



HARVARD

Alumni Association

MYSTICAL INDIA

OCTOBER 8-25, 2015

Mystical and spiritual, chaotic and confounding, India overflows with riches. While staying at excellent hotels, we travel the classic Golden Triangle: bustling Delhi; Agra, home of the sublime Taj Mahal; and Jaipur, great city of the Rajput. Plus, we search for elusive Bengals at Ranthambore Tiger Preserve; admire Khajuraho's ancient temples; and absorb the holiness of Varanasi.

STUDY LEADER: David A. Aguilar , Director of Public Affairs and Science Information, Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics



A naturalist, astronomer, author and astronomical artist, David's expertise is in communicating the wonderment of science. He is the past Director of the Fiske Planetarium and Science Center at the University of Colorado, former Director of Marketing Communications at Ball Aerospace in Boulder, and Marketing Director for the *PBS* Emmy-winning NOVA series *Evolution*.

David is also author/illustrator of six National Geographic books on astronomy and his work has been featured in *Time* magazine, *BBC*, *NBC Nightly News*, *ABC World News Now*, *CBS*, *Fox News*, *CNN*, the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *National Geographic*, *Wired*, *Sky & Telescope*, *Astronomy*, and *Scientific American*.

David has appeared on TV programs including *History Channel's "The Universe," "UFO Hunters,"* and *"EARTH,"* a new *Weather Channel* series.

He is a scholar and enrichment lecturer for Harvard Alumni Tours and Smithsonian Journeys, and popular host of the long-running Harvard-Smithsonian CfA program "Observatory Nights." As marketing director for Ball Aerospace, he attended seven space shuttle launches including the fateful Challenger Mission as well as Delta rocket launches of satellites from Cape Canaveral and Vandenberg Air Force Base. As a long-time follower of the Soviet space program, he is in a unique position to present insights and intimate stories of manned space on this one-of-a-kind tour. In honor of his recognized educational achievements, in 2010, asteroid 1990DA was named after him.

GROUP SIZE: 24 guests

PRICING: Based on per person double occupancy

- 18 days from \$6,094 total price from Boston (\$5,195 per person air and land inclusive plus \$899 airline taxes and departure fees)
- \$4,695 total Price per person Land Only
- \$1,695 Single Supplement

SCHEDULE BY DAY

B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner, R=Reception

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8
DEPART U.S. FOR DELHI, INDIA

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9
ARRIVE DELHI

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

Overnight: *Taj Palace Hotel*

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10
OLD DELHI

This morning meet your tour director for a briefing on the journey ahead. Delhi is one of the best examples in the world where old meets new. After lunch on your own, begin touring Old Delhi, capital of Muslim India between the 12th and 19th centuries. First stop is the Gandhi Memorial, the simple black marble slab honoring India's beloved Mahatma Gandhi, the political and spiritual leader of India's independence movement renowned for his advocacy of civil disobedience as a form of nonviolent resistance. Next, stop 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 in 1656 as the last monument commissioned by Emperor Shah Jahan, builder of the Taj Mahal.

The tour continues with a rickshaw ride through bustling and colorful Chandni Chowk market, one of Delhi's oldest and busiest, and where Mughal emperors once shopped. Then, return to the New Delhi district to visit a Sikh temple (*gurdwara*). Tonight enjoy a welcome dinner at the hotel.

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

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11
NEW DELHI

This morning, first encounter New Delhi by visiting the 16th-century Tomb of Humayun, the second Mughal emperor whose resting place is now a UNESCO World Heritage site, thanks to its groundbreaking Mughal architecture. Continue on to see Qutab Minar, one of Delhi's most visited and striking monuments. King Qutubuddin Aiback laid the foundation for the monument after defeating the last Hindu Kingdom in 1199. With a height of 239 feet, this red stone tower ranks as the highest in India. 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.

Following lunch on your own, 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 enjoy dinner at a local restaurant serving international cuisine.

Overnight: Taj Palace Hotel / (B, D)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 12 DELHI/JAIPUR

Depart this morning by motorcoach for the day-long journey to Jaipur, one of the great cities of the Rajput. En route to Jaipur, 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 then this evening enjoy dinner at the hotel.

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

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13 JAIPUR

This 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. First stop today is at Hawa Mahal, the elaborately carved "Palace of the Winds," whose pink sandstone façade allowed the ladies of the court to view the streets of the city from behind its 953 small windows - and also allowed cooling breezes to enter.

Continue on to Amber Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage site built by the Kachhawah Rajputs as their capital from 1037 to 1728 and considered the pinnacle of Rajput architecture. Then tour the unoccupied citadel this morning, approaching by jeep to admire the fresco-covered portal, the impressive room of mirrors, walls of jewel-encrusted marble, and the royal apartments offering beautiful panoramic views of the surrounding valleys.

