



**Exotic India - A Cultural Tour of India
November 06 – 30, 2012 – 23 days**

Nov 6 – depart Canada, arrive early morning of Nov 8, 2012

Day 01: Arrive Delhi: Namaste! We are welcomed the traditional Indian way with hands clapped together. Following customs & immigration formalities and baggage collection, a Bestway Tours representative will meet you as you EXIT the ARRIVALS TERMINAL building and driven through the city to your hotel. New Delhi, the capital of India is a fusion of the ancient and the modern India. It unwinds a picture rich with culture, architecture and human diversity, deep in history, monuments, museums, galleries, gardens and exotic shows. Comprising of two contrasting yet harmonious parts, the Old Delhi and New Delhi, the city is a travel hub of Northern India. Narrating the city's Mughal past, Old Delhi, takes through the labyrinthine streets passing through formidable mosques, monuments and forts. The imperial city of New Delhi displays the finely curved architecture of British Raj. It generates a mesmerizing charm reflecting well-composed and spacious streets under the shade of beautifully lined avenues of trees and tall and imposing government buildings. Overnight: Hotel in Delhi (2 nights)

Day 02: Delhi: The capital of India is a true reflection of the old and new of India. We start our morning tour with old Delhi, starting with the famous Red Fort. Built by Shah Jehan, this was once the most opulent fort of the Mughal Empire. Next we visit another Mughal majesty, the Jama Masjid, India's largest mosque, enjoy a rickshaw ride through the narrow lanes & bazaars of Chandni Chowk, followed by Raj Ghat, the cremation site of Mahatma Gandhi. Our afternoon concentrates on New Delhi and visit first the famous India Gate followed by the Houses of Parliament, Connaught Place, Birla House and the Qutub Minar – a perfect minaret towering 102 meters / 112 yards into the sky. New Delhi is a blend of Mughal India, Hindu India, British India and, certainly, modern independent India. In the evening we enjoy Welcome Dinner at Famous Indian Restaurant. (B, D) Please Note: Red fort and Birla House are closed on Monday and Chandni Chowk is closed on Sunday

Day 03: Delhi –Varanasi: By Flight: Today we are transferred to airport for our flight to the holy city of Varanasi – amongst the oldest living cities. Our arrival at Varanasi will give us a clear feeling of spiritualism, as Varanasi is the spiritual centre of Hindus, the pilgrim centre for the Hindus who dip themselves in the holy water of the Ganges for salvation. We start our Varanasi experience with a visit to the old part of the city and Bharat Mata Temple which houses a huge relief map of India made of marble. Varanasi is known for its many temples and today we cover the Durga temple, the Tulsi Manas Mandir beside the Banaras Hindu University and the Mosque of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Overnight: Hotel in Varanasi (2 Nights) (B)

Day 04: Varanasi: Early morning a serene experience begins as we take a sunrise cruise on the River Ganges. One of the cardinal principles of Hinduism is the belief in the holiness of the Ganges and every morning scores of pilgrim and priests fill the riverbanks performing the holy dip and other rituals. This is a site that has to be seen and experienced, as it is so different from anything else in the world. We return to hotel for breakfast. Later we leave for Sarnath the site of Lord Buddha's first sermon after attaining enlightenment. Varanasi is also famous for its Banarasi silk sarees; we visit some of the houses where they are woven. In the evening we witness the Aarti ceremony on the Ghats of Ganges. Every evening at sunset, on the banks of the river Ganges, the devotional ceremony of Aarti is performed. Thousands of Hindus and tourists flock to the ghats, particularly in the pilgrimage town of Varanasi. (B)

Day 05: Varanasi –Khajuraho: By Flight: Today we are transferred to airport for our flight to Khajuraho. On arrival in Khajuraho, we are transferred to our Hotel. In the afternoon our Khajuraho tour starts with the Erotic temples of Love, designated as a World Heritage Site. They were built during the time of the Chandella dynasty between 950 and 1050 AD. Today only about 20 temples remain and they fall into three distinct groups and belong to two different religions- Hinduism and Jainism. The Kandariya is decorated with a profusion of sculptures - masterpieces of Indian art. The divine sculptures in these temples are a tribute to Life itself. Overnight: Hotel in Khajuraho (1 Night) (B)

