



INDIA



CULTURAL & WILDLIFE SAFARI
February 5, 2011

Sat 5th Feb - Sydney to Ahmedabad

This morning we leave Australia flying with Singapore Airlines on flight SQ232 departing Sydney at 12.40pm. Arrival into Singapore is at 5.40pm, with the connecting flight (SQ530) departing at 7.00pm. Arrival into Ahmedabad is scheduled for 10.00pm (local time - India is 5½ hours behind Sydney time).



After clearing customs we will be met and transferred to our hotel.



Overnight at the **Sarovar Portico, Ahmedabad.**

Sun 6th Feb - Rann of Kutch

After breakfast we will transfer by road from Ahmedabad to the Rann of Kutch, a journey of around 3 hours.

The Rann is part of the great Thar Desert and one section of it has been declared a wildlife sanctuary. Here we will stay in very comfortable traditional accommodation (called "Koobas") built from mud (with your own en-suite), at Desert Coursers Camp, Zainabad. The village of Zainabad is right on the edge of this massive desert salt pan.



Our host, Mr Dhanraj Malik, happens to be heir to the throne of the local traditional royal family. His charm, outstanding knowledge and enthusiasm for the environment and wildlife, plus his pleasure of taking us to visit the local people, will make our stay here a very rewarding experience. We have now entered into an area where to see a tourist is a rarity, and the local Gujarati villagers will welcome us and love having their photos taken !

The Rann of Kutch sanctuary was designed to help preserve part of the vast array of desert wildlife. This area is home for around 1000 Asiatic Wild Asses - an endangered species with a mundane name, but a striking beauty. Locally these animals are called "Ghud-khur". The Ghudkhur live in an area which in summer suffers appalling heat and aridity, and during the monsoon it floods to a depth of around 40cms, limiting the animals to small mounds or "bets".



Apart from the wild asses, other sightings may include blue bull, Indian gazelle, wolf, jackal, Indian and desert foxes, desert and jungle cat. Dry land birds like the sand grouse, houbara bustard, desert wheatear, steppe eagle and montagu harrier, can be seen in winter.

During our stay here, we will have opportunity to visit the vast wetlands, which usually teem with birdlife at this time of year. These lakes and marshlands attract flamingos, pelicans, cranes and ducks, in large flocks. We can practice sneaking up to the edge of the wetlands to get great photographs. The number of cranes that migrate to this area at this time of year make for spectacular sights as they swirl in their thousands into glorious sunsets.



Our time here will be filled with visits to the salt flats of the Rann or rivers that run off it, interspersed with stops at local villages. Gujarat is a face of India definitely worth discovering and not commonly experienced by the average traveller.



Afternoon game viewing and village visits.

Overnight at **Desert Coursers Camp, Zainabad.**

Mon 7th Feb - Rann of Kutch



Exploring the Rann of Kutch - Game viewing, local village visits, and meeting personalities !

Overnight at **Desert Coursers Camp, Zainabad**

Tue 8th Feb - Rann of Kutch



Exploring the Rann of Kutch - Game viewing, local village visits and meeting tribal folk at work.

Overnight at **Desert Coursers Camp, Zainabad**

Wed 9th Feb - To Udaipur

This morning we depart from Zainabad and travel by road north to the city of Udaipur. The journey is over 300 kilometres, and we will pass through quite a change in scenery as we move from Gujarat into Rajasthan.



The city of lakes "Udaipur" is a lovely blend of water and lush green hills. Its palaces are straight out of a fairy-tale book..... lakes, forts, palaces, temples, gardens, mountains and narrow lanes with market stalls, all re-live the reminiscences of a heroic past, valor and chivalry. Their reflection in the placid waters of the Lake Pichola is picturesque.

One of the highlights of our visit will be that you are staying in the Fateh Prakash Palace. It is a royal retreat tastefully decorated in traditional style with antiques and fixtures. The palace has been restored to its pristine glory with modern amenities, offering you an experience originally reserved for the royalty. The Palace provides breathtaking picturesque views of Lake Pichola, Jagmandir, Lake Palace and the Sajjangarh Fort (Monsoon Palace), and offers a soothing break from the rigors of city life. The grand Durbar Hall, the exclusive Gallery Restaurant and the dazzling Crystal Gallery complete the royal repertoire of Fateh Prakash Palace.