After lunch at a local restaurant, continue on to Jantar Mantar, the incredible open-air Royal Observatory (ca. 1728) housing oversized astronomical instruments and a UNESCO World

Heritage site; and City Palace, former residence of the Maharajas of Jaipur, built in the shape of the city itself and 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. The hotel houses several restaurants and your tour director will be happy to offer further recommendations.

Overnight: Jai Mahal Palace / (B, L)

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14 JAIPUR/SANGANER

This morning, visit nearby Sanganer to watch villagers engage in traditional block printing and hand-made 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 you'll see the craftspeople paint free-hand. 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 to a family in their haveli (a home built around a central courtyard, in the traditional Muslim architectural style). This provides a fascinating window on 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 15 JAIPUR/RANTHAMBORE NATIONAL PARK

Depart 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 natural preserve (one of India's largest) 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 our drive will be on bumpy or unpaved roads. Additionally, the canters which are 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. Tonight, dine at the lodge.

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

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16 RANTHAMBORE NATIONAL PARK

On today's morning and afternoon game drives, you'll surely see more game (though tiger and leopard 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 52 tigers currently live in Ranthambore (which actually represents a net gain in the past decade or so). Nationally, Project Tiger has seen the Bengal population rise to about 4,000 from the 2,000 counted when the project launched in 1973.

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. Take all meals today at the lodge.

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

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17 RANTHAMBORE/KALAKHO

This morning, embark on the five-hour drive to Dera Village Retreat (formally Dera Lake View Retreat) in Kalakho, on the banks of Madhosager Lake (a seasonal "monsoon" lake), stopping along the way to visit with children at

a roadside school. After lunch at the retreat, set out on a camel safari through the surrounding villages to meet the local Meena tribespeople who live in mud huts that they decorate inside with floral and animal designs. Largely an agricultural people, the Meena have maintained much of their traditional culture and customs, as you see for yourself up close. Late this afternoon, return to the lodge and then tonight enjoy dinner accompanied by a local folk dance performance.

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

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18 KALAKHO/ABHANERI/AGRA

Leaving Kalakho this morning, travel to the village of Abhaneri to witness an architectural marvel: the Chand Baori step well. To overcome the perpetual issue of water scarcity during summer months, inhabitants of northern India began constructing unique step wells in the 6th century CE to collect this precious resource. An estimated 3,000 of these "baori" once gave villagers multiple routes of access to the pools of water below and provided a gathering place with respite from the heat. 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 three of its sides 13 stories to the 100-foot-deep 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 that has attracted directors to shoot scenes for films such as "The Fall" and "The Dark Knight Rises," continue on to the ancient Mughal stronghold of Agra, arriving early this afternoon. Lunch is on your own today. After lunch, proceed to the Itimad-ud-Daulah, often called the "Baby Taj," the two-story marble mausoleum that inspired the Taj Mahal. Tonight dine at the hotel.

Overnight: *Taj Gateway Agra / (B, D)*

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19 AGRA

This morning savor a travel highlight as you embark on a tour of the Taj Mahal, the magnificent tomb of white marble built by Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz, who had implored her husband to build a monument symbolizing their undying love for each other. Some 20,000 laborers and artisans from around the world spent 17 years constructing what became Mumtaz's mausoleum, which was begun in 1632. Along with its exquisite symmetry, the Taj features striking examples of *pietra dura*, a decorative art in which craftsmen embed precisely cut semi-precious stones in marble to form dazzling patterns.

Next, visit the imposing Red Fort of Agra (also known as Agra Fort), comprising fairy tale palaces, two beautiful mosques, audience halls, pavilions, courtyards, and gardens all surrounded by a massive wall, a moat, and yet another wall. Your tour here features the Hall of Public Audience and the Royal Pavilions. A creative, architectural, and strategic masterpiece, the Fort is protected as a UNESCO World Heritage site. In a cruel twist, Emperor Shah Jahan, builder of the Taj Mahal and whose grandfather built the original Fort and who also assumed the throne himself, was imprisoned here at the end of his life by his own son – in a room looking out on the Taj Mahal across the river. Return to the hotel following your visit to the Red Fort, then savor a highlight of another sort: an Indian cuisine cooking lesson and lunch. The remainder of the day at leisure; dinner tonight is on your own.

Overnight: *Taj Gateway Agra / (B, L)*

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20 AGRA/KHAJURAHO

Travel by train this morning to Jhansi then continue by motorcoach to the village of Orchha for lunch. Next, travel by coach over rough rural roads (where a distance of 100 miles can take four to five hours) to Khajuraho, known the world over for its temples, architecture, and erotic sculpture. Today the city's collection of 22 Hindu temples (out of 85

originally built here) dating to the 10th century is protected as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Reach the hotel early this evening and dine here tonight.

