedicated clinic boasting a decompression chamber for complete peace of mind. The freshwater pool, with a wading area for children, provides a comfortable area to relax, and for the ultimate luxurious experience, indulge yourself with one of the revitalizing Asian therapies on offer at the Orchid Spa.



Komandoo

Komandoo Island Resort & Spa, 152km north of Malé International Airport, is a tiny private retreat with sugar-white sandbanks at both ends. The transfer is a dramatic 40-minute seaplane flight. The resort opened in 1998 and offers spectacular accommodation in spacious air-conditioned with terraces overlooking beach and crystalline turquoise water.

A popular honeymoon destination equipped with excellent scuba diving and water sports facilities, Komandoo also has a small gym. Alternatively, you’ll have plenty of excursions to choose from including night fishing, luxury sailing and trips to local islands. After all this activity, enjoy a rejuvenating experience at the Duniye Spa.

How to book your holiday

Having discussed your options with one of our travel consultants and chosen a trip that meets your aspirations, the next step is to confirm your booking by paying a deposit. This is normally 20% of the total cost of the tour, though it may be higher in some instances (such as when river cruises form part of the itinerary). A booking form will need to be completed and returned along with the deposit; the final payment will be due 8 weeks prior to departure.

We suggest you familiarize yourself with our booking terms and conditions, a copy of which you'll be sent along with the booking form. More details may be obtained from your travel consultant.



TransIndus - Events, blogs & Social media

At TransIndus, we believe visiting a new country – meeting its people and experiencing its culture – should yield far more than just a memorable holiday. A great trip enriches one's life long after it is over. In order to gain a deeper understanding of a destination, many of our clients return to the same one again and again. To inspire and help people keep in touch with their favourite parts of the world, we regularly run events, from illustrated talks to hands-on cultural evenings focussing on different aspects of a country or region. These may be conducted by our own staff, writers, journalists, experts and even a few celebrities! Our staff also regularly visit their specialist destinations and post blogs to share their discoveries.

Visit us at the Old Fire Station

We're always delighted to meet clients at our offices in South Ealing, London. Feel free to drop by to discuss your holiday plans with one of our specialist travel consultants over tea, coffee or a glass of wine. We are open from 9am–5.30pm on weekdays, and 9am–4pm on Saturdays. Our office is located in the Old Fire Station on St Mary's Rd, only 5 minutes' walk from South Ealing station, in West London. If driving, there is a paid car park immediately behind our premises, and free parking around nearby Lammas Park. However you travel to us, to ensure the right people are available to meet with you, it's a good idea to make an appointment by calling us on 020 8566 3739.



Keeping in touch

You can keep abreast of all that is happening at TransIndus including the introduction of new destinations, news, views and events in many different ways
Sign up for the TransIndus Newsletter
Read our Blogs at www.transindus.co.uk
Like our thoughts & posts on facebook at www.facebook.com/TransIndusUK
Follow us on twitter @TransIndus_UK
Enjoy our videos on www.youtube.com/user/TransIndus
Email us at enquiries@transindus.com to discuss your holiday
Speak to us on 020 8566 3739

Responsible Tourism

At TransIndus we make every effort to ensure our holidays have a positive environmental, social and economic impact on local communities. We support local schools, wildlife conservation and village projects and favour the use of responsible local hotels, lodges and guest-houses.

Karunya Kindergarten, Colachel | After the devastating Boxing Day tsunami of 2004, with the aid of International donations the Lebenslicht Charitable Trust helped build a village school for orphaned children and TransIndus provided hot lunches for the pupils to make sure they got at least one nutritious meal a day. Our involvement continues to this day, and we are proud to report the school remains a happy, healthy community with lively children.

The Jaipur Virasat Foundation (JVF) | The JVF is a charitable trust, set up in September 2002, to conserve Jaipur's heritage, and brings together traditional creative arts and craft skills with modern market requirements and skills to generate employment. We encourage our clients to visit JVF workshops as part of their tours, and donations from TransIndus travellers help to sustain the foundation's programme.

Guy's Trust | TransIndus is proud to support this charity set up by our clients Vicky and Tony Joseph in memory of their son Guy, who was tragically killed, aged 25, in a paragliding accident in Spain. Guy loved Nepal and as over a million children in Nepal don't go to school, Guy's Trust has built two Early Childhood Development Centres in the impoverished Kaski region, close to Pokhara where Guy lived.

More information can be found on their website: www.guystrust.org



Photo Competition

With so many TransIndus clients being keen amateur photographers, we have thoroughly enjoyed the wonderful entries received since our first competition over a decade ago. As you can tell from our brochures and website, we really appreciate the power of a striking image. So if you've travelled to any one of our destinations in the last year (or so), then send us your best travel photographs. The competition is open to everyone, even if you have not yet travelled with us. More information on this can be found on our website: transindus.co.uk/news-events



Namaz at Taj Mahal, India
– Sourav Karmakar



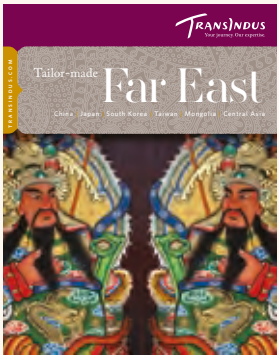
Whirling Black Hat Dancer, Bhutan
– Janet Marshall



Bead Shop Man, Nepal
– Francis Cox

More TransIndus destinations

When planning future visits beyond the sub-continent make sure you request our exciting brochures on other destinations further east that are equally as vibrant and, just as stimulating. Our Southeast Asia and Far East brochures offer a wide choice from popular destinations like Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, China and Japan to the more remote and less frequented islands of Indonesia, the tiny islands of Taiwan, the jungles of Kalimantan & Borneo through to the romance of the Silk Route and the hidden central Asian nations of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and their neighbours. Our group tours brochure offers a wide selection of well planned group tours that cater to those who want the company of a small group of like minded people who enjoy exploring new cultures.



