



HARVARD

Alumni Association

MYSTICAL INDIA

OCTOBER 11 – 27, 2018

Mystical and spiritual, India abounds with riches that invite personal exploration. Begin your adventure by exploring both Old Delhi and New Delhi. Continue to the “pink city” of Jaipur and enjoy a home-hosted dinner with a local family, offering a unique vantage point into the lifestyle of a Rajasthan family. Spend two nights at Ranthambore Tiger Preserve and search for elusive Bengal tigers and other wildlife on this land that was once a royal hunting ground. Travel to Agra to visit the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort. Conclude in Varanasi, witnessing Hindu pilgrims perform their time-honored rites along the ghats leading to the sacred Ganges River.

GROUP SIZE: Up to 24 guests

PRICING: To be announced

STUDY LEADER: To be announced

SCHEDULE BY DAY

B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 11

DEPART U.S. FOR DELHI, INDIA

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12

ARRIVE DELHI

Spend today en route to Delhi, India's capital and second largest city. Arriving after midnight, transfer directly to the hotel.

Overnight: *Taj Palace Hotel*

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13

DELHI

This energetic capital is one of the world's best examples of a city that blends the old with the new. After lunch on your own, begin touring Delhi by visiting the 16th-century Tomb of Humayun, the second Mughal emperor whose resting place is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Continue on to see Qutab Minar, one of Delhi's most visited and striking monuments. With a height of 239 feet, this red stone tower ranks as the highest brick minaret in the world. Next pass by India Gate, the majestic 137-foot high arch that stands over an eternal flame to honor the 90,000 Indian soldiers who died fighting alongside the British during World War I and the Afghan wars. Tonight enjoy a welcome dinner at the hotel.

Overnight: *Taj Palace Hotel (B, D)*

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14

DELHI

This morning encounter Old Delhi, capital of Muslim India between the 12th and 19th centuries. Stop first at the Gandhi Memorial, the simple black marble slab honoring India's beloved Mahatma Gandhi. Next pause for a photo opportunity at Lal Qila, the Red Fort complex of palaces considered the greatest of all Delhi's earlier cities and today a UNESCO

World Heritage Site. From here visit India's largest mosque, the red sandstone and marble Jama Masjid, completed as the last monument commissioned by Emperor Shah Jahan, builder of the Taj Mahal. Your tour continues with a rickshaw ride through bustling and colorful Chandni Chowk market, one of Delhi's oldest and busiest. Then return to the New Delhi district to visit a Sikh temple. Following lunch at a local restaurant, visit the National Museum, housing a superb collection of Indian and international art and artifacts, some two million pieces covering 5,000 years of cultural heritage. Tonight have dinner on your own; the hotel has a variety of restaurants from which to choose.

Overnights: *Taj Palace Hotel (B, L)*

MONDAY, OCTOBER 15

DELHI / JAIPUR

Depart this morning for the day-long journey to Jaipur, one of the great cities of the Rajput. En route, visit the village of Neemrana and eat lunch at Neemrana Palace, a restored heritage hotel dating to the 15th century. Late this afternoon, reach Jaipur and the hotel, where you'll dine together tonight.

Overnight: *Jai Mahal Palace (B, L, D)*

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 16

JAIPUR

Jaipur was the home of India's legendary Hindu warriors, whose historic forts, palaces, and gardens lend a timeless quality to this storied region. Called the "pink city" for its buildings of rose-hued sandstone, Jaipur today retains the exquisite symmetry of its original construction, as well as the eight historic gates that protected the city centuries ago. Stop first today at Hawa Mahal, the elaborately carved "Palace of the Winds," whose pink sandstone façade allowed cooling breezes to enter. Continue on to Amber Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site considered the pinnacle of Rajput architecture. Tour the citadel this morning to admire the fresco-covered portal, the impressive room of mirrors, walls of jewel-encrusted marble, and the royal apartments. After lunch at a local restaurant, continue on to Jantar Mantar, the incredible open-

air Royal Observatory and a UNESCO World Heritage Site; and City Palace, former residence of the Maharajas of Jaipur, now converted to a museum that houses the rulers' magnificent art collections. Late this afternoon return to the hotel; dinner tonight is on your own.

