

Pilgrimage to India

November 1 – 21, 2010

21 Days Ex-New Delhi

Welcome to the Himalayan Exposure way of travel. We are determined to show you a fantastic experience in a truly magical part of the world. Himalayan Exposure trips have been developed to provide quality, passionate and fun trips for those with a desire to explore wonderful cultures and destinations. During this Pilgrimage to India we will accompany the venerable Geshe La of the Drolkar Buddhist Centre to some of the spiritual centres of Northern India. We'll explore the Mughal splendours of Agra and Delhi, visit the Holy Centres of Varanasi and Bodh Gaya, and visit Sera Je Monastery in Bylakuppe in southern India near the IT capital of Bangalore where we will complete our journey.

We have designed an itinerary to suit many of travellers. There are plenty of activities to keep those with itchy feet busy, but we have scheduled plenty of free time throughout the trip. All the included activities are optional so if it is all getting a bit much, just take it easy and relax. There's only one compulsion on this trip...to enjoy yourself!

Itinerary

The itinerary attached is correct at the time of printing. We may make changes as logistics and other changes are required. For the latest itinerary please refer to the itinerary as listed on our website at www.himalayanexposure.com.

Important Dossier Note

It is important that you understand that Himalayan Exposure offers adventure holidays in regions of India. The standard of services – accommodation, transport, safety, hygiene, medical facilities and other factors -- will not be of the standard you are used to at home or could expect to find on a conventional holiday. By joining Himalayan Exposure/Drolkar you are accepting those risks and dangers, although we always do our best to ensure the safety and comfort of our travellers.

A word of warning about travelling in India: India is a country which is very different to anything you will have experienced before. Although this means it is not the easiest place to travel, this is also what makes it so special. Pollution, poverty and the crowds can result in initial culture shock but should be seen as an exciting new challenge. During our time here we have come to love this large and wonderfully different country, but we know that we should always expect to encounter some difficulties along the way.

In India there are very different attitudes to time keeping, public cleanliness, privacy and service. Trains will sometimes be late, plumbing can sometimes be temperamental and power will often just vanish. Optimistic menus turn out to have only one dish available and everyone, just everyone will want to know your name or where you are from. If you are able to travel with a lot of patience and a healthy sense of humour, then we know that you - like all of us - will be captivated by what India has to offer.

Please remember this is YOUR holiday. There are people with all different tastes and desires travelling with you. We will try to give you as many options for things to do in each town or city. It is up to you to decide what you would like to do with your time. As a result there are many activities that are not included in the trip cost to give you more freedom with your time.

Itinerary Detail

Day 1 Arrival – New Delhi

We'll arrive late in the evening in the capital of India, New Delhi, where we will transfer through the sleepy streets of the suburbs to our comfortable hotel in Karol Bagh, just east of the city centre.

Day 2 New Delhi

India's capital is a colourful, busy, chaotic city packed with museums, art galleries, historical sites, shops and bazaars. On our first full day we'll head out to the streets of Old Delhi where we'll take a guided visit through the Red Fort and see how the Emperors once ruled their Empire. From the Red Fort we'll abandon our transport and travel like the locals, by bicycle rickshaw, the short distance to the largest mosque in India, the Jama Masjid. We'll take a wander in the crowded bazaars and spice markets to really get a feel of daily city life among the noise, life and smells of the narrow alleyways. It will be a crowded affair and you may get lost, but that is part of the fun when travelling in India. We'll finish our excursion on Chandni Chowk, Old Delhi's busiest thoroughfare before returning to New Delhi. The afternoon will be free to explore some of the city at your leisure, lunch at one of Delhi luxury hotels, or try and simple Indian dish at one of the many colourful restaurants.

