



Discover India

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Bengal tigers, Rajasthan, India

Discover India

India: is there anywhere else on the planet that offers such a kaleidoscope of travel experiences? One day, you could be touring hill forts in Rajasthan, the next, drifting along Kerala backwaters on a houseboat or practising Bollywood dance routines in Mumbai. Come to ride heritage steam trains to pine-scented hill stations, get lost in the labyrinthine bazaars of sprawling cities or bask on palm-fringed coastlines – the adventures are endless.

Of course, there are some India experiences no traveller wants to miss – watching the sunrise over the Taj Mahal or catching a pulse-pounding glimpse of a wild Bengal tiger – but it's the quieter, unexpected moments and the people you'll meet along the way that will etch an everlasting mark on your heart. It's the sound of Tibetan monk chants carried on an icy Himalayan breeze, the smiling chaiwala who hands you a spice-laden brew, or the family that teaches you how to cook the perfect biryani.

Home to practically every kind of landscape imaginable and 40 UNESCO sites, it would take a lifetime to experience all that India has to offer. Our travel experts will help you figure out where to begin and connect you with locals who can show you the real India; think expert guides and safari rangers, traditional teamakers and homestay hosts, skilled boatmen and regional cooks. We'll also recommend the top places to stay on your journey, from palaces to deluxe jungle camps and historic havelis.

Get in touch and we'll help you plan your India adventure.

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Plan your India holiday

India is a colossal nation that encompasses saw-toothed Himalayan peaks, blistering deserts, dense jungles and flawless beaches – each region offering a distinctly different experience to the next. Planning a trip here can be overwhelming, so we've put together some travel essentials and destination highlights to get you started.



Essentials

Home to over 1.4 billion people, India is the world's seventh-largest country. There are 22 official languages, Hindi being the most widely spoken; with its British-colonial legacy, many people speak English. India is a deeply spiritual nation; nearly 80 percent of the population is Hindu, while other religions include Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism.



When to go

India enjoys a tropical climate that varies by region. Overall, the best time to visit is the cooler dry season between October and March, before the stiflingly hot and humid monsoon season begins. If you're planning a safari, animals are drawn to water in the spring, offering prime sightings. Spring, as well as October and November, is also the ideal time for Himalayan visits.



Good to know

India boasts the world's largest film industry and Bollywood movies are as central to Indian culture as its spicy cuisine, which features regional specialties. Be prepared for vibrant festivals like Holi, where revellers pelt each other with colourful powder in the streets. Remember to dress conservatively and remove your shoes before entering homes and temples.



Getting around

India's rickshaw-choked roads, often stalled by wandering cows, are best explored with a private driver or on a group tour, but no trip would be complete without also experiencing India's vein-like railway network. Board a steam train to navigate one of the country's three UNESCO-protected mountain railways for views of tea estates and snow-topped peaks.

Destination highlights



Amber Fort, Jaipur

Golden Triangle and Rajasthan

The Golden Triangle is home to India's crown jewels, a parade of architectural gems that stretch from Delhi's snaking bazaars and mosques to the imposing Amber Fort near Jaipur and Agra's world-famous monument to love: the Taj Mahal. Venture deeper into Rajasthan to amble the blue-hued city of Jodhpur, shadowed by mighty Mehrangarh Fort, then continue to the Aravalli foothills for romantic lake palaces in Udaipur.



Houseboat on Kerala backwaters

Kerala and Beach

Kerala sprawls from the spice-rich Western Ghats to a maze of lazy backwaters that empty into the Arabian Sea. Adventures in this lush southern state can see you sipping tea in Munnar, strolling through Thekaddy's cardamom fields and cruising canals in a houseboat. End on the palm-lined coast, where the pearls of colonial architecture abound in Cochin, or head north to Goa for never-ending white sands infused with hippy vibes.



Kalachakra Temple, Dharamsala

The Himalayas

The Himalayas is a land of frozen peaks, where monks pray in Tibetan monasteries and prayer flags flutter in the breeze. Come to hike among clouds in high-altitude hill towns like Pelling and visit gold-topped stupas in Dharamshala, home of the Dalai Lama. Meanwhile, heritage steam trains puff in from the arid plains to the verdant foothills, stopping at Darjeeling's emerald tea plantations and the historic hill station of Shimla.



Bengal tigers, India

Tigers and Safaris

Tour central India's wildlife-rich national parks for a real-life *Jungle Book* adventure. Bump through thick forests and vast grasslands on a Jeep safari in protected reserves like Bandhavgarh, Panna, Pench and Kanha for a chance to spot majestic Bengal tigers, as well as sloth bears, black panthers, wolves and a host of other exotic creatures. Enjoy chic jungle camps, eco-walks, and dawn boat rides along the way.