Early this evening we will walk around the city centre to witness the activity as the day comes to a close and tonight we will dine on the rooftop of a nearby hotel which affords glorious views back over the lake and the palaces.

Overnight at Fateh Prakash Palace, Udaipur

Thu 10th Feb - Udaipur

We shall commence the morning by travelling to an older part of the city and visiting the Bara Bazaar. Later we shall we will be guided through an overview of the city, its palaces, ramparts, lake views and artist colonies.





In the afternoon we will visit the Shiv Niwas Palace. Built at the turn of the century as an adjunct to the royal residence Shambhu Niwas, which is a somewhat incongruous, western looking building. Shiv Niwas is its anti-thesis, with its curved Chajjas or drip stone roofs, and its arched chambers that were opulently appointed of a number of white halls and white kiosks.



After visiting Shiv Niwas we shall undertake an afternoon boat ride on the lake (this is subject to the water level of Lake Pichola at the time) which will include a visit to the Jag Mandir Palace (made famous in the James Bond movie, Octopussy), and experience a close up viewing of the Lake Palace hotel from the water.



Overnight at **Fateh Prakash Palace, Udaipur**

Fri 11th Feb - Jodhpur

This morning we depart from Udaipur for the journey to Jodhpur.

En-route we will stop at Ranakpur, not only an appropriate place to break our journey, but a world famous religious and architectural site. Ranakpur is widely known for its marble Jain Temple, and for a much older Sun Temple which lies opposite the former.

The renowned Jain temple at Ranakpur is dedicated to Adinatha. Light coloured marble has been used for the construction of this grandiose temple which occupies an area of approximately 60 x 62 meters. The temple, with its distinctive domes, shikhara, turrets and cupolas rises majestically from the slope of a hill.



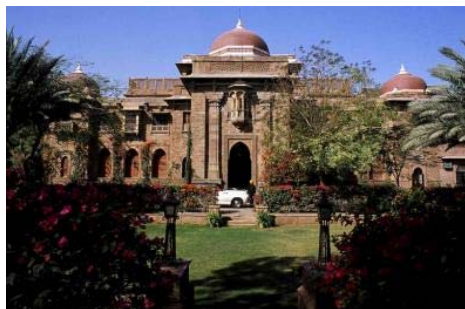
Over 1400 marble pillars, carved in exquisite detail, support the temple. Idols face all four cardinal directions. In the axis of the main entrance, on the western side, is the largest idol. The construction of the temple and quadrupled image symbolize the conquest of Tirthankara of the four cardinal directions and hence the cosmos.



The dating of this temple has been a matter of controversy but it is largely considered to be anywhere between the late 14th to mid-15th centuries.

On arrival in Jodhpur we will check-in at our hotel.

Well, it's not just another hotel, it's the Ajit Bhawan. Bestowed with the pride of being the first ever "heritage hotel" in India, Ajit Bhawan is ideally situated in the desert city of Jodhpur. Home to the royal family of Jodhpur, the lavish palace was exclusively built for Maharaja Ajit Singh, the younger brother of Maharaja Umaid Singh of Jodhpur. A modern heritage hotel today, Ajit Bhawan continues to serve as the residence of the Jodhpur royal family, while welcoming visitors at the same time.



The old Jodhpur city, founded in 1459, is surrounded by a 10 km long wall with eight gates serving as entrances. The new city is settled around this walled area. This city was on the silk route of the 16th century and hence was host to many travellers.

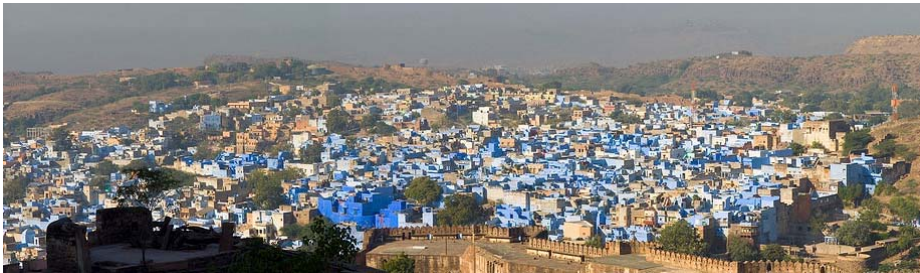
Late this afternoon we shall journey to the city centre and discover the city coming alive in the early evening. The late light creates eerie tones in the alleyways and city squares.