Day 3 New Delhi, Afternoon transfer to Agra

On day three we'll take some time out to explore the Tibetan's place in New Delhi. We'll make a trip to the suburb of Majnu Ka Tilla, home to Tibet's refugees in Delhi. If he is in (which is not always the case) we'll receive some information from the local Welfare Officer about the community and the trials and tribulations they face living in India. We will need to check out of the hotel in the morning and take our luggage with us. After our excursions we'll head south towards the city of Agra, home of the Mughal capital in the 17th century. The drive will take around 4 – 6 hours depending on traffic arriving in Agra to enjoy the delights of one of the many excellent local restaurants.

Day 4 Agra, Taj Mahal, Overnight train to Varanasi

After breakfast we'll head out to explore some of the beautiful historical Mughal monuments in Agra. Agra is home to one of the world's most instantly recognisable monuments, the majestic Taj Mahal. Built by Emperor Shah Jahan as a memorial to his wife, this 'teardrop on the face of eternity', as Rabindranath Tagore described it, lives up to all expectations. We'll visit this magnificent monument. We'll also take some time out to visit a local carpet weaving factory, something India generally, and this region in particular is famous for. We'll see how they are made and have the opportunity to buy one, or more as you please. For anyone who is interested there may be the chance to organise a visit to a marble inlay factory also, something Agra is also famous for. (Please note that only one entry to the Taj is included as part of your tour cost. If you choose to go again please allow 750INR/A\$20 for the entry ticket)

In the afternoon we'll have the chance to visit Agra's Red Fort, the Mughal capital during their reign in the late 17th Century before moving their capital to Delhi.

As part of the local government's fight against pollution that is damaging monuments like the Taj Mahal, most vehicles are banned within close proximity to the Taj Mahal. Therefore during our explorations of Agra we'll be travelling around using either electric tuk-tuks or cycle rickshaws and in the process reducing our carbon footprint. ☺

This evening we will be travelling by overnight air-conditioned train to Varanasi. We will check out of our rooms some time in the morning in between our excursions before transferring to the train station late afternoon.

Day 5 – 7 Varanasi

Arriving early in the morning we'll transfer to our hotel, The Hotel Meradan Grand, in Varanasi. We'll have three days to enjoy this very special, spiritual city, known as one of the world's oldest living cities. The Ganga or Ganges River, which normally follows a south-eastern course, changes its path here briefly and flows north for a while, through the city. This is considered very auspicious. Shiva is said to have poured the river Ganga down from the Himalayas. Buddha gave his first sermon just outside the city in the town of Sarnath, and 3 tirthankars (holy men) of the Jain religion were born here. It is the holiest of the 7 sacred cities of Hinduism. To die here is to receive an instant passport to heaven. There are more than 2,000 temples and shrines.

After a rest we'll take a walk along the ghats, the famous bathing steps that front the river Ganges. The rest of the afternoon will be free to explore and enjoy this wonderful city. On Day 5 we'll take an early morning boat cruise to see the city at the best time of the day. After breakfast there is the option to visit the holy city of Sarnath, 12kms out of Varanasi where the Buddha gave his first sermon. During our visit we'll also have the opportunity to visit the Tibetan institute and library. One evening we'll take to the Holy River for sunset for a flower ceremony with musicians. There's the Maharaja's palace across the holy Ganges to visit if you are in for adventure or find a step to sit on and watch the river, and the colour that surrounds it, flow by.

Day 8 Bodh Gaya

On day 8, we leave Varanasi after breakfast and travel by air-conditioned bus or cars across the plains of Uttar Pradesh (240kms, 5-6 hours) to the state of Bihar and the holy site of Bodhgaya. The drive will take us through farmland and fields along bumpy roads and back streets to the oasis that is Bodhgaya.

Day 9 – 12 Bodh Gaya

We have 4 days to enjoy the magic and history of Bodhgaya. Bodhgaya is one of the most important and sacred Buddhist pilgrimage centres in the world. It was here under a banyan tree, the Bodhi Tree, that Buddha attained Enlightenment. Buddhism as a religion was really born in Bihar and evolved here through his preaching and the example of his lifestyle of great simplicity, renunciation and empathy for everything living.

