

EXPLORE!

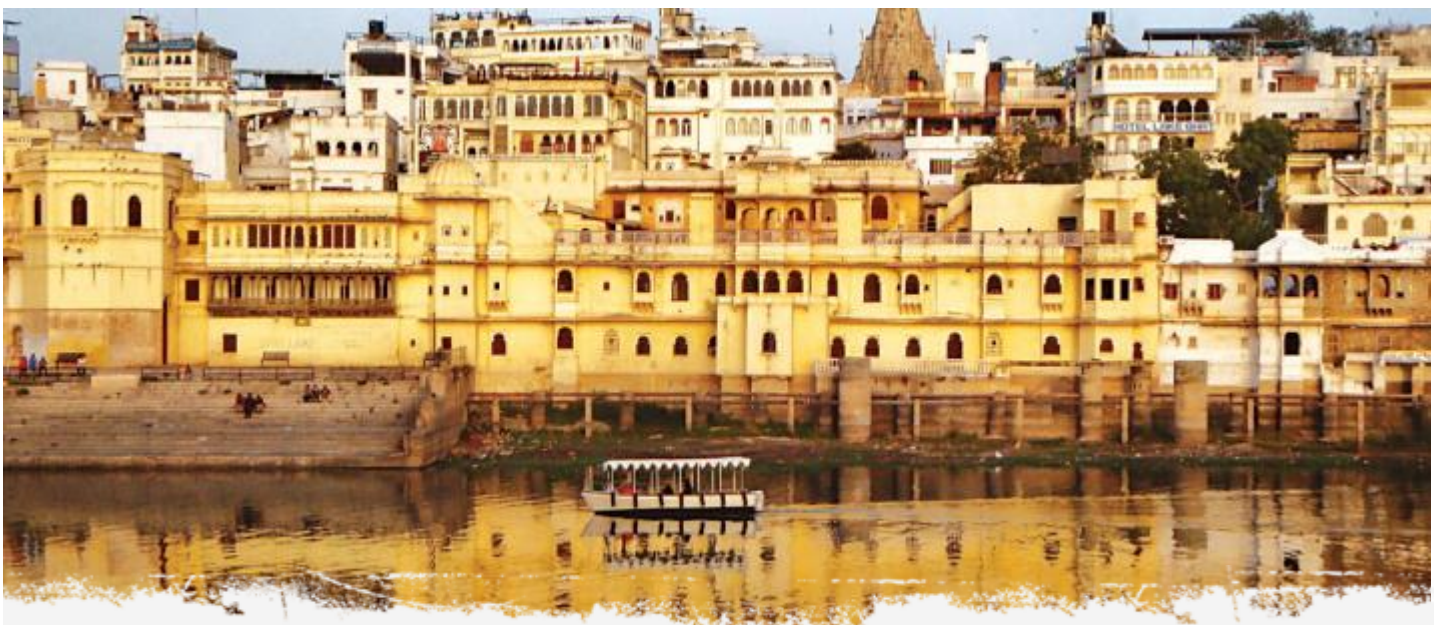
TRIP NOTES



North India Explorer + South India Explorer (QIS 2017)



TRIPDURATION
32
DAYS



Tour Style: Simply
Tour Pace: Moderate

Tour Type: Small Groups
Accommodation Grade: Simple

Trip Code: QIS

Trip Highlights - North India Explorer + South India Explorer

- ✓ Delhi - Explore India's capital by metro and rickshaw
- ✓ Jaipur, Agra & Udaipur - Discover India's glorious moghul heritage
- ✓ Varanasi - Witness the evening aarti ceremony in the holy Hindu city
- ✓ Ganges - Float along the sacred river by traditional sail boat
- ✓ Madurai - Join the worshippers at the vibrant Meenakshi Temple
- ✓ Kerala Backwaters - Cruise through the beautiful backwaters
- ✓ Kochi - Watch fishermen bring in the days catch as the sun sets
- ✓ Ooty - Ride the 'Toy Train' to this hillstation
- ✓ Hampi - Explore the ruins of the ancient Vijayanagar capital
- ