

Itinerary & Optionals

DAY 1 WELCOME TO DELHI

India's vibrant capital extends a lively welcome, launching an unforgettable journey through northern India's most exquisite sights. On arrival in Delhi, you'll be transferred to your hotel where you'll meet your Travel Director and fellow travellers for a Welcome Reception with drinks and local appetisers this evening.

MEAL(S)	HOTEL
Welcome Reception	Le Meridien New Delhi

DAY 2 DISCOVER THE DELIGHTS OF OLD DELHI

Savour the scents of spice as you embark on an exhilarating rickshaw ride, navigating the busy streets of Old Delhi. See the Red Fort, a sandstone fortress which once housed the emperors of the Mughal dynasty for centuries. Next, Dive Into Culture as you ride through the colourful Chandni Chowk market and watch it come to life as the day's trading begins amidst the sounds of enthusiastic salesmen and endless traffic. Visit Jama Masjid, one of the largest mosques in India. Admire its ornate façades before boarding a waiting vehicle to drive to Raj Ghat, a memorial dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi. Pay tribute to this beloved figurehead, who led the campaign for India's independence from Britain. You'll come face-to-face with the site where he was cremated following his assassination in 1948. Today the simple square platform of black marble is surrounded by a tranquil park, befitting of its status as a place of contemplation. Your next stop is Agrasen Ki Baoli, one of the most noteworthy stepwells in Delhi. Hidden amidst the cacophony of Delhi's streets and business towers, this ancient water reservoir rises from the depths of the earth to stand atop 103 stone steps. Spend a few moments of serenity amidst its centuries-old ornate arches before returning to your hotel for an afternoon of leisure or consider one of our Optional Experiences.

MEAL(S)
Breakfast

OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES

Discover the Lotus Temple and Dilli Haat

Join your Travel Director for a visit to the Lotus Temple, an architectural marvel famous for its unique lotus structure which has won several awards for its style of building. It is composed of 27 free-standing marble-clad 'petals' arranged in clusters of three to form nine sides, with nine doors opening onto a central hall with a height of slightly over 34.27 metres and a capacity for 2,500 people. It is a modern style non-religion-oriented temple open to all and is surrounded by nine ponds and gardens covering 26 acres in total. Afterwards spend some time browsing at Dilli Haat INA, an open-air food plaza cum craft bazaar which was established to encourage arts and crafts in India. It has food stalls representing each state in India and offers a complete variety of tasty Indian snacks from across the country. Products on offer also include many ethnic creations such as rosewood and sandalwood carvings, colourful fabrics and drapery, gems, beads, brassware, metal crafts, and silk and wool fabrics. The price shown is in US dollars.

Adult Price: **USD23.0***

* The Optionals and pricing listed here are a guideline only and subject to change.

DAY 3 SEE THE SIGHTS OF DELHI

Dive Into Culture this morning and join a guided walking tour run by one of the rehabilitated street children who were taken in by the Salaam Baalak Trust in Delhi. Your visit is a MAKE TRAVEL MATTER® Experience and supports this non-profit organisation and the street children for whom it cares. Later, walk through Paharganj Bazaar, rubbing shoulders with the locals who flock to the market to shop every day. Escape the noise and head to New Delhi, designed and built by the British in the 1920s. Your first stop here is a visit to the UNESCO-listed Humayun's Tomb, the earliest example of Mughal architecture in India. Recently renovated with the gardens restored to their former glory, you'll see first-hand why it served as the inspiration for the design of the famous Taj Mahal. Enjoy local flavours for lunch at a restaurant near India Gate, then head to the Qutub Minar complex, also a UNESCO listed site. This fluted 'Victory Tower' is decorated with elaborate inscriptions, geometric carvings and elegant balconies. Returning your hotel later, you'll drive past Lutyens' Delhi to view the elegant colonial façades leading British architect Edwin Lutyens left behind on the cityscape. You'll have the rest of the afternoon free, or perhaps join one of our Optional Experiences.

MEAL(S)
Breakfast

Lunch

OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES

Delhi's Heritage Park: Sunder Nursery

Visit the Sunder Nursery with a Local Specialist and discover the fascinating Biodiversity Zone as well as the stunning gardens inside the nursery such as the Paradise Garden, Water Garden and Sunken Garden. Dating back to the 16th century, this spectacular heritage park complex is a treasure trove of attractions. It covers an area of 90 acres and boasts several UNESCO World Heritage monuments, 300 plant and tree species, marble fountains, raised sandstone pathways and around 80 resident bird species. After discovering the nursery's main attractions on a walking tour with the Local Specialist, enjoy some free time to explore further at your leisure. The price shown is in US dollars.