Magical experiences in India

Delve deeper into Indian culture with our locally-led travel experiences – here are some of the best, from tuk tuk tours to spice coast cruises and visits to inspiring social enterprises.

A bizarre border closing ceremony

Kuldeep Singh Jodha, Amritsar Guide: "When you get to the Wagah-Attari border closing ceremony, you might think you've arrived at a football match rather than a ritual. The Indian Border Security Force and Pakistan Rangers dressed in official garb march past cheering crowds performing synchronised dance moves, slick salutes and high kicks!"



Amritsar, Wagah-Attari border closing ceremony

Why Munnar's tea gardens are best explored by tuk tuk

Sebinster Francis, Photographic Tour Guide: "Feel the sun on your face and the wind in your hair as you ride alongside dazzling green tea bushes in a colourful tuk tuk. We'll visit some of Munnar's oldest estates, where the owners will welcome you in for a cup of tea."



Munnar tea gardens

Cooking class in Jaipur



Cooking with a noble family in Jaipur

Thakur Durga Singh, Owner of Dera Mandawa: "Take a cooking class with my wife Usha and me at our home in Jaipur. We'll teach you our family recipes – chickpea savoury pancakes are a favourite and guests are always amused to learn that our biogas ovens are powered by cow-patty fuel!"



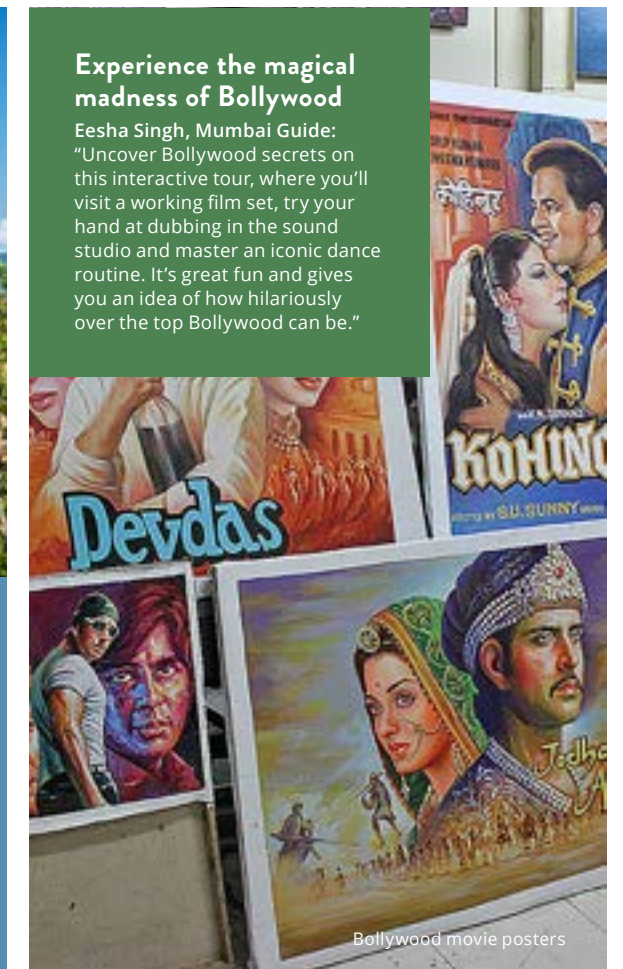
Toy train of Kalka - Shimla Railway

Climb the Himalayas on a toy train

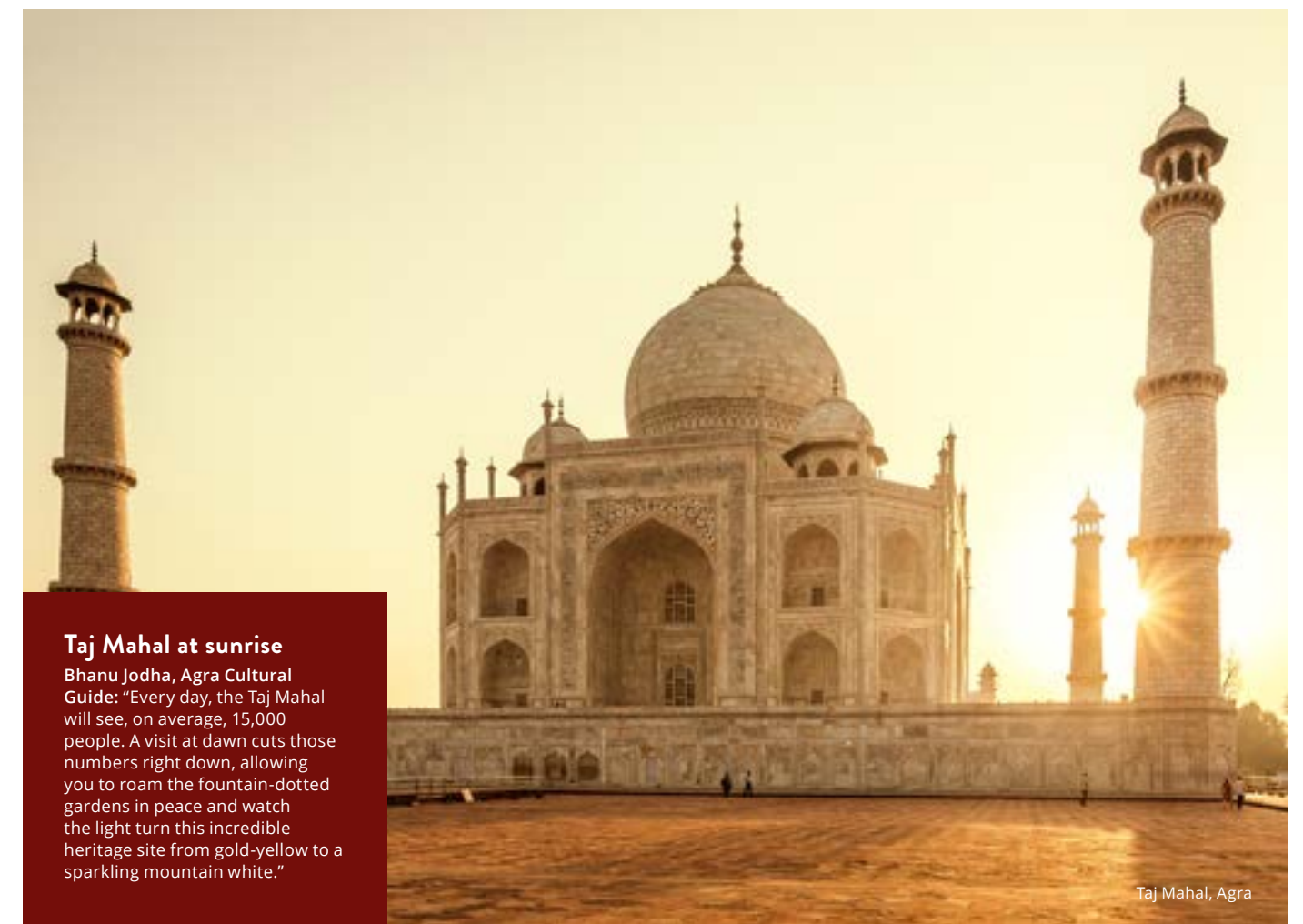
Kabir Chettri, Darjeeling Tour Guide: "Spiral up the mountain in a steam train that's been running for over 150 years. On a clear day, you can see Nepal, the Tibetan border and Kanchenjunga, the world's third-highest mountain. Eventually, you'll reach Ghoom Monastery with its Tibetan architecture and prayer flags."

Experience the magical madness of Bollywood

Eesha Singh, Mumbai Guide: "Uncover Bollywood secrets on this interactive tour, where you'll visit a working film set, try your hand at dubbing in the sound studio and master an iconic dance routine. It's great fun and gives you an idea of how hilariously over the top Bollywood can be."



