



INDIA

Ganges River Cruise and Himalayas from Sundarbans to
Darjeeling

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TADOBA-ANDHARI TIGER PRESERVE PRE-TRIP

&

KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK EXTENSION

December 4 - 20, 2026
November 29 - December 6, 2026
December 18 - 24, 2026

There is something about India that makes every western visitor yearn to come back. It may be the vastness of this ancient but timeless country, or its strange and fascinating mixture of peoples and cultures. Or perhaps it is the way that humans and nature here are still so closely linked, co-existing in a way that is now foreign to so much of the western world.

Over the years, VENT has returned again and again to this captivating land, and we have developed a very special expertise in travel throughout the great Subcontinent. Our new cruise, aboard the spacious and luxurious *Ganges Voyager*, takes us from sophisticated and bustling Kolkata, renowned as the cultural capital of India, to the most extensive mangrove forest in the world, the Sundarbans, and Darjeeling, a historic and cosmopolitan city in India's far northeast. Along the way, we will visit such imposing structures as the temples of Nabakailas, comprising 108 smaller temples dedicated to the Hindu deity Shiva; colonial forts, palaces, and other monuments from the period of British rule; and the world-famous monastery of Ghoom, with its vibrant mural paintings, irreplaceable collection of religious manuscripts, and colossal statue of Maitreya Buddha.

Natural wonders also abound, and we will seek birds and other wildlife in centuries-old gardens, vast wetlands, mangrove forests, and the rhododendron groves of the Himalaya foothills. Among the many mammalian highlights for the natural historian are chances at the endangered Ganges River Dolphin and Bengal Tiger; a boat safari is the opportunity to look for Monitor Lizards and Saltwater (Estuarine) Crocodiles. And for the birder, India at this season is a veritable dream, with migrants from East Asia such as Falcated Duck, Siberian Stonechat, and White-tailed Lapwing joining a host of resident specialties ranging from splendidly colored green-pigeons to the endangered Rufous-necked Hornbill.



Falcated Duck © Kevin Zimmer

The densely interwoven tapestry of cultural wealth and flourishing wildlife India offers is unparalleled, offering rich new experiences to all of us, whether we are photographers, historians, anthropologist, travelers, or naturalists. There is no more convenient or more comfortable way to explore this land than on its waterways, above all the mighty Ganges, which flows more than 1500 miles from the western Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal.

Our floating home for seven days of our tour is the *Ganges Voyager*, a superb but still intimate ship in the luxurious tradition of India's colonial past and its vibrant present. Built in 2014, the *Ganges Voyager* accommodates 56 passengers in 28 comfortable and stylish cabins spread over three decks, decorated with precious fabrics and other refined materials. The ship's restaurant, on the main deck, serves delicious cuisine in beautiful surroundings, and the sun deck offers a lounge and bar, a small exercise space, a yoga area, and a spa. Our accommodations on land rise to the same standard of excellence as the *Voyager*, with stays in some of India's very finest hotels. Our itinerary and our accommodations are the perfect way to discover the history, venerable cultures, and delightfully welcoming people of the Indian Subcontinent.



Ganges Voyager © Exotic Journeys



Lounge, Ganges Voyager © Exotic Journeys

Those interested in an even fuller natural history experience in India should join our optional pre-trip to Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve and our optional extension to Kaziranga National Park. Our Tiger Reserve pre-trip takes us to a “jungle jewel” of dense bamboo forest with some of the highest densities of Bengal Tigers in India: the population here was recently estimated at some 80 individuals. We also have a chance here at encountering Leopards, Sloth Bears, Rusty Spotted Cats, and Four-horned Antelope, among many other exciting mammals. The bird list here runs to more than 200 species, among them the Crested Serpent-Eagle, Gray-headed Fish-Eagle, and the stunning Indian Paradise-Flycatcher.

Marvelous Kaziranga National Park, in the northeastern state of Assam, has as its centerpiece the park's large population of Indian (or Greater One-horned) Rhinoceros. In addition to a spectacular list of other mammals, including Bengal Tigers, Kaziranga is a first-rate birding locality, with the Greater Adjutant, Spot-billed Duck, and Indian Pitta among the many highlights we can hope for.

December 4–5, Days 1–2: Travel to Kolkata, India

Most flights departing North America on December 4 arrive at Kolkata's Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport (airport code CCU) in the early afternoon of December 5, typically with a connection in Europe, Delhi, or the Middle East. On your arrival in Kolkata, you will be met by a representative of our ground agent in India for the transfer from the airport to our serene and luxurious five-star hotel, in Kolkata's upscale Elipore district. A room will be reserved here in your name.

This is a long flight, and we recommend that you arrive in Kolkata a day or more in advance to allow for possible flight delays and to rest in preparation for the exciting activities of the next days. If you choose to travel to Kolkata early, the VENT office will be happy to make arrangements for lodging and transfers at an additional charge.

We will assemble on the evening of December 5th for a welcoming dinner, a chance to get to know each other and to talk about our hopes for the days ahead.

NIGHTS: Aboard aircraft en route to India (December 4)

Taj Bengal, Kolkata (December 5)

December 6, Day 3: Kolkata, and Embarkation on the *Ganges Voyager*

After breakfast in our hotel, we will check out and set forth on a driving tour of the city of Kolkata. Our baggage will be collected by our staff and delivered to the ship in anticipation of our embarking this afternoon.

Kolkata, founded in the eighteenth century by the British East India Company, served as the capital of British India until 1911, when the seat of government was moved to Delhi. Even today, the cityscape is characterized by an impressive suite of well-preserved colonial-era buildings. Among the important historical and architectural monuments on our driving route are the modestly named Writers' Building, a massive complex covering more than half a million square feet that served originally as the secretariat of the colonial government. Almost equally imposing, the nineteenth century General Post Office now also houses a postal museum; more sinisterly, it is adjacent to the site of the notorious Black Hole of Kolkata, where British prisoners were held after the 1756 siege. The Raj Bhavan, built at the very beginning of the nineteenth century on the model of a lavish English country house, is today the official residence of the governor of West Bengal. The same period saw the construction of the "new" Council House, dating to 1775, while the red-brick Treasury Building and the neogothic High Court date to a century later, at the high point of the British Empire's political and architectural domination. These buildings surround Dalhousie Square (Binoy-Badal-Dinesh Bagh), a UNESCO World Heritage site that is the most extensive and best-preserved complex of British colonial architecture anywhere in Asia.



Writers' Building, Kolkata © Tarunsamta

Kumartuli, in northern Kolkata, is home to innumerable potters and sculptors working clay they have gathered from the riverbanks. Clay idols are fashioned here for export and for use in religious festivities in private residences and in Kolkata and beyond. One of the city's best-known idols is in the Shree Digambar Jain Pareswanath Temple, a Nagar-style sacred site renovated in 1914 by the same architect responsible for Kolkata's Victoria Memorial. The figure of Tirthankara Parswanath, a ninth century B.C. preacher and theologian, rests among the temple's ornamental pillars and other sculptures.

We will have lunch in an excellent restaurant in the area, then pay a visit to the Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Botanic Garden, founded almost 250 years ago by an officer of the East India Company. The garden, occupying more than 250 acres, was first dedicated to propagating commercially valuable plants and spices; today, it's more than 12,000 specimen plantings, representing the plant life of five continents, include enormous selections of orchids, bamboos, and palms. The garden's most famous inhabitant is the Great Banyan, recognized as the largest tree in the world. The banyan's central trunk, destroyed by disease a hundred years ago, measured some fifty feet in diameter, and the surviving portions of the tree today cover more than four and a half acres.

At a time determined by tidal conditions, we will transfer to the jetty where our vessel is docked for embarkation. Our professional crew will welcome us on board, and after a brief time to settle into our staterooms, we will gather for a mandatory safety briefing before we begin our journey upstream toward Kalna.

NIGHT: Aboard the *Ganges Voyager*

December 7, Day 4: Kalna to Matiari

After arriving in Kalna this morning, we will enjoy a rickshaw ride through the city center to the enchanting temple complex of Rajbari. Rajbari has the greatest concentration of temples anywhere in the region; among them are the Nabakailas Temples, built in 1809 under the Bardhaman Maharaja. The Nabakailas complex comprises no fewer than 108 slope-roofed temples, arranged in two concentric circles of 74 and 34 structures, with a well at the center.



Shiv Temple, Kalna © Exotic Journeys

Forty years younger, the Pratapeshwar Temple, ornamented with terra cotta reliefs depicting scenes from the Hindu epics, the life of Sree Chaitanya, and daily life in the area. The oldest temples on the site are Lalji, completed in 1739, and Krishnachandra, constructed in 1751.

We will return to the ship and sail on to the coastal village of Matiari.

NIGHT: Aboard the *Ganges Voyager*

December 8, Day 5: Matiari and Purvasthali

We will arrive in Matiari this morning, then have the choice of two morning excursions, one focused more closely on natural history, in particular a very special mammal species, and the other concentrating on the arts and crafts of the town itself.

