

Ultimate India
(North & South)
February 15 – March 6, 2013



Rajasthan

Detailed Itinerary

Feb 16 Arrival in Delhi, LH 76, 135 am. Met at airport and transfer to hotel.

Feb 16 Delhi / Radisson Marina Hotel (B, D)

Morning rest. Afternoon half-day city tour of Old and New Delhi including Jama Masjid, Red Fort, Qutab Minar, India Gate, House of Parliament, President's House; Gandhi memorial and rickshaw ride thru Old Delhi market.

Welcome dinner at Colors & Spice.

Feb 17 Fly to Varanasi Flt 9w 2423 dep 1030, arr 1150. Transfer to hotel Radisson (B,D)

Afternoon visit the Old City as it comes alive with preparations for the evening ceremony. Evening attend aarti puja (fire ceremony) performed by Hindu priests on the banks of the Ganges. We shall observe close-up from our private country boat.

Feb 18 Varanasi / Hotel Radisson (B,D)

A visit to Varanasi reveals the spiritual heart of India, and the best way to experience this is to tour the Ganges in a country boat at sunrise. Pilgrims, yogis and mystics flock to the ghats (steps) which lie along the banks of the Ganges to take a cleansing dip in India's holiest river, practice yoga, meditate, or to complete mundane earthly chores such as washing clothes and vessels. Early morning life in this city revolves around the ghats. A contemporary of Nineveh and Thebes, Varanasi is the oldest living city in the world. One of India's most sacred cities, a devout Hindu believes that to die and be cremated in Varanasi is to gain *moksha*, or release from the eternal cycle of rebirth. The visit to the old city is a fascinating insight into the rituals of Hinduism. Every temple is well attended and every street corner has roadside shrines and vendors selling garlands, incense sticks and other items used in worship.

After the boat ride, walk through the narrow alleys with your guide, sharing space with cows, scooters, cycle rickshaws, shops and people, to the banks of the Ganges, visiting the temples and watching the rituals of Hindu worship.

Afternoon visit to Sarnath, the spiritual center of Buddhism (where the Buddha gave his first sermon). The ancient ruins include the Dhamekh Stupa which is believed to mark the spot where the Buddha preached his famous sermon. The archaeological museum here is excellent. There is also a monument dedicated to the Buddha and a modern Buddhist temple with murals by a Japanese painter depicting the story of the life of the Buddha.

Feb 19 Transfer to airport for flight to Khajuraho flt 9W2423 dep. 1225 arr. 1350 / Hotel Taj Chandela (B, D)

Afternoon visit the temples from the Chandella period (9th to 11th century) that are illustrated with remarkable sculptures of the classic erotic literature the Kama Sutra. Also visit the old village of Khajuraho.

Feb 20 Drive Khajuraho - Orchha - Gwalior / Hotel Usha Kiran Palace (B, D)

Morning drive to Orchha (170km/105 miles/4 hours drive), the capital of the kingdom of the Bundella Rajputs from 1531 to 1783. We visit Jahangir Mahal Palace, an Indo-Persian style palace of the Mughul period and the Ram Raja Temple, built in the 17th century. NOTE: road conditions are very poor in this section. Mostly due to monsoon damage that has been slow to be repaired. This means the drive can be slow and bumpy.

Lunch at the Orchha Palace Hotel (pay direct).

Afterwards, drive 30 minutes to Jhansi to board the Taj Express Train to Gwalior, dep 1520, arrives 1650.

Feb 21: Drive to Agra (2 hours)/ Radisson Hotel (B, D)

After check in visit Itmad-Ud-Daulah, the first white marble inlaid grave in pure Indo-Persian style, built between 1622 and 1628. Afterwards visit Sikandra and Agra Fort. Sunset visit to the Taj Mahal.

Feb 22 Drive Agra-Fatehpur Sikri- Jaipur / Shahpura House or Mandawa Haveli (3, D)

Fatehpur Sikri, built in 1571, it is one of the world's most perfect ghost cities and a marvel of design and construction. It is a synthesis of the flourishing styles of the Persian courts and the prevailing Hindu Islamic trends. Fatehpur (which translates to town of victory) Sikri was built by Akbar, the third and greatest of the Great Moguls. It is over 400 years old and today its pristine red sandstone buildings are as perfect as when they were first chiseled. The town was erected after a holy man, Sheikh Salim Chisti, living in Sikri, decreed the births of three sons to Akbar after all his children had died in infancy. There are three sections to the City: The Royal Palace (notable for the Emperor's throne), outside the Royal Palace and the Jami Masjid (the location of the Tomb of Sheikh Salim Chisti, a masterpiece in brilliant

white marble). The centerpiece of this remarkable monument is the Jewel House of the Diwan I Khas. Architecturally extraordinary, the four doorways lead into a single story room where a huge central pillar, carved in baroque richness, supports a seat reached by midair walkways. Late afternoon arrival in Jaipur, Independent rest of day to relax (swim, massage), visit markets.

