



**Holi (Festival of Colours), Varanasi and Tigers
11 Days: 18-28 March 2011**

Delhi-Jaipur-Agra-Bandhavgarh-Varanasi- Delhi

**A wonderful combination of lively Holi celebration,
spiritual Varanasi and Bandhavgarh, one of India's
best tiger safari parks.**

**£2,800 per person sharing, excluding international
flights.**



Friday 18th March 2011 (Arrive Delhi -Jaipur)

Your flight will arrive at Indira Gandhi International Airport where you will be met and we will drive to Jaipur (250 kms / 05-06 hours)

We arrive in Jaipur and will settle in to our hotel, Shahpura House for 03 nights.

Shahpura House in Jaipur is located in a residential area, well insulated from the bustle and chaos of the city in Rajasthan, a Northwestern province of India. Jaipur is also called the Pink City and is surrounded by the ancient Aravali Mountains and is set on the edge of three lakes. It is a brilliant kaleidoscope of narrow lanes flanked by bright stalls, gardens, lakes, palaces and temples. The Shahpura House is about 4 kilometers from the city centre (Court Square).



We can relax briefly before the special dinner at Dera Amber along with an Elephant Safari.



Dera Amer, situated behind the hills of the famous Amer Fort is the ideal location for outdoor recreational and adventure activities, in very close proximity to the city of Jaipur. The Camp is located at the foothills of the Aravali Range and surrounded by the wilderness of a reserved forest with no urban civilization in the vicinity, just a few hamlets housing the local villagers who farm their fields which border a pretty lake.

After dinner we drive back to our hotel.

Saturday 19th March 2011 (Jaipur)

Enjoy a guided tour of Amber Fort & enjoy the Elephant Festival at Jaipur stadium.



The Kachchawahas ruled from Amber, 11 km from Jaipur, for seven centuries. With a history so old, it is not unexpected that there is a lot of the past that can be traced in its archaeological history. While many of the early structures have either disappeared or ruined, those dating from the 16th century are remarkably preserved. Amber as it exists now is the handiwork of three of the kingdom's rulers that include Man Singh, and Jai Singh I and II. Approached from a steep ramp, visitors ride up on elephant back, entering through the grand Singh Pol gateway and continuing to Jaleb Chowk, the courtyard. From here, we

walk two flights of steps, one leading to the Shila Mata complex with its enshrined image of the goddess, and the other to the main palace complex.

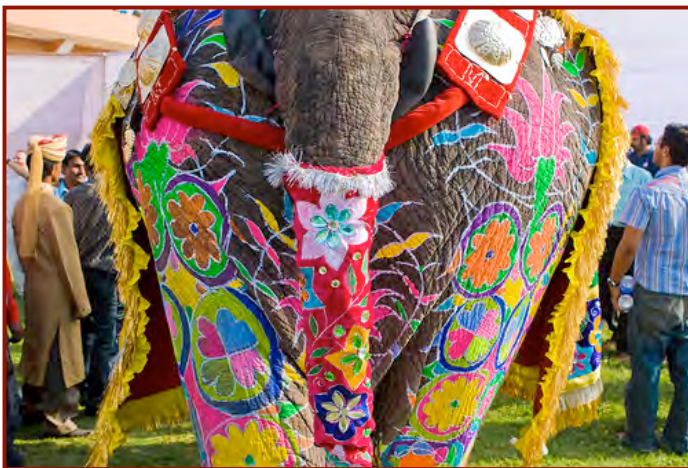


The City Palace was built by Maharaja Jai Singh II of the Kachhwaha clan of Rajputs, but a lot of changes and additions were made to the original structure by his successors.

The architecture of the City Palace is a synthesis of Rajasthani and Mughal styles. The Complex comprises of many structures, courtyards, gardens and buildings. There are many splendid small palaces and halls in the complex, such as the Chandra Mahal, Mubarak Mahal and Badal Mahal. There is also a famous temple called the Shri Govind

Temple and a museum inside, named the City Palace Museum.