Option 1: The endangered Ganges River Dolphin is India's official National Aquatic Mammal. A freshwater species, this grayish-brown cetacean has a distinctively long and pointed snout, with sharp teeth protruding from the jawline. The dolphins eat a wide variety of fish and large aquatic invertebrates, which individuals or small pods locate by echolocation in the sediment-

rich waters of the rivers and small tributaries they inhabit. Unfortunately, these dolphins compete with people for aquatic resources, and poaching and net entanglement are among the risks facing the world population of fewer than 5000. Significant levels of pollution are released into their freshwater habitats every year as well, killing dolphins directly and indirectly, by poisoning their prey. On our boat safari this morning, coupled with some walking along the riverbanks, we also have a chance at finding a variety of wading birds.

Option 2: The shoreside village of Mataria is famous for its beautifully handcrafted brass objects. Using traditional methods passed down through untold generations, the village's master craftsmen fashion recycled copper into extraordinary pots, platters, and other vessels and ornaments. Our leisurely morning walk will take us right to the workshops, where we can watch as some of the most famous of these highly skilled artisans create their works.



Ganges River Dolphin © Katwa Shankhai Ghat

After lunch, we will take a 30–45-minute walk through the villages to Purvasthali Bird Sanctuary. Every year, many thousands of birds from Europe and central Asia descend on the sanctuary's large oxbow lake, which just forty years ago was still part of the meandering channel of the Bhagirathi-Hooghly River, a tributary of the mighty Ganges in West Bengal. The crystal-clear waters of the lake, Chupi Char, and its cluster of small islands sprawl across an area of nearly two square miles, providing a winter home to more than 100 species of resident and wintering birds. Photographers have made this one of the most famous winter wildlife localities in India, but in spite of its well-earned popularity, Purvasthali remains a serene destination for birds and their watchers alike. Bronze-winged and Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, Black-headed Ibis, Asian Openbill Storks, and Marsh Sandpipers are some of the specialties

here among the noisy hordes of Lesser Whistling Ducks and lapwings. This amazing abundance once proved irresistible to hunters and poachers, but fifteen years ago, a local organization, Kasthashali Banabithi, recognized the site's potential as a natural history tourism destination. Today, birders, botanists, and photographers contribute significantly to the economy of the neighboring villages, confirming the sanctuary's value not only to the birds but to the people who live with them.



Pheasant-tailed Jacana © Exotic Journeys

After our visit to the bird sanctuary, we will return to the ship and continue our cruise.

NIGHT: Aboard the *Ganges Voyager*

December 9, Day 6: Purvasthali to Mayapur and Namkhana

After breakfast this morning, we will continue to sail downstream, observing local life along the banks of the mighty river, then stop in the village of Mayapur. Mayapur was the birthplace in 1486 of Sri Chaitanya Maha Prabhu, considered an incarnation of Lord Krishna. Today, it is the headquarters of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness. ISKCON's new temple here, largely funded by Alfred B. Ford, grandson of Henry Ford, rivals the Vatican in size. We will make time for a stroll through the colorful pilgrim's bazaar.

We will return to the *Ganges Voyager* for lunch, then sail toward Namkhana, gateway to Sundarbans National Park and its mangrove forest on the Bay of Bengal, the most extensive in the world. Our route this afternoon takes us past a number of imposing colonial-era structures and monuments, among them Raichak and Mornington Forts, constructed to guard the harbors and rivers from pirates.

Diamond Harbor was an important steamer stop. Of particular note is Falta's Bose Bigyan Mandir, the home of the famous Bengali scientist and polymath Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose. The Cambridge-educated Bose's accomplishments included pioneering work in radio and microwaves, botany, and metallurgy, and he was the author of one of the earliest works of Bengali science fiction. He was the founder and first director of the namesake Bose Institute, one of India's premier facilities for the study of physics, chemistry, biology, and environmental science.

NIGHT: Aboard the *Ganges Voyager*

December 10, Day 7: Namkhana, Sundarbans, and Bali Island

This morning will find us at Bhagabatpur Island, a sanctuary and breeding facility dedicated to research, education, and the preservation of the magnificent Saltwater (Estuarine) Crocodile. The well-maintained path through the sanctuary will give us not only a privileged glimpse into the life of this rare reptile, but also many chances to observe and admire the diversity of plants and birds that thrive in the island's rich ecosystem. Photographic opportunities are excellent in this serene setting among the lush mangroves.

We will continue our voyage to Bali Island, one of the best starting points for an exploration of the Sundarbans and the mangrove forest.

The Sundarbans mangrove forest, one of the largest such forests in the world, covers more than 300,000 acres of the deltas of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna Rivers as they empty into the Bay of Bengal. Designated a World Heritage Site in 1987, the area is crisscrossed by a complex network of tidal waterways, mudflats, and small islands of salt-tolerant mangrove forest. In constant ecological flux, this fascinating area is famous for the vast variety of animals that live here, including the Bengal Tiger, Saltwater Crocodile, and Indian Python. Among the many sought-after bird species here are the Gray-headed Lapwing, Lesser Adjutant, Pallas's Fish-Eagle, and Buffy Fish Owl; there are even winter records of the rare and vanishing Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

We will return to our ship for dinner and a relaxed evening on board.



Saltwater (Estuarine) Crocodile © Dr. Vinod Kumar

NOTE: After dinner, we will enter the brackish waters of the Sundarbans, and the ship's water supply may be regulated for the next day until we reach Bali Island.

NIGHT: Aboard the *Ganges Voyager*

December 11, Day 8: Sundarbans

We will continue our exploration of Sundarbans National Park this morning, with our precise starting time depending on the tides. Maximizing our opportunities for wildlife sightings and photography, our safari boats will take us through narrow creeks and canals to watch towers where we will search for Bengal Tigers, Leopard Cats, Spotted Deer, Monitor Lizards, Wild Boars, and Saltwater Crocodiles.

The birdlife here can be downright astonishing. The nearly 250 species recorded in the national park include a wide variety of winter birds and migrants from the north: herons, cormorants, darters, storks, spoonbills, geese, and ducks. Among the resident birds are no fewer than eight kingfisher species, from the massive Stork-billed and Pied Kingfishers to the diminutive Common Kingfisher; raptors we will be looking for include the Brahminy Kite and Changeable Hawk-Eagle.

NIGHT: Aboard the *Ganges Voyager*



Stork-billed Kingfisher © Andrew Whittaker

December 12, Day 9: Sundarbans

Again today we will board smaller boats for the trip into the mangroves, our destination this time the observation towers of Sudhanyakhali and Dobanki. The Sudhanyakhali tower overlooks the vastness of the mangrove forest and a small freshwater pond, both habitats that can attract a wide range of migrant and resident birds and other wildlife. Bengal Tigers, Fishing Cats, Wild Boars, Monitor Lizards, and Saltwater Crocodiles are some of the larger animals we will be on the lookout for, while birds here can include Indian Pond-Heron, Asian Green Bee-eater, and Oriental Magpie-Robin. An early start will be to our advantage here, as many of the shyer species withdraw as the day goes on.

The tower at Dobanki connects to a quarter-mile canopy walkway some 20 feet above the ground, letting us move with the wildlife below and peer into the foliage to discover new plants. As at Sudhanyakhali, the forest is punctuated with small freshwater pools, which attract an impressive range

of birds and mammals. This is a good site for Brahminy Kites, and it is not unheard of to get to watch a Bengal Tiger hunting below us.

We will return to the ship for lunch, then enjoy a casual walk through the village of Bali. We will be able to watch and talk to local artisans as they create beautiful handicraft objects, and it may be possible to visit a private home. The hard work of the Bali Nature and Wildlife Conservation Society and of the Wildlife Protection Society of India to support the communities living around the reserve here has encouraged the villagers to view wildlife and its environment as a cultural and economic asset rather than a threat—even the tigers.

Back on board the ship, we will enjoy a final convivial dinner and prepare for the next segments of our tour.

NIGHT: Aboard the *Ganges Voyager*



Oriental Magpie-Robin © Exotic Journeys

December 13, Day 10: Sundarbans to Kolkata, and Flight to Bagdogra

We will reluctantly disembark this morning and be transferred by boat to the jetty, where we will begin our four-hour journey by road to Kolkata to board the seventy-minute IndiGo flight to Bagdogra. Once

in Bagdogra, it is a quick half hour drive to our beautiful and welcoming hotel in the stunning Himalayan foothills of Siliguri.

NIGHT: Mayfair Tea Resort, Siliguri

December 14, Day 11: A Day of Birding: Latpanchar or Upper Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary

Our time in the Himalayan foothills begins in immersive fashion with a focus on birding. Today, we present our guests with two excursion options for birding: one a full day at Latpanchar, the other a half-day outing to Upper Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary.

Option 1: We will start the day early with a packed breakfast and a drive into the beautiful foothills above the Tista River. We will make our way in SUVs to the small forest village of Latpanchar, perched at an elevation of 4,500 feet above sea level about two and a half hours from Siliguri. Set in gorgeous scenery and offering wonderful views in all directions, Latpanchar is a paradise for naturalists. The 250 bird species recorded in the immediate area include Himalayan Griffon, the endangered Rufous-necked Hornbill, Red-headed Trogon, Long-tailed Broadbill, Greater Yellowthroat, Green Shrike-Babbler, Gray Tree-Pie, Sultan Tit, the shy Hill Partridge, and Pin-tailed and Wedge-tailed green-pigeons among many others. After a full day at Trogon Point and along the Nursery Birding Trail, we will make the return drive of two and a half hours to the hotel for dinner. Please note that this will be a long day in the field.



