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18 Day Idyllic India

- ✓ Return international airfares with a full-service airline
- ✓ All internal airfares
- ✓ All airport transfers
- ✓ 16 nights in charming and comfortable 4-star accommodation, with one night in a heritage hotel
- ✓ Daily breakfast
- ✓ Fully escorted English speaking tour guide (Local guides if the group size is under 10 people)
- ✓ Incredible sightseeing with entry fees included – see the awe-inspiring Taj Mahal at sunrise, majestic palaces and impressive forts like the UNESCO World Heritage site Jaisalmer Fort, and witness an Aarti ceremony
- ✓ Comfortable, dedicated private transportation throughout
- ✓ 24/7 customer service and your own Dedicated Support Agent



You will be visiting

Delhi - Jaipur - Udaipur - Agra - Jodhpur - Jaisalmer - Lucknow - Varanasi - Gajner.

Day to Day Itinerary

Day 1

Destination: Home ✈ Delhi

Hotel: Hotel Golden Grand, or Similar

Welcome to India! Today begins your tour through this incredible country. Upon arrival at Indira Gandhi International Airport you will be warmly greeted by one of our representatives who will then assist by transferring you to your hotel. Get a good night's sleep to start your tour tomorrow well rested.

Day 2

Destination: Delhi 🚗 Mandawa

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Desert Resort Mandawa, or Similar

After breakfast we'll have a group briefing from our tour guide, who will outline the incredible itinerary that awaits over the coming days. Following the briefing we will depart Delhi and begin our drive to the town of Mandawa. Here, we'll be staying at the stunning Desert Resort – a colourful oasis set amid the stark desert landscape. The architecture is typical of a Rajasthani village and captures the mystery and romance of the surrounding desert. After checking in take the rest of the evening to relax and enjoy the charm and luxury of this boutique resort.

Day 3

Destination: Mandawa 🚗 Gajner

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Hotel Gaj Kesri , or Similar

This morning, spend some time exploring this amazing town, which is often referred to as an outdoor museum. Mandawa is famous for its ornate *havelis* (townhouses, or mansions). You'll notice that some are faithfully restored, and others are crumbling. The havelis of this particular part of India are recognised around the country for their lavishly painted walls and artwork.

This afternoon we depart Mandawa and head to the town of Gajner, where

we will stay at the sparkling red jewel that is the Gaj Kesri Hotel. This small but elegant hotel houses a beautiful collection of art and handicrafts and does an incredible job of fusing the modern with the traditional. After check-in, spend the rest of the day at leisure.

Day 4

Destination: Gajner 🚗 Jaisalmer

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Gorbandh Palace, or Similar

This morning, after breakfast, we will visit one of the most impressive fort complexes in India: Junagarh. Junagarh Fort was built by Raja Rai Singh in 1588 CE. Junagarh is one of the few major forts in Rajasthan that is not built on a hilltop. One of the most impressive structures in the fort complex is the Anup Mahal, or Privy Council Room – this elaborately decorated space features walls covered in brilliant red and gold with coloured glass inlay.

In the afternoon we will depart Gajner and transfer to Jaisalmer, where we will check in to the luxurious Gorbandh Palace. The city of Jaisalmer is a former medieval trading center that lies in the heart of the Thar Desert. Known as the 'Golden City', Jaisalmer is famous for its yellow sandstone architecture.

OPTIONAL TOUR - DESERT CAMP FOR CAMEL RIDE AND DINNER ON THE DUNES

Experience the romance and mystery of the desert as the sun sets over the golden sand, enchanted by the melodies of the desert musicians. Traditional folk artists like the langaas and kalbeliyas will mesmerise you to a melody of music and dance. Relax on commodious Indian style beds named “charpais” (jute beds). Enjoy a delectable array of barbecued items as you dine under the stars.

Day 5

Destination: Jaisalmer

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Gorbandh Palace, or Similar

This morning we will explore the magnificent Jaisalmer Fort. The fort's towering honey-coloured sandstone walls are the perfect camouflage, allowing it to blend in perfectly with the golden hues of the desert and thus avoid attack. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Jaisalmer Fort was built in the 12th century, and is believed to be the very last 'living fort' in the country –

nearly one fourth of the old city's population still resides within the fort's walls. The rest of the day is yours to use as you please: explore the city on your own or participate in an optional tour to enhance your experience.