Bodhgaya is a small, lively village and especially in November it will be swarming with people from all over the world. The main focus is the Mahabodhi Temple (www.mahabodhi.com), which we will visit with a guide on our first day there. The temple sits amongst pleasant grounds beside the bodhi tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. You will want to visit yourself more than once as activities vary at different times of the day and year. Entrance to the temple is free but there is a daily camera fee (20rs) or video camera fee (500rs).

Throughout Bodhgaya there are a number of temples built by Buddhist organisations from around the world. You'll have plenty of time to visit them at your leisure. There are also numerous institutions offering meditation and yoga and other related activities. The Root Institute is a Socially Engaged Buddhist Meditation Centre which provides an ideal location for the study and practice of Buddhist meditation and philosophy (www.rootinstitute.com). Another organisation doing good work for local village people is Muskan Viklang Trust or "Let the disabled smile" (www.muskanviklangtrust.org). MVT tries to help the great amount of handicapped people in Bihar, the poorest and most underdeveloped State of India. You may be able to join them for some village visits depending on their schedule at that time.

In Bodhgaya one of the other popular day trips is to Rajgir and Nalanda, an important part of the Buddhist history of the region. It is a long day to Vulture's Peak in Rajgir but a thoroughly enjoyable one that can be arranged for anyone interested in making the journey.

In Bodhgaya we will be staying at the Sujata Hotel located walking distance from the main attractions and close enough to the Mahabodhi temple where much of your time will be spent.

Day 13 Fly Bodhgaya to Bangalore via Kolkata

Our transfer to the south is a bit of a long trip transferring early morning to Gaya airport for our flight to Bangalore. We leave Gaya around 7.30am stopping in Kolkata for a lengthy wait (between 6 – 8 hours) before continuing onto to Bangalore. On Day 13 we'll overnight in Bangalore.

Day 14 Transfer to Kushal Nagar, Bylakuppe

From Bangalore we'll make the 5 hour drive to Kushal Nagar, the closest town to the Tibetan settlement at Bylakuppe and Sera Jey Monastery.

Day 15 – 17 Kushal Nagar, Bylakuppe

Kushal Nagar is located a short 6 kms from Bylakuppe and the monastery settlement where we will spend some of our time. The Golden Temple is the main temple in the settlement and a sight to behold. Some recent visitors elaborated on their experience there... "We sat and listened to the monks chant their Mantra's while others played long hornpipes and Conch shell. Huge drums beat hypnotic beats to the chanting. It is a sound and experience we will never forget."

Day 18 – 19 Mysore

After our time in Bylakuppe we'll make the short 2-hour drive to the city of Mysore. Mysore is the Karnataka's second biggest city. The city has recorded history dating back a thousand years and a mythical history. We'll have a day and a half to enjoy the magic of this ancient city.

The Mysore Palace is well worth a visit with its intricately carved rosewood doors and ceilings some with inlaid ivory work, marble figurines, collections of caskets, paintings of the members of the royal family and other objects of personal use exhibiting such opulence, though age has worn them out a little.

For those with a bit more energy you could climb Chamundi Hills overlooking Mysore starting early in the morning to get a good view of the city as it rises from slumber while getting good exercise at the same time. You can also take nice early morning or late evening strolls at either Kukkarahalli lake or Karanji lake, though the latter is recommended, since the entrance has a fee and thus will reduce any potential nuisance in the form of beggars or vendors that might come and disturb your stroll. Karanji lake also has a butterfly park worth checking out.

We stay in Mysore for 2 nights.

Day 20 Bangalore

Bangalore is known as the IT capital of the East but is a cosmopolitan centre. We'll have the night here to enjoy the delights of this modern town before our pilgrimage to India comes to a regrettable end.

Day 21 Depart Bangalore

Departure day. The day is free to do some last minute exploring in this vibrant Indian city before an evening transfer to airport.

Trip Grade: Moderate

This trip is graded 'moderate' which means that, while the trip is relatively straight forward, there are some challenging elements, especially for travellers who have never visited India before. The weather will be hot and incessant by day, and can become quite tiresome. We have some long overnight train journeys which can also be a touch challenging to the uninitiated.