Long-tailed Broadbill © Krishna Prajapati/Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International

Option 2: About 90 minutes from our hotel is Upper Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary. Established in the late 1950s to protect the Bengal Tiger and Indian Bison (Gaur), Mahananda preserves more than 60 square miles of subtropical pine and broadleaf forest, at elevations from 400 to nearly 5,000 feet. In addition to its signature large mammal species, the sanctuary also offers a home to Barking Deer, Fishing Cats, and Spotted Deer. Among the tremendous diversity of birds here are the Great and Oriental hornbills, Green Magpie, Maroon Oriole, and Sapphire Flycatcher. Mahananda is particularly well known among birders for its diversity of woodpeckers: we have a chance at the Rufous, both Greater and Lesser Yellownapes, and—most spectacular of all—the Greater Flameback. Mahananda is also an important site for wintering passerines from northern and eastern Asia; among the rare species we will be keeping a sharp eye out for are the Siberian Blue Robin and Siberian Rubythroat, two exceptionally beautiful chat species that winter here in the sanctuary. At midday, we will make the return drive, 90 minutes, to the hotel, where we will spend the afternoon birding in the lovely Tea Garden before joining the other group for dinner and an evening together.

NIGHT: Mayfair Tea Resort, Siliguri

December 15, Day 12: Siliguri and Darjeeling

This season finds birds from all over eastern Asia traveling to the Himalayan foothills to winter. This morning we will leave the hotel with a packed breakfast to visit the Gajoldoba Barrage in search of Falcated Duck, Common Shelduck, Great Crested Grebe, Sand Lark, and four species of large and flashy plovers: the White-tailed, Gray-headed, Northern, and River lapwings. The area is equally rich in resident specialties, among them the glistening Purple Sunbird, White-capped Redstart, and Rufous Tree-Pie. With almost 350 species on its list, Gajoldoba is the kind of place where virtually anything can show up. We will bird from traditional boats, powered by bamboo poles, then walk along the embankment of the reservoir.



Purple Sunbird © Exotic Journeys

We will return to the hotel for lunch, then drive 45 miles to Darjeeling, with birding stops along the way selected in consultation with local experts. Straight through, the drive would take about three hours, but we will keep a leisurely pace and devote much of the afternoon to the pleasant and scenic journey, which will likely end up taking about four hours.

NIGHT: Mayfair Hill Resort

December 16, Day 13: Darjeeling

After breakfast in our hotel, we again have the choice of two itinerary options the day: one in Darjeeling that combines history, culture, and birding; and the other an all-day birding trip to Singalila National Park on the border with Nepal.

Option 1: After breakfast, we will take an expertly guided tour of two of Darjeeling's most distinguished research organizations, Darjeeling Zoo and the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute. We will learn about the zoo's impressive breeding programs for Red Pandas and other threatened animal species; the grounds here also offer opportunities for some birding. Nearby is the Himalayan Mountain Institute, founded in 1954, following the first successful attempt on Mount Everest. In addition to exhibits on the history of alpinism in the Himalayas, the institute also trains climbers from all around the world as they prepare to face their own montane challenges. After lunch, we will drive about 45 minutes to the Japanese Pagoda. Built under the direction of the Japanese Buddhist Nichidatsu Fujii, this structure rises almost a hundred feet into the air; its purpose is to encourage those who visit to strive for worldwide peace. Afterward, we plan to walk about two and a half miles on the forested Japanese Temple Road in search of such regional highlights as the Gray-headed Canary-Flycatcher, White-throated and Yellow-bellied Fairy Fantails, and the wonderful Himalayan Bluetail. We will return to our hotel for dinner.

Option 2: This full-day excursion takes us to Singalila National Park by way of Sukhia Pokhari and Manebhanjyang. After an early breakfast, we will drive two and a half hours to Manebhanjyang; along the way, we will stop at Sukhia Pokhari for some roadside birding, hoping to find Scarlet and Long-tailed Minivets, Blue-winged Minla, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, and perhaps a Bay Woodpecker or Crested Serpent-Eagle. At Manebhanjyang, we will switch to 4x4 vehicles for the remaining hour and a half drive to Singalila. This national park, in the extreme northwest corner of West Bengal, on the border with Nepal, preserves prime habitat for the Red Panda, with thick bamboo, oak, and rhododendron forest covering the ridges at altitudes between 6500 and 12,000 feet. In clear conditions, there are excellent views over the valleys to

Kanchendzonga, the sacred mountain of the Sikkimese and the third highest peak in the world. Birding here can produce such colorful beauties as the Kalij Pheasant, Green-backed Tit, Himalayan Bluetail, and a fine selection of rosefinches. Raptors may include the Himalayan Buzzard or the Eurasian Goshawk, recently re-split from the American Goshawk. At the end of our outing, we will make the return drive to our hotel for dinner.

EXCURSION NOTE: Participants on this outing should expect cold weather. We will go over a pass at 10,000 feet elevation. Accordingly, please be prepared with clothing suitable for potentially freezing conditions. Also, this excursion presents an opportunity to see a range of special birds, but please take note that the diversity at this season is lower than in the summer months.



Yellow-billed Blue-Magpie © Exotic Journeys

NOTE: In the Darjeeling area, on clear days you can see Mount Everest and other high peaks including Kanchenjunga, the third highest peak in the world.

NIGHT: Mayfair Hill Resort

December 17, Day 14: Darjeeling, Ghoom, and Senchal Wildlife Sanctuary

Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, constructed between 1879 and 1881 to connect Darjeeling with New Jalpaiguri, was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999. We will ride the narrow-gauge train to Ghoom (Ghum) this morning to visit Yiga Choeling (Ghoom Monastery) and its famous statue of the Maitreya Buddha. Ghoom belongs to the Yellow Hat, or Gelugpa, sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Among the artworks held here is a 15-foot statue of Maitreya, a successor to Gautama Buddha who in Buddhist tradition will appear on Earth at some point in the future, where he will attain perfect enlightenment and teach pure dharma—righteousness—to a world that has forgotten it. The monastery's library also holds a large collection of invaluable scriptural manuscripts, including the 108 volumes of the Kangyur, said to transmit the words spoken by the Buddha himself. The interior walls of the monastery preserve fantastic examples of Tibetan mural painting.



Yiga Choeling Bernard Gagnon/Wikimedia Commons Attribution-Share 4.0

Note that the timing of our train ride will be confirmed closer to the date, as schedules on the DHR change frequently.

We will continue our day with a visit to Tiger Hill and Senchal Wildlife Sanctuary, an ideal picnic spot in a picturesque landscape with scenic views of the mountains. Surrounded by greenery, the sanctuary

and Senchal Lake are only about seven miles from Darjeeling, and home to such sought-after birds as the elusive Hill Partridge, Blue-winged and Red-tailed minas, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, and a whole suite of handsome laughingthrushes, including Black-faced, Chestnut-crowned, Spotted, White-throated, and Gray-sided. Tiger Hill, rising to a lofty 8500 feet in elevation, offers panoramic views of both Everest and Kanchenjunga.

We will be back in Darjeeling for a relaxing dinner and night in our historic luxury hotel.

NIGHT: Mayfair Hill Resort

December 18, Day 15: Darjeeling to Bagdogra & Flight to Kolkata

We'll get an early start on this, our last day of the main tour. We will check out of our hotel after breakfast and leave at 7:30 am to drive to Bagdogra, stopping along the way at the Hotel Four Vedas for a delicious vegetarian lunch. After lunch, we will drive the remaining half hour to Siliguri's Bagdogra Airport, where those returning home will take an afternoon IndiGo flight to Kolkata. The flight is only a little more than an hour, leaving us plenty of time to check in to our airport hotel. Late that evening or early the next morning, we will have a transfer to Kolkata's international airport.

Those continuing to Kaziranga National Park on our optional post-tour extension will leave Bagdogra this evening for Guwahati, the capital of the state of Assam.

NIGHT: Taj Newtown, Kolkata

December 19, Day 16: Departures from Kolkata

Many flights from Kolkata (CCU) bound for the US depart in the very early morning, arriving in the US on the same calendar date or the next day.

December 20, Day 17: Arrivals in the USA

While some flights from Kolkata to the US may arrive December 19, others arrive early the next day, December 20.

TADOBA–ANDHARI TIGER PRESERVE PRE-TRIP NOVEMBER 29–DECEMBER 6, 2026



Bengal Tiger © Exotic Journeys

Our Tiger Reserve pre-trip takes us to a “jungle jewel” of dense bamboo forest with some of the highest densities of Bengal Tigers in India: the population here was recently estimated at some 80 individuals. We also have a chance here at encountering Leopards, Sloth Bears, Rusty Spotted Cats, and Four-horned Antelope, among many other exciting mammals. Not to be outdone, the bird list here runs to more than 200 species, among them the Crested Serpent-Eagle, Gray-headed Fish-Eagle, and the stunning Indian Paradise-Flycatcher.

November 29–30, Days 1–2: Travel to Delhi, India

Most flights leaving the USA on Day 1, November 29, will arrive the next afternoon, November 30, Day 2, at Delhi’s Indira Ghandi International Airport (airport code DEL). On your arrival on November 30,

you will be met at the airport for the transfer to the Radisson Blu Plaza Hotel where a room is reserved in your name. This evening we will gather in the hotel for a group welcome and orientation followed by dinner.