Overnight: *Taj Chandela / (B, L, D)*

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21 KHAJURAHO

Built during the 500-year reign of the Chandela dynasty, the temples here represent a burst of creative and religious energy that faded as Islam gained influence and Hindu Khajuraho ultimately was abandoned. But because of its remote location, Khajuraho was out of harm's way when Muslim invaders destroyed many relics of Hinduism throughout India – which ironically resulted in the well-preserved temples that you explore today at the Chandela Temple Complex. Adorned with erotic sculptures (as a reminder that life should be enjoyed to the fullest), these temples represent the finest examples of temple architecture in northern India. Today's touring includes the Kandariya Mahadeva, Chatrabhuj, Parswanath, and Ghantai temples. This evening enjoy a "Dances of India" performance followed by dinner at the hotel.

Overnight: *Taj Chandela / (B, D)*

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22 KHAJURAHO/VARANASI

Following a morning at leisure, fly early this afternoon to Varanasi, Hinduism's holiest city and a center of learning, civilization, and religion since time immemorial. Lacking in important architecture, elaborate palaces, and ancient fortresses, Varanasi nonetheless exudes an allure and mystique unlike any other Indian city, thanks to its role as a sacred place of pilgrimage. After time to relax at the hotel, this evening attend a traditional *aarti* offering ceremony (a twice-daily ritual performed to ward off evil) as you cruise along the Ganges. Tonight enjoy dinner at the hotel.

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

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23
VARANASI

Early this morning return to the Ganges, where Hindu pilgrims perform their time-honored rites along the *ghats* (steps) 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; it can help lead to the forgiveness of sin and the attainment of salvation. Visit several of the important *ghats* by boat as you experience the spiritual mystique of these hallowed waters. Next, walk through the old town and tour the New Vishwanath Temple (also known as Birla Temple), located on the premises of Banaras Hindu University. Unlike the original Vishwanath Temple, the newer white-marble temple welcomes visitors of all religions. As you walk around inside, see some of the many Hindu scriptures inscribed on the walls.

Return to the hotel for breakfast then visit Bharat Mata Temple, the only temple dedicated to Mother India and featuring a relief map of the country in marble. Then, visit Sarnath, birthplace of Buddhism. It was here in the 6th century BCE that Buddha delivered his first sermon, and Sarnath remains a major center of the practice today. Returning to the hotel for lunch on your own, you then have the afternoon free for independent exploration or to relax. Tonight celebrate your journey at a farewell dinner at the hotel.

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

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24
VARANASI/DELHI

After a morning at leisure, fly to Delhi and then transfer to the hotel which is conveniently located near the airport. Dinner tonight is on your own. Late this evening transfer to the airport for the return flight to the U.S.

Those embarking on the Nepal post-tour extension today will transfer to the airport mid-day for the flight to Kathmandu.

Overnight: *Crowne Plaza Gurgaon / (B)*

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25
RETURN TO U.S.

After arriving in the U.S. this morning, connect with your flights home.

FOR GUESTS TAKING "NEPAL"
OPTIONAL POST-TOUR EXTENSION

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24
VARANASI/KATHMANDU

Today bid farewell to your Indian tour director and transfer mid-day to the Varanasi airport for the flight to Kathmandu, Nepal's capital and largest city, high in the storied Himalayas. Upon arrival, meet your Nepalese tour director, who will accompany you throughout your journey. After checking in at your hotel and time to freshen up, visit Swayambhunath Temple, an ancient (ca. 250 BCE) and sacred Buddhist complex second in importance only to Nepal's Boudhanath (which you visit on Day 18). 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 where you will have dinner.

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

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25
KATHMANDU

Today, begin the discovery of 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 as non-Hindus, you cannot 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 for the many Tibetan immigrants who now live in Nepal. Dedicated to the teachings of the Buddha, this huge white dome-shaped 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, its unique architecture a blend of Nepali, Indian, and European influences.

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

MONDAY, OCTOBER 26 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 the 3rd century 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 the 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 local village of Bungmati where you can 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 the hotel in Nagarkot, a hilltop village commanding a

spectacular vista of Nepal's major Himalayan peaks. Enjoy dinner here this evening.

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

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27 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 unspoiled ancient square and warrens of medieval streets, Bhaktapur is known for its fine artisans, abundant temples, colorful festivals, and traditional lifestyle, which you'll have the opportunity to see up close. After a final lunch 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)*

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28 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, and board your return flight to the U.S.

(B)

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29 ARRIVE U.S.

After arriving in the U.S. this morning, connect with your flight home.