Adult Price: **USD23.0***

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DAY 4 SUNSET AT THE TAJ MAHAL

It's time to leave Delhi behind, bound for the Uttar Pradesh city of Agra. While there are many reasons to love Agra, its own 'monument to love', the Taj Mahal is perhaps the most captivating. You'll have an opportunity to see its sun-kissed white marble façades just before sunset, watching as its elegant walls glow with rose and golden hues. Admire this well-preserved landmark from all sides. Step away from your fellow travellers for a minute and contemplate the magnificence of this man-made wonder before re-joining your group. This evening, you could choose to end a memorable day at an optional sound and light show prior to dinner.

MEAL(S)

Breakfast **HOTEL**
Dinner Double Tree by Hilton

OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES

Mohabbat-E Taj Show

The Taj Mahal represents the finest example of Mughal architecture and the 'Mohabbat-e-Taj' show, with the backdrop of the largest replica of the Taj Mahal to date, brings to life this wonderful monument. Spend an enjoyable evening at the show and gain an insight into what life might have been like in those days. Discover the epic love story of the emperor Shah Jahan and Mumtaz in a typical Bollywood song and dance show, performed by over 80 talented artists dressed in lavish costumes.

Adult Price: **USD53.0***

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DAY 5 FROM THE TAJ TO THE TIGERS

There's more to Agra than the Taj Mahal as you'll come to discover this morning during your visit to the UNESCO-listed Agra Fort. Stroll through the chambers of a royal residence that was built in the 16th century and served as the principal residence of four generations of the influential Mughal emperors until the capital was moved to Delhi. Continue on to the long-deserted 'Ghost Town' of Fatehpur Sikri, which was built at great expense by Emperor Akbar in 1569 only to be abandoned soon afterwards because of a lack of water. The city remains beautifully preserved, albeit with an air of melancholy - a rusty-red sandstone masterpiece without a population. Later, enjoy lunch at a local restaurant in Bharatpur. Then experience first-hand a quintessential experience of getting around in India when you board a train bound for Ranthambore where you'll stay for the next two nights.

MEAL(S)

Breakfast
Lunch **HOTEL**
Dinner Anuraga Palace

DAY 6 ROAM RANTHAMBORE IN SEARCH OF TIGERS

Start the day with an early morning visit to Ranthambore National Park, which was once the hunting ground of the Maharaja of Jaipur. Before the heat of the day sets in and the wilderness awakens, keep a keen eye out for the resident animal and birdlife that find sanctuary here. You'll also want to have your camera ready in case the park's tigers make a brief appearance. Return to your hotel for a late breakfast, followed by some time to relax or consider joining an Optional Experience. After lunch, there's another opportunity to explore the park for glimpses of the various species of bird and wildlife on your second game drive of the day. Dinner is served this evening at your hotel.

MEAL(S)

Breakfast
Lunch
Dinner

OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES

Save the Tigers: The Dhonk Initiative

Interact with local women working on indigenous craft forms at the Dhonk Textile Studio and take the opportunity to contribute to the 'Save the Tiger' cause. The Dhonk initiative started several years ago to encourage local families away from poaching tigers and other terrible activities such as illegal cutting of trees, grazing, ecologically harmful ways of farming etc. This initiative provided them with an ethical livelihood. It's a holistic craft project and a huge variety of products are manufactured. Meet the Manager who will give a brief talk about the project and with the Travel Director on-hand to assist with translating, chat with the local women and learn more about the work they do. The price shown is in US dollars.

Adult Price: **USD15.0***

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DAY 7 ONWARDS TO JAIPUR

Continue your journey to Jaipur, the Pink City. After some free time for lunch, join a workshop on hand-block printing, one of the most famous traditional art forms of Rajasthan. A skilled Local Specialist will show you the tricks of the trade as you observe how the prints are handmade using small wooden blocks and hone your own block-printing skills. Later, Dive Into Culture and see the talents of local craftspeople on display during a visit to a local market. Admire the colourful textiles and perhaps buy a memento or two to take home. Jaipur is particularly renowned for its embroidery and blue pottery. This evening, join a local family for an exclusive Be My Guest dinner in their home. Connect With Locals and savour some of the regional delicacies.