NIGHTS: Aboard international flight to Delhi (November 29)

Radisson Blu Plaza Hotel, Delhi Airport (November 30)

December 1, Day 3: Delhi to Nagpur and the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve

After breakfast in our hotel, we will return to the airport for the two-hour IndiGo flight to Nagpur. Once in Nagpur, we will drive approximately two hours to Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. After lunch together, you will have the afternoon at your leisure for exploration or rest. We will gather again for dinner in our lodge.

NIGHT: Svasara Jungle Lodge, Tadoba

December 2–4, Days 4–6: The Tiger Reserve by Jeep

We will have two exciting game drives on each of these days through the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, one after breakfast and the other after lunch. Tadoba is a true jewel among India's tiger reserves and national parks. The oldest and largest national park in the state of Maharashtra, it was founded in 1955 and merged with Andhari Wildlife Sanctuary forty years later; today, the combined reserve covers more than 220 square miles of forest, home not just to the eponymous tigers but also a tantalizing selection of other large wildlife species, among them Leopards, Sloth Bears, and Gaur, or Indian Bison. At the other end of the size spectrum are the Indian Mouse Deer, or Chevrotain, and the Giant Brown Flying Squirrel—at 3.5 pounds, the squirrel is actually more than half the weight of the diminutive deer! In addition, Tadoba Lake hosts a healthy population of Mugger (Marsh) Crocodiles, a species listed as vulnerable by the IUCN.

The Bengal Tigers are the real wildlife stars here. An estimated 88 individuals live here, hunting their prey through the vast bamboo forests. These huge cats can weigh up to 550 pounds, maintaining that weight on a diet that includes everything from Gaur—the world’s largest bovid—to hares. Inevitably in a country as densely populated as India, they also come into conflict and competition with humans, occasionally taking domestic livestock and even, in extreme circumstances, attacking and killing humans. Though India’s tigers enjoy legal protection, poaching remains a source of peril, as does habitat loss resulting from farming and settlement. Tadoba-Andhari is famous as one of the best sites in the world to see these magnificent predators, and our jeep drives give us good chances at a tiger sighting.

While the big mammals may be the primary draw, the reserve also provides a home to more than 200 bird species. Raptors are common here, and we will be keeping a sharp eye out for Oriental Honey-buzzards, Gray-headed Fish-Eagles, Crested Serpent-Eagles, and Changeable Hawk-Eagles. Among the colorful smaller birds are the Orange-headed Thrush, Indian Pitta, Indian Paradise-Flycatcher, and Black-rumped Flameback, a dramatic woodpecker clad in green and red. Indian Peafowl are also among the possibilities.

NIGHTS: Svasara Jungle Lodge, Tadoba

December 5, Day 7: Tadoba to Kolkata

Provisioned with packed breakfasts prepared by our lodge, we will set out on an early drive to Nagpur, where we will catch an early flight to Kolkata. We are scheduled to arrive in Kolkata at 9:00 am, followed by the transfer to our hotel, the Taj Bengal, where we will have time to rest and relax before meeting up with the participants on the main tour over a welcome dinner in the hotel.

NIGHT: Taj Bengal, Kolkata

KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK EXTENSION

DECEMBER 18–24, 2026



Greater One-horned Rhinoceros © Brian Gibbons

Our post-tour extension to marvelous Kaziranga National Park, in the northeastern state of Assam, has as its centerpiece the park's large population of Indian (or Greater One-horned) Rhinoceros. But here on the banks of the mighty Brahmaputra River, the marshes, reedbeds, gallery woodlands, and lowland subtropical forests teem with birds and mammals, which we will view over the course of our three days by jeep and possibly on elephant-back. The park's spectacular list of mammals includes Sloth Bears, Asian Elephants, Hoolock Gibbons, Hog Badgers, Leopards, Jungle Cats, and Gaur or Indian Bison (Gaur); even the Bengal Tiger is a possibility. The opportunities here for photographers are outstanding.

Kaziranga is also a first-rate birding locality, with hundreds of resident and wintering species, some of them threatened or endangered. Among the waterfowl, we will be looking in particular for Bar-headed Geese and Falcated Ducks; long-legged waders are represented by Black-necked Storks, Greater Adjutants, and Cinnamon Bitterns. Overhead, we may see soaring Spot-billed Pelicans, Oriental Honey-buzzards, Himalayan Griffons, Brahminy Kites, or Pallas's and Gray-headed fish-eagles. Swamp Francolins, Bengal Floricans, Great Hornbills, and Red-headed Trogons may also make their way onto our impressive tally. All told, our visit to Kaziranga offers a precious glimpse of what wild Asia must once have looked like.

December 18, Day 1: Flight from Bagdogra to Guwahati

We will leave Darjeeling after breakfast for the drive to Bagdogra airport, then board a 65-minute SpiceJet flight that will take us to Guwahati, the capital of Assam. We will be met by our local agents on arrival this afternoon, when we will check in at our Guwahati hotel and assemble for dinner as a group.

NIGHT: Radisson Blu Hotel, Guwahati

December 19, Day 2: Guwahati to Kaziranga National Park

After breakfast in our hotel, we will set out on the 4-1/2-hour drive to Kaziranga. Our route parallels the course of the mighty Brahmaputra River, where rich alluvial deposits left by summer floods have created an emerald-green agricultural landscape, its well-kept rice fields plowed by domestic Water Buffalo reminiscent of tropical Southeast Asia. At this time of the year, the temperature will be pleasantly warm to occasionally cool. We will take the entire morning to reach the park, perhaps with a brief stop or two along the way for birds and mammals. Some of the species we may see on our drive include the globally endangered Greater Adjutant, Asian Openbill, Pied Harrier, Asian Palm-Swift, Pied and White-throated kingfishers, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Red-breasted Parakeet, Large Cuckooshrike, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Chestnut-tailed Starling, and Indian Silverbill.



Greater Adjutant © Dion Hobcroft

We will arrive at our luxurious lodge, in the very center of the park, at mid-day, and enjoy lunch in one of its fine restaurants before taking the first of our exciting game drives by jeep, one of the only permitted modes of access to the national park (see Pre-trip and Extension Information, below). Kaziranga is home to the world's largest population of the single-horned Indian Rhinoceros, totaling about 2200 individuals, or two thirds of the global number. Until quite recently, poaching remained the direst threat to this massive creature, even in the national park. The rhino was illegally hunted virtually to extinction for trophies and for use in traditional Chinese medicine, but the efforts of government rangers and local conservation groups have reduced annual losses to effectively zero, and this is now the only rhinoceros species that is believed to be on the very slow increase in numbers. The rhinos, too, have done their small part: curiously, the greatly desired horns appear to be shrinking in response to poaching, which has always disproportionately targeted individuals with the largest horns.

Our first sighting of a rhinoceros will leave us thoroughly awestruck: these animals can stand more than six feet tall at the shoulder and weigh more than two tons. These mighty beasts are not alone in the park, of course, and among the other mega-mammals we'll be hoping to encounter are Indian Elephants, Indian Bison (Gaur), Swamp and Hog Deer, Sloth Bears, Bengal Tigers, Capped Langurs, Hoolock Gibbons, and many more. Add to that an imposing bird list, and our first afternoon in Kaziranga is bound to be nothing short of breathtaking.

NIGHT: Iora—The Retreat, Kaziranga

December 20–21, Days 3–4: Kaziranga National Park

As our experience yesterday afternoon made abundantly clear, Kaziranga is one of South Asia's truly great wildlife sanctuaries. Encompassing an area of approximately 300 square miles, it boasts a wonderful array of habitats, ranging from vast grasslands interspersed with lagoons and marshes along the Brahmaputra to monsoon woodlands alive with flowering *Erythrina* trees and rich lowland subtropical forests at the foot of the Panbari Hills. We will devote both of these days to exploring and enjoying this magnificent park and its profusion of wildlife. The birding will be outstanding, but a visit to Kaziranga is about more than the birds: it is a full natural history experience and a compelling glimpse into the amazing wilderness that covered the subcontinent so long ago.



Great Hornbill © Dion Hobcroft

Our morning and afternoon game drives (one of which may be conducted on elephant-back) will be sandwiched between excellent meals at our lodge. Iora has two restaurants, one specializing in the many regional cuisines of Assam, the other serving a wide range of Indian and international foods.

Our game drives on these two days, by jeep or on elephant-back, will lead us to many more encounters with the park's amazing mammal fauna—but the birding in this wildlife paradise is every bit as impressive. Among the fine variety of wintering waterfowl, we may see the handsome Bar-headed Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, and Falcated Duck. Long-legged waders are just as well represented, with Black-necked Stork and Greater and Lesser adjutants among the standouts; all three of those species are globally threatened. Ground-dwelling species such as the Swamp Francolin, Kalij and the noisy but elusive Gray Peacock-Pheasants, and Bengal Florican are also among the good possibilities, while raptors may include Red-necked Falcons and Greater Spotted, Tawny, and perhaps Steppe eagles. Among the many colorful species found here are the Orange-breasted Green-Pigeon, Green Imperial-Pigeon, Red-headed Trogon, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Blue-throated Barbet, Blossom-headed and Red-breasted parakeets, and the almost impossibly exquisite Asian Fairy-bluebird. Perhaps most impressive of all are the Wreathed and Great hornbills, the latter a truly magnificent bird, the largest of all arboreal hornbills. The list goes on and on: it can be hard sometimes to know where to look.