TransIndus Tailor-Made Brochure Credits

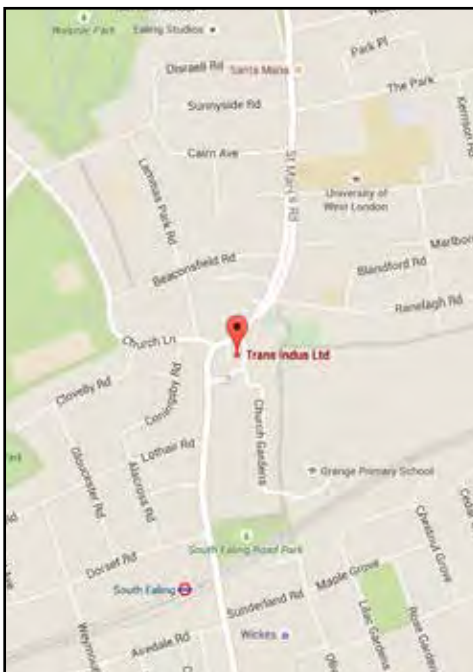
Writing: David Abram & Amar Grover

Photography: David Abram, Amar Grover, Saskia Gall, Sinna PJ, Adam Bannister, Satyaki Basu, Matt Brandon, François-Olivier Dommergues, Tim Draper, Rachel Dunston, Nick Flemming, Markus Gebauer, Diana Jarvis, Marji Lang, Rohit Markande, Ajay Ojha, Rohit Rath, Claude Renault, Brian Snelson, TransIndus hoteliers and suppliers, the team at TransIndus and last but not least our clients.

Price Guide Tailor-made Indian Subcontinent

India | Nepal | Bhutan | Sri Lanka | Maldives

Your journey. Our expertise.



Visit us at the Old Fire Station

We welcome our clients visiting us to discuss and plan their holiday with one of our specialist travel consultants over a glass of wine, tea or coffee. We are open from 9 am to 5:30 pm on weekdays and on Saturday from 9 am to 4 pm. It is best to make an appointment by calling us on 020 8566 3739, to ensure the right people are available to meet with you.

Directions: We are located in the tastefully restored Old Fire Station, adjacent to the beautiful St Mary's Church in Ealing, and very well connected both by public transport and major road networks.

South Ealing station (Piccadilly Line) is just a five-minute walk.

Ealing Broadway station (Central line, District Line and Great Western Trains) is a 15-minute walk or 5 minutes by taxi/65 bus from the station.

The M4, M40 & A406 arterial roads are all within 5-10 minutes' drive away.

A pay and display car park behind the office makes driving an easy option.

Address: 75 St Mary's Road, Ealing W5 5RH.

020 8566 3739 enquiries@transindus.com

www.transindus.com

No Surcharges . Fully Bonded

Financial Protection: Peace of Mind

All our clients are financially protected. When booking with TransIndus, you can rest assured that, should your travel arrangements be disrupted by circumstances beyond your control, you'll be fully refunded. Flight-inclusive holidays are covered by our Air Travel Organiser's License (ATOL 3429), granted by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), while those without flights are protected by our financial bond with the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA V0709). In the unlikely event of an emergency, the CAA and ABTA ensure you will not be stranded abroad. And if you haven't already left the UK, they'll also make sure your money is fully refunded. In addition, we are proud members of the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO), whose 'client's charter' assures you of the highest standards of service.



ATOL 3429



**inspirational
globe**
Travel Specialists
to the Finest Destinations

TransIndus - who we are

Among the UK’s largest and most successful operators of tailor-made tours to the Indian subcontinent, TransIndus, The India Travel Company features five different countries in the subcontinent. With decades of experience designing journeys and a wealth of hard-won travel knowledge and local contacts to draw on, we are able to create trips of the highest possible quality, featuring the most desirable destinations and memorable activities. This expertise, backed by gold-standard customer service, has ensured our company consistently generates satisfaction ratings of 99%. Over half our clients travel more than once with us, or else have been referred by family, friends or colleagues.

‘Your journey. Our expertise’ | Our goal is simple: to devise holidays that are both relaxing and culturally stimulating, and perfectly tailored for your needs. To do this, this we first have to gain a clear sense of what you’re hoping to experience – ideally face-to-face over a glass of wine, cup of tea or coffee at our office (‘The Old Fire Station’, in Ealing, London), but over the phone is fine too!

Inspired by an extensive, first-hand knowledge of the Indian

What makes a TransIndus tailor-made holiday unique?

Tailor-made holidays are designed bespoke to suit your requirements. After an in-depth consultation, we’ll put together an itinerary which we think best meets your requirements, taking into account the kind of holiday you want, how long you have to spend away, and your budget, but the shape and substance of your trip will be determined essentially by you.

Flexibility | Travelling tailor-made instead of opting for an off-the-peg trip gives you much greater flexibility. Although every country and sub-region has its unmissable highlights, there’s rarely a single route around them. You may have specific interests which you’d like to pursue, or a list of less well known destinations that you’d like to tie into your trip. This is where our expertise comes in: having explored each destination in depth, often several times over, our consultants will be able to suggest the best order in which to visit them, as well as the most suitable hotels.