Overnight at Ajit Bhawan, Jodhpur.



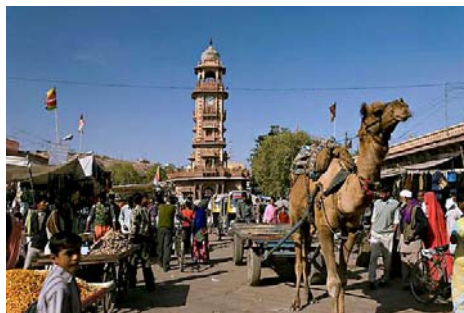
Sat 12th Feb - Jodhpur

Jodhpur is called the "Blue City" because of the blue paint on the houses - which originates from times when the Brahmin caste owners, painted their homes this colour.



The highlight of this morning will be a guided tour of the famous Sardar markets. This travel-writer's description may tempt you...

"We elbow our way through the chaotic crowds of Jodhpur's Sardar market. A spruiker stands on his clothing cart waving his arms as he launches into a noisy spiel; next to him old women in colourful saris have rows of multi-coloured bangles for sale....."



In one corner a roadside barber sits cross-legged on the footpath giving his client a careful shave while the market dentist proudly displays his newest equipment - old-looking pliers, tweezers and mouth plates of all sizes - hoping to snare his next patient.

We turn into a narrow lane and find ourselves in the fresh vegetable section, where shoppers haggle over the price of aubergine, fresh peppers and an array of local produce.

In the Maharaja spice shop, spice merchant Sandeep Chouhan pulls out a photo album. Flicking through, his chest swells with pride as he shows us photographs of Greg Chappell, the Test great and former Indian national cricket coach. "His wife is my No. 1 customer," Sandeep says as he plunges into his sales pitch.

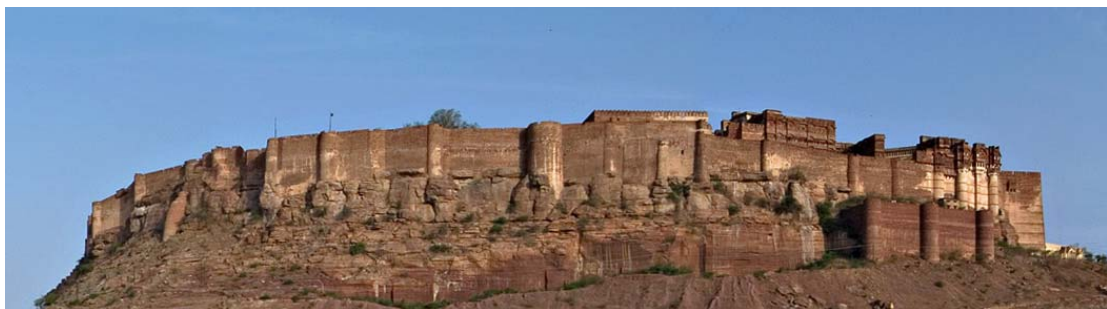
Further down the laneway are more spice shops, with colourful open metal containers piled with earthy shades of ochre, yellow and brown. The Sardar market is one of Jodhpur's must-sees."



This afternoon we will visit Jaswant Thada a white marble memorial built by Sardar Singh in 1899 in memory of Maharaja Jaswant Singh II.



The monument, in its entirety, is built out of intricately carved sheets of marble. These stones are extremely thin and polished so that they emit a warm glow when the sun's rays dance across their surface. Within this cenotaph, there are also two more tombs. The Jaswant Thada is a traditional cremation ground of Jodhpur rulers. The grounds are also comprised of exquisitely carved gazebos, a beautiful multi-tiered garden, and a small lake.



Then we travel to the nearby Mehrangarh Fort, a perfect location for witnessing and photographing the sunset over the "blue" city. The tower fort known as Mehrangarh rises 120 meters above the plain. On a clear day one can even see the fort of Kumbalgarh which is 124 kilometres away. We will be able to explore the splendid palaces located in the fort, noted mainly for their exquisitely carved sandstone latticework. There is also an interesting museum within the fort with its collection of royal heirlooms ranging from superb antique weaponry to elephant howdahs of different types to ornate cradles for royal babies. Another exhibit depicts various styles of turbans worn in Rajasthan - with about a hundred of them on display.