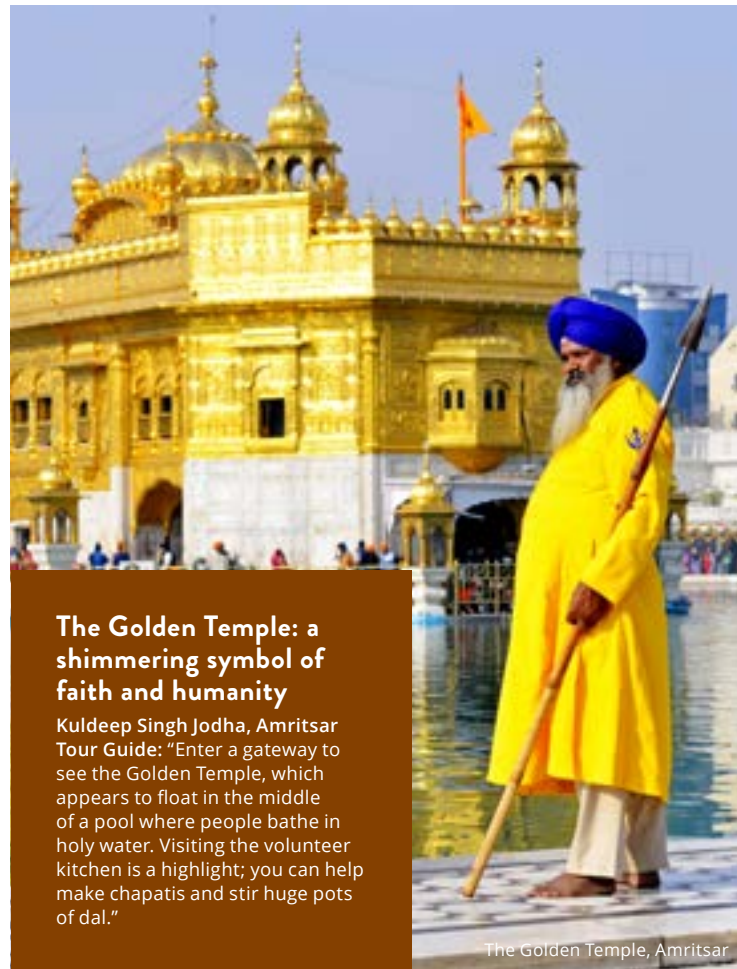
Bollywood movie posters



Taj Mahal at sunrise

Bhanu Jodha, Agra Cultural Guide: "Every day, the Taj Mahal will see, on average, 15,000 people. A visit at dawn cuts those numbers right down, allowing you to roam the fountain-dotted gardens in peace and watch the light turn this incredible heritage site from gold-yellow to a sparkling mountain white."

Taj Mahal, Agra



The Golden Temple: a shimmering symbol of faith and humanity

Kuldeep Singh Jodha, Amritsar Tour Guide: "Enter a gateway to see the Golden Temple, which appears to float in the middle of a pool where people bathe in holy water. Visiting the volunteer kitchen is a highlight; you can help make chapatis and stir huge pots of dal."

The Golden Temple, Amritsar



Indian women sewing

Meet the women of Sadhna, an inspiring social enterprise

Subhangi Singh Rathore, Head of Production at Sadhna: "At Sadhna, we teach women from rural and tribal backgrounds handicraft skills to make a living - there's a story of female empowerment sewn into all of our products. Tour our centre to meet these inspiring women and take part in block printing and embroidery workshops."



Pondicherry, Hindu temple

Pedal in vintage style around Pondicherry's historic centre

Manisha Ray, Sita Cultural Center Guide: "Cycling is the perfect way to explore Pondicherry and its four heritage districts, including Goubert Market and the mosque where Life of Pi was filmed. You'll see the small details you'd miss from a car and really experience the town's sights, sounds and smells."



A glimpse into Lake Vembanad's life on the water

Joby Joseph, Spice Coast Cruises Manager: "Spend a night on our traditional houseboats to experience Lake Vembanad's backwater life, where fishermen cast nets and children race along the banks. Our talented boatmen double as private chefs, cooking fish wrapped in banana leaves while you watch the sunset on the deck."