NIGHTS: Iora—The Retreat, Kaziranga

December 22, Day 5: Kaziranga to Kolkata, and departures

As time and permitting processes allow, we hope to be able to make one last early morning game drive. Hard as it will be to tear ourselves away from this paradisiacal place, we will leave after breakfast for the drive to Jorhat airport, where we will catch the early afternoon flight to Kolkata. We should land in Kolkata about 4:30 pm, then transfer to our hotel, the Taj City Centre New Town, where we have reserved rooms for the evening or the night, depending on your flight departure time.

Depending on your final destination, flights depart Kolkata (CCU) in the late evening of December 22 or the very early morning of December 23. If you are departing late in the evening on December 22, you will remain at Kolkata (CCU) until your flight departs. Those with early morning flights on December 23 will transfer to the Kolkata airport to check in and begin their journey home.

EVENING/NIGHT: Taj City Centre New Town, Kolkata

December 23, Day 6: Departures

An early morning transfer will take the rest of our group to the Kolkata airport to begin their journey home. For those taking later flights or planning to extend their stay in India, our hotel accommodation will be available until noon today.

December 24, Day 7: Arrival in the USA

Most flights from India will arrive in the USA today.

Essential Tour Information

TOUR SIZE: We have reserved 23 suites exclusively for VENT travelers on the main and upper decks of the 56-passenger *Ganges Voyager*. Our Ganges River Cruise and Himalayas main tour is limited to 35 participants; both the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Pre-trip and the Kaziranga National Park Extension are limited to 12 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: The Ganges River Cruise and Himalayas main tour is led by **Barry Lyon, Brian Gibbons, Scott Baker, Rafael Galvez** and **Raj Singh**. The Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Pre-trip will be led by **Brian Gibbons** and a local leader, while our Kaziranga National Park Extension will be led by **Scott Baker** and a local leader.



Barry Lyon's passion for the outdoors and birding has its roots in his childhood in southern California. During his teenage years, he attended several VENT/ABA youth birding camps, which ultimately led to his involvement with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. He holds a B.A. from the University of Arizona at Tucson, where he studied history and political science, with an emphasis on environment and development politics. Barry joined the VENT team as a tour leader in 1995, embarking on a travel-based career that has taken him to an array of destinations worldwide. He has lived in Austin, Texas, since 2004,

when he joined our office staff as an administrative assistant. In 2014 he was named Chief Operating Officer (COO), reflecting his increased experience and responsibilities. In 2023, Barry assumed the role of Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Although Barry still leads two or three trips a year, these days his work is geared almost entirely toward business, customer relations, and the management of the company. Barry's background and his knowledge of natural history have given him a strong interest in conservation. He is a former board member and past president of Travis Audubon Society, which emphasizes conservation through birding and outdoor education for children. Barry lives in South Austin with his wife, Brooke Smith.



Brian Gibbons grew up in suburban Dallas, where he began exploring the wild world in local creeks and parks. Chasing butterflies and any animal unfortunate enough to cross paths with the Gibbons boys occupied his childhood. A wooden bird feeder kit sparked a flame that was stoked by a gift of the *Golden Guide* and family camping trips to Texas state parks. Thirty years ago, Brian attended two VENT camps for young birders. Birds are now his primary interest, but all things wild continue to captivate him. After college, Brian undertook a variety of field biology research jobs that have taken him to the

Caribbean, the Bering Sea, and the land of the midnight sun, arctic Alaska. He enjoys working with kids, hoping to spark environmental awareness through birds. For many years, Brian's field research has involved bird banding. His most amazing recoveries were a female Wilson's Warbler that had been banded in Alaska and was captured by Brian in Colorado, and a Sooty Tern that perished after a hurricane on the Texas coast; it had plied the Gulf of Mexico and the oceans of the world for 24 years. Brian's recreational bird-seeking has taken him to Machu Picchu in Peru, the Great Wall in China, the plains of East Africa, and the Himalayas in Nepal. Brian leads birding trips in the United States, Central America, the Caribbean, Asia, South Africa, and Europe. As well as being a fanatical birder, he loves capturing birds with photography. He lives in Tucson, Arizona, with his wife, Lacreia Johnson, and their son, Grayson.



Scott Baker's interest in wildlife began early on, while he was growing up in the leafy eastern suburbs of Melbourne, a highly urbanized environment that nevertheless retained significant tracts of natural woodland. It was at the age of 11 that he got his first pair of binoculars and began what was to become a lifetime quest to identify all the birds in an ever-expanding neighborhood. By the age of 15, he was running weekly bird walks and giving talks, and he became a founding member of the very successful Yarran Dheran Junior Field Naturalists Club. In 1988, he was named the Nunawading Young Citizen of the Year in recognition of his

contribution to natural history and conservation. Pursuing complementary interests in life science

and fine arts, Scott went on to hold various roles in business, education, and environmental consultancy. This has given him opportunities to explore the wild places and wildlife of Australia and beyond. In 30 plus years, he has traveled extensively throughout the continent, with a major focus on birds. He loves the rare and sometimes challenging, cryptic varieties, but also shorebirds and seabirds, having spent many days at sea. To date he has recorded (and photographed) almost all of the regular and resident land birds and pelagic species likely in tAustralia. Scott has a passion for all wildlife, not just birds, and conducts studies and regular surveys for mammals, reptiles, and frogs. His fieldwork often involves nocturnal spotlighting sessions, requiring late nights and early mornings to maximize the “tetrapod” options. Scott is a well-regarded member of the Australian birding community and a moderator for several birdwatching forums and rare bird committees. He has been conducting birdwatching and nature tours in Australia and southeast Asia since 2017. Scott currently lives in Victoria.



Rafael Galvez has been birding and illustrating birds since childhood, a dual passion that developed when his family moved from Peru to South Florida. Always with a sketchpad in hand, he has traveled throughout the U.S., Latin America, and Eurasia in pursuit of birds. He served several years as a board member of the BirdLife International affiliate in the Republic of Georgia, developing educational and conservation programs. He gained knowledge of the Caucasus region while directing a series of records and documentary shorts on the ancient chants of the Georgian nation. During that

period he also produced retrospective books and catalogs on the works of Russian realist painters. He has combined his love of art, education, and birds while collaborating in several publications, including a field guide to Raptors and Owls of Georgia (Caucasus), which he illustrated and coauthored. After working with raptor research along the Black Sea, he returned to South Florida to spearhead a new phase for the Florida Keys Hawkwatch migration monitoring project, where he has participated as director. As chair of citizen science and IBA monitoring at Tropical Audubon Society in Miami, he has reached out to underserved communities by providing opportunities for the greater appreciation of birds and Florida habitats. Currently, he lives in Homestead, spends much time in the Everglades, serves on the Florida Ornithological Society’s Records Committee, and is on the Leica

Sport Optics Pro Staff. He loves sharing his passion for birds with audiences of all ages, and has been a guide and teacher for over 15 years. You can find some of his latest sketches and articles about painting in the field at his blog, GalvezBirds.com.



Raj Singh, born in Bharatpur, Rajasthan, is a distinguished ornithologist, fellow of the Royal Geographic Society, and inveterate world traveler. His first passion in life is wildlife conservation, and his knowledge of natural history is unsurpassed. He also has a fascination with India's history, culture, and cuisine. A descendant of India's royal Kshatriya family from Bharatpur, Raj is the author of *Bird and Wildlife Sanctuaries of India, Nepal, and Bhutan*, and of *Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent*.

TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: *Ganges Voyager* accommodates 56 passengers in 28 comfortable and stylish cabins spread over three decks:

Signature Cabin: **\$17,995** (single occupancy is \$21,790)

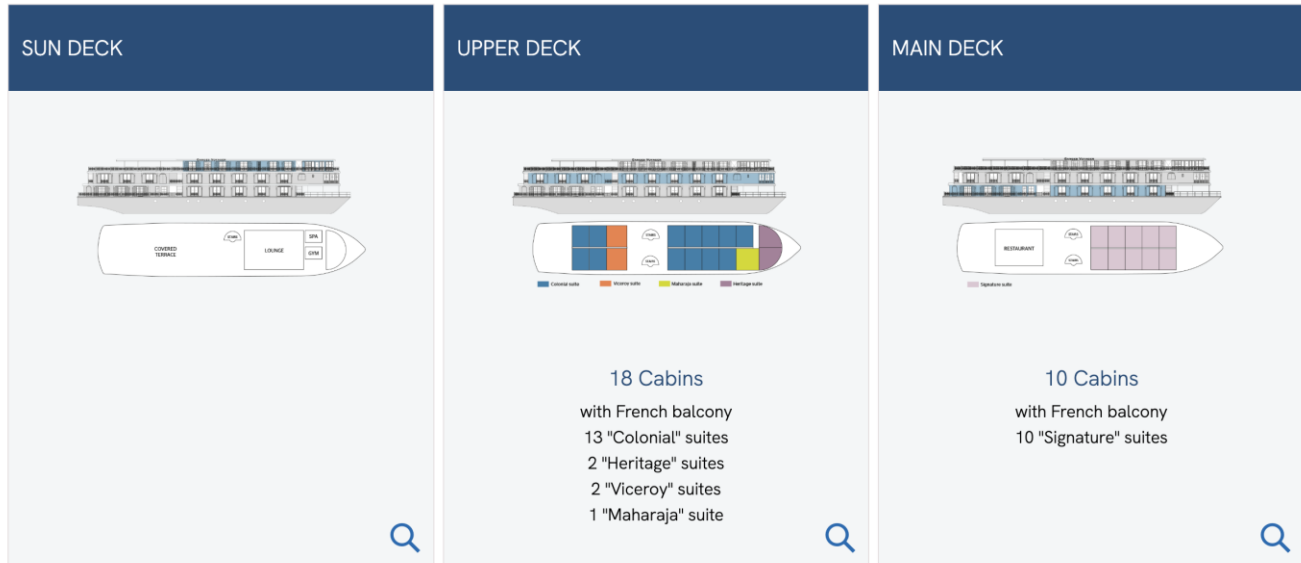
Colonial Cabins: **\$18,695** (single occupancy is \$22,640)

Heritage Suites: **\$19,595**

Viceroy Suites: **\$20,395**

Maharaja Suite: **\$20,995**

Quoted prices are per person in double occupancy. Single occupancy is available in Signature and Colonial cabins only. All cabins aboard the *Ganges Voyager* feature individually controlled air conditioning and en-suite bathrooms with shower. Cabins will be booked on a first-come-first-served basis.