Day 6

Destination: Jaisalmer 🚗 Jodhpur

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Indana Palace Jodhpur, or Similar

This morning we will depart Jaisalmer and drive to Jodhpur, otherwise known as the 'Blue City', or the Gateway to Thar, due to its position right on the edge of the eponymous desert. Here, we will be staying at the gorgeous Indana Palace Hotel, whose brilliant architecture echoes the royal Marwar heritage, with exquisite columns; intricate latticed screen work, known as *jaali*; arches and domes and wide-open courtyards. You'll feel as though you are staying in your own private palace. Once we reach Jodhpur, the second largest city in the state of Rajasthan, the rest of the day is yours to spend at leisure.

Day 7

Destination: Jodhpur 🚗 Udaipur

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Hotel Raj Kuber, or Similar

Before departing Jodhpur we'll take a guided tour of the imposing Mehrangarh Fort, built in the 15th century. Situated on a high rocky outcrop that overlooks the walled city, from here you can see the iconic azure shade that the city's buildings have been painted. Mehrangarh Fort is one of the largest forts in India and is still run by the Jodhpur royal family. Within its thick, sturdy walls lie numerous palaces and courtyards, as well as an 18th-century Rajput garden.

In the afternoon we will begin our drive to the beautiful city of Udaipur. Set around a series of stunning artificial lakes, Udaipur is known as the 'City of Lakes' and is also recognised for its lavish royal residences.

OPTIONAL TOUR - LAKE PICHOLA BOAT RIDE

Enjoy a cooling boat ride on Lake Pichola to get an uninterrupted view of Udaipur's lakeside splendour.

Day 8

Destination: Udaipur
Meals: Breakfast
Hotel: Hotel Raj Kuber, or Similar

Today, we will visit the awe-inspiring City Palace. Well known as one of the biggest palaces in Rajasthan, the palace is a grand building set on the banks of Pichola Lake. Though construction began in the late 1500s, under the orders of Maharana Udai Singh II, the palace was added to and tinkered with for a further 400 years, as his successors came and went. Today this monumental complex consists of 11 palaces surrounded by courtyards, balconies, towers and gardens, and is famed for its intricate peacock mosaics. After our tour here, you may spend the rest of the day at leisure, or participate in an optional tour to enhance your experience.

OPTIONAL TOUR - SUNRISE CYCLING CITY TOUR

Explore the 'City of lakes' on a short countryside loop on a bike, swerving to untreaded nooks and corners through the beautiful rural countryside and absorbing this historic capital of Mewar at your own pace. A colourful landscape unfolds here with brightly clothed village women. Here you can see a typical hamlet of Rajasthan with people busy with farming. We get to discover kingfisher, langoors, cows, goats, peacocks along the way and a chance to take a refreshing ride around Lake Pichola, Fateh Sagar and Badi Lake.

Day 9

Destination: Udaipur  Jaipur
Meals: Breakfast
Hotel: Lemon Tree Premier, or Similar

Enjoy a free morning relaxing or exploring on your own as you please, or participate in an optional tour to enhance your experience. In the afternoon we will be transfer by bus to the city of Jaipur, the capital of the state of Rajasthan.

Day 10

Destination: Jaipur
Meals: Breakfast
Hotel: Lemon Tree Premier, or Similar

This morning, after breakfast, we will visit the ancient capital of Amber (sometimes called Amer) to see the fabulous Amber Fort. We'll transfer from the hotel to the parking area at the foot of the Amber Fort, where we'll board Jeeps that will take us up the hill to the entrance gate. The fort's

majestic appearance and its advantageous location, looking out over the surrounding area, make it a very special place to visit. Made from red sandstone and white marble, this beautiful hill fort has its foundations in the 17th century. Following our guided tour, the rest of the day is yours to spend at leisure: wander the city on your own, exploring its colourful bazaars, or participate in an optional tour to enhance your experience.