Smooth Travel | We'll also discuss meal plans with you, and make all your transport arrangements in advance. Chauffeur driven, air-conditioned cars tend to be our preferred option for most of the Indian subcontinent countries, as they allow you to stop and engage with much along the way – though you may well need

subcontinent, one of our consultants will draw up an initial itinerary, which can be further refined according to your wishes. All TransIndus team members travel regularly to their specialist regions to keep abreast of the latest developments, and are passionate about sharing their discoveries. If a beautiful new boutique hotel opens in an off-track location, they’ll know if it’s worth staying there and which its best rooms are. If a particular coastal resort has grown too crowded, they’ll be able to suggest a lesser frequented alternative, and the best monuments, nature sanctuaries and lunch stops to pause at en route. Or if you want to spend a few days river cruising, they’ll know which of the boats offer the best value and most varied routes.

Sound Advice | Throughout, ‘authenticity’ is our watchword. We want our clients to enjoy not just a revitalizing, inspirational holiday, but return home feeling that they have had a genuine insight into the countries visited. Whether you’re dreaming of a cultural trip highlighting historic monuments and the arts, or a nature-based one with wildlife as its focus, you will find us passionate about our destinations and committed to offering you quality at every step of your journey.

to add some domestic flights to cover longer distances. One of our expert, English-speaking guides will also be assigned to you for day trips to historic and religious sites, markets and other destinations where in-depth local knowledge is desirable.

A critical element we take care of, of course, is your international flight. Experience has shown us the best routings, stopovers and departure times for the Indian subcontinent hubs, and we’ll be able to suggest the most comfortable, time-saving option for you, whether you’re travelling alone, as a couple or in larger family group with children.

Special Places to Stay | TransIndus understands how important accommodation is to one’s overall enjoyment of a country while travelling, which is why we go to great lengths to find the loveliest hotels and guest houses in all of our destinations. Landmark luxury hotels, particularly those with a colonial-era pedigree, are perennial favourites among our clients, but we also favour smaller heritage and boutique properties where greater emphasis is placed on traditional architecture and interior design, and where the setting of the hotel itself is central to its appeal.

What makes an ideal tailor-made holiday?

Good planning is crucial to an enjoyable holiday and at TransIndus we ensure that all your requirements are discussed and implemented to perfection at every stage. The collective knowledge of our specialist travel consultants and 27 years’ experience as one of the UK’s leading tailor-made holiday providers to Asia, helps us ensure your personalised holiday is meticulously planned and executed to perfection. We will ensure each element of your holiday wish list is fully considered and fulfilled.

International flights

At TransIndus we enjoy a very special relationship with most carriers flying to Asia and are privileged in receiving negotiated rates, including for upgrades to Premium economy, Business and First class cabins. When quoting for your holiday we will research the optimal route and fare to suit your itinerary. If you have air miles, or otherwise wish to book your international flight independently, we are happy for you to do so and can advise on the best routing.

Internal flight travel in destination

A large number of excellent, local carriers criss-cross most cities in the subcontinent and provide tremendous connectivity with more services being introduced on a regular basis. As in Europe, most provide a no-frills service, making them an economical option. It is worth bearing in mind that between the time of booking and travel, the best option may have changed; we keep abreast of the changes and will provide you with the best option available at the time of travel. Baggage allowance on these carriers is usually lower than on international flights but thankfully, excess baggage costs are far more reasonable.

Road Travel

For most tailor-made journeys road travel is provided in private air-conditioned, chauffeur-driven cars. A large variety of vehicles are available in each destination and our preference, where available, is usually a ‘people carrier style’ vehicle that sits high on the road, and has wide windows to facilitate sightseeing. Higher grade, luxury vehicles are readily available and we will be happy to quote for these at your request.

Train Travel

India has an extensive railway network and we will use this to your best advantage, especially if it facilitates ease of travel or otherwise enhances the quality of your travel. India also offers beautifully appointed luxury train services that allow you to stay on board, in style, while you traverse the country. You travel overnight, arriving refreshed at a new destination each morning. Private Butler and white glove restaurant service complete the experience and makes this a thoroughly enjoyable way for visiting these destinations in complete comfort. These trains are featured in the brochure on p92.

River cruising

India’s major rivers invariably form a vital part of the nation, with villages, towns and cities lining the banks as they provide connectivity for commerce, water for agriculture and are rich in fish, the staple for local cuisine. River cruising in India provides an option of enjoying local life at close quarters as you travel leisurely along the water. A host of cruise ships, of varying size and style ply these rivers and offer some of the finest options for river cruising in India. A selection of our favourites boats are provided on p93.

Accommodation

The Indian subcontinent offers a host of options for accommodation; from grand luxury palace hotels, family run heritage estates, unique traditional boutique properties; to small charming guest houses and everything in between. Over the past 27 years we have inspected and enjoyed staying in a vast number of properties; built tremendous relationships with them and today enjoy some very special rates and privileges with them for the benefit of you, our clients. We are usually guided by your preference for accommodation but are happy to recommend properties and advise on the best options. Often the ideal is to mix a variety of styles to enhance the overall experience of your journey.

Meal plan

Food is a major part of enjoying a destination and allows visitors to immerse themselves in local life and savour the true ambience, culture and traditions of the destination. Food here is always fresh, local and invariably rated as one of the top ten experiences of the Indian subcontinent by our clients. Wherever possible we offer our clients the option of a Bed & Breakfast meal plan to facilitate eating out in local restaurants, bars and neighboring hotels to sample wider experiences. In some remote places this may not be possible and there we will try to use properties that provide the most authentic experience both in terms of food and accommodation.

Sightseeing, game viewing and trekking

For your sightseeing sessions, we will provide you with hand-picked, experienced English-speaking guides. Entrance fees to all monuments, museums and other sites will be included. When visiting nature or wildlife parks, all arrangements for game viewing such as naturalists, jeeps, attendants and wardens, will be included. If your journey involves trekking, we will again ensure all arrangements are booked in advance, including trek schedules, trek leader/guide, cook, porters, and camping equipment inclusive of sleeping bags, although some guests may prefer to bring their own. Environment fees and porter insurance is also prearranged.

Local representatives

A selection of hand-picked, experienced representatives provide support and guidance for our clients locally on the ground during the journey. They are available 24/7 and are equipped to help with any questions or requests you might have during travel.

Assisted transfers

When arriving or departing a destination by air, rail or boat, you will usually be met by a local representative, who will escort you to your vehicle and introduce you to your driver. These vehicles are again, usually private, air-conditioned and chauffeur-driven. On occasion we may have the use shared transfer services provided by partner hotels for ease of travel and connectivity. We will let you know of these cases individually.

Money

Most hotels in the Indian subcontinent, with the exception of some in Bhutan, readily accept credit cards and US Dollars, and will also exchange foreign currency into local cash. Some of the smaller, local shops, restaurants, bars and coffee shops may only accept local currency and it is advisable to exchange a small amount for such contingencies on arrival. Banks and cash machines are available in the larger hubs but may be scarce in more remote locations; hence it is advisable to carry sufficient local currency for the duration of your stay in these parts. We will offer you more specific advice on these aspects closer to your departure date.

Advice prior to departure

Prior to your departure we will send you a comprehensive list of things you might consider before your departure and while on holiday. We are, however, available to answer any questions you may have, at any stage.

Responsible tourism

TransIndus strongly believes in its social responsibility and we actively encourage conservation. We support lodges and resorts that follow eco-friendly practices. We are actively involved in local projects that help local communities. Should you wish to become involved in any of these projects or wish to visit them during the course of your holiday we will be happy to include a visit as part of your itinerary.



Price Guide for suggested brochure itineraries

Our Indian subcontinent brochure is designed for private travel with a selection of suggested itineraries at the end of each section. These, however, should be considered only as a starting point. Each may be adapted – refined, extended or tweaked in a variety of ways – until your itinerary is precisely what you want. More information on these or any other aspect can be requested from our office.

All prices given are per person based on twin share. Single room supplements are available on request.

India

Rajasthan & the North (page 29) Price from Duration

Essential India	£1,675	10 days
Royal Rajputana	£3,295	15 days
Off-Track Rajasthan	£3,065	14 days
Northern Highlights	£3,375	14 days
Classical Splendour	£3,465	14 days

The Indian Himalayas (page 41)

Wildlife & Walking in the Kumaon Hills	£2,965	12 days
The Kashmir Valley	£2,635	12 days
Golden Temple & Spiritual Himalayas	£3,075	14 days
Sikkim & the Darjeeling Railway	£2,595	14 days

Kolkata & the Northeast (page 49)

Rural Bengal	£3,185	14 days
Temples & Tribes of Odisha	£3,245	15 days
Nagaland & Assam	£3,295	16 days

Mumbai, Gujarat & the West (page 59)

Mandu & Cave Temples of Maharashtra	£3,165	12 days
Gujarat	£3,495	16 days

Deccan & the South (page 69)

Temples & Traders of Tamil Nadu	£3,075	16 days
The Deccan Plateau	£2,895	16 days
Exploring the Western Ghats	£3,565	16 days

Kerala (page 79)

Classic Kerala	£1,865	10 days
Up the Malabar Coast	£3,275	16 days

Wildlife in India (page 91)

Tiger Trail: The Parks of Central India	£2,175	12 days
Off The Beaten Track	£2,795	12 days
Southern Wildlife	£3,465	16 days

Luxury Trains & River Cruises (page 92 & 93)

Luxury train journeys available from	£3,835	10 days
River cruises available from	£2,535	8 days

Nepal (page 105)

Treasures of Nepal	£2,595	12 days
Wildlife of Nepal	£2,965	12 days
North India & Nepal	£3,465	17 days

Bhutan (page 113)

Bhutan Highlights	£3,275	12 days
Mountain Kingdoms	£3,995	16 days
Eastern Bhutan	£3,995	16 days

Sri Lanka (page 125)

The Cultural Triangle	£2,198	9 days
Sri Lanka in Style	£3,265	16 days
Sri Lankan Wildlife	£2,265	12 days

WEATHER CHART

CITY		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
AGRA	Max T	23	26	32	38	42	41	35	33	34	34	29	24
	Min T	6	8	13	20	25	29	27	26	24	17	9	7
	Rainfall	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.4	2.4	8.5	8.1	4.6	0.7	0.1	0.3
AHMEDABAD	Max T	29	31	36	40	41	38	34	32	34	35	33	31
	Min T	12	14	20	24	26	27	26	25	24	22	17	13
	Rainfall	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	3.9	12.6	8.1	5.9	0.4	0.0	0.0
AMRITSAR	Max T	29	31	36	40	41	38	33	32	34	35	33	31
	Min T	4	7	12	17	22	26	26	26	22	15	9	5
	Rainfall	1.2	0.4	1.0	1.1	0.4	1.3	6.7	6.6	4.2	2.1	0.4	0.6
ANDAMANS	Max T	29	30	31	32	32	29	29	29	29	29	29	29
	Min T	23	22	23	24	24	24	24	25	24	24	24	23
	Rainfall	1.0	1.0	1.2	3.0	14.0	23.0	17.0	17.0	20.0	13.0	8.0	2.0
CHENNAI (Madras)	Max T	29	31	33	35	38	38	36	35	34	32	29	29
	Min T	19	20	22	26	28	27	26	26	25	24	22	21
	Rainfall	1.4	0.4	0.3	0.6	1.0	1.9	3.6	4.6	4.7	12.0	14.0	5.5
COCHIN (Kochi)	Max T	31	31	31	31	31	31	28	28	28	29	30	30
	Min T	23	25	26	26	26	24	24	24	24	24	24	24
	Rainfall	0.9	1.0	2.0	6.0	14.0	30.0	23.0	15.0	9.0	13.0	7.0	1.0
COLOMBO (SRI LANKA)	Max T	30	30	31	31	31	29	29	29	29	29	29	30
	Min T	22	22	24	24	26	25	25	25	25	24	23	22
	Rainfall	3.9	2.7	5.7	9.0	14.4	8.7	5.2	4.3	6.2	13.5	12.2	5.7
DARJEELING	Max T	8	9	13	16	17	18	19	19	18	16	13	11
	Min T	2	3	6	9	11	14	14	13	13	11	6	2
	Rainfall	0.5	1.2	1.9	4.1	9.6	24.0	32.9	22.6	18.9	5.5	0.8	0.3
DELHI	Max T	21	24	31	36	41	39	36	34	34	34	29	23
	Min T	7	9	14	20	26	28	27	26	24	18	11	8
	Rainfall	0.9	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.5	2.9	7.1	6.8	4.6	0.4	0.1	0.4
GOA	Max T	29	29	31	32	32	31	29	28	28	29	30	29
	Min T	21	22	24	26	27	25	24	24	24	24	23	21
	Rainfall	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.7	2.6	29.6	31.2	15.9	9.5	3.8	1.3	0.2
HYDERABAD	Max T	29	32	36	38	40	35	31	30	30	31	30	29
	Min T	15	17	20	24	26	24	23	22	22	20	16	14
	Rainfall	0.3	0.4	0.5	1.2	1.1	4.4	6.0	5.3	6.5	2.4	1.1	0.3
JAIPUR	Max T	23	25	31	37	41	35	35	33	34	34	30	25
	Min T	8	10	16	20	25	27	26	24	20	18	13	9
	Rainfall	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.6	2.2	7.6	8.1	3.2	0.5	0.1	0.3
JODHPUR	Max T	25	28	33	38	42	40	36	33	35	36	31	27
	Min T	9	12	17	22	27	29	27	25	24	20	14	11
	Rainfall	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	1.2	4.8	5.7	1.9	0.3	0.1	0.0
KATHMANDU (NEPAL)	Max T	18	19	25	28	30	29	29	28	28	27	23	19
	Min T	2	8	12	17	20	21	21	20	19	13	8	3
	Rainfall	0.7	1.0	1.2	1.5	4.0	7.9	14.8	12.4	7.4	2.2	0.2	0.1
KOLKATA (Calcutta)	Max T	27	29	34	36	36	33	32	32	32	32	29	26
	Min T	13	15	21	24	25	26	26	26	26	24	18	13
	Rainfall	0.4	1.2	1.4	1.7	5.5	11.7	12.8	12.9	9.9	4.5	0.8	0.2
KOVALAM	Max T	30	31	32	31	31	29	28	92	28	28	92	30
	Min T	23	24	25	26	26	25	24	24	25	24	24	24
	Rainfall	0.8	0.7	1.5	4.6	8.8	13.1	7.8	4.7	4.5	10.7	4.6	2.5
LEH	Max T	-3	1	6	12	17	21	25	24	21	14	8	2
	Min T	-14	-12	-6	-1	2	6	10	10	6	-1	-7	-11
	Rainfall	0.5	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.6	0.7	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.3
MADURAI	Max T	30	32	35	37	37	37	36	35	35	33	31	30
	Min T	20	22	23	25	26	26	26	25	25	24	23	22
	Rainfall	1.0	0.8	0.8	2.0	2.0	1.6	2.2	4.5	4.7	7.1	5.9	1.6
MALE (MALDIVES)	Max T	30	30	31	31	31	30	30	30	30	30	30	29
	Min T	25	26	26	26	26	26	26	25	25	25	25	25
	Rainfall	3.0	2.0	2.9	5.2	8.5	6.8	5.8	7.4	9.6	8.7	7.9	9.1
MUMBAI (Bombay)	Max T	28	28	30	32	33	32	29	29	29	32	32	31
	Min T	19	19	22	24	27	26	25	24	24	24	23	21
	Rainfall	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.7	19.1	24.3	13.4	10.4	2.5	0.5	0.1
MYSORE	Max T	29	32	34	35	33	29	28	29	29	28	28	28
	Min T	16	18	20	21	21	20	20	19	19	19	19	18
	Rainfall	0.1	0.2	0.5	2.3	1.7	2.4	2.7	3.3	5.0	5.9	2.8	0.4
SHIMLA (Simla)	Max T	7	9	14	18	22	23	21	19	19	17	14	11
	Min T	2	3	7	11	14	16	16	15	14	11	7	4
	Rainfall	2.4	2.7	2.4	2.1	2.6	6.9	16.7	17.1	6.3	1.3	0.5	1.1
SRINAGAR	Max T	5	6	13	19	25	29	31	30	28	23	17	8
	Min T	-4	-1	2	7	10	13	17	17	5	1	1	-2
	Rainfall	2.9	2.8	3.6	3.7	0.7	1.4	2.3	2.4	1.6	1.2	0.4	1.3
THIMPU (BHUTAN)	Max T	12	14	16	20	23	24	19	25	23	22	18	15
	Min T	-2.6	0.6	3.9	7.1	13.1	15.2	13.4	15.8	15	10.4	5	-1.1
	Rainfall	0.6	1.6	0.9	2.3	4.8	9.7	14.7	13.6	6.1	1.5	0.3	0.1
UDAIPUR	Max T	24	26	32	36	38	37	32	30	31	33	30	26
	Min T	8	10	16	22	26	25	24	23	22	18	12	9
	Rainfall	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	3.4	7.8	7.5	4.7	0.6	0.2	0.1
VARANASI (Benares)	Max T	23	27	33	39	41	39	33	32	32	32	29	25
	Min T	9	11	17	22	27	28	26	26	25	21	13	9
	Rainfall	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.0	0.9	4.0	13.6	9.4	10.3	1.5	0.6	0.1

Max T: Maximum average temp °C; Min T: Minimum average temp °C; Rainfall: Average monthly rainfall in inches.