RV Ganges Voyager

Length: 183 feet

Width: 41 feet

Year of construction: 2014

Number of passengers: 56

Number of crew: 35

Main Tour/Ganges River Cruise: Included in your tour fee are all hotel and shipboard accommodations as indicated in the itinerary, all shore excursions during the cruise, internal flights, the services of your VENT leaders and local guides, any pilot boat charges or passenger service fees, entrance fees, and group transfers in deluxe air-conditioned coaches to and from the port of embarkation and disembarkation in Kolkata. Also included are all meals (with vegetarian options), beginning with dinner on Day 2 and ending with dinner on Day 15; Indian-brand soft drinks, alcoholic beverages with meals, regular teas and coffee, and mineral water are included throughout the cruise. In addition, your cruise fee covers tips and gratuities for hotel staff, porters, local guides, ship staff and crew, and local drivers.

The tour fee does *not* include hotel accommodation before Day 2 or after Day 15, international flights to/from Kolkata, personal expenditures such as telephone or internet costs, tips and gratuities for our Indian escort and (optionally) your VENT leaders, travel insurance, excess baggage charges, any airport departure fees, fuel surcharges, or other items not indicated in this itinerary as included.

Tadoba-Andhari Pre-trip: The fee for the Tiger Reserve pre-trip is **\$3,895** in double occupancy from Delhi and to Kolkata or **\$4,545** for a person requiring single accommodation. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 6, alcoholic beverages with meals, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation by deluxe coach in Delhi and by Innova/jeep in Nagpur and Tadoba during the tour, internal flights, park admission fees and still photography fees, Indian-brand mineral water during long drives and park visits, the guide services of a local residential naturalist and your VENT leaders, and tips and gratuities. The fee does *not* include the international flight to Delhi, video photography fees, or any expenses of a personal nature such as telephone and fax costs, internet usage fees, or laundry.

Kaziranga National Park Extension: The fee for the Kaziranga post-tour extension is **\$3,995** per person in double occupancy from Bagdogra and to Kolkata or **\$4,645** for a person requiring single accommodation. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 1 to dinner on Day 5, alcoholic beverages with meals, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, roundtrip airfare in Economy class between Bagdogra and Guwahati and between Jorhat and Kolkata, park admission fees and still photography fees, Indian-brand mineral water during long drives and park visits, the guide services of a local residential naturalist and your VENT leaders, and tips and gratuities. The fee does *not* include airfare from your home to Kolkata (or Delhi if participating in the pre-tour as well) and back, airport departure taxes, visa fees, special gratuities, video photography fees, and any expenses of a personal nature such as telephone and fax costs, internet usage fees, or laundry.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: You may register for this tour through the VENT [website](#) or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The initial deposit for this tour is: **\$1,000** per person, per tour. At 180 days VENT will collect a second deposit that brings the total deposit amount to 40% of the tour price. We accept MasterCard and Visa for both deposits.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial

deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date (Tadoba-Andhari Pre-trip = August 1, 2026; Main Cruise = August 6, 2026; Kaziranga National Park Extension = August 20, 2026)

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: Tour prices are based on the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If rates change drastically, it may be necessary to impose a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges have been passed on to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

FUEL SURCHARGES: Our prices are based on fuel prices at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TIPPING: An important part of the value of a VENT tour is knowing that tips for local service providers at our destinations—restaurant staff, hotel staff, drivers, local guides, and various other support staff—are included in your tour fee. If you would like to offer any of your local guides an additional tip, \$5 to \$10 a day is a common amount.

Tips for your VENT tour leader(s) are **not** included, but it is customary to tip them if you feel that you have received exceptional service. To assist in your planning, we recommend tipping your VENT tour leaders \$15 to \$20 per day, or the equivalent of approximately 2–4% of the tour fee. **NOTE:** For special departures involving multiple VENT tour leaders, we typically divide the tips equitably among the staff. More information will be provided prior to the start of our trip.

If you plan to give tips by cash, they should be given directly to your tour leader at the end of the tour and **not** sent to the VENT office. Some of our tour leaders use mobile payment applications such as Venmo, PayPal, and Wise. If you would like to use this method, please ask your tour leaders directly whether they can accept tips through such an application.

We emphasize that tipping is optional and that these amounts are only recommendations. The amount you decide to tip is based entirely on your experience and at your discretion.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS

CANCELLATION BY PARTICIPANT:

- **More than 120 days prior to the tour start date:** A refund of all monies paid will be issued, less 50% of the deposit (including initial and second deposit)
- **120 days or fewer prior to the tour start date:** No refund will be provided.
- **Optional add-ons:** Some tours offer optional add-ons that are designated as non-refundable. Any such add-ons are clearly identified as non-refundable at the time of booking. By selecting and purchasing an optional add-on, the participant acknowledges and accepts its non-refundable status. Fees paid for non-refundable add-ons are not refundable under any circumstances, regardless of when the tour is cancelled.

This cancellation policy applies to all participants and all tours (Pre-Trips and Extensions are considered self-contained tours separate from the main tour). Because unexpected events can occur, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance.

CANCELLATION BY VENT:

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to

participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A “**Force Majeure**” event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE/PROTECTION REQUIREMENT: This tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may not be available. **For this reason, travel insurance/travel protection which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this tour.** This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Alternatively, comparable service can be obtained through **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist** plan. If you choose not to purchase insurance/travel protection through Ripcord or Medjet, you are required to obtain it through another provider. Please refer to the TRAVEL INSURANCE/TRAVEL PROTECTION section for additional information.

SUGGESTED OPTIONS: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with **Redpoint Travel Protection** as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its comprehensive Ripcord plan, which includes a medical evacuation benefit. With this in mind, it is important to note that medical evacuation is not offered by Redpoint as a stand-alone policy or benefit. For travelers not interested in comprehensive travel insurance, VENT recommends **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist®** plan. Medjet is not an insurance company, and Medjet Assist is not an insurance product; rather, Medjet is a membership-based air-medical transport company specializing in moving hospitalized travelers from an admitting hospital to a medical facility of choice. Medjet does not provide medical evacuation service from the point of injury or illness; yet, the MedjetAssist plan offers robust enough travel protection to satisfy the medical evacuation insurance requirement in place for many VENT tours.

About Redpoint Travel's Ripcord Plan

Ripcord is a completely integrated travel insurance program with single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims. Critical benefits include comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a "Cancel for Any Reason" benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

For a price quote or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: **Ripcord Travel Insurance**; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help > Preparation and Insurance > Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip

payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, second deposit, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip costs in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a [Coronavirus FAQ page](#) on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

About Medjet’s MedjetAssist Plan

MedjetAssist is a membership program that functions like AAA for motorists. The company’s primary service is air medical transport. Critical benefits of MedjetAssist include a staff on call and ready to provide assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; all-expenses-paid air medical transport in the United States and internationally to medical facility of choice, regardless of medical necessity; repatriation of remains; and no exclusions for pre-existing conditions.

For travelers under 75, MedjetAssist may be purchased as Short-Term Memberships of 8, 15, 21, and 30 days, or Regular Annual Memberships from 1 to 5 years. For travelers 75–84, Medjet offers a Diamond Membership that is the same program but with a few additional conditions.

For a price quote or to purchase MedjetAssist, please visit: [Medjet.com/VentBird](https://www.Medjet.com/VentBird) or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

GETTING THERE & REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

AIR TRAVEL: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

BAGGAGE: Please limit baggage to one medium or large size piece of luggage and one carry-on. The airlines strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and/or airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag.

Note well that security at Indian airports is particularly rigorous, and some items may be summarily confiscated if they are found in your carry-on bag, including walkie-talkies, GPS units, large numbers

of batteries, and any tools or other sharp objects. To speed your passage through the security lines, be sure to place all of your electronic items in the tray.

Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security, we recommend that you check the website of the [Transportation Security Administration \(TSA\)](#) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items.