Day 06: Khajuraho –Jhansi-Agra: By Surface & Train # 12001- NDLS Shatabadi, Dep: 17:55 Hrs, Arr: 20:25 Hrs: Morning is free. In the afternoon we drive to the Railway Station in Jhansi to embark on the luxury first class train to Agra. This is a very comfortable train journey lasting just over 2 hours with four brief stops en route. It offers air conditioned "business class airline" seating with meal services on board. We are welcomed in Agra and transferred to our Hotel. Overnight: Hotel in Agra (2 Nights) (B)

Day 07: Agra: In the morning we visit to one of the most well known wonders of the world, the Taj Mahal. Built by Shah Jehan as a mausoleum for his favorite wife, Mumtaz Mahal, the Taj is built of white marble, beautifully carved and inlaid with semi-precious stones. Return back to hotel for breakfast. Next we visit Agra Fort, where Shah Jehan, was imprisoned by his son to prevent him from spending the family fortunes on a black echo of the Taj Mahal. We also visit Itmad-Ud-Daulah, often called as Baby Taj. A highly ornate edifice, this mausoleum is considered as the imminent precursor of the Taj Mahal as far as elaborate carvings and inlay work are concerned. Though the structure does not have much to offer architecturally, it makes a clear departure from the earlier Mughal tombs built during the period and is more softer and with a lot of inlay carvings. We end our tour with a visit to some of the local factories famous for inlay work on marbles and witness the complex art inlaying precious and semiprecious stones on the world famous Marbles for the mines of Makrana. (B)



Day 08: Agra/ Fatehpur Sikri / Ramathra (Drive 225 kms / 5 Hours) A short drive gets us to Fatehpur Sikri, the beautiful capital built in 1640 by the Mughal King, Akbar the Great. The city was later abandoned for lack of water. A superb example of Mughal architecture, it stands perfectly preserved in the desert. We also visit the artistically designed mausoleum of Salim Chisty who is reputed to have prayed for a son for Akbar leading to the birth of Salim Jehangir, the builder of the Taj. From here we continue on a countryside drive to Ramathra. On arrival we check in at Fort. Evening enjoy bird watching. Overnight: Ramathra Fort (3 nights) (B, L, D)

Day 09: Ramathra: Ramathra Fort offers several interesting activities and excursions. Some visitors stay for up to a full week to relax in the fort's quiet ambiance and take in the following activities at their own pace.

- Ramathra Village Trail – A complete walking tour of Ramathra village, a small hamlet of farmers and cattle herders, takes about 3 hours. .
- Boating @ Sunset – in a rowboat in the kalisil dam. It is peaceful & picturesque with breathtaking views of the sunset & rich with bird life. We provide life jackets, a bird book & a pair of binoculars.
- Bird Watching – There are a variety of species of birds seen around the Fort & Lake. Bird watching can be done at the lake, at the marshes below the fort or during your walk to the village.
- Wilderness Drive – Tour the countryside, visit 'Gujar' hamlets, and explore a cavernous gorge and an old cave temple, Return early evening for possible wildlife sightings
- Night Drive into the Buffer Zone of Kaila Devi National Park – Drive across the Daang plateau stretching east to the Chambal river valley and as far as Ranthambhor to the south, This area is filled with gorges, Until recently, tigers roamed the area but visitors regularly see several varieties of deer, blue bulls, wolves, jackals, hyenas, foxes and if lucky, a wild boar, bear or leopard.
- Cycling @ Ramathra Fort – (10 Kms) with a route map. Cycle through nearby villages & along the lake & countryside totally unspoilt & see nature at its best.
- Cross Country Jeep Safari to Ranthambhore – Depart Ramathra Fort, lunch stop & tour of Ranthambhore Fort and return to Ramathra Fort.
- A day-trip to Karauli – An hour's drive from Ramathra, the city palace in Karauli and the temple of Madanmohanji are very well preserved. The Karauli bazaar is a busy place to explore and shop in. Lacquered bangles are a specialty and one can see bangle makers at work.