Feb 23: Jaipur / Shahpura House (B, D)

Morning visit Amber Fort. At one time the capital of the Kacchawa Rajputs before it was shifted to Jaipur, the rugged exterior belies a beautiful and delicate interior. The gates of the palace are approached on elephant back.

Afternoon, visit the City Palace where the museums display textiles, carpets, costumes and manuscripts from the personal collection of the royal family; the Jantar Mantar Observatory which uses extraordinary shaped stone monoliths covered in marble to read the time accurately even today; and the colorful market dominated by the elegant facade of the Hawa Mahal or Palace of the Winds.

Feb 24 Drive Jaipur-Pushkar-Jodhpur (310 km) / Ajit Bhawan Hotel (B, L, D)

Morning drive to Jodhpur. We'll stop in Pushkar for lunch, at the Pushkar Palace Hotel Cafe which faces the lake. Afterwards we enjoy a brief walk about the town before continuing to Jodhpur. Transfer to hotel.

Feb 25 Jodhpur / Ajit Bhawan Hotel (B,D) .

Morning tour of Jodhpur, including the 15th century Mehrangarh Fort perched majestically on a high hill. The best way to trace the history of Jodhpur is to visit the Meherangarh Fort, which dominates the skyline. We enter through gates which bear the evocative handprints of the Sati queens, women of the royal harem who took their own lives when their men were defeated in battle. The fort has a series of spectacular palaces, each decorated with exquisite engravings, lattice and mirror work. Of particular note is the museum that exhibits a magnificent collection of royal memorabilia; we stop to admire the graceful cenotaph at Jaswant Thada.

Afternoon, browse the bazaars of the old city, for Jodhpur is well known for its glass bangles, puppets and other folk art. Ornate mirror-embedded and lacquer-finished glass bangles can be found here. The area around the bazaars is a wonderful example of 19th century town planning, blending Rajasthani concepts with more contemporary styles.

Late afternoon drive out to the sand dunes in the desert for sunset, passing by small villages for a glimpse of lifestyles outside the city.

Feb 26 Drive Jodhpur-Ranakpur-Udaipur / Laxmi Vilas Palace Hotel (5 hrs) (6, D)

Enroute we visit the magnificent Ranakpur Jain Temples built in 1439 and dedicated to Adinath, the first Jain Tirthankar. The three temples in the complex each are distinct in design, with carved ceilings and arches decorated with friezes depicting scenes from the lives of the Jain saints. The largest, Adinatha, is noted for its grandiose scale and elaborate ornamentation and for its 1444 sculptured pillars, all with different scenes from Jain mythology and cosmology. The temples are situated in the Haldigathi Jungle where monkeys, wild boars and panthers live among exotic trees such as Cinnamon Apple and Babur Maple. Lunch at Maharani Bagh (Mango Orchard of the Maharaja of Jodhpur) near the Temples.

Arrival in Udaipur and transfer to hotel. Sunset private boat ride on Lake Pichola. Jagat Niwas Palace Hotel is an early 17th century haveli, typical Mewar architecture, with its charm and aesthetics, situated on the eastern banks of the famous Lake Pichola (deluxe rooms).

Feb 27 Udaipur-Bombay (B, D)/Hotel Kohinoor Continental

Morning visit the City Palace, Museum and Crystal Gallery, bazaars. Afternoon enjoy a walking tour with guide, of the cobbled, narrow quaint streets in the area outside the City Palace gates; visit miniature painting studios if interested.

Afternoon independent time to browse bazaars. Evening transfer to airport for flight to Bombay 9W2542 dep 201 5, arr. 2205. On arrival transfer to Kohinoor Hotel (by airport).

Around Phillip Kutty's Farm, nwcsrs



Feb 28 Bombay-Cochin / Tea Bungalow (B, Dj)

The influence of medieval Portugal, Holland and England can still be seen in this fast growing coastal city. It is also known as the spice city of India. Most of the worldwide spice exports originate here.

Transfer to airport for flight SG131 dep 0835, arr 1035. On arrival transfer to hotel for check-in. Then we start our tour of Cochin including the Jewish Synagogue, St. Francis Church, is the Mattancherry Palace, or "Dutch Palace," and the Chinese Fishing Nets along Vypeen Island.