We will explore the fort till closing time, and then wander down into the city on a footpath that leads us through hustling and bustling Jodhpurians, as they finish their busy day.

Overnight at *Ajit Bhawan, Jodhpur*



Sun 13th Feb - Jaipur

This morning we depart Jodhpur and drive to Jaipur, where on arrival we check-in to our hotel.

This afternoon we will undertake a walk around the city's busy commercial and historical centre.



In the early evening we will see the streets transform into sidewalk markets with all kind on wares and edible delights.



Our stay in Jaipur will be at the Alsisar Haveli, built in 1892 and a fine example of Rajput architecture.



Overnight at Alsisar Haveli, Jaipur

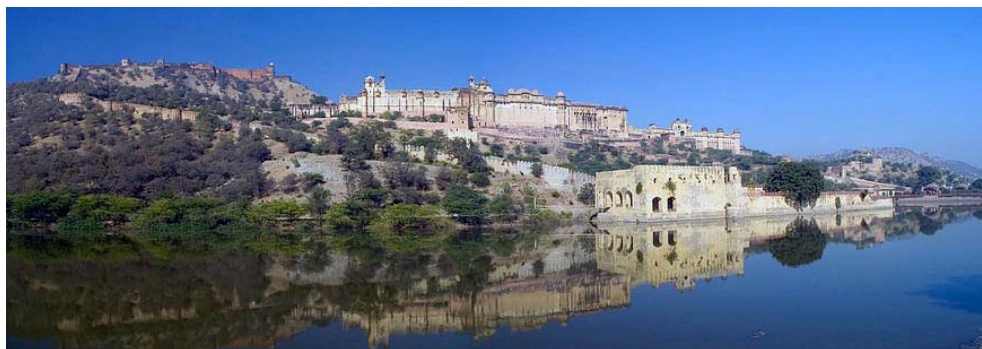


Mon 14th Feb - Jaipur

This morning we visit the ornate Hawa Mahal (Palace of Winds) in the city centre before we travel to the old city of Amber.



The Amber Fort is superbly located and protected by the wild Aravali Hills on all sides. Originally built in the 11th Century, it was extended in the late 16th Century. We will spend some time exploring the intricacies of the palaces.



We return to our hotel for lunch and this afternoon we have a tour of the city of Jaipur.

Jaipur, popularly known as the Pink City, is the capital of Rajasthan state. The kingdom of Jaipur was originally known as Amber, which was also the name of its ancient capital (situated eleven kilometres from Jaipur). Its history can be traced backed to the 12th century. In the 1720's Sawai Jai Singh II, began to build the new city of Jaipur. The city turned out to be an astonishing well-planned one based on the ancient Hindu treatise on architecture, the Shilpa Shastra. Different streets were allotted for different professions such as potters, weavers, dyers, jewellers and bankers. Jaipur has a variety of manufacturing industries. It is especially known for its arts and crafts, jewellery, enamel work, hand-printed fabrics and stone sculptures.



We will visit the City Palace, a delightfully idiosyncratic five-tier composition of arches and balconies.



We shall also visit the nearby astronomical observatory built in 1827, an amazing monument.



We shall finish the day by walking through the early evening street markets ending up at the famous Bapu Bazaar.

Overnight at Alsisar Haveli, Jaipur

Tue 15th Feb - to Bharatpur

This morning we depart Jaipur and head east to the town on Bharatpur. We will stay at Birders Inn (the Inn is run by an avid birder and naturalist of considerable repute, who grew up in the area and still makes his home there). After lunch we leave for birding in the Keoladeo Ghana Bird Sanctuary. We undertake the exploration on cycle-rickshaws - our rickshaw drivers have an incredible knowledge of their park and will share it with us. The park is 11 square miles in area however over 350 species of birds have been recorded here, with over 120 nesting species. The heronry, one of the best in the world, can have up to eight different species breeding in a single tree.