OPTIONAL TOUR - EXPLORE JAIPUR CITY

Our city tour will begin at the magnificent City Palace, now converted into a museum, except for a small portion that is still used by the royal family of Jaipur. Built in the fortified campus style, the palace covers an area equal to almost one-seventh of the city. Here we will tour the beautiful Chandra Mahal and Mubarak Mahal Palaces within, as well as the intricately decorated Peacock Gate. Following this we will visit the Jantar Mantar monument and observatory, constructed between 1727 and 1734 by Maharajah Jai Singh II of Jaipur and one of the five observatories in India. Jantar Mantar is home to a ancient collection of nineteen architectural astronomical instruments and features the world's largest stone sundial. It has also been declared a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Day 11

Destination: Jaipur ✈️ Varanasi

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Rivatas By Ideal, or Similar

Upon arrival in Varanasi you'll be greeted by a representative and transferred to your hotel. After checking in enjoy the rest of the afternoon at leisure.

This evening we will make a very special visit to the local *ghats* – steps that lead down to the River Ganges – to witness an Aarti ceremony. Taking its name from the Sanskrit word for homage and devotion, this religious ritual takes place every evening on the banks of the river. During the ceremony, small candle-lit lamps decorated with flowers are floated down the river as an offering to the Goddess Ganga, accompanied by a chorus of chanting hymns, drums and temple bells.

Day 12

Destination: Varanasi

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Rivatas By Ideal, or Similar

We'll start early today with an invigorating sunrise boat ride on the Ganges, where you can watch the light gradually illuminate the many ghats and temples along the river as you pass.

Later this morning we'll take a trip to nearby Sarnath, one of the four main Buddhist pilgrimage destinations. The site is where Buddha preached his message of the path to enlightenment and it features a number of intriguing stupas and museums to explore. Alternatively, the day can be spent exploring the laneways and alleys behind the ghats, or picking up some examples of the excellent local silk industry.

In the afternoon we'll enjoy a lovely walking tour of the old city, through narrow laneways packed with stalls and shops, past *dhobi-wallahs* (open-air laundry washermen), burning ghats, and the endless temples that echo with bells and the pungent aroma of incense. And as your first day in this sacred city comes to an end, we'll witness pilgrims performing ancient bathing rituals and ceremonies.

OPTIONAL TOUR - CULINARY WALK WITH FOOD TASTING

This fantastic food tour allows you to hop in and out of traditional roadside eateries giving you an opportunity to try a variety of different kinds of delicious local foods. Experience the best of the best in traditional restaurants, where the recipes were not only invented but actually perfected, without having to worry about how to eat without a fork or to wipe your hands clean after you are done.

Day 13

Destination: Varanasi 🚗 Lucknow

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Golden Tulip Lucknow, or Similar

Today we depart Varanasi by private vehicle to Lucknow, a large city in northern India, and the capital of the state of Uttar Pradesh. Upon arrival in Lucknow we will check in at the hotel and then spend the rest of the day at leisure. Alternatively, you may choose to participate in an optional tour to enhance your experience.

Day 14

Destination: Lucknow 🚗 Agra

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Howard Plaza - The Fern, or Similar

This morning we will be visiting the mosque complex of Bara Imambara. The Bara Imambara was built in 1784 by Asaf-ud-Daula, the fourth Nawab (or 'ruler') of the state of Awadh. Created as part of a famine relief program, the complex marks one of the earlier attempts in Lucknow to imitate the architecture and design style of the Mughals; it is one of the few buildings in Lucknow completely devoid of European elements.

The Complex contains a mosque, several courtyards and gateways, and a grand *bawali* or 'stepwell' that was once used as a summer palace. In the afternoon we will be departing Lucknow for the city of Agra via the expressway. Upon arrival in Agra in the evening we will jump on a '*Chaat* Crawl' through the city. Chaat are savoury snacks (like fried potatoes or samosa broken into pieces and served with chutney) typically served roadside from stalls or carts – the Indian equivalent to fast food. Chaat have become immensely popular throughout India and the Indian subcontinent, though Uttar Pradesh, where the tradition originated, is still be believed to serve up the country's best.

Day 15

Destination: Agra 🚗 Delhi

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Hotel Golden Grand, or Similar

Very early this morning we will enjoy a special treat – a visit to the Taj Mahal at sunrise. This monument to love is a spectacle to behold at any time of day, but it takes on a whole new life when bathed in the early morning light. Taking 22 years and 20,000 men to build, the white marble was quarried in from a site more than 300 kilometres away and transported by a fleet of 1,000 elephants.