The Jewish Synagogue was constructed 1568 AD, with hand-painted willow-pattern floor tiles brought from Canton in the mid-18th century by a Rabbi who had trading interests there. Afterwards you'll have time to browse the market area nearby, including the spice markets and well-known antique shops.

St. Francis Church is where Vasco da Gama was buried for 14 years before his remains were transferred to Lisbon. His tombstone still stands. The church was built in 1503 by Portuguese Franciscan friars. Nearby is the Mattancherry Palace or "Dutch Palace," built in 1557. The central hall on the 1st floor was the coronation hall of the rajahs of Cochin. Other rooms depict scenes from the Ramayana and Puranic

Legends connected with Hinduism gods. Next we'll see the Chinese Fishing Nets along Vypeen Island (set up between 1350 - 1450). These cantilevered fishing nets were introduced by traders from the courts of Kublai Khan.

Mar 1 Full day excursion to Kodanad / Tea Bungalow (B, D)

Kodanad, the headquarters of Malayattur forest division, known for the Elephant Kraal is about 45 km from Ernakulam (Cochin/Kochi) and 12 km to the east of Perumbavoor town. Kodanad, set on the southern banks of the Periyar River amid the beautiful high ranges near Perumbavoor, is one of the largest elephant training centers of Kerala. Earlier elephants captured from the Malayattoor forests (the forests in the east and north of Kodanad) were trained here. Return to Cochin.

Evening attend Kathakali dance performance, We arrive by 5 pm to watch the performers apply their elaborate make-up and costumes.

Mar 2 Drive, then cruise to Kumarakom / Philip Kutty's Farm (B, L, D)

After breakfast, drive to Kumarakom (1.5 hrs) and a short boat cruise to Philip Kutty's Farm, a small homestead located on an island in the midst of the Kerala backwaters. The farm is part of an island reclaimed in the early 1950s. The 50-acre farm is 5 feet below sea level and has an interesting mix of intercrop cultivation. See the cultivation of various tropical fruits and vegetables including coconut, banana, cocoa, nutmeg, pepper and the culture of freshwater prawns.

On arrival, we board a traditional rice boat for a day cruise on the backwaters of Kerala. A series of canals which thread their way through the state to the sea allows you a glimpse of life in Kerala impossible to get from land transport. Along the way you will pass rice fields, tiny villages, boats transporting children to school and farmers transporting their produce to the market, and women completing household tasks such as laundry, and washing utensils. You will disembark from the boat to wander in the villages and talk to the people. The "kettuvolloms" or rice boats are made completely of natural material. A specially prepared fresh foods lunch served on board. Return to Philip Kutty Farm for the overnight.

Rest of day free to relax, enjoy the island ambiance, take a walk, enjoy visiting the family, explore. Dinner and overnight individual cottages, all facing the backwaters.

Mar 3 Drive to Peviyar Wildlife Sanctuary (140 km/4 hrs)/Spice Village (B, D)

Varied agro-climatic conditions in Thekkady (Periyar) offers vast scope for production of herbs from mint to parsley to oregano. Spice Village is located in the Periyar wilderness, high in the western ghats of Kerala. For centuries, the area attracted voyagers and adventurers, mercenaries and empire builders, kings and merchant princes. Men and women are drawn not only by the lure of spices, but by the romance and wild beauty of the land. The Portuguese and the Jews of Cochin visited as traders, turning the natural bounties of the area - pepper and cardamom, cinnamon and ginger, nutmeg, mace and anise - into wealth. The Periyar hills became nature's taste factory in the 14th century, as Cochin became nature's harbour, the port for a spice-hungry world. Later, the area came under the Kingdom of Travancore, and many of its plantations, orchards and hunting lodges date from that time. The Raj too, left its mark on the Cardamom Hills. Early efforts at conservation came from its dedicated forest rangers, who loved the land and its people as their own. On the road to Spice Village, the earth is a fertile outpouring: every conceivable shade of green is visible here, flecked with the crimson and gold of mountain flowers. This is a world of forests patterned in dappled sunlight, plantations of rubber, coffee and spice, rolling highlands and crisp, cool air.

Afternoon boat ride on lake Periyar to view wildlife. Home to bison, sambars, wild boars, monkeys, nilgiri langurs, a wide variety of birds, and some 750 elephants. This is a relaxing, pleasant experience and not to be compared to intensive wildlife safaris.