The Elephant Festival is one of the most popular festivals of Jaipur, Rajasthan. The Elephant Festival has its own charm and is celebrated every year in March on the occasion of Holi, the Festival of Colors. The colorful festival of Holi is celebrated throughout India, but the festival gets some more spice added to it, when it combines with the Elephant festival of Jaipur, Rajasthan. The Elephants become a major attraction in their classy attires.



It is a festival time for Elephants, so they enjoy the festivity by dressing up and playing. Live Folk dances and music programs are also arranged for the overall entertainment. This festival of Elephants revives the royalty of Jaipur, when people rode Elephants in the grounds. The Elephants, all beautifully decorated make for great photographic subjects.

We will have our dinner at Spice Court in Jaipur.

Sunday 20th March 2011 (Jaipur)

Today we will celebrate Holi , the Festival of Colours with local people in Jaipur.

HOLI HAI... Come Holi and the streets will reverberate with the chants of Holi hai... Colours will fill the air as people throw abeer and gulal showing their joy and celebration of the arrival of Spring .



Holi marks the end of the winter gloom and everyone will be boisterously celebrating.

Holi has become the festival of freedom from social norms. Colors and 'gulal' are showered on everyone dressed up in white clothes and the whole community seems to merge into one big fraternity under the guise of colors, without any distinction of caste, creed, color or sex. Children with 'pichkaris' (big syringes to squirt colored water) and faces smeared with color will try to get you. People exchange good wishes, sweets and gifts. Holi parties are organized everywhere, people dance to the rhythmic beats of drums and sing Holi songs. Light snacks and milk-based cool drinks known as 'Thandai' are often served in these parties that may be intoxicated with 'bhang'. A fun and colourful way to celebrate the arrival of Spring!

We will take dinner in the hotel restaurant.

Monday 21st March 2011 (Jaipur – Agra – over night train to Katni)

After an early breakfast we will drive to Agra (210 kms / 05 hours) to connect to our overnight express air-conditioned train to Katni train station (***Gondwana Express , departs Agra at 1850 hrs***)

Before boarding the overnight train we will have a brief tour of the Taj Mahal.



The Taj Mahal - "the epitome of love", "a monument of immeasurable beauty" was built by Mughal Emperor Shah Jehan in the memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal, with whom he fell in love at first sight.

Set amidst the Vindhyan ranges and the eastern flank of Satpura hill range Bandhavgarh National Park is one of the best places to see and enjoy wildlife in India. The Reserve is named after the highest hill Bandhavgarh (807 m.) in the centre of the Reserve. A chain of smaller hills, 32 in all, surrounds this hill, forming a number of valleys and spurs in between. This park was the former hunting preserve of the Maharaja of Rewa and at present is a famous natural hub for White Tigers. White Tigers, now a major attraction around the world's zoos, were first discovered in Rewa, not far from here. The terrain is broken, with rocky hill ranges, running roughly east west, interspersed with grassy swamps and forested valleys.

The rivers Johilla and Son flowing on the eastern side, the river Umrar passing through the western fringes and the Bandhavgarh hill, visible from as far as 30 km., are some of the landmarks of the Reserve.

Much of the park is covered in Sal forest, replaced by mixed forests in the higher elevations of the hills. There are extensive strands of bamboo, which flowered in 1984-85, and grasslands. Generally the forests have less undergrowth here, thus offering better sightings of wildlife, notably mammals, including daylight sightings of Tigers.

Afternoon game drive to the National Park by jeep .

During our stay at King's Lodge we will have evening slide shows and there may be wildlife lectures by local wildlife specialists.

Friday 25th March 2011 (Bandhavgarh National Park - Varanasi)

We will drive to Khajuraho airport with our packed breakfast from King's Lodge as there is no good hotel /resort on the way from Bandhavgarh National Park to Khajuraho. We will connect with **Kingfisher Airlines flight 336 at 1225 hrs .**

Arriving in Varanasi at 1410 we will transfer to our hotel The Gateway, also known as The Taj Ganges.



The hotel is set amidst 40 acres of lush green gardens, just 21 kms (45 mins drive) from the airport. The hotel is 6 kms away from the city Centre or the commercial hub of Varanasi also commonly known as The Chowk. The hotel is constructed in the holy Swastik shape (The Swastika is an ancient symbol which represents good fortune and blessing). Taj Ganges offers recently renovated & refurbished world-class contemporary rooms & suites with views of the lush green gardens or the swimming pool.

