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RAJASTHAN INSIDER TOUR

From palace hotels to luxury tents - you get to see the most famous tourist attractions and escape from it all. Along the way you'll have: a camel safari, cooking, boating, bird watching, cycle rickshaws, palaces and forts, markets and bazaars, train journeys, homestays, and open fires.

Sample Rajasthan Insider Tour: 15 days/ 14 nights

Delhi, Agra, Chambal, Ranthambhore, Jodpur, Jaipur and Delhi (extension to Bhundi and Bharatpur).

Cost: £1885 per person (based on twin share) for this Rajasthan tour, excluding flights. All our tours are private - you won't be part of a group.

The price quoted for is for accommodation with all meals at Chambal, Ranthambhore. Other places B & B, an English speaking Indian driver, local guides, other travel costs.

This is a sample tour to Rajasthan. We can mix and match according to the dates and places you would like to visit. Note that we don't arrange air flights.

Day one and two

We'll pick you up from the airport and take you to Lutyens Bungalow, located in the plush green environs of central New Delhi. It's colonial architecture and mature gardens make it a fairly picturesque property. The family run bed and breakfast guest house has been in the business for over 30 years. So you can simply relax and recover from your journey - or you can brave the city.

Old and New Delhi is worth exploring - by car and/or by rickshaw. You'll find monuments, shrines, plazas, parks and gardens, markets, museums and Government buildings. There's the wonderfully manic bazaar called Chandi Chowk, India's largest mosque - the Jama Masjid which along with the Red Fort dominates Old Delhi (25,000 people can fit in the courtyard of the mosque), and excellent shopping at the Dilli Haat, an open market where you can buy crafts and foods directly from the producers. The handicraft stalls are allotted on a rotational basis to craftsmen from all states of India, usually for fifteen days.

Overnight: (2 nights) Lutyens Bungalow house.

Located in the central New Delhi and is the ancestral property of Vinita and Meenakshi Nath's and the bungalow was built in 1935. Its colonial architecture



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and mature gardens make it a fairly picturesque property. The family run bed and breakfast guest house has been in the business for over 30 years. When you are here you will be within strolling distance of the outstanding Lodhi Gardens as well as the Safdarjung Tomb.

Day three, four and five

We'll make our way to Agra by car, city best known as home to the Taj Mahal.

We can take you to see the Taj Mahal. The white marble mausoleum was built as a monument to romantic love. Shah Jehan - the emperor of India - built it in memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal. A work force of 20,000 started the project in 1632. It was completed in 1653. It's particularly worth seeing in the evening when the building changes colour as the sun goes down.

After viewing Taj Mahal we'll make our way by car (90 kms) to Chambal.

The National Chambal Sanctuary is based around a 400 km stretch of the river Chambal, with its deep river ravines, rocky cliffs, sandy beaches and tropical dry scrub forest. The sanctuary is refuge for the rare and endangered Gharial (a crocodile-like reptile with long, narrow jaws.) and Ganges River Dolphin. The water also supports Marsh Crocodiles, Smooth Coated Otters, 6 species of terrapins/turtles plus 250 species of birds.

For centuries the forests and ravines of Chambal have also been home to the dacoits, outlawed gangsters whose exploits have been romanticized in several Bollywood movies. Chambal River Lodge is half an hour away from the reserve. The lodge lies in a 35 acre plantation, surrounded by fields of organically grown produce that supply the kitchens.

During the next three days, we can explore the area. For centuries camels have been the preferred mode of transport in the Chambal ravines, and even today are the best way to gain access into the deepest recesses of these untamed labyrinths. You can take a camel safari along the rivers' banks, into the ravines, through villages and up to Fort Ater. Alternatively, you can take a boat cruise through the ravines, along with a picnic lunch. At the base camp (where the boat departs from), you can relax, play beach games, build sand castles, spot wildlife, or just lie back and relax. Additional activities includes walking to nearby villages, bird watching, and a visit to the ancient temple complex at Bateshwar.

Overnight: (3 nights) Chambal River Lodge.



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The Lodge and safaris are owned and managed by Ram Pratap Singh, a descendant of a local royal family and his wife Anu. There are eight independent cottages with en-suite bathrooms and small covered verandahs, built on raised red sandstone platforms. Accommodation is simple - there is limited hot water and electricity is sporadic. Food - much of it organic, is cooked on open camp fire. You will be given candles at night.

Day six, seven and eight

We will make our way to Ranthambhore by car. The driving time is around 6 hours, covering 250kms.