For pre- and post-trip participants:

For domestic air travel in India, travelers are allowed one piece of checked luggage weighing up to 33 pounds (15 kilograms), one piece of carry-on luggage weighing up to 13 pounds (5.9 kilograms), and whatever you carry over your arm or in your hands (coat, book, purse, etc.). Excess baggage charges may be imposed when these regulations are exceeded (bag weight and number). The differing regulations for international and domestic air travel can make planning complicated, yet we feel it is better to incur excess baggage charges than to cut back on clothing and equipment so that you are not prepared for a trip of this length. Excess baggage charges are the personal responsibility of the traveler.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS: US and Canadian citizens must have a passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from India; please check the expiration date on your passport, which can be renewed online if necessary. You must have at least two blank pages in your passport for stamps. Citizens of countries other than the US and Canada should consult their Indian consulate or embassy for instructions.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport. Keep the photocopies in a safe place, so if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so **do not pack it in your checked luggage.**

VISAs: Visas are required for U.S. citizens traveling to this destination. If you hold a passport from another country, please check with your consulate or embassy for the most accurate guidance.

A Tourist Visa is required for entry into India and must be obtained prior to departure. The visa can be obtained online through the Indian government's website (indianvisaonline.gov.in) or Travel Document Systems (traveldocs.com; 888.838.4867), a company that handles visa procurement.

In lieu of applying for a Tourist Visa, US citizens seeking to enter India solely for tourist purposes and who plan to stay no longer than 60 days may apply for an Electronic Travel Authorization at least four days before their arrival in India. Please visit indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/tvoa.html for additional and up-to-date information about eligibility requirements for this type of authorization.

Citizens of countries other than the United States should consult their Indian consulate or embassy for instructions.

IMPORTANT: The visa details above are current for U.S. citizens as of January 19, 2026. Because entry requirements can change without notice, we kindly remind all participants to double-check the latest information before traveling. Travelers using non-U.S. passports are responsible for confirming any entry requirements that apply to their home country.

WHAT TO BRING

CLOTHING: As this trip combines birding and nature excursions with interpretive walking tours and leisure time aboard the riverboat, you will want to pack a mix of clothing that prepares you for all activities. In general, we recommend “casual and comfortable” attire throughout the trip. The following items are recommended for the main tour and for the pre- and post-trip extensions:

- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela's and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight, durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular and more reasonably priced than in the past. Such clothing offers protection from the sun and biting insects and is easy to launder (including by hand). Notable brands include Columbia, Ex Officio, and REI.
- **Pants and shirts:** For non-birding occasions, such as cultural excursions or time on the riverboat, you may also wish to have other types of clothing available. We recommend a pair or two of lightweight pants made of cotton, denim, or other material. You might also consider several long-sleeved and short-sleeved shirts in addition to other comfortable styles suitable for warm weather.

- **Smart Casual:** The atmosphere aboard *Ganges Voyager* and in the fine hotels we'll use is casual, but some will feel more comfortable with a few items of smart casual attire for some evenings. For women this includes casual dresses or blouse/slacks ensembles. For men this includes khakis/slacks and open-collared shirts. Sports jackets and ties are not necessary. Of course, the style of dress you choose is in accordance with your personal preference.
- **Hat:** A hat for protection from the sun is essential. We recommend a broad-brimmed hat for the best protection, but you should at least bring a baseball-style cap.
- **Sweaters and Coats:** December in Kolkata is warm and dry, with temperatures in the 70s (°F) and even low 80s in the day, falling to the mid-50s at night. Darjeeling is cooler, with highs in the 60s and lows in the 40s; here, too, little or no rain is the norm. In the Sundarbans, we can expect temperatures in between, with the humidity higher than at either Kolkata or Darjeeling. December in the Himalayan foothills at Siliguri and Ghoom can be noticeably chillier, with highs in the 40s and lows on some nights dropping to the 30s or even 20s. Remember that early mornings anywhere are likely to feel cold, especially if there is a breeze. All this is to say that you should be prepared not just with warmer-weather clothing as described above but with a warm jacket or coat, gloves, warm hat, sweater, fleeces, turtlenecks, or heavy shirts. Dressing in layers is the best strategy. We are unlikely to see much precipitation, but if it does rain, you will need a waterproof jacket.
- **Socks:** Some people prefer thick socks for absorbing perspiration and cushioning one's feet, especially when walking on hard surfaces, as on some of our excursions.
- **Swimsuit:** You will want to pack a swimsuit if you like to swim. All of our hotels except for the Mayfair Hill Resort in Darjeeling have swimming pools.

SPECIAL NOTES:

- On the pre- and post-trips, **blankets may be provided by our lodges for early morning drives.**
- We strongly encourage you to avoid clothing with bright colors when we are in the field. Although many of the birds and other wildlife are relatively approachable, we will also be trying to see a number of more elusive species; muted colors increase the chances for success. Please try also to avoid nylon or plastic jackets and pants, as their rustling makes it harder to hear birds.

FOOTWEAR: A lightweight hiking boot or trail shoe is recommended for our birding outings and walking excursions in cities, towns, historical sites, etc. On board the riverboat, you may also prefer sandals or athletic shoes, but do not make them your sole footwear, as they do not provide the same stability and support as a sturdier shoe or boot, and they will not keep your feet dry if they get wet. It is certainly not necessary, but some may feel more comfortable in dressier shoes in some of our hotels.

EQUIPMENT: Having the right equipment makes the travel experience more enjoyable. Below is a list of items that will ensure you are well-prepared:

- **Backpack or daypack:** Essential for extra clothing, optical equipment, field guides, supplies, toiletries, and food and water on our excursions.
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock:** In addition to or instead of the alarm on your mobile phone.
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions:** Essential for sun protection
- **Personal toiletries:** Including medications, spare glasses and contact lenses, etc.
- **Cameras, lenses, memory cards, and extra batteries:** Batteries and especially memory cards are inconvenient to obtain in India, and you should bring all you think you might need and more. You will likely take many photographs and will need all the storage you can get.
- **Plastic bags:** A supply of strong plastic bags is very useful in protecting equipment from rain and dust.
- **Collapsible walking stick:** Highly recommended for those who have trouble walking.
- **Tissue packs and handy-wipes:** Indispensable.
- **Refillable water bottle.**
- **Flashlight or headlamp:** Essential for being out after dark, particularly on our pre-trip and post-trip extensions.
- **Umbrella:** A small collapsible umbrella offers helpful protection against rain and sun.

Binoculars: We strongly recommend you bring a pair of good binoculars of 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. Please do not bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like them because they

are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. You will find that 8x32 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes: Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

DESTINATION INFORMATION & LOCAL CONDITIONS

CLIMATE & WEATHER: The difference in temperature between coastal areas and the Himalaya foothills can be considerable. While December averages about 65° F for a daytime high in Darjeeling, the temperature regularly reaches the high 70s or low 80s in Kolkata. The season of our visit is normally a dry one, with little or no significant rainfall expected. Be prepared for the possibility of a cold snap, with cold mornings and high temperatures in the low 50s. In the Darjeeling area, particularly on the excursion to Singalila National Park on December 13, we will go over a 10,000-foot mountain pass, where temperatures could be in the 20s.

At some of our locations we'll be riding in the back of open jeeps, when the breeze can be surprisingly cold. Dust is a ubiquitous feature, and mornings can occasionally be foggy.

CONDITIONS:

Main tour program:

Your trip to India will be a relaxing but comprehensive travel experience in which birding and natural history activities are offered alongside guided visits to famous historical sites and cultural attractions. This trip offers an abundance of cultural, historical, and anthropological experiences in addition to birding, and participants should strongly consider this point before registering.

Because we intend this program to appeal to anyone, we have designed options for different activities wherever possible. Participants whose main interest is history and culture do not need to be birders to enjoy this trip or to participate in the birding portions of the itinerary. Similarly, birding options will be available as alternatives to the sightseeing options on many days throughout the trip.

The *Ganges Voyager* will be our waterborne home for seven nights, a truly luxurious way to experience the sacred river and the lifestyles of those who depend on it. Our time off the ship during this portion of the tour includes visits to important birding areas and walking and driving tours of major historical sites and cultural attractions. After disembarking on Day 10, we will stay at two resort-level hotels in Siliguri and Darjeeling; the quality of accommodation in these hotels is consonant with that offered on board the *Ganges Voyager*.

Physical demands on this tour will be easy to moderate, but bear in mind that our excursions may involve a variety of conditions including but not limited to walking and standing for extended periods and riding in a range of vehicles including tourist buses and jeeps. We emphasize that no one will be subjected to physical demands that exceed their capabilities. All walking will be done at a slow or moderate pace.

Birding skills: It is a common misperception that all participants in group tours are highly skilled and experience birders. In fact, we design our tours to accommodate birders at all levels, whether they have been birding for years or are just taking up this captivating hobby. We don't race to see every bird possible, or dedicate disproportionate time to tracking down any one "target" bird, but rather seek to have the fullest, most satisfying experiences possible. We take ample time to enjoy each species encounter, taking the opportunity to inform interested participants about the lives of the birds and the demands of their environments. Our leaders meet your skill where they, functioning as resources to answer questions and enhance your tour experience with individualized attention and instruction.