Overnight: *Jai Mahal Palace (B, L)*

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17

JAIPUR / SANGANER

This morning visit nearby Sanganer to watch villagers engage in traditional block printing and handmade paper industries. Using centuries-old techniques, artisans craft coveted hand-printed textiles and unique paper goods. Sanganer also is known for its distinctive blue pottery, which the craftspeople paint free-hand. Then tour a local market before visiting Birla Mandir, the Hindu temple made of pure white marble that enshrines Lord Vishnu and counts as one of Jaipur's most popular attractions. After some time at leisure this afternoon, tonight you are dinner guests of a multigenerational Rajasthan family in their home. This provides a fascinating window into Indian life and an opportunity to witness up close the traditional society from which India is transitioning to a more urban lifestyle.

Overnight: *Jai Mahal Palace (B, D)*

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18

JAIPUR / RANTHAMBORE NATIONAL PARK

Leave Jaipur this morning for Ranthambore National Park. Bordering the outer fringes of the Thar Desert and the former hunting grounds of the Maharajah of Jaipur, Ranthambore is now a 512-square-mile nature preserve that is home to diverse plant life; historic ruins; and hundreds of species of birds, reptiles, mammals, and of course, Bengal tigers. Please note that road conditions in and around Ranthambore are poor; about two hours of the drive will be on bumpy or unpaved roads. Additionally, the canters used for game drives provide minimal shock absorption: be prepared for very bumpy drives. This afternoon take a game drive through the park, whose mission is to help preserve

and protect the endangered Bengals. Dine tonight at the lodge.

Overnight: *Vivanta by Taj – Sawai Madhopur Lodge (B, L, D)*

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 19

RANTHAMBORE NATIONAL PARK

On today's morning and afternoon game drives, set out in search of more game. One of India's best known national parks, Ranthambore belongs to India's groundbreaking Project Tiger, dedicated to preserving and protecting the once plentiful Royal Bengal tigers that roamed the land here. Now threatened by poachers, illegal logging, and encroaching civilization, India's tiger population has decreased precipitously; it is believed that just 58 tigers currently live in Ranthambore. The park's varied landscape of beautiful lakes, lush grasslands, deep ravines, wooded valleys, and open scrub also features picturesque ruins of old fortifications and the thousand-year-old Ranthambore Fort, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which you'll stop to admire. On the way back to the lodge, visit an organization called Dhonk, which works with members of the Mogya tribe. Here see tiger conservation in action as families who once relied on poaching the big cats now have an alternative means of earning income through crafts and artwork. Take all meals today at the lodge.

Overnight: *Vivanta by Taj – Sawai Madhopur Lodge (B, L, D)*

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20

RANTHAMBORE / KALAKHO

This morning embark on the five-hour drive to Dera Village Retreat, stopping along the way to visit with children at a roadside school. After lunch together at the retreat, meet the local Meena tribespeople, who live in mud huts. Largely an agricultural people, the Meena have maintained much of their traditional culture and customs, as you'll see for yourselves up close. Late this afternoon, return to your lodging, where tonight you enjoy dinner accompanied by a local folk dance performance.

Overnight: *Dera Village Retreat (B, L, D)*

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21
KALAKHO / ABHANERI / AGRA

Leaving Kalakho, travel to the village of Abhaneri to witness an architectural marvel: the Chand Baori step well. To overcome water scarcity during summer months, inhabitants of northern India began constructing step wells in the 6th century CE to collect this precious resource. The 9th-century ruler King Chand built this astounding structure – one of India’s largest and most visually arresting – with 3,500 symmetrical steps descending 13 stories to the well. Ruins of an elaborately sculpted temple dedicated to Harshat Mata, Goddess of Joy and Happiness, stand opposite the step well. Leaving this marvelous site, continue on to the ancient Mughal stronghold of Agra, arriving early this afternoon. After lunch on your own, proceed to the Itimad-ud-Daulah, often called the “Baby Taj,” the two-story marble mausoleum that inspired the Taj Mahal. Next, preview tomorrow’s excitement as you view the Taj Mahal from Mehtab Bagh, an idyllic garden complex located directly across the Yamuna River from the fabled mausoleum. Tonight dine together at the hotel.