Day 10: Ramathra: Day at Ramthra fort. Enjoy optional activities. (B, L, D)

Day 11: Ramathra –Jaipur: (Drive: 180 Km/ 3 Hours); In the morning after breakfast we drive to Jaipur. On arrival we check in our hotel. Later we enjoy demonstration of block printing on cotton textile. In the evening we have dinner at Spice Court an ethnic Rajasthani restaurant, which offers cultural dance show and traditional Rajasthani style Dinner. Puppet show, live dance and music performance of folk dancers sway to the lilt of the "Been" and beat of the drum. Their graceful and sinuous dance movements captivate all visitors. Overnight: Hotel in Jaipur (B, D)

Day 12: Jaipur: A royal experience awaits us as we take an elephant ride uphill to the intriguing Amber Palace, a distinguished example of 17th Century Rajput architecture. After the tour and enjoying a panoramic view, we return to Jaipur to visit the old astronomical observatory built by the founder of the city, Jai Singh. Next we visit the majestic Palace, which houses a rare collection of Indian art, and the colourful bazaar. Jaipur is noted for its craftsmen, skilled in brass inlay, lacquer work and stone setting. Most of the buildings in the old city are made of pink sandstone and one of the most beautiful is Hawa Mahal, Palace of Winds, where the ladies of the royal harem used to watch the city from behind the intricately carved facade. After a photostop at Hawa Mahal, next we visit Albert Hall Museum, situated in the Ram Niwas Gardens. Its Indo-Saracenic style of architecture is a combination of European style with traditional Indian elements. The museum has a rich collection of artifact like paintings, carpets, ivory, stone, metal sculptures, colourful crystal works etc. Evening is free to enjoy both shopping and a cultural experience in the bazaars of Jaipur. (B)

Day 13: Jaipur – Pushkar: (Drive: 140 Km/ 3 Hours): In the morning after breakfast we drive to Pushkar. On arrival we check in at Tent. Pushkar is bewitching but touristy little town, like a beautiful mirage on the edge of the desert, with temples, bathing ghats, onion domes and chalk colored buildings clustering around its holy lake, which is said to have appeared when Brahma dropped a lotus flower. It's an important pilgrimage centre and you'll see plenty of Sadhus (Spiritual men), as well as countless chilled-out travelers experimenting variously with spirituality, Bhang and the facial hair. Pushkar boasts temples, though few are as ancient as you might expect at such an important pilgrimage site, since many were deserted by Aurangzeb and subsequently rebuilt. We visit the most famous temple of Lord Brahma Temple, said to be one of the few temples in the world dedicated to this deity. It's marked by red spire, and over the entrance gateway is the Hans, or goose symbol, of Brahma, who is said to have personally chosen Pushkar as its site. Overnight: Royal Desert Camp (Swiss Tent) (3 Nt) (B, L,D)

Day 14: Pushkar: Attend Pushkar Fair: The annual fair in Pushkar is serious business for villagers who spend days traveling across the desert to Pushkar hoping to turn camels into much needed cash. The Pushkar Lake is holy to the Hindus and religious ceremonies are performed simultaneously as camels are being traded. The night at the fairground takes on a Carnival atmosphere. The ferries wheel attracts line-ups of giggling Rajput women in their richly coloured saris and sparkling bangles that stretch from wrist to shoulder. Roadside vendors sell pots, pans, bangles, saris, belts and other various items. Campfires dot the dark desert like bright stars, as the evening meal is prepared. This day is free to experience the festivity and mingle with the people. (B, L, D)

Day 15: Pushkar: Day is free to experience the festivity and mingle with the people. (B, L, D)

Day 16: Pushkar -Udaipur (Drive: 280 Km / 6 Hrs): In the morning after breakfast we drive to Udaipur. No city in Rajasthan is quite as romantic as Udaipur. Misty ochre-shadowed hills and pale, intricate buildings encircle the mirror glass of Lake Pichola. If Jaipur is a study in pink then Udaipur is a vision in white. The City of Dawn, surrounded by the ancient Aravali Mountains and set on the edge of three lakes, is a brilliant kaleidoscope of narrow lanes flanked by bright stalls, gardens, lakes, palaces and temples. Eight marble porticos mark the spot where the Mewar sovereigns were weighed in gold. Within the City Palace are several architectural and artistic highlights such as the MOR Chowk, known for its stunning peacock mosaics and the Bhim Vilas Palace with its series of lovely wall paintings. The most memorable parts of Udaipur are its lake palaces, shimmering like jewels on Lake Pichola. Jag Mandir, the other island palace with a marble dome, is a marvel in red sandstone. It was a refuge for the Moghul Emperor Shah Jahan when he was in exile following a quarrel with his father, Emperor Jehangir. On arrival we check in our Hotel. Rest of the day is free. Overnight: Hotel in Udaipur (2 Nights) (B)