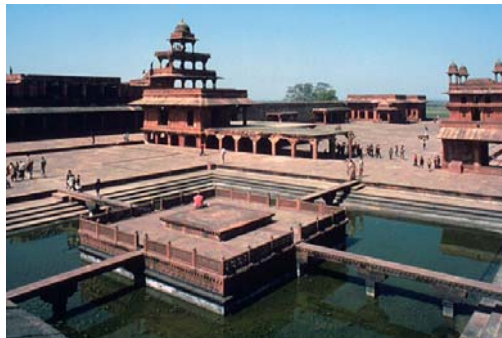


Overnight at **Birders Inn, Bharatpur.**

Wed 16th Feb - Bharatpur

This morning we will depart early from our lodge and undertake a rowboat ride (water levels permitting) on the rich wetlands of Bharatpur. This time of day is truly amazing, with birds and mammals moving amongst the morning light and mists.

Mid morning we depart Bharatpur for Agra. On the way we visit Fatehpur Sikri, an epic poem in red sandstone. Larger than London in its day, it was abruptly abandoned when the wells went dry.



After taking lunch at Agra we will head out to visit a relatively unseen but beautiful part of the city. We will visit Itmad-Ud-Daulah's Tomb, often referred to as the "baby Taj". Along with the main building, the structure consists of numerous outbuildings and gardens. The tomb, built between 1622 and 1628 represents the transition between the first phase of monumental Mughal architecture - primarily built from red sandstone with marble decorations, as in Humayun's Tomb in Delhi and Akbar's Tomb in Sikandra - to its second phase, based on white marble and pietra dura inlay - most elegantly realized in the Taj Mahal.





As the sun begins to go down, we will continue along this northern bank of the Yamuna River to a spot directly opposite the Taj known as the Mehtab Bagh (Moonlight Garden). At this beautiful site we will watch the sun go down over the river and the Taj.

Overnight at *Utkarsh Vilas Hotel, Agra*

Thu 17th - Feb

This morning it's an early rise as we travel to see the morning light on the Taj, and also to avoid the crowds that come later in the day.

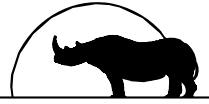


After lunch we visit the Agra Fort and its Jasmine Tower, an exquisite octagonal turret from which the Mughal ruler Shah Jahan would watch the workmen's progress on the Taj Mahal. Views of the Taj Mahal from the Fort are amazing.

The remainder of the day can be spent visiting some of the markets of Agra and learning about the intricate stonework of the Taj.

(There is the option of returning to the Taj for Sunset - the entry is at your own expense)

Overnight at *Utkarsh Vilas Hotel, Agra*.



Fri 18th Feb - Delhi

We depart Agra this morning and travel to Delhi for lunch. This afternoon we have the opportunity to see some of the highlights of the old city.



We shall join in the hustle and bustle by walking through some of the narrow lanes of Chandi Chowk.

Overnight at **Hans Plaza, Delhi.**

Sat 19th Feb - Varanasi

This morning we fly to Varanasi.

Varanasi is also known as "Benaras", and is one of the holiest pilgrimage sites in India. Situated on the banks of sacred river Ganges, Varanasi has been a centre of learning and civilisation for over 2000 years. Besides being a pilgrimage centre, it is considered as an auspicious place to die, ensuring an instant route to heaven. Apart from Hinduism it is also an important pilgrimage centre for Buddhists as it was at Sarnath (10 km from Varanasi), Lord Buddha gave his first sermon after enlightenment. One of Varanasi's claims of fame is that it is the only city in Asia with three Universities.





This evening we visit the Ghats on the banks of river Ganges to see evening prayers being performed with lighted lamps cast on the river's surface, or the "Arti" ceremony.



Overnight at **Radisson Hotel, Varanasi**

Sun 20th Feb - Varanasi

Early this morning we travel to the ghats and undertake a boat ride at dawn down along the Ganges. The activity at this time of day is fascinating and the light along the ghats is spectacular.



After the boat journey we shall take a short walking tour prior to returning to the hotel for breakfast.





Later in the morning we shall visit Sarnath where Buddha preached his first sermon - this area is one of India's holiest sites.

The afternoon and evening are free to permit some shopping or just the chance to see some of this amazing city.

Overnight at **Radisson Hotel, Varanasi**

Mon 21st Feb

This morning we will depart early from Varanasi for our road journey to Bandhavgarh. This will see us arrive in time for a late lunch followed by an afternoon jungle drive.



Overnight at *Nature Heritage, Tala*.