Houseboat, Kerala backwaters



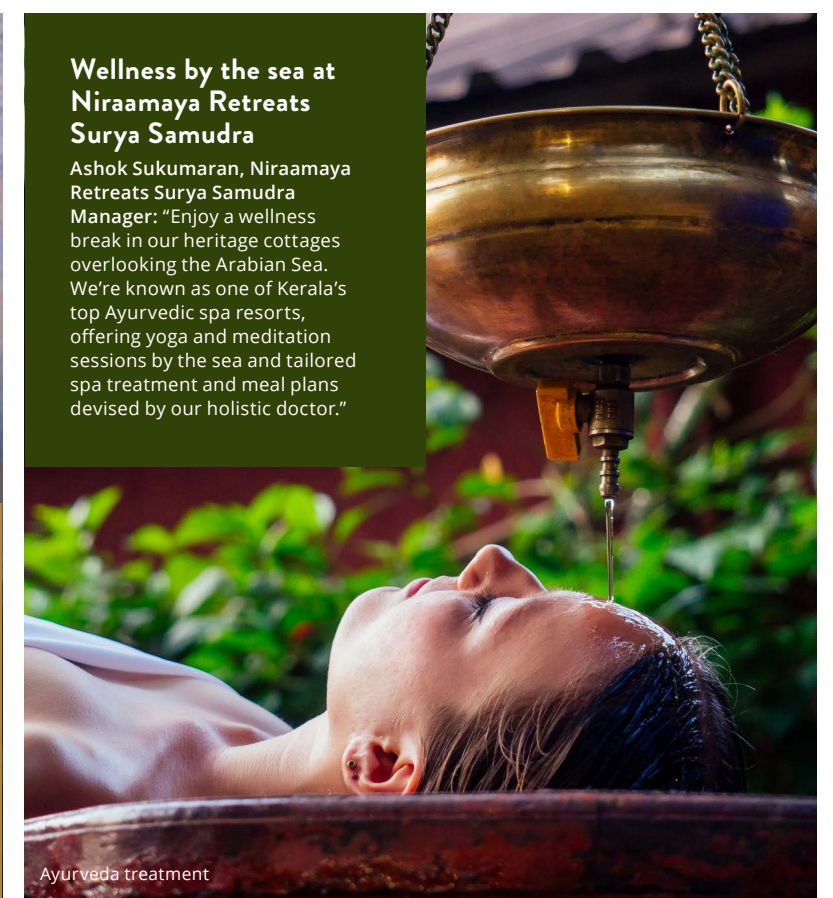
Indian street seller, Delhi

Get a taste of Old Delhi with a local

Dhruv Gupta, Founder of Masterji Kee Haveli: "Let me introduce you to the people, monuments and food that make Old Delhi so special - you'll discover that everyone has a story to tell. We'll visit temples, Asia's largest spice market and sample street food favourites like samosas and pav bhaji."

Wellness by the sea at Niraamaya Retreats Surya Samudra

Ashok Sukumaran, Niraamaya Retreats Surya Samudra Manager: "Enjoy a wellness break in our heritage cottages overlooking the Arabian Sea. We're known as one of Kerala's top Ayurvedic spa resorts, offering yoga and meditation sessions by the sea and tailored spa treatment and meal plans devised by our holistic doctor."



Ayurveda treatment

Our pick of places to stay

Here's a taste of our handpicked India hideaways, from authentic homestays to lakeside bungalows and Mughal-inspired palaces.



Images left to right: Diyas and candles, Diwali
Samode Haveli, Jaipur

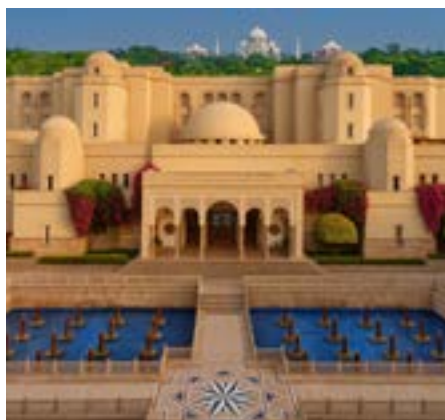


Coconut Lagoon

Great for sampling Kerala's backwaters.

Sail to Coconut Lagoon's heritage bungalows and pool villas, set on the forested shores of Lake Vembanad. Look out for birds as you swim in the lakeside pool and feast on freshly-caught grilled seafood accompanied by Kathakali dance displays.

Highlight: Canoeing from Coconut Lagoon's tranquil canals to the Kumarakom backwaters.



Oberoi Amarvilas

Great for supreme views of the Taj Mahal.

Stay within striking distance of the Taj Mahal at this opulent hotel, inspired by Moorish and Mughal palace architecture. Revel in 24-hour butler service, decadent spa treatments, emperor-style Indian fine dining and exclusive Taj Mahal views from your private balcony.

Highlight: Show-stopping views of the Taj Mahal from almost every window.



The Colonel's Retreat

Great for a genuine Indian homestay.

Savour a slice of Indian hospitality at this Delhi homestay, owned by a former colonel of the British Indian Army. Comfy rooms feature hand-drawn art and you'll enjoy sunset city views and homecooked family meals on the panoramic roof terrace.

Highlight: Afternoon tea on the terrace with the family's famous banana bread.



Samode Haveli

Great for experiencing India's historic havelis.

Step inside the aristocratic Samode family's haveli, set within Jaipur's ancient ramparts. Interiors include mosaics, carved archways and a royal dining hall adorned with murals, while outside, a former elephant ramp leads to a courtyard pool shaded by palms.

Highlight: A family-led tour of the haveli's frescoes, murals and antiques.



Brijrama Palace Hotel

Great for a stylish stay on the River Ganges.

This royal palace stands guard over the Ganges in Varanasi, offering front-row seats to the river's sacred aarti ceremonies. Sleep among Banarasi splendour with hand-painted ceilings and silk furnishings, waking to morning yoga sessions, Ayurvedic treatments and courtyard flute players.

Highlight: A Ganges dinner cruise on BrijRama's two-tiered bajra boat.