TransIndus Limited - Booking Conditions for Tailor-made holidays

Introduction:

We hope you have enjoyed going through our brochure and discussing your suitable holiday. We recommend you read our Booking Conditions, which are governed by British law and are designed to protect your rights. Irrespective of your booking coming to us directly or via a retail travel agent, your contract is deemed to be with TransIndus Limited, trading as The India Travel Company. When you book your holiday with us, it is deemed that you accept our booking conditions.

1.How to Book

Having chosen your holiday you just need to complete the Booking Form provided online or by your consultant and forward it to us with an appropriate deposit. You can book and make a payment of the deposit by giving us your debit/credit card details over the telephone. A booking form will need be sent subsequently. In addition we work with a number of excellent retail agents throughout the UK and Ireland and you may chose to book your holiday through one of them. The agent will hold your deposit on behalf of TransIndus but your contract in all cases will deem to exist with TransIndus. Please note, if a retail agent fails to adequately/fully convey your special requirements to TransIndus Limited, or our advice/instructions to you, we will not be responsible. TransIndus will normally confirm your order via a 'Booking Acceptance Letter' within 7 working days.

2.Deposit

A deposit of 20% of your holiday cost or £250 per person, whichever is higher, is payable when placing a booking. Deposits and final payments made by Non-UK debit cards, Visa and Mastercard credit cards are subject to 2% transaction charge, while American Express cards incur a 2.5% surcharge. There is no transaction charge for UK debit cards or UK bank transfers. Cruises and some hotels, beach resorts, wildlife lodges may require a higher deposit or even full payment at their discretion, especially during peak season. More airlines are now requesting for full payments and we may need to ask for additional deposits for your international flights. We will advise you of these at the time of the booking or as soon as we are made aware. Please note all deposits are non-refundable; except in instances when we cancel the holiday or express our inability to operate it.

3. Financial Protection

When you book and pay for an ATOL protected air holiday package you will receive an **ATOL Certificate** confirming your holiday contract and your protection under our Air Travel Organiser's Licence number (ATOL) 3429 issued by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). Please ask for it and check to ensure that everything you booked (flights, hotels and other services) is listed on it. You will subsequently be sent a Booking Acceptance Letter from us. In the unlikely event of our insolvency, CAA will protect your holiday arrangements and arrange to refund any money you have paid. If already travelling the CAA will ensure you are not left stranded overseas. For further information visit the ATOL website at www.atol.org.uk and www.atol.org.uk/ATOLCertificate. The price of our air holiday packages includes the ATOL Protection Contribution (APC) we pay to the CAA.

Holidays excluding flights are protected separately by the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) with whom TransIndus has a financial bonding, number V0705.

The UK government's holiday protection schemes may undergo change, we recommend you look up our updated Booking Conditions on the website at the time of booking.

When booking through an agent for arrangements that include, but are not limited to, TransIndus' arrangements, your contract will deem to be with the agent and not with TransIndus. TransIndus is such circumstance will be deemed to be a supplier for your agent. Similarly,if booking only a single component eg a flight or hotel, via an agent, TransIndus will be deemed to be an supplier for the agent and will accept no liability for the provision of the service.

4.Travel Insurance, Health & Safety

It is strongly recommended that all travellers be adequately insured for the holiday. You may buy the insurance through Holiday Extras, our preferred insurance providers, or locate comprehensive policy independently. When taking insurance, please ensure it covers any activities that you may undertake during your holiday such as hikes, treks, travel to high altitude regions and diving. If you are unable to provide proof of adequate travel insurance we will require you to sign an indemnity form absolving us of any liability which may arise owing to your failure to take out adequate insurance cover. You can get a quote or issue your insurance directly with HOLIDAY EXTRAS by calling 0871 360 2742 or visiting <http://secure.holidayextras.co.uk/transindus-insuranceukrefere>. Please quote our ABTA number V0705 when dealing over the telephone.

We strongly recommend you consult your doctor about mandatory health requirements, health precautions and recommended vaccinations a few months before your holiday. Additional information is available from the National Travel Health Network www.nathnac.org or the NHS website - www.nhs.uk

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) provides regular information/updates about foreign destinations and risks, if any, to British citizens when travelling to these destinations. The FCO advice can be seen on their website www.fco.gov.uk/travel; they can also be contacted on 020 7238 4503.

5. Confirmation and Final Payment

The balance amount for your holiday must be paid no later than 8 weeks before departure; Final documentation will not be released unless full payment has been received by due date. If payments are delayed without notification or adequate reason we reserve the right to treat your booking as cancelled retaining the deposit. If the booking is made within 8 weeks of departure, the full cost of the holiday is payable at the time of booking.

Arrangements for tailor-made travel are made *after* the acceptance of your booking and are as such subject to availability. While in most cases we are able to confirm all the arrangements within a few weeks of receiving the order, in some instances changes may be required or some confirmations may have to wait till much later. If we need to make a significant change to the itinerary booked, such as change of hotel or mode of transport or omission of a place, it is done with your concurrence. It is thus important that you give us your contact telephone numbers, both for daytime and evenings, so that changes can be communicated, discussed and implemented.

For minor variations in the itinerary we do not make

supplementary charges nor do we offer reductions. If however the cost variation exceeds 2% of the total holiday price, you may be required to pay the difference, if the costs go up, or become entitled to a refund, if the costs go down.