Wildlife viewing: Birding and sightseeing in Sunderbans are best at low tides, when animals emerge. To maximize our experiences, the exact timings of our excursions there will depend on the tide schedule each day. This trip presents a striking contrast of habitats, from warm coastal lowlands to forested Himalayan mountains. December is a superb time for birding, especially in the lowlands. While there are important, remarkable birds to be seen in the Darjeeling area, the diversity of species at this season is decidedly lower. Participants should take this point into account before registering.

The *Ganges Voyager*

This superb ship offers a unique cruise experience in old-fashioned luxury and a British colonial atmosphere, a perfectly relaxing way to discover the history, ancient cultures, and welcoming people of the Indian subcontinent.

Built in 2014, the RV *Ganges Voyager* is a magnificent yet intimate-sized premium ship that sails on the Ganges, the sacred river of ancient India. It can accommodate 56 passengers in 28 cabins offering amenities and all the comforts needed during our aboard. The decor of this air-conditioned ship is stylish and its atmosphere in perfect harmony with the surroundings. Precious fabrics and fine materials make it a particularly refined environment for enjoying the water and the sights. The ship's restaurant offers delicious cuisine, including vegetarian options, prepared from local ingredients in beautiful surroundings, with large windows for admiring the splendid landscapes we journey through.

The sun deck has a lounge and bar, a small sports room, a yoga area, and a spa.

All lounge areas on board have free wi-fi (where a signal is available), and the ship's library is full of fascinating and informative works about India, as well as board games and other amusements.

Pre-trip and Extension Information:

Both the pre-trip and the post-tour extension use the best accommodations available: Svasara Jungle Lodge on our Tadoba-Andhali Tiger Pre-trip, and Iora—The Retreat at Kaziranga National Park. Both properties offer accommodations of very good to excellent quality.

All visitors to national parks in India must ride in park service jeeps. Since only three passengers are allowed in each jeep, on some outings you will not be with the VENT leader. The VENT leader will rotate among vehicles to the extent possible, allowing for an equal amount of time with all participants. The local guide and the park service guide will know the mammals and a majority of the birds, but they may not be as knowledgeable as your VENT guide in some aspects of field identification. The VENT leader will let the park guides know what birds we may especially be searching for so that they focus on those desirable species. Many of the birds that we'll see in the

parks are widespread species encountered elsewhere during the trip; thus, you will almost surely not miss any birds by being with local park staff part of the time.

FOOD & WATER: The food in India is outstanding, not just a plate of hot spices. On past VENT tours to India, many of our participants have named India’s cuisine one of the highlights of their experience. Excellent breads, tandoor-cooked chicken, and a dazzling variety of vegetarian dishes cater for any palate. For religious reasons, beef is generally not available.

Purified water and bottled water will always be available throughout the trip.

CURRENCY & SPENDING: Your tour fee includes all necessary expenses; however, you will want to bring enough cash to cover expenses not included in the program such as gifts, laundry, meals on your own, personal items, gratuities (optional), etc. Major credit cards are accepted at large establishments including hotels, restaurants, and shops, particularly in larger cities. Visa and MasterCard are accepted widely, American Express less so. Smaller vendors and vendors in smaller communities may accept only cash, so it’s recommended that you keep a supply of local currency handy. It is best to carry small denominations, as it can be difficult to break larger bills.

The Indian Rupee (INR) is the official currency of India. It is easy to exchange US dollars for rupees at airport currency exchanges and at some of the larger hotels where we’ll be staying. You can also use ATMs if your card is compatible with the machine—many ATMs in India are of an older design, but Cirrus, for example, is widely used. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information about banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

You can check currency conversion rates at xe.com.

ELECTRICITY: Electrical power aboard the Ganges Voyager is supplied at 110/220 volts. Off the ship, power in India is 230 volts, 50 cycles. The country uses a variety of electrical plugs and outlets, so an all-around adaptor plug set is strongly recommended. Type D (Old British) is the most common type of outlet, accepting a plug with three round pins in a triangular configuration. The Type C outlet is also widespread, accepting a plug with two round pins in horizontal formation (Europlug). Desks and workstations at some hotels accept a variety of plug types.

If you plan to use American-standard 110V equipment with flat-pronged plugs, you should consider in addition to the adapter plug set an all-purpose transformer to convert the current for 110V use. Electricity can be erratic in remote areas, and systems may not be able to support high-wattage devices like hair dryers. Do not rely on an electric razor or on always having electricity available for charging batteries.

INTERNET ACCESS: On the main tour, internet service is available on board the *Ganges Voyager* and in all of the hotels on our itinerary. Aboard ship, service is limited during our time in Sunderbans National Park, as many locations there have no network reception. Speed may vary from good in the cities to slow in rural areas. Internet service is available at the accommodations on our pre-trip and post-tour extensions, but it is usually slow or unreliable.

LANGUAGE: Hindi and English are the official languages of India. Hindi is the most commonly spoken language, but English is widely spoken and used extensively for signage. A multitude of other languages are spoken in India; besides Hindi, other commonly encountered languages include Marathi and Urdu.

TIME: India observes India Standard Time (IST), which is 10:30 ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST) and 13:30 ahead of Pacific Standard Time (PST).

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is available at an extra charge on the riverboat and in all of the hotels we stay at.

HEALTH & SAFETY

HEALTH: VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

If there is any doubt about your physical fitness to travel, consult your doctor before registering for this trip.

COVID-19: We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance for avoiding COVID-19.

MALARIA: Malaria is present in India, but the risk to travelers is no higher than moderate. VENT has never had a participant contract malaria on an India tour; however, because we cannot guarantee that it is not a possibility, we recommend that you check with your health care provider or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for more information and to determine whether an anti-malarial regimen is right for you. Please note that the strain of malaria present in India is of the Chloroquine-resistant type.

TYPHOID: A disease of fecal contamination of food and water, Typhoid is endemic to Uganda. Although the risk is low, the CDC recommends vaccination.

SUN EXPOSURE: The sun’s ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes), even in winter and early spring. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very

painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

FOOD SAFETY AND SANITATION: Sanitation is not great in India, but it has improved radically during the many years that VENT has operated tours here, largely as a result of greatly improved hygiene and the widespread availability of bottled water. To avoid getting sick (traveler's diarrhea, for example), you should not drink the water anywhere in India, even in the nicer hotels. Bottled water will be available everywhere, and beer, soda, and other bottled drinks are safe. You are advised to avoid eating uncooked or partially cooked food or food that has been cooling in the open. Only fruit that you have peeled yourself, ideally after washing the outside in bottled water. Remember the adage: "Boil it, peel it, or forget it."

Bottled water for drinking will be available at all times, but during the time we are sailing in salt water in Sunderbans, fresh water for washroom use on board the *Ganges Voyager* will be available for a limited time before breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and after excursions. The precise times each day will be announced by the ship manager.

AIR POLLUTION: The air quality in India has deteriorated markedly over the past decade. Pollution from auto and factory emissions and field fires are the primary culprits, especially in the bigger cities. The main tour spends only limited time in Kolkata; our Kazaringa post-tour extension spends one night in Delhi. Because our exposure to poor air is limited, we do not recommend as essential any protective devices; however, you may want to consider precautionary measures such as a scarf, wrap, or surgical mask to cover your nose and mouth. If you are especially concerned about air quality, you might consider purchasing an air-pollution mask, available at various online stores. If you suffer from breathing problems or associated medical issues, please consult your physician before registering for this tour.

BITING INSECTS: For the most part, biting insects are not a problem at this time of the year. The exception could be in areas with standing water, such as we'll find at several birding sites. In these

cases, mosquitoes could be present. Mosquito repellent will be provided by the VENT staff, but if you prefer to bring your own, we suggest a lotion or stick-type repellent for your face and hands, plus at least one pump-style container of repellent for your clothing.

INSECT REPELLENTS: There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- **DEET:** (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- **Picaridin:** A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- **Herbal insect repellents:** Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

Insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- **Permanone® (Permethrin):** is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for pre-treatment of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so it is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment must be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- **Insect Shield® apparel:** Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800 CDC-INFO (800 232-4636) and maintains a helpful website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

SUGGESTED READING & TRIP PREPARATION

A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

FIELD GUIDES:

Birds

Grimmett, Richard, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp. *Birds of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh,, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives*. Princeton University Press, 2026. Third edition. **Covering all of the birds we are likely to see, this field guide is the most important resource for this trip.**

Mammals

Menon, Vivek. *Field Guide to Indian Mammals*. London: Helm. 2009. An excellent and complete treatment

of the mammals of India by one of the country's top wildlife biologists. Highly recommended.

Reptiles

Daniel, J.C. *The Book of Indian Reptiles and Amphibians*. London: Oxford UP. 2002.

HISTORY AND CULTURE: The following are all highly regarded but represent only a very small sample of the fine resources available.

Basham, A.L. 2014. *The Wonder That Was India*. Delhi: Picador.

Collins, Larry. 1997. *Freedom at Midnight*. 2nd ed. New York: Harper Collins.

Fischer, Louis. 2010. *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World*. New York: Signet.

Guha, Ramachandra. 2008. *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Keay, John. 2011. *India: A History*. Grove Press.

Kulke, Hermann, and Dietmar Rothermund. 2016. *A History of India*. New York: Routledge.

TERMS, CONDITIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, "**VENT**") act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category (i), or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on May 12, 2026 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily

departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely.

No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

INDGRC:2026, INDGRCE:2026 & INDGRCO:2026

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5/11/26: manager initials / DCE/PS

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