Following our visit to this landmark enjoy some leisure time until the afternoon, when we depart Agra for Delhi. Once we check into our hotel in Delhi the rest of the day is yours to spend as you like.

Day 16

Destination: Delhi

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Hotel Golden Grand, or Similar

The highlight for today is a magnificent city sightseeing tour of Old Delhi, an area that dates back to the 1600s. Our tour begins at the Jama Masjid, one of India's largest mosques, which stands across the road from the

historic Red Fort. This glorious mosque was commissioned by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, who also commissioned the Taj Mahal. Built with red sandstone and white marble, Jama Masjid can accommodate up to 25,000 worshippers.

Next, we will experience an exhilarating cycle rickshaw ride in the busy market area of Chandni Chowk. Within the market's narrow lanes the traditional workmanship for which Delhi is famous is still very much alive. Originating from the times of the Mughal Empire, it is said that the descendants of royal chefs still work in the market.

Later, we will visit the Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib, a magnificent place of worship where we will learn about the history of the Sikh religion. Enroute back to our hotel we will stop at the India Gate, a war memorial dedicated to the Indian soldiers who died during WWI, as well as Rashtrapati Bhavan, the official home of the country's president. You may spend this evening seeking out some of the city's fantastic local cuisine or participate in an optional tour.

OPTIONAL TOUR - HOME COOKED DINNER IN DELHI

Skip the celebrity chefs and head straight to the source of authentic Indian cooking secrets on this Delhi tour that delves into the heartland of Indian cuisine - a local's home! It's not just a meal, but a dining experience in a family home, where you'll learn about local culture, taste, incredible food, and make new friends. The food you'll dine on a traditional Indian home-cooked meal, which will be predominantly vegetarian and sure to tantalise our taste buds like no other.

Day 17

Destination: Delhi ✈ Home

Meals: Breakfast

Today marks the end of your magnificent and unforgettable tour through India. Enjoy free time at the hotel before your transfer to Delhi International Airport where you will board your flight home or towards your onward destination. We hope you have thoroughly enjoyed your inspiring experience.

Day 18

Destination: Home

Arrive home today.

What's Included

- Return international airfares with a full-service airline
- Return airport transfers
- 16 nights in authentic 4-star accommodation with one night in a heritage hotel
- Breakfast daily
- The services of a professional English-speaking guide throughout (Local guides if the group size is under 10 people)
- In-depth sightseeing, including all entry fees, as per the itinerary
- Dedicated private transportation throughout
- 24/7 customer service and your own Dedicated Support Agent

Sightseeing Highlights

- Delhi - Walk through the famous bazaars of Old Delhi, visiting Jama Masjid – India's largest mosque
- Delhi - Experience a rickshaw ride in Chandni Chowk, a marketplace from the times of the Mughals
- Delhi - Stop by the 17th-century Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib to learn about the history of the Sikh religion
- Mandawa - Explore this amazing town, often referred to as an 'outdoor museum'
- Gajner - Visit one of the most impressive fort complexes in India, in the city of Junagarh
- Jaisalmer - Explore the Jaisalmer Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage site
- Jodhpur - Visit one of the largest forts in India, Mehrangarh Fort, situated on a steep hill
- Udaipur - Enjoy a boat ride on Lake Pichola, savouring an uninterrupted view of Udaipur's lakeside splendour
- Udaipur - Visit City Palace, one of the biggest palaces in Rajasthan, set on the banks of Lake Pichola
- Jaipur - Visit the City Palace, which covers almost one-seventh of the city, and learn about its famous Peacock Gate
- Jaipur - Explore the ancient capital of Amber to see the fabulous Amber Fort
- Varanasi - Witness the Aarti ceremony, taking place every evening on the banks of the River Ganges

- Varanasi - Sunrise boat ride on the Ganges, watching the light illuminate the *ghats* along this spiritual river
- Varanasi - Take a trip to nearby Sarnath, one of the four main Buddhist pilgrimage destinations
- Lucknow - Visit the Bara Imambara mosque complex and admire the stunning architecture that has left modern architects perplexed
- Agra - Jump on a 'chaat crawl' in the city thought to serve up the country's best *chaat* (savoury snacks)
- Agra - Admire the Taj Mahal, the almighty 'Monument of Love', at sunrise