Day 17: Udaipur: We start our experience of Udaipur by visiting the City Palace. The palace has several architectural and artistic highlights such as the Mor Chowk, known for its stunning peacock mosaics and the Bhim Vilas Palace with its series of lovely wall paintings. From City Palace we can see the most memorable part of Udaipur lake palace, shimmering like jewels on Lake Pichola. Later we visit Jagdish Temple, Fateh Sagar lake and Saheliyon Ki Bari or the Garden of Maids. In the afternoon we visit Crystal and Tea display at the Gallery Restaurant after which we take a boat ride on lovely Lake Pichola and visit Jag Mandir, the other island palace with a marble dome, is a marvel in red sandstone. It was a refuge for the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan when he was in exile following a quarrel with his father, Emperor Jahangir. (B)

Day 18: Udaipur –Mumbai-Goa: By Flight: Today we are transfer to airport to take flight via Mumbai to the Goa. On arrival we are transferred to our hotel. Rest of the day is free to enjoy a unique blend of India with a strong Portuguese influence. The beaches in Goa offer both quite and a public area where one would find lots of families enjoying the silver sands and the local hawker selling home cooked snacks. Overnight: Hotel in Goa (3 Nights) (B)

Day 19: Goa: This morning we have tour of Goa we visit the World Heritage Site of the churches and convents of Goa, the former capital of the Portuguese Indies. Of particular interest is the Church of Bom Jesus, which contains the tomb of St Francis-Xavier, a great illustration of the evangelization of Asia. These monuments were influential in spreading forms of Manueline, Mannerist and Baroque art to all the countries of Asia where missions were established.

From here we are driven to Spice Farm to a welcome of fresh tender coconut water or lemon grass tea and some snacks. A guide will take us around the spice farm, where cardamom, vanilla, cinnamon and nutmeg, herbs, fruits, betel and medicinal plants grow. Lots of butterflies and many species of birds are found here. A big attraction at the farm is its elephants who take you for rides and let you bathe them. All this over, a delicious buffet lunch of local Goan Cuisine like, prawn, fish & Chicken & vegetable curries made with whole spices from the plantation. (B, L)

Day 20: Goa: Breakfast at hotel. Day is free for personal activities. (B)

Day 21: Goa-Mumbai: By Flight: Today we are transferred to airport for our flight to Mumbai on arrival we are transferred to our hotel. Rest of the day is free. (B) Overnight: Hotel in Mumbai (2 nights) (B)

Day 22: Mumbai: After breakfast we are taken on a short trip by Motor Boat to Elephanta Caves, this 7th century rock - cut temples are dedicated to Lord Shiva. An epitome of Hindu cave culture, Elephanta consists of seven caves of which the most notable is the Mahesa-murti cave. The main temple consists of a large pillared mandapa (hall) and a freestanding square shrine at the west end of the hall. Set in various niches are a number of large reliefs depicting different aspects of Shaivaite iconography. After the sightseeing of Elephanta caves we return to the main land and proceed on tour of the city. Our first stop is the Prince of Wales Museum & Victoria Terminus, which has recently been added to the World Heritage site. This exuberant Gothic building looks more like a lavishly decorated palace or cathedral than a train station. From here we go to Mani Bhawan, now converted to museum, where Mahatma Gandhi stayed here during the freedom Struggle. We also visit the Jain Temple, Hanging gardens. We also drive past 800 year old Tomb of Haji Ali. We end our tour at the Dhobi Ghats - a vast outdoor laundry (B)

Day 23: Mumbai-Home: Today we are transferred to airport in time for our flight to home. (B)

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