Tue 22nd Feb Bandhavgarh National Park

Morning and afternoon gameviewing in Bandhavgarh National Park.



Set among the Vindhya Hills in the state of Madhya Pradesh, Bandhavgarh consists of 168 square miles of Sal and mixed forest with large stretches of bamboo and grassland to the north. There is a dramatic natural fort at the park's centre, rising 1,000 feet above the surrounding countryside. Wildlife viewing is by open jeep.

Overnight at *Nature Heritage, Tala*



Wed 23rd Feb Bandhavgarh National Park

Morning and afternoon jungle excursions in the Bandhavgarh National Park.



In addition to tigers, we are likely to see chital, sambar, muntjac, nilgai, chinkara, sloth bear, wild boar, rhesus macaque, black faced langur and leopard. There are also more than 275 species of bird found here.



Overnight at Nature Heritage, Tala

Thu 24th Feb - Kanha National Park

This morning we depart Bandhavgarh and travel south to Kanha National Park. Kanha's sal and bamboo forests, rolling grasslands and meandering streams stretch over 940 sq km in dramatic natural splendour which form the core of the Kanha Tiger Reserve created in 1974 under Project Tiger. The park is also the only habitat of the rare hardground Barasingha.

Kanha National Park is one of the best known tiger reserves in the country and one of the best areas for tiger sightings. Over 100 tigers are found in this Park. Other animals like common langur, sambar, chital, barking deer, blackbuck, wild boar, and the Barasingha are easily seen in this Park. Other rarer sightings include gaur (or Indian Bison), wild dogs, jackals and leopards. The Park supports over 200 species of birds.



Afternoon jungle excursion in Kanha National Park.

Overnight at *Tuli Tiger Resort - Kanha*

Fri 25th Feb - Kanha National Park

Morning and afternoon jungle excursions in Kanha National Park.



Wildlife viewing is by open jeep. (At the time of writing, April 2010, elephant-back viewing has been withdrawn by the authorities. This may have changed by the time of our tour.)



Overnight at *Tuli Tiger Resort - Kanha*



Sat 26th Feb - Kanha National Park

Morning and afternoon gameviewing in Kanha National Park.



Overnight at *Tuli Tiger Resort - Kanha*

Sun 27th Feb - Nagpur - Delhi - Australia

This morning we leave Kanha and travel to Nagpur for our flight to Mumbai. We connect with the late evening Singapore Airlines flight (SQ423) departing just after midnight for Singapore.

Mon 28th Feb - to Australia

We arrive in Singapore at 8.20am where we connect with our flight (SQ219) departing back to Sydney, arriving at 8.20pm.

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(Most images contained in this brochure were taken on previous group tours.)



INDIA



CULTURAL & WILDLIFE SAFARI
February 5, 2010

The cost of the tour is \$9,485.00 per person. ** (A Single Supplement of \$1,745.00 may apply for sole travellers, where sharing is not available or requested. A minimum of 6 persons is required to operate this tour.)

The cost includes:-

- ✓ The complete tour as per the itinerary
- ✓ International Economy Airfares from Sydney to India (flying Singapore Airlines) *
- ✓ All Domestic Airfares within India *
- ✓ All International and Domestic Airport and Airline taxes & charges *
- ✓ **All Meals**
- ✓ **Visa fees** (for Australian Passport Holders - based on the current charge at 1/4/10)
- ✓ Reasonable amounts of bottled water
- ✓ Camera fees for still cameras only - not video camera fees (where they apply)
- ✓ Sightseeing and excursions as per the itinerary with English speaking local guides
- ✓ Entrance fees and taxes at places of visit specified in the itinerary
- ✓ Jungle excursions in 4x4 Jeeps

The cost does not include:

- Travel Insurance (we have a special offer for QBE, or Suresave, Travel Insurance)
- Any expenses of a personal nature (such as laundry, phone calls, personal tipping etc.)
- Any drinks (alcoholic or non-alcoholic), except reasonable amounts of drinking water
- Tipping for any services

** As the ground arrangements are in US Dollars, any major fluctuations in the Australian / US exchange rate (this cost is based on the rate at Apr 15, 2010) will require a revision of the cost of the tour.

* Subject to change prior to ticket issuance (due to weekly variations in Taxes and Surcharges).