Please also read the 'Important Dossier Note' above carefully

Accommodation:

Hotels 19 nights, Overnight Train 1 nights: Accommodation during this trip will be comfortable with most hotels offering air-conditioning, room service and hot showers. All accommodation will be on a twin-share basis (2 people per twin room) unless requested. (See 'single supplement').

On some occasions we will be arriving into cities very early in the morning. This will usually be after an overnight train journey. On these days hotel rooms may not be ready for us as other guests still need to check out, rooms need to be cleaned etc, etc. Please be patient upon arrival in such situations. In addition, there will be times where we won't be leaving towns until late in the afternoon but we will need to check out well before we leave. We will provide luggage storage or a couple of rooms to use on these occasions.

Single Supplement

All accommodation will be on a twin-share basis. Single Supplement as requested

Meals

Included – 12 Breakfasts, 2 Dinners

Meals in India can be a real adventure, which is why we encourage passengers to try different kinds of dishes. Some of your meals will be included as part of your itinerary. Your group leader will endeavour to advise group members on the safest and most delicious places to eat while in the cities. It is advised to stay away from street-side vendors, as the food is not always fresh or washed in hygienic water.

Transport

During your trip we will be using a variety of forms of transport – Trains, Taxis, bus, Auto Rickshaws, Tuk-tuks, cycle rickshaw, electric tuk-tuk – just to name a few. We will be using air-conditioned transport for most transfers and longer journeys. In some places we will be using non-air conditioned transport because the weather will be cold and air conditioning really doesn't make sense. In some towns – Varanasi – we'll be using smaller vehicles (Taxis, rickshaws etc) simply because with the size of the streets and traffic congestion the idea of using a bus is either illegal or very impractical. In Varanasi large vehicles are not allowed in the crowded, narrow streets near the river at certain times of day. In Agra, large non – electric vehicles are not allowed near the Taj Mahal. In these places we will need to be flexible to local whims. See also 'Responsible Travel'

Activities included

New Delhi – Tour of Old Delhi including Agra Red Fort and local bazaars.

New Delhi – Tour of Tibetan Refugee Community

Varanasi – Morning Orientation walk

Varanasi – Dawn Cruise on River Ganges

Varanasi – Evening Flower Ceremony on River Ganges

Varanasi – Sarnath including entrance to Stupa

Agra – Taj Mahal, Red Fort

Bodh Gaya – Mahabodhi Temple Visit

Kushal Nagar – Visit to Tibetan Children's Village

Kushal Nagar – Visit to Guymed Monastery

Mysore – Excursion to Mysore Palace

Please note that this is YOUR holiday. The included activities are optional and you are under no compulsion to join any of these tours. There will be no refund of fees for these if you choose not to attend. In addition activities that are not listed above are not included as part of the tour cost and will have to be paid by yourself. No refund will be granted for activities not completed as a result of itinerary changes out of our control eg: late trains, local restrictions, natural calamities etc.

Responsible Travel

It is important to realize that to travel and visit other countries and cultures is an honour and a PRIVILEGE. We at Himalayan Exposure want to ensure that our visit provides a productive and positive interaction with both the people and the natural environment. We realize we have great power to change people's lives for the better at a grass roots level, and in this way we will make a difference. Please read more at www.himalayanexposure.com/hearts.htm

Throughout this dossier we provided a number of references to community based organisations that are doing good work in the locations we will visit. In some places we may visit these organisations in other places you may have the chance to visit individually. We as an organisation usually make donations from our funds to some of these organisations but we provide this information also so you can research them yourself and maybe you'll find something special that you would like to support, learn more about or get involved with on your trip.

In addition, in this era of global climate change it is very important to do what we can to make a difference. Travelling by train is a positive step and we use lots of trains on this trip. We also want to look after your comfort so where it is necessary we will be provided air-conditioned transport but where it is not we will forgo this for the sake of the planet.