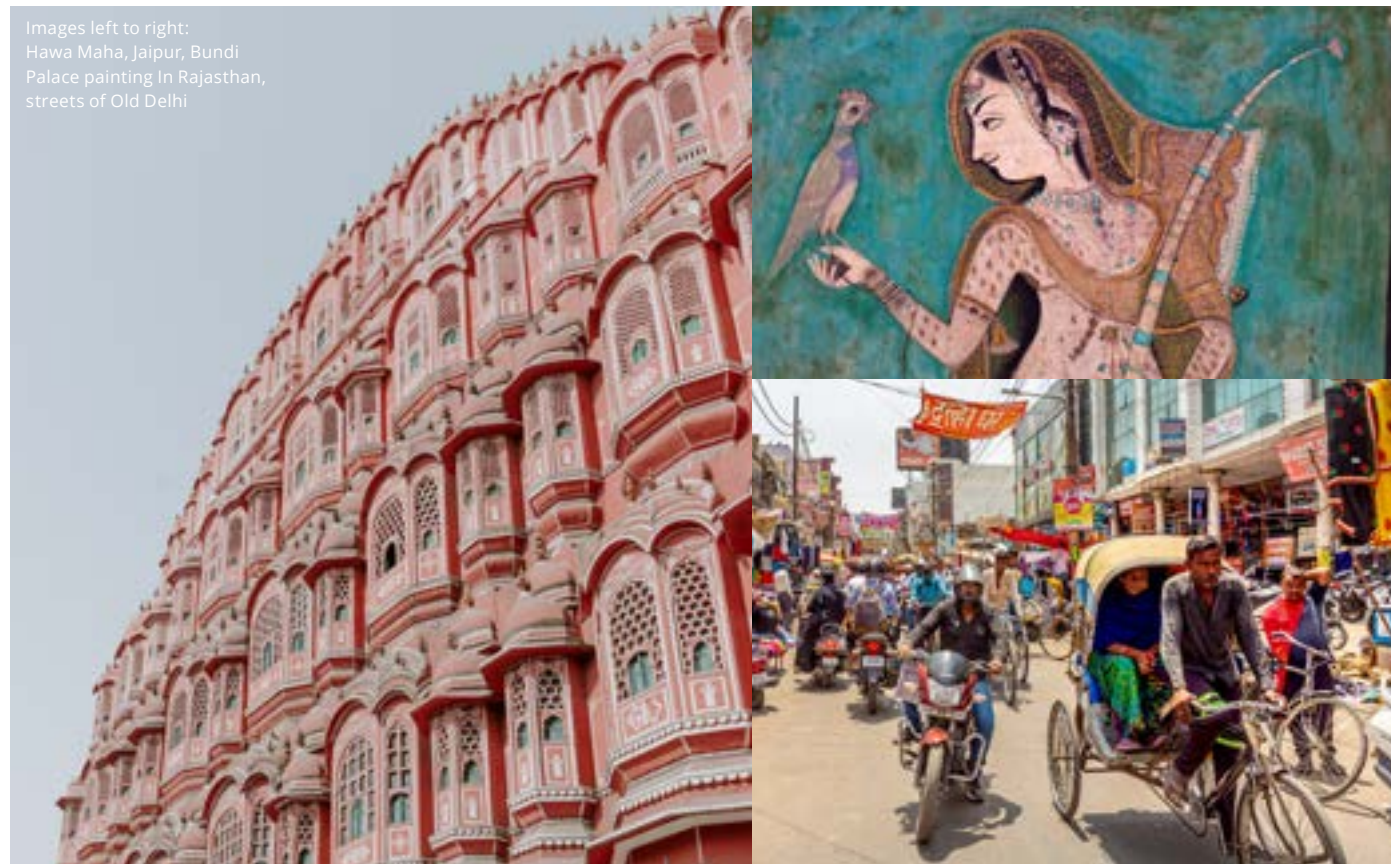
Pench Jungle Camp

Great for wild Jungle Book scenery.

Fall asleep to the sounds of the jungle in a luxe, African-style safari tent near Pench National Park. Spend your days on tiger-spotting safaris, then wander the camp's nature trails, cool off in the pool and enjoy starlit bush dining.

Highlight: Wildlife-spotting sundowners on the shores of Lake Khoka.

Suggested itineraries



Images left to right:
Hawa Maha, Jaipur, Bundi
Palace painting in Rajasthan,
streets of Old Delhi

India's Genuine Golden Triangle

Best for history and culture hounds

8-DAY TAILOR-MADE ITINERARY

Venture beyond the Golden Triangle's architectural wonders, staying at family-run guesthouses and enjoying cultural experiences with the locals.

Day 1 and 2 – Delhi

Explore India's frenetic capital from the comfort of your homestay, the Colonel's Retreat. Watch the city come alive on an optional dawn walking tour, learn how to make regional dishes with chef Neha Gupta or traverse Old Delhi by rickshaw, pausing to trawl spice markets and photograph the Red Fort.

Day 3 and 4 – Jaipur

Take a private car to the Pink City of Jaipur, where you'll discover the UNESCO-listed wonders of the Amber Fort. Choose from a range of extra cultural activities, including a tour of Jaipur's temples and historic havelis and an evening of food and laughter at the Singh family's noble home.

Day 5 and 6 – Agra

Continue to Agra, perhaps stopping en route at the former Mughal capital, Fatehpur Sikri. The next day, rise early for a bucket-list trip to the Taj Mahal at sunrise. Complete your Agra experience with an optional city walking tour or a countryside cycling excursion.