Mar 4 Drive to Madurai (180 km, 4 hr drive) / The Gateway of Hotel Pasumalai (B, D)

After hotel check-in and lunch, tour of Meenakshi Temple. The temple was built in the Dravidian style of temple architecture. The Gopurams are covered from top to bottom with profuse multi-colored images of gods, goddesses, animals and mythical figures. The main temple has long galleries and large halls supported by columns. The Hall of 1000 Columns has musical pillars.

Evening return to Meenakshi Temple on cycle-rickshaws to witness the nightly spiritual ceremony (pooja) in which Lord Shiva is carried in a palanquin accompanied by musicians, temple singers and priests to the temple of his consort, Parvati, to spend the night. He is brought back to his temple in the morning. Every day the timing for this night ceremony procession is different as they follow the almanac so it done during an auspicious time. On certain nights of the month there is also a Golden Chariot (in Tamil known as Thanga Ratham) which bears the miniature idol of Goddess Meenakshi from the Meenakshi Kalyani Mandapam To the East Gate (called Aadi Veedhi) prior to the nightly ceremony, around 7.30 p.m. Announcements will be made same day if the Golden Chariot ceremony will be held. Dates cannot be known in advance.

Mar 5 Fly Madurai - Chennai; drive to Mahabalipuram / Radisson Blu GRT (B, D)

Morning fly to Chennai 9W 2342 dep 0835, arr 0950.

On arrival drive to Mahabalipuram and enjoy some free time at the hotel with lunch on your own. Afternoon visit the Five Rathas and culminate the day with a visit to the beautiful Shore temples at sunset.

Mar 6 Mahabalipuram-Chennai-Home

Morning relax; enjoy the resort facilities and the beach. After lunch drive to Kanchipuram. Kanchipuram, known as the Golden City of a Thousand Temples, is one of the oldest towns in India. It is famous for both its temples - many of them remarkably well preserved - and for its hand-woven silks.

Kanchipuram is one of the seven sacred cities of India and is the only one associated with both Shiva and Vishnu. Visit Ekambareswar Temple, Kailashnath Temple, Kamakshi Temple, the Vaikunthaperumal Temple, all built in the 7th and 8th centuries.

With a weaving tradition dating back to the Pallava era (when silk was the royal cloth), Kanchipuram is justly famous for its particularly fine silk saris, embellished with stunning patterns. These silk weavers came from neighboring Karnataka and make saris woven in jewel colors, decorated with gold threads. Most of the weavers work from their own homes and we will arrange a visit to a home for you, if interested.

Afterwards, drive to Chennai airport for flight home. Rooms available for wash/change at hotel near the airport. Late night transfer to International Airport.

Includes:

Accommodation with meals as indicated:

Two nights Delhi at Radisson Marina (B, one D)

Two nights Varanasi at The Radisson (B,D)

One night Khajuraho at Taj Chandela (3,D)

One night Gwalior at Usha Kiran Palace (B, D)

One night Agra at Radisson Hotel (B,D)

Two nights Jaipur at Shahpura House (B, D)

Two nights Jodhpur at Ajit Bhawan (B, D)

One night Udaipur at Lalit Laxmi Vilas Palace (B,D)

One night Bombay at Kohinoor Continental (B,D)
Two nights Cochin at Tea Bungalow (B,D)
One night Philip Kutty's Farm (B,L,D)
One night Periyar at Spice Village (B,D)
One night Madurai at The Gateway Hotel Pasumalai (B,D)
One night Mahabalipuram at Radisson Blu GRT (formerly called GRT Temple Bay) (B)
Room for wash and change at airport hotel in Chennai

Enroute: one lunch in Pushkar, one lunch at Maharani Bagh near Ranakpur Temples & one lunch on riceboat in Kerala

Arrival, departure transfers & land transport in ac Toyota Tempo Traveler or mini bus as per itinerary.
Accompanying escort throughout (two separate guides, one for the North and for the South)
Professional local guide during city sightseeing in Delhi, Varanasi, Agra, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Cochin, Madurai, Chennai per itinerary
Monument entrance fees and Camera fees
Bottled water during the drives, 1 litre per person per day
Elephant ride to Amber Fort in Jaipur, Boat ride on River Ganges & Lake Pichola, Kathakali dance entrance ticket
Entrance tickets to Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary and boat ride on Periyar Lake
Porter tips at domestic airports and hotels; Tips to local guides
India Gov Service Tax 3.09%

Does not include: international air, travel/trip cancellation insurance, visa fee, airport, meals other than mentioned, tips to guide and drivers, any expenditure of personal nature such as drinks, telephone calls, laundry.