

DIINBCULT02

Cultural Highlights of Northern India A Journey through Jaipur - Varanasi - Khajuraho

The fabulous "pink city" of Jaipur, the ultimate showcase for Rajasthan's distinctive architecture; the incomparable masterpiece of the Taj Mahal; Varanasi, one of the holiest places in India; and the exotic temple art of Khajuraho. This is the old "dream India" of your imagination, an elegant feast for all the senses, a vivid kaleidoscope of sights, scents, sounds, and tastes that will remain in your memory for a lifetime. You'll explore it all, from visiting the old Rajput stronghold of Amber to witnessing evening Hindu ceremonies along the banks of the Ganges. And for a full immersion into the multifaceted aspects of this teeming, diverse, and always alluring destination, we've added visits to one of the finest bird sanctuaries in the world.

THE TOUR Overview Location - , India Trip Length - 12 Days Best Time - Activities -

Day 1: Delhi
Meeting and assistance upon arrival thereafter transfer from airport to hotel. Day at leisure. The remainder of the afternoon is free to rest and relax. Overnight stay at Hotel.

Day 2 : Delhi - Jaipur
Breakfast at Hotel. After breakfast drive 05 hrs to Jaipur, a rather young city by Rajasthan's standards; it was founded in 1727 when Maharaja Jai Singh II moved his capital there. We'll transfer to the hotel (which was formerly a royal palace), then half of sightseeing. Jaipur is the ultimate showcase for Rajasthan's distinctive architecture. Jai Singh II planned this city with great symmetry and wide spacious streets intersecting at right angles (unlike the narrow twisting streets of other cities of that era). In the old walled quarter of town, called the "Pink City" because of the soft suffusion of light that gives it a pink glow, there are glorious temples and palaces built in styles that span centuries. Evening enjoy movie at Raj Mandir. Overnight stay at Hotel.

Day 3 : Jaipur
Breakfast at the hotel. Morning excursion to Amber Fort. Make your ascent to the palace fortress on the gaily caparisoned elephant back. Tour the chambers and hallways of the palace which are famous for the excellence of their design and decoration. Afternoon tour of Jaipur known as "The Pink City of Rajasthan". Visit the unique Jantar Mantar Observatory, which was built in the 1700's, yet even today still looks futuristic or almost surrealistic; the City Palace and its Museum, the Hawa Mahal or the Palace of Winds. Overnight stay at hotel.

Day 4 : Jaipur - Keoladeo Ghana National Park
Morning drive (about five hours) to Bharatpur. We then quickly transfer to our lodge within the Keoladeo Ghana National Park, where we have an afternoon bird walk. Keoladeo is a beautiful reserve, dotted with lakes and waterways built by the Maharajah of Bharatpur when the park was his private bird hunting preserve. It was later turned into a national park, and is such an important place for migratory birds that it has been declared a World Heritage Site. We'll have the late afternoon to investigate this world-famous nature reserve. Named for the Shiva temple located at its center, Keoladeo is one of the finest bird sanctuaries in the world, harboring over 360 species. It is also well known as the wintering ground for countless thousands of migratory Eurasian waterfowl, and especially for the highly endangered Siberian crane. We explore the wetlands by foot and bicycle rickshaw on a network of trails and dikes, as well as by boat (if water levels are sufficiently high). We can also take a walk at night looking for nocturnal creatures such as the porcupine, jackal, and toddy cat. overnight stay at Hotel.

Day 5 : Bhartpur - Agra
Morning two-hour drive to Agra. We'll stop along the way to visit the deserted city of Fatehpur Sikri ("the city of victory"). Built by the Moghul Emperor Akbar, Fatehpur Sikri is a walled Indian "ghost town" of elaborate royal audience halls, palaces, and mosques that are perfectly preserved and faithfully record the ambiance of its time. We continue to Agra, famous the world over as the city of the Taj Mahal. One of the greatest architectural masterpieces of the world, the Taj was built by Emperor Shah Jehan in memory of his beloved consort, Mumtaz Mahal. The mausoleum and its compound are built of gleaming marble inlaid with semiprecious stones. It's an incredible sight at any time, but especially in the golden light of sundown and sunrise, or in moonlight. We will visit the Taj this afternoon, or early the next morning. While in Agra, we'll also tour the famous Agra Fort. Built by the Emperor Akbar, its maze of courtyards, mosques, and private chambers tell the story of the Moghul Empire. Such monuments as the Moti Masjid, the Jasmine Tower, and Itmad-ud-Daulah reflect the skills of this era's Indian architects and artists. Overnight stay at Hotel.

Day 6 : Agra - Jhansi - Orcha - Khazuraho
Morning train to Jhansi (2 hours). Upon arrival, we'll drive 45 minutes to visit the palace-fort complex at Orcha. The former capital of this region is now just a village, but the old fort on an island in the Betwa River still stands and contains Bir Singh Deo's fine palace (the Raja Mahal) and another palace built for, but never used by, the Emperor Jehangir (the Jehangir Mahal). The palaces are of impressive size and there are pleasant views of the countryside from their upper levels. We'll also visit the immense seven-story Chaturbhuj Temple and the Lakshmi Narayan Temple, which are both architecturally unusual. Continue driving to Khajuraho, known the world over for its magnificent temples with intricate, erotic carvings on the outer walls of the temples. Built between 950 and 1050 AD, 22 temples remain out of the original 85. The sensuous sculptures depict apsaras (maidens), lovers, as well as griffins, nymphs, beasts, demons, and gods. Overnight stay at Hotel.

Day 7 : Khazuraho - Varansi
Morning, sightseeing tour of the famous Chandela Dynasty Temples which are set in a lovely grassy park. These temples are really amazing - rising in many peaks and spirals, intricately carved and designed with statues and friezes. These temples are also known for their renowned erotic carvings. Afternoon flight to Varanasi. the "holy city" of Shiva, on the banks of the Ganges River. Medieval palaces tumble down to narrow streets, and the river's edge is crowded with sacred ghats (ceremonial stairs or cremation platforms) and devout pilgrims. Transfer to the hotel for check-in and lunch. In the afternoon, we'll go for a boat ride along the Ganges and, later on, witness evening Hindu ceremonies on the ghats along the holy river. Overnight stay at Hotel.

Day 8 : Varanasi - Sarnath

A walk through Varanasi is a trip through the heart of India. In the morning we'll visit the palace of the Maharaja of Varanasi, a fascinating if decaying relic of the days of the Raj. After lunch at the hotel, we visit the Buddhist complex of temples at Sarnath, where the Buddha preached his first sermon. We also visit various Hindu shrines around town and the Hindu University. Return to Varanasi for overnight. Overnight stay at Hotel. Day 9 : Varanasi - Delhi
The morning is free before flying back to Delhi, where you'll have rooms at the hotel close to the airport until 8:00 p.m. Transfer to the airport on your own for departure on homeward-bound flight. Day 10 : Delhi - Flyout Accommodation and Food:

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