Rest of the day at leisure.

Saturday 26th March 2011 (Varanasi)

Today we will get up early morning to enjoy the boat ride on the Ganges and to see the daily rituals and life of local people at Varanasi.



The land of Varanasi (Kashi) has been the ultimate pilgrimage spot for Hindus for ages. Often referred to as Benares, Varanasi is the oldest living city in the world. These few lines by Mark Twain say it all: "Benares is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together". Hindus believe that one who is graced to die on the land of Varanasi would attain salvation and freedom from the cycle of birth and re-birth. Home of Lord Shiva and Parvati, the origins of Varanasi are yet

unknown. The Ganges in Varanasi is believed to have the power to wash away the sins of mortals.

Varanasi has also been a great centre of learning – it is associated with the promotion of spiritualism, mysticism, Sanskrit, yoga and Hindi language and honored authors such as Prem Chand and Tulsi Das, the famous saint-poet who wrote Ram Charit Manas. Aptly called the cultural capital of India, Varanasi has provided the right platform for all cultural activities to flourish. Many exponents of dance and music have come from Varanasi. Ravi Shankar, the internationally renowned Sitar maestro and Ustad Bismillah Khan, (the famous Shehnai player) are all sons of the blessed city or have lived here for a major part of their lives.

After the boat ride on the Ganges we will have a walking tour to the Narrow streets of Varanasi.



We will have quick visit to the Mother India temple (Bharat Mata Mandir) before heading back to our hotel for breakfast.



After breakfast it's time for us to visit Sarnath.

The deer park where the Buddha preached his first sermon is now called Sarnath. It lay forgotten ... until a British amateur archaeologist excavated the site in the nineteenth century. He found stupas and a pillar originally erected by emperor Ashoka in the third century BC. The biggest stupa, called Dhamekh, was on the site where the Buddha supposedly

gave his first sermon, sitting with the Brahmins from Kapilavastu. Later archaeologists discovered the shrine where the Buddha apparently had sheltered from the rains; they also found monasteries, which seemed to have been destroyed by a great fire. A temple built by the Sri Lankan Buddhist Anagarika Dharmapala now stands in place of the shrine. The ruins of the monasteries lie amid vast green lawns. The grounds also include a deer park and a zoo.

There are many Buddhist monuments and edifices in Sarnath. Some of the important Buddhist monuments at Sarnath are the Dhamekha stupa, the Chaukhandi stupa and monasteries and temples of different schools of Buddhism from Japan, China, Thailand, Burma and others. The Indian Buddhist society called Mahabodhi Society maintains a park around the Buddha temple. The Mahabodhi Temple within the park has a tooth relic of the Buddha.



After visiting Sarnath we will drive back to Varanasi and visit the Ghats again where we will see the evening prayer (Aarti) at the Ganges.

Aarti is said to have descended from the Vedic concept of fire rituals, or *homa*. The word may also refer to the traditional Hindu devotional song that is sung during the ritual. Aarti is performed and sung to develop the highest love for God. "Aa" means "towards or to", and "rati" means "right or virtue" in Sanskrit.

The purpose of performing Aarti is the waving of lighted wicks before the deities in a spirit of humility and gratitude, wherein faithful followers become immersed in God's divine form. It symbolises the five elements: 1) space (akash), 2) wind (vayu), 3) light (tej), 4) water (jal), and 5) earth (pruthvi). Communal Aarti is performed in the mandir; however, devotees also perform it in their homes.

We will have our dinner at one of the local restaurants before driving back to our hotel.

Sunday 27th March 2011 (Varanasi)

Today we will visit the local markets, shopping places and nearby local villages for photography.

Monday 28th March 2011 (Varanasi – Delhi – London)

After a leisurely breakfast we will be transferred to the domestic airport to connect with our **Kingfisher flight 336 at 1340 hrs**, we will arrive back in Delhi at **1500 hrs** and will be transferred to a nearby hotel airport where we can relax until our farewell dinner and our transfer to the International airport for our flight s home.