MEAL(S)

Breakfast	HOTEL
Be My Guest	Hilton

DAY 8 EXPLORE COLOURFUL JAIPUR

One of today's highlights is a visit to the UNESCO-listed Amber Fort. But first, stop to admire the red and pink façades of the Palace of Winds, whose latticed windows once revealed the outside world to the sheltered ladies of the royal household. Continue with a visit to the ornate City Palace, an impressive complex of buildings from different eras and gardens in the heart of the Old City. You'll have some free time for lunch before visiting the UNESCO-listed Jantar Mantar Observatory, featuring the world's largest sundial. Later, you could choose to join our optional Aarti ceremony, offering a blessing to one of the Hindu deities and hopefully receiving one in return. This evening, we'll toast to shared memories over a delicious local dinner and say farewell to those not travelling on to Varanasi.

MEAL(S)

Breakfast
Farewell Dinner

OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES

Aarti Ceremony at the Birla Temple

Experience India's rich spirituality at the Birla Mandir, one of the most famous temples in Jaipur, dedicated to the Hindu Gods, Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi. The temple is made of pure white marble and you'll find beautiful sculptures of the Hindu Gods and Goddesses and mythological scenes. You'll get to witness the enchanting Aarti (religious ceremony), with an up-close view of the priest who has a tray with a small bell and offerings of food, water, flowers and incense. A traditional 'Aarti lamp' is passed around the deity accompanied by singing and the ceremony ends with everyone sharing the food that has been offered to the Gods. The price shown is in US dollars.

Adult Price: **USD19.0***

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DAY 9 VENTURE TO VARANASI

Depart Jaipur this morning and board your included flight to embark on a pilgrimage to the sacred city of Varanasi, exploring

the city's role as the centre of Hindu religion. There's a palpable sense that life begins and ends on the shores of Ganga Mata (Mother Ganges). Spirituality extends beyond the sacred waters of this mighty river, however. The city is also renowned for its ancient temples mostly dedicated to Lord Shiva, and its old ghats, which lead down to the river. You'll see all this and more, but first there's some free time for lunch before the sightseeing begins. Next Dive Into Culture and experience a rural way of life during a walk around Weavers Village, where a Local Specialist will reveal the centuries-old silk weaving tradition. Your visit during this MAKE TRAVEL MATTER® Experience will help the community's efforts to keep this extraordinary tradition alive. You'll also see first-hand how the talented weavers create beautiful silk fabrics. These are used to make the famous Banarasi silk saris, which are sought after for weddings and other special occasions. Later this evening, feed your soul as you cruise down the River Ganges to witness the ritual of Aarti. Watch as the delicate diya laden with a candle and tiny blooms floats in a magical train down the river. After this poignant ritual, you'll return to your hotel and enjoy dinner.

MEAL(S)

Breakfast	HOTEL
Dinner	Madin

DAY 10 WITNESS LOCAL LIFE ALONG THE GANGES

Admire the pink light of sunrise appear over the Ganges, watching the sights and sounds of Varanasi stir slowly along the banks of the river. Observe the locals taking their morning bath in the holy water while worshipping the rising sun. Afterwards, explore the city on foot, the best way to immerse yourself in the day-to-day of the oldest living city of the world. You'll have an opportunity to visit Kashi Vishwanath Temple, one of the most famous Shiva temples. Demolished and rebuilt many times over its history, this is Varanasi's main temple, and it's a sight to behold with its towering spire and domes made of pure gold. You'll return to your hotel for breakfast and some free time. Perhaps choose to join our Optional Experience to watch a live performance of Indian classical dances known as Kathak. This afternoon, visit Sarnath, one of the four holy Buddhist sites sanctioned by the Buddha himself for pilgrimage. Explore the spectacular collection of Buddhist artefacts dating back to the 3 BC and see the Lion Capital of Ashoka with its inverted lotus carving, adopted as the national emblem of India. Then, return to your hotel for an evening at leisure.

MEAL(S)

Breakfast

OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES

Kathak Dance Performance

Take a stroll with your Travel Director to a nearby dance centre for a live performance of the Indian classical dance Kathak, organised especially for you. The city of Varanasi has been a cultural hub since ancient times and Indian dance forms have evolved over the centuries. Kathak is one of the main genres of ancient Indian classical dance which is believed to have originated from the travelling bards of North India referred to as Kathakars or storytellers. Enjoy a performance of around 90 minutes that incorporates legends from ancient mythology where the stories are communicated through rhythmic foot movements, hand gestures, facial expressions and eye movements. The price shown is in US dollars.

Adult Price: **USD56.0***

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DAY 11 FAREWELL VARANASI

Your spiritual and cultural encounter with India at its end, it's time to bid a sad farewell to Varanasi. Take a transfer to the airport for your onward flight.

MEAL(S)

Breakfast