Ranthambhor is another former hunting preserve of the Maharajas of Jaipur, comprising of deep ravines and steep cliffs with thorn and dry deciduous forests all overlooked by an impressive eleventh-century fortress. The forests around the Ranthambore Fort were once, the private hunting grounds of the Maharajas of Jaipur.

Overnight: (3 nights) Khem Villas

Khem Villas describes itself as a luxury jungle camp, but it is more interesting and unusual than that because the camp combines conservation efforts with community-based tourism. Set in 10 acres of former desert-land converted into wilderness, the accommodation is owned by Goverdhan Singh Rathore and his wife Usha, along with Pritam Singh. The family have devoted their lives to environmental and philanthropic causes, including the prevention of deforestation and overgrazing in the Bengal tigers' natural habitat. This has been a risky business: the family home was burnt down and their lives at risk but, as a result of their efforts, there is a comprehensive Tiger conservation program in the area. Their work led Goverdhan to be awarded the Ashden Award for Sustainable Energy in 2004 given to him by Sir David Attenborough.

Day nine, ten and eleven

Known as the pink city and capital of Rajasthan, Jaipur is known for its forts, palaces, cars, cows, rickshaws, golden sands, elephants, temples, colourful garments, diamonds, handicrafts and shopping opportunities galore.

We can visit the local monuments, or take day trips to visit the local artisans: diamond cutting and jewelry designing, stone carvings, leather works, block printing of textiles, Blue Pottery. Or you can take an elephant ride at Amber Fort (magnificent pink, fort-palace).

Overnight: (3 nights) Maduban Homestay



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Madhuban is a family owned Hotel in central Jaipur. It is the home of Rao Digvijay Singh Patan and his family. Here you are greeted with genuine Rajasthani hospitality.

Day twelve and thirteen

After breakfast, we'll make our way to Jodhpur by car. Jodhpur is the second largest city in the Indian state of Rajasthan. It is located 335 kilometres west from the state capital, Jaipur. Jodhpur is a popular tourist destination, featuring many palaces, forts and temples, set in the stark landscape of the Thar desert.

The city is known as the Sun City for the bright, sunny weather it enjoys all year. It is also referred to as the Blue City due to the blue-painted houses around the Mehrangarh Fort. The old city of Jodhpur is surrounded by a thick stone wall.

We will go on a sightseeing of the Fort, Jaswant Thara, Mandore Gardens and the clock tower and see in detail Jodhpur and its illustrious history. An excursion to Osian on the edge of the desert is also on the cards. Besides in winter Rajasthan is alive with fairs and festivals and it will be a delightful occasion to join in these celebrations.

Overnight: (2 nights) Otara

Otara is a family residence which has been renovated and completely refurbished. The interiors are a mix of eclectic styles and contemporary designs matched with modern comforts. This is an ideal place from where to discover this ancient city.

Day fourteen

We'll make our way to Colonel's home stay in Delhi and the spend the night here.

Overnight (1 night) at Colonel's homestay

Day fifteen

We'll make our way to the airport for your flight back home.

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

Bundi

Bundi is a small, friendly, elegant and filled with history - palaces, forts and reservoirs - Bundi is off the main tourist track and is a treasure to explore. Its narrow streets are lined with shops selling everything from groceries to newspapers and paintings. Signs of modernization can be seen in the cyber



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cafés and shops advertising Xerox and lamination services. And in just 15 minutes you can have a tiger painted onto your finger nails!

Overnight: (3 nights) Ummed Bagh, is a tented camp in a old palace compound. The establishment is run by the brother of Maharajah of Bundi. The tents are luxurious and are five star standard.

Bharatpur

Bharatpur is home to the Keoladeo Ghana Bird Sanctuary, a UNESCO World Heritage site and once the hunting preserve of the Maharaja. The reserve is a mixture of marshes, mature forests, sandy acacia scrub, and open grassland. Herons, egrets, geese, owls, cormorants, kingfishers, cranes - 364 species of birds have been identified in the park and it's one of the world's most important breeding and aquatic grounds. Motorized traffic is prohibited inside the park, so we'll visit the reserve by bicycle rickshaw.

We can also explore the town of Bharatpur, or alternatively, we can take a day trip (by car or bus) to Deeg. The town is described by Lonely Planet as a "small, rarely visited town, with an incongruously glorious palace, gardens and fortifications".

Overnight: (3 nights) The Bagh - Is set in 12 acres of garden with 3 big residences and nearby Keoladeo Ghana National Park.

When to travel

Ideal period is October to March. It can get chilly in the mornings and evenings during December, January and February (though the days remain generally warm and sunny). Temperatures begin to rise in March and April and by June can reach up to 45C. The monsoon arrives in July and continues until September.