Overnight: *Courtyard Marriott Agra (B, D)*

MONDAY, OCTOBER 22
AGRA

This morning savor a travel highlight as you embark on a tour of the Taj Mahal. The magnificent tomb of white marble was built by Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his wife, who had implored her husband to build a monument symbolizing their undying love. Next visit the imposing Red Fort of Agra, comprising fairy tale palaces, two beautiful mosques, pavilions, courtyards, and gardens all surrounded by a massive wall, a moat, and yet another wall. An architectural and strategic masterpiece, the Fort is protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In a cruel twist, Emperor Shah Jahan was imprisoned here at the end of his life by his own son in a room overlooking the Taj Mahal across the river. Return to the hotel, then savor a highlight of another sort: an Indian cuisine cooking lesson and lunch together in their home. The remainder of the day is at leisure; dinner tonight is on your own.

Overnight: *Courtyard Marriott Agra (B, L)*

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 23
AGRA / DELHI / VARANASI

Depart this morning for Delhi, where you’ll have lunch together. Late this afternoon, board a flight to Varanasi, Hinduism’s holiest city and a center of learning, civilization, and religion. Varanasi exudes a mystique unlike any other Indian city thanks to its role as a sacred place of pilgrimage. Tonight enjoy dinner together at the hotel.

Overnight: *Taj Gateway Ganges (B, L, D)*

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 24
VARANASI / SARNATH

Before breakfast, those who wish can join in a private yoga session. This morning visit nearby Sarnath, where after achieving enlightenment the Buddha delivered his first sermon and founded the Sangha – the first monastic community – in the 6th century BCE. A Turkish invasion at the end of the 12th century CE left the city in ruins; it lay forgotten until the 19th century when excavation and restoration efforts began. One of Buddhism’s four holiest sites, Sarnath draws pilgrims from the world over today. See some of the temples and stupas, then tour Sarnath Museum, which houses a superb collection of Buddhist artifacts from excavations here. Late afternoon, attend a traditional *aarti* offering ceremony (a twice-daily ritual performed to ward off evil) as you cruise along the Ganges. Dinner tonight is at the hotel.

Overnight: *Taj Gateway Ganges (B, D)*

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25
VARANASI

Early this morning return to the Ganges, where Hindu pilgrims perform their time-honored rites along the *ghats* leading to the sacred river. Hindus believe that bathing in the Ganges at least once in a lifetime is both a duty and a privilege. Visit several of the important *ghats* by boat as you experience the spiritual mystique of these hallowed waters. Returning to the hotel for breakfast, you have some time at leisure with lunch on your own.

Return to the city for this afternoon’s walking tour and private performance of classical sitar. Tonight

celebrate your journey at a farewell dinner at the hotel.

Overnight: *Taj Gateway Ganges (B, D)*

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26 VARANASI / DELHI

After a morning at leisure, fly this afternoon to Delhi and then transfer to your hotel which is conveniently located near the airport. You have the evening free with dinner on your own. Those embarking on the Nepal post-tour extension today will transfer to the airport mid-day for the flight to Kathmandu.

Overnight: *Hotel Pullman New Delhi Aerocity (B)*

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27 RETURN TO U.S.

Take an early transfer to the airport for your return flight to the U.S.