If the very nature of the holiday changes due to non-availability of significant portion(s) of the tour, such as internal flights, we will ourselves offer you the option of a departure on an alternate date or cancellation with full refund.

If the availability of a certain portion of the holiday, or a specific hotel, is critical for you it must be specified in writing at the time of booking the holiday. Non-availability of this **critical element** will entitle you to a full refund of all monies paid, including the deposit amount. If, after notification of the non-availability of critical element(s) of your holiday, you decide to still proceed with the holiday, you cannot subsequently cancel it using this condition. We expect you to be reasonable when specifying critical elements, if any.

6.Travel Documents, Passports & Visas

You will need a passport with a minimum validity of six months from the intended date of return to the UK which must contain at least two blank pages for the issuance of a visa (additional pages required if visiting more than one country). Information on how to obtain a visa, if required, will be sent to you with the confirmation of your booking.

Travel documents are normally sent to you approximately 2 weeks before departure. These include your international flight tickets (if purchased through us), final itinerary, local contacts at your destination, baggage tags, some useful tips and suggestions including on tipping, etc. Vouchers for hotels and internal travel, etc., are delivered on arrival at the destination.

7. Price Guarantee

The price of your holiday is fully guaranteed. This guarantee is applicable once we have accepted your booking via a Booking Acceptance Letter and is subject to all payments being received by due dates. The price guarantee applies to complete holidays bought from us and does not cover the purchase of individual items such as airline tickets or hotel rooms. Thus if a flight is quoted separately, it is not protected against future cost increases prior to ticketing. Supplements such as club class upgrades or higher grade rooms in hotels are not covered by this guarantee.

It may be noted that price variations due to increases in fuel surcharges and airport taxes are not governed by this guarantee.

8. Alteration or Cancellation by you

If you wish to alter your programme after the booking has been accepted, an amendment fee of £25 per set of amendments per person will be charged, in addition to any additional costs due to the alterations, including any advances already paid to our suppliers. Changing the date of departure will entail a higher charge of £50 per person.

Any requests for alteration, once the tour has begun, will be treated sympathetically but we cannot guarantee their implementation. Any costs incurred in making such alterations, by us or our agents, will be passed on to you and the unutilised portion of the holiday will attract 100% cancellation charges.

Should you wish to cancel your tour, you must notify TransIndus in writing stating the reasons for cancellation. In such cases you may be covered by your insurance policy. Such cancellation will deem to take place only on the date of receipt of your written request and will attract the following cancellation charges:

Date of receipt of cancellation	Cancellation charges
61 days or more before departure	The deposit amount
42 - 60 days before departure	Deposit+40% of balance
28 - 41 days before departure	Deposit+60% of balance
15 - 27 days before departure	Deposit+90% of balance
14 days or less before departure	100% of tour price

9. Cancellation of a tour by us before departure

We reserve the right to cancel a holiday on offer by us, without assigning reasons at any time over 8 weeks before departure date. If such cancellation takes place, we will offer you a comparable alternative or at your option refund all monies paid by you. No compensation is payable for any holiday cancelled by us 61 days or more before departure.

Cancellation takes place within 60 days of departure it will be for one of the following reasons:

- a) Due to non-payment or late payment of the balance amount due. In such cases an alternative holiday or refund will not be available and cancellation charges will apply.
- b) Due to circumstances beyond our control such as cancellation of international or domestic scheduled service, technical problems with transportation, civil disorder or the threat of such, riots, strikes, natural disasters, accident or pollution, terrorist activity or the threat of such, war or the threat of war, etc. In deciding whether it is safe to visit a certain destination or not, we depend on the advice of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In such instances we may offer comparable alternative arrangements or if you choose, we may make a full refund of all monies paid.

In the unlikely event of us cancelling a holiday within 60 days of departure for reasons other than those listed above, we will offer you a compensation of £15 per person for 42 to 60 days, £20 per person for 28 to 41 days, £30 for 15 to 27 days and £50 per person for within 14 days of departure.

10. Alterations to your tour Programme by us

We will make all reasonable efforts to provide you with booked tour arrangements but cannot rule out occasional changes and reserve the right to change accommodation, internal trains and flights, international flights or the sightseeing schedule due to unforeseen circumstances.

If the changes are significant we will inform you of these before departure, if possible, and offer you comparable alternative arrangements or at your option make a full refund of all monies paid. A significant change is one that involves a change of airport for international flights to and from your holiday destination, the outward or return journey being rescheduled by more than twelve hours or the omission of a featured overnight stop in the itinerary. Where such changes take place for reasons within our control we will offer you a compensation of £25 per person if you had paid the full holiday price by the prescribed date. Where the change is due to

circumstances beyond our control amounting to force majeure, such as weather conditions, technical problems, civil disorder, decisions by governments or other associations, etc., we will offer comparable alternative arrangements or if you choose refund fully the monies paid by you.

If any of the circumstances amounting to force majeure occurs during a tour we reserve the right to alter the tour programme, as required depending upon the circumstance, without offering any compensation. We may consider a refund for the unutilised portion of the tour if we are able to secure any refunds.

We reserve the right to cancel your holiday anytime during its operation if you are found to be behaving in a socially unacceptable manner or indulging in an illegal activity. In such cases no refund will be offered for the unutilised portion of the holiday and TransIndus will further claim from you the costs of your return to the parent country.

11. Your responsibility

It is your responsibility to ensure you have valid passports, visas, vaccinations, foreign exchange for personal expenses, etc., and we do not accept any liability for non-communication of relevant details to you. If any service offered by us is not clear, you should get written confirmation from us about its inclusion in the price.

If any client suffers death, illness or injury whilst overseas arising out of an activity which does not form part of the foreign inclusive holiday arrangement or excursion arranged through us, we shall, at our discretion, offer advice, guidance and assistance but are not liable for the consequences of such independent act.