Day 7 – Delhi

Return to the capital to squeeze in a final photography tour of Old Delhi or get to know the wonders of Chandni Chowk after dark with a local.

*Similar available as a small group tour

Add one of our experiences...

Explore the magnificence of the Amber Fort

Take a tour of the Amber Fort, one of Rajasthan's six UNESCO-listed forts. The yellow sandstone building sits like a giant sandcastle on a hilltop near Jaipur, protected by commanding ramparts. Discover its secrets with a local guide, who'll tell stories of bygone Mughal rulers as you pass through its grand gates and mirrored halls, palaces adorned with intricate frescoes and lake-view courtyards.

Explore Chandni Chowk after dark

Experience Chandni Chowk's whirl of architecture, food and history. Ramble streets that glitter with store lights as your Delhi guide teaches you the art of haggling and introduces you to fascinating residents like the ear-cleaning man and chai vendors who swirl tea in metal pans. Dine on Mughlai cuisine at Karim's, a chef who served in an emperor's kitchen, and snack on street desserts like mango ice cream.

Discover the untold stories of Agra's Mughal women

See Agra through the eyes of Mehira, a local artist who'll show you the city's monuments that have been built or inspired by women. Hear the stories of powerful figures from the Mughal dynasty, like Khazanda Begum, who helped shape Agra's politics and architecture. Mehira will introduce you to jewellery makers, flower specialists and Zardozi embroiderers - for an insight into life as a modern Agra woman.

Everything we do is tailor-made. Our travel experts will shape your ideas and likes into a bespoke trip full of memorable experiences - here's a taste of what's possible.



Images left to right:
Indian fisherman, Goa,
Houseboat, Kerala backwaters,
Tea plantations, Kerala

Enchanting Kerala

Best for relaxation and nature lovers

11-DAY TAILOR-MADE ITINERARY

Explore Kerala's colonial-tinged beach towns, spice farms and backwaters with the people who call these enchanting landscapes home.

Day 1 and 2 – Cochin

Start in Cochin, where you'll ramble along colonial-tinged streets and enjoy an optional Kathakali dance workshop, Anglo-Indian cooking class or fishing village tour.

Day 3 and 4 – Munnar

Head to lavish Windermere Estate in the Western Ghats to visit Munnar's oldest tea plantations by tuk tuk.

Day 5 and 6 - Thekkady

Continue to Thekkady, home to an endless carpet of spice plantations which you'll explore by Jeep, meeting resident farmers.

Day 7 - Kumarakom

Descend to Kerala's dreamy backwaters, where you'll stay on the shores of Lake Vembanad and spend your days canoeing along sleepy canals.

Day 8 - Alleppey

Board a traditional kettuvallam, a houseboat made of bamboo and coir, for an overnight cruise to Alleppey, dubbed the 'Venice of the East'.

Day 9 and 10 - Mararikulam

End in the languid fishing village of Mararikulam, where you can laze on the soft sands of Marari Beach.

*Similar available as a small group tour

Add one of our experiences...

On the scent of a local spice farm

High up in the cool-climate Western Ghats, spices thrive in fertile plantations. Take a spice tour from Thekkady with an expert guide who will teach you about this biodiverse region. Visit a village to meet spice farmers Sam and Jisha, who'll show you around their gardens filled with everything from cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon and cardamom to coffee and black tamarind, treating you to snacks like homemade chocolate from their cacao trees.

A window into the dance drama of Kathakali

Immerse yourself in the world of Kathakali, an age-old Indian art form that combines music, choreography and dance. Meet Sharath Kumar, a performer with over 40 years' experience, at a centre in Fort Kochi, where you'll unravel the roots of this dance drama tradition. Watch an exclusive performance and then head backstage to see how the elaborate costumes are made and try out some basic Kathakali moves.

Hiking the Letchmi hills through a photographer's lens

Breathe in Munnar's crisp mountain air on a hike through the Letchmi Hills. Accompanied by a local trekking guide, you'll begin in fragrant tea gardens and ascend through grasslands to a rocky hilltop 1,950 metres above sea level. From the top, you'll soak up views of southern India's highest peaks, its undulating valleys and patchwork spice gardens. You might even see elephants, birdlife and a mongoose or two.



Images left to right: Houses in Dharamsala, Indian man making parathas, Buddhist prayer flags Himalayas

Tibetan retreats and toy trains in the western Himalayas

Best for walkers and spiritual seekers

11-DAY TAILOR-MADE ITINERARY

This Himalayan adventure features everything from mountain steam trains and Raj-era hill stations to Tibetan monasteries and Sikh temples.

Day 1 and 2 – Amritsar

Touchdown in Amritsar to tour the Golden Temple and witness the eccentric India-Pakistan daily border closing ceremony.

Day 3 and 4 – Dharamshala

Journey to Dharamshala in the Himalayas, where an optional Buddhist cultural tour and village hike await.

Day 5 – Palampur

Drive to Palampur and check into the Lodge at Wah, a family-run tea estate with mountain views.

Day 6 – Pragpur

Continue to Pragpur via the Masroor Rock temples, one of northern India's architectural masterpieces.

Day 7 and 8 – Shimla

Travel on to Raj-era Shimla where you can trek through fairytale forests and join a Himalayan family for lunch.

Day 9 and 10 – Delhi

Ride the Himalayan Queen toy train and Shatabdi Express to Delhi for cooking classes, rickshaw rides and photography tours.

Add one of our experiences...

Tour the Masroor Rock temples

Weave through sub-Himalayan scenery to the Masroor Rock temples. This astounding engineering feat dates back to the 6th or 7th century, comprised of 15 monolithic temples carved from a single rock. Your guide will point out detailed floral, geometric and animal patterns, as well as carvings of Lord Shiva's life. Take in views of the Dhauladhar Mountains from the temple, which change colour in the shifting light.

Explore the true essence of Amritsar

Learn about Sikh gurus and formidable maharajas on this Amritsar cultural tour. Wake early to witness the Golden Temple's soul-stirring Gurbani chanting ceremony and help volunteers in the community kitchen. Explore Amritsar's history as you wander its streets, confronting the legacy of British occupation at Jallianwala Bagh. End at a family home for chai and a Punjabi meal, chatting with your hosts about everything from religion to history.

Pens and brushes: an artistic tour of Shimla

Explore Shimla's literary and artistic legacy on this walking tour. Navigate the streets of Shimla with a cultural guide, learning about the colonial town that inspired Kipling's stories and visiting the home of renowned Hindu writer Nirmal Varma. You'll follow a trail through magical hillsides and forests to an art gallery founded by the late, celebrated Indian artist Sanath Chatterjee.



Images left to right: Delhi; monkey, Panna National Park; Bengal tiger

In search of the Bengal tiger

Best for wildlife enthusiasts

13-DAY TAILOR-MADE ITINERARY

Seek out Bengal tigers and *Jungle Book* landscapes on this wildlife tour of central India's national parks, book-ended by cultural city stays.

Day 1 and 2 – Mumbai

Begin in Mumbai, where you can enlist local storytellers for dawn walking tours, street food extravaganzas and Bollywood workshops.

Day 3 and 4 – Pench

Fly to Pench National Park, the real-life inspiration for *The Jungle Book*, to spot animals on Jeep safaris with an eagle-eyed guide.

Day 5 and 6 – Kanha

Continue to Kanha National Park, where a naturalist will teach you about tiger behaviour and you'll scour the grasslands and forests for animals.

Day 7 and 8 – Bandhavgarh

Journey to Bandhavgarh National Park, where game drives offer potential sightings of Indian bison, leopards and sloth bears.

Day 9 and 10 – Panna

Drive to Panna, a former royal hunting ground that's now a tiger reserve and sanctuary for five species of wild cats, crocodiles and monkeys.

Day 11 and 12 – Delhi

End in the heart of Delhi for optional guided walks, cooking classes and a tour of Chandni Chowk after dark.

Add one of our experiences...

Explore Mumbai at dawn

Experience the spirit of Mumbai on this dawn walking tour where you'll witness the city's morning routines: Koli fisher-folk hauling fish at the docks, vendors sorting newspapers in seven different languages, milkmen on their rounds and women selling flowers at the morning market. You'll learn about the people who've migrated to Mumbai from all over the world and glimpse the underbelly of this thriving city.

Pench National Park, home of the Bengal tiger

Step inside *The Jungle Book* with game drives in Pench National Park, which inspired Kipling's beloved tale. The reserve is one of the best places to see regal Bengal tigers on Jeep safaris, tracking these stealthy creatures through meadows, deciduous forests and rock-strewn terrain. Your safari guide is perfectly in tune with the environment, able to spot paw prints in the dust and elusive species like jackals and sambars.

An eco-focused walk around the wilds of Singinawa

Follow a nature trail through Singinawa on the borders of Kanha National Park with a local guide who understands the area's wildlife and knows every inch of the expansive sal-tree forest and boundless grasslands that Kanha is famed for. You could encounter herds of grazing barasingha deer, foxes treading lightly through the jungle or over 150 species of birds flitting among the treetops.

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Talk to our tailor-made India specialists today on **0808 239 8368**

Make an appointment at your local Kuoni store

Visit **www.alfredand.co.uk/India** for more inspiration