Safety

There can be no compromise on safety when travelling through Asia or anywhere for that matter. Himalayan Exposure takes every precaution to ensure the safety of its travellers while travelling in remote destinations.

For more information on Himalayan Exposure's safety policy please see www.himalayanexposure.com/safety.htm

Spending Money

You will need to allow enough money for meals not included as part of the itinerary, drinks, shopping and additional sightseeing. We recommend allowing A\$15 per day for food and drink. This is a liberal estimate and you can easily get by on a lot less. We estimate allowing an additional A\$300 – \$400 for meals and other activities.

When you arrive it is a good idea to try to get small money. It is the one question (Second only to "Where are you from?") that you will get asked.

Tipping is an integral part of Indian life and is essential to a smooth trip. Tips are expected by all people for services rendered. From your trip cost SOME of your tips have been paid for. This includes private transport drivers, guides and other assistants we will use along the way. Your TIP Kitty does not cover restaurant tips or individual porters you may use at train stations, etc. Tips usually amount to 10% of your total bill.

Camera Fee: At most monuments in India there is a 'camera fee' charged to bring your camera in. This expense is usually no more than a few dollars but is not included in the cost of your tour. If you want to carry your camera you will need to pay this fee yourself.

Currency Exchange

The currency of India is Indian Rupee: Approx US\$1 = 45rs, A\$1 = 38rs. (Current at Jan 2010)

For the latest exchange rates please see www.xe.com

Currency exchange in India can be time consuming and inefficient. If you plan to bring funds in traveller's cheques it is advisable to bring them in US dollars and to bring only Thomas Cook or American Express traveller's cheques. Credit card use is available in most cities and ATMS are widely available. It is advisable to bring funds in a couple of different formats. We basically feel that you should bring at least half your spending money in a combination of cash &/or TC's and the rest on a credit card.

Emergency Funds

Please also make sure you have access to an additional A\$200, to be used when unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control (eg. a natural disaster) necessitate a change to our planned route. This is a rare occurrence but it is well worth being prepared!

Emergency Contact Number for Your group Leader:

Nathan Cook – To be provided closer to the departure date.

Visas

It is your responsibility to arrange visas before you travel. At the time of printing **all nationalities require a visa for India**. Visas for India are **not available at port of entry** but must be obtained in advance. Himalayan Exposure will arrange any additional permits required in country.

Laundry

Facilities are offered by most hotels for a charge. Many hotels, due to water shortages may not permit you to do your own laundry. If you plan to do your own laundry can we recommend you bring biodegradable laundry soap.

Departure Tax

Departure taxes for your flights should be included as part of the cost of your tickets.

Travel Insurance

Your trip cost does not include personal travel or medical insurance. Himalayan Exposure insists you take out personal insurance cover for all trips. It is your responsibility to make sure suitable insurance has been taken out for your trip. For all trips it is essential to ensure your insurance covers you for emergency repatriation. You will not be allowed to participate in the trip until evidence has been sighted by your group leader.

Health and Fitness

There are no specific health requirements regarding entry into India. You should consult your doctor before you depart for up to date information and prescriptions for vaccinations for any reasonably foreseeable illnesses whilst travelling in India. It is recommended that all travellers carry a small first aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements. Please be aware that for legal reasons Himalayan Exposure representatives are prohibited from administering any type of drug whatsoever. Please be adequately prepared.

The climate of India is very hot by day and it is important to stay hydrated. We will be doing quite a bit of walking during day tours. Please be advised that your group leader has the power to recommend any group member not partake in activities that may place the traveller in undue risk.

Moving through train stations and onto some of the transport can be a bit taxing. Due to the crowds, the heat, lots of stairs & sometimes lack of a bathroom it can be a challenge even for the hardest traveller. For this reason it is very important you can manage your luggage adequately when moving around. Not for long distances, but it might be 5 or 10 minutes of up & down & around. At train stations porters are available for a charge if you need assistance.

Climate

November in India represents very much a changing month in India. The weather is moving from the hot weather of monsoon into the cooler winter. The days should be clear and warm to hot with daytime temperatures around 30°C but temperatures can become quite cool in the evenings.