If you avail of a service during the course of your holiday which is not part of your contract with us, we will not be liable for the provision of that service or its quality even if you purchase it through our agents or their representatives. Similarly if we recommend a restaurant or a shop, it is merely to assist you, and we do not accept any responsibility for the quality or content of the service received from these.

12. Our responsibility

We accept responsibility for ensuring that the holiday which you book with us is supplied as described, and the services offered reach a reasonable standard. In the unlikely event that any part is not provided as promised, for reasons within our control, we will pay you appropriate compensation if this has affected the enjoyment of your holiday. We accept responsibility for the acts and/or omissions of our employees, agents and suppliers except where they lead to death, injury or illness and except where the supplier is a government or quasi-government institution. Our liability in all cases shall be limited to a maximum of three times the cost of the portion of holiday adversely affected.

We accept responsibility for death, injury or illness caused by the negligent acts and/or omissions of our employees or agents together with our suppliers and sub-contractors, servants and/ or agents of the same whilst acting within the scope of, or in the course of their employment in the provision of your holiday. We will accordingly pay to our clients such damages as might have been awarded in such circumstances under English Law.

In respect of carriage by scheduled air, sea, other water bodies like rivers and lakes, and rail transports the provision of accommodation and services in these are the responsibility of the providers of these transports and we merely act as agents for these providers. Our liability in all such cases will be limited in the manner provided by the relevant international convention. Thus if a scheduled flight or train or ship has delays or changes in schedule or cancellation of service we are not obliged to offer alternative arrangements, it is the providers of these services who are responsible. We will, however, try our best to assist in the provision of alternative services, if required, on receipt of appropriate payment for these.

13. Inclusions and exclusions in the Tour Price

All inclusions and exclusions are clearly mentioned with your holiday itinerary.

14. Arbitration

If you have cause for complaint during the holiday please bring it to the notice of our Local representative/agent and/or the hotel who will try their best to solve the problem immediately. It is not advisable to do nothing about a problem when it occurs but to later write to us seeking recompense. If we feel we/our agents were not afforded an opportunity to redress a problem when it occurred, we will not be able to offer compensation if it is brought to our attention later/your return home. If the problem remains unresolved in spite of your pointing it out locally to our agents when it occurred, please write to us within 28 days of the completion of the holiday. We will investigate the complaint and respond to you within 28 days.

In the unlikely event of us not being able to reach an amicable settlement you may refer the dispute to an arbitrator appointed by the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators under a special scheme devised for the travel industry. The scheme provides for a simple and inexpensive method of arbitration based on documentation alone with restricted liability of the client in respect of costs. The scheme does not apply to claims greater than £5000 per person or £25000 per booking form or to claims, which are solely, or mainly in respect of physical injury or illness. The application for arbitration must be made within nine months of the date of return from the holiday but in special circumstances it may still be offered outside this period.

15. Data Protection Statement

Please be assured that we have measures in place to protect the personal booking information held by us. This information will be passed on to the relevant suppliers of your travel arrangements. The information may also be provided to public authorities such as customs or immigration if required by them, or as required by law. Certain information may also be passed on to security or credit checking companies. If you travel outside the European Economic Area, controls on data protection may not be as strong as the legal requirements in Europe. If we cannot pass this information to the relevant suppliers, whether in the EEA or not, we will be unable to provide your booking. In making this booking, you consent to this information being passed on to the relevant persons. If we need to give your details to anyone other than those listed above we will do so only with your consent.

16. Jurisdiction

Your holiday contract with TransIndus is made on the terms of these Booking Conditions which are governed by English Law and both parties shall submit to the jurisdiction of English Courts at all times.

TransIndus Booking Form

Please read our booking terms and conditions carefully before completing this form using block capitals.

Lead traveller details

Name

Address

Postcode

Evening tel

Daytime tel

Email

All traveller details (including lead traveller) as they appear in your passport

Title

First name(s)

Surname

Insurance details

Traveller name

Policy Underwriter

Policy number

Insurance company & emergency contact number

Holiday details

Tour name

Departure date

Extensions with dates

Visas

If you require a visa for your holiday please speak to our preferred visa services partner The Travel Visa Company. As a TransIndus client you will qualify for a preferential rate. Visit www.thetravelvisacompany.co.uk/transindus or call 01270 250 590 and mention that you are a TransIndus client.

Payment details

Deposit at £

per person

Total deposit for booking £

Full payment at £

per person

Total payment for booking £

The total holiday price is payable if booking within 8 weeks of departure.

To book by credit or debit card please call us on 020 8566 3739

Signature

Date

Please return the completed form to TransIndus or your retail agent.

TransIndus, 75 St. Mary's Road & The Old Fire Station, London W5 5RH | enquiries@transindus.co.uk | transindus.co.uk | 020 8566 3739

Emergency contact details (non-traveller)

Name

Relationship

Address

Postcode

Evening tel

Daytime tel

Where did you hear about TransIndus?

Please let us know where you heard about us

Name of TransIndus consultant

Your booking reference number

Special requests

Flight details (if arranged independently)

Agency stamp / details

TRANSINDUS

Your journey. Our expertise.

INDIA | NEPAL | BHUTAN | SRI LANKA | MALDIVES



“ The organisation of my TransIndus holiday was excellent. Everything ran 100% smoothly and the whole experience was flawless. Would definitely recommend and travel with TransIndus again. ”

MISS STEPHENSON,
TAILOR-MADE SOUTH INDIA

“ I don't know any travel company that offers and provides such service, expertise and patience in sorting out itineraries... A good collection of places to see, loved it. Thank you for sorting us out, again. ”

MS TROY,
TAILOR-MADE INDIA

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