Optional Extension: Nepal

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26 VARANASI / KATHMANDU

Mid-day, fly to Kathmandu, Nepal's capital and largest city, high in the storied Himalayas. After checking in at the hotel and time to freshen up, visit Swayambhunath Temple, an ancient and sacred Buddhist complex second in importance only to Nepal's Boudhanath (which you'll visit tomorrow). The architectural treasure of Swayambhunath features a white dome that symbolizes Nirvana, a 13-tiered golden spire, and the all-seeing "eyes" of the Buddha on each of four sides. Lunch today is on your own. Late this afternoon, return to the hotel and enjoy dinner together tonight.

Overnight: *Crowne Plaza Kathmandu-Soaltee (B, D)*

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27 KATHMANDU

Today discover Kathmandu Valley, whose three major cities (Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur) boast seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites – the largest concentration of such riches in the world. Start with a visit to the house of the Kumari Devi, devoted to the tradition of worshipping young girls as a manifestation of the divine female energy. You then have some leisure time at the Durbar Marg, the city's center abounding with restaurants and shops, for lunch on your own. After lunch visit Nepal's oldest and holiest Hindu shrine: the ornate Pashupatinath Temple. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the temple honors the manifestation of Lord Shiva, one of Hinduism's three most important deities. Please note that non-Hindus are not permitted to enter the temple itself, but you can see the building and its compound from the riverbank on which it stands. From here continue on to renowned 16th-century Boudhanath, the country's oldest and largest Buddhist stupa (a monument containing Buddhist relics) that serves as the religious center. Dedicated to the teachings of the Buddha, this monument boasts hundreds of colorful prayer flags fluttering in the wind and draws millions of religious devotees, seekers, and tourists annually.

Return to the hotel early this evening. Tonight attend a traditional dance performance and dinner at a former palatial complex reconstructed in the 1990s as a tribute to Nepal's past Rana rulers.

Overnight: *Crowne Plaza Kathmandu-Soaltee (B, D)*

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28 KATHMANDU / NAGARKOT

This morning travel to Patan, Nepal's third largest city known for its rich culture and artistic tradition. Also known as Lalitpur ("City of Beauty"), Patan was constructed in a circular manner that resembles the Buddhist Wheel of Religion. Enjoy a walk including Patan Durbar Square, a UNESCO site of historic palaces, temples, and shrines. During your tour, see some of the city's many Buddhist monuments and Hindu temples, along with bronze gateways and intricate wood carvings reflecting the time-honored artisan traditions still practiced here today. Next visit the village of Bungmati to walk the narrow lanes and gain insight into the traditional ways of rural Nepalese life. You are likely to see people bathing in communal waters, actively woodcarving, and participating in other hands-on trades. After lunch on your own, take the scenic drive up to your hotel in Nagarkot, a hilltop village commanding a spectacular vista of Nepal's major Himalayan peaks. Enjoy dinner together this evening.

Overnight: *Club Himalaya Nagarkot (B, D)*

MONDAY, OCTOBER 29 NAGARKOT / BHAKTAPUR

Begin today's half-day sightseeing tour by traveling to Bhaktapur, the least developed of the valley's three cities and a UNESCO World Heritage Site commonly called the "City of Devotees." Virtually a living open-air museum with its ancient square and warrens of medieval streets, Bhaktapur is known for its fine artisans, abundant temples, colorful festivals, and traditional lifestyle, which you have the opportunity to see up close. After a final lunch together at a boutique hotel in Bhaktapur, return to the hotel in Nagarkot. Tonight you are free to dine on your own.

Overnight: *Club Himalaya Nagarkot (B, L)*

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 30 NAGARKOT / KATHMANDU / RETURN TO U.S.

Early this morning you have an opportunity for an unforgettable experience: watching the sun rise over the fabled Himalayas from your room balcony or the hotel's rooftop observatory. The remainder of the morning is at leisure, with the option to take a short guided hike. Lunch is on your own; early this afternoon transfer to the airport for your connecting flight to Dubai, where you board your return flight to the U.S. (B)

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31 ARRIVE U.S.