Local Dress

When packing be aware that dress standards are conservative throughout India. Loose, lightweight, long clothing is both respectful and cool in the predominantly hot Indian climate. Singlets, tank tops, short skirts, and shorts are not suitable for India. From a local Delhi Guidebook "Skimpily dressed women (no matter how normal by western standards) will be stared at. Wear informal, loose clothes during the day and you won't feel uncomfortable.

What to Take

It is in your own interest to pack as lightly as possible as you are expected to carry your own luggage, though distances are never great. At most hotels and train stations porters can usually be hired for a nominal fee to assist with carrying your luggage. While sightseeing you will only be required to carry essential daily items like water, sunscreen and a hat. Please also read the last paragraph of the 'Health & Fitness' section above.

Checklist

- Travel documents: passport, visa, travel insurance, air tickets
- 1 photocopy of above documents
- Health requirements arranged
- Money: travellers cheques/cash/credit card
- First Aid kit

- Camera
- Day pack to carry your personal needs during the day
- Sarong or travel shammy
- Mosquito repellent
- Ear plugs can be useful if you are a light sleeper
- Good/comfortable shoes
- Sunscreen (30+), and Sunglasses
- Alarm clock, Torch/flashlight
- Warm clothes for the mountain areas and air-conditioned transport.
- Light, airy clothing
- Lock for your bag
- Enormous sense of adventure

Joining

Swati Deluxe Hotel – Delhi

17A/32,W.E.A, Karol Baugh,Gurudwara Road, New Delhi-110005

Ph:+91 11 45000325, 45000300

e:- swatideluxe@hotelswati.com

Joining Instructions

You will be provided with a transfer upon arrival.

Scheduled Itinerary

Day 1	Late night arrival Delhi, Transfer to Hotel
Day 2	Delhi - Visit the Red Fort, Local Bazaars
Day 3	Delhi - Visit Tibetan Refugee Camp & Gandhi Memorial. PM to Agra
Day 4	Agra, Taj Mahal - O'nite train to Varanasi
Day 5	Arrive Varanasi - Orientation Walk, Sunset cruise
Day 6	Varanasi - Dawn boat ride, Visit Sarnath and the Tibetan Institute & Library
Day 7	Varanasi - Free Day, Sunset tour
Day 8	Tfr to Bodhgaya
Day 9	Bodhgaya
Day 10	Bodhgaya
Day 11	Bodhgaya
Day 12	Bodhgaya
Day 13	Fly to Bangalore
Day 14	Bus to Kushal Nagar
Day 15	Kushal Nagar - Golden Temple
Day 16	Kushal Nagar - trip out to Gyumed Monastery
Day 17	Kushal Nagar
Day 18	Bus to Mysore
Day 19	Bus to Mysore
Day 20	Bangalore
Day 21	Depart Bangalore

Important Note

It is important that you understand that Himalayan Exposure offer extreme adventure holidays in remote regions of Asia. The standard of services – accommodation, transport, safety, hygiene, medical facilities and other factors - will not be of the standard you are used to at home or could expect to find on a conventional holiday. By joining Himalayan Exposure you are accepting those risks and dangers.

Travelling in India is sometimes like travelling on a different planet. The rules of order that you are used to at home don't necessarily apply in this land of chaos and disarray. DO NOT let this stress you out! It is crucial that you relax, engage your sense of humour, and let your group leader do the hard work of organizing your trip through the chaos. You will see things that amaze you, disgust you, touch your heart, and you will often go to sleep at night thinking "did today REALLY happen?" Patience and a very good sense of humour will add drastically to your experience of India. If you release into the flow of life She offers, you will be engaged in an amazing journey through Mother India.

Updates

Please note that from time to time our dossiers are updated. Please check our website for the most up to date dossier.
Trip dossier: IP10 1.0 Updated: 2/02/10

Please Note:

The information in this dossier has been compiled with care and is provided in good faith. However it is subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the client and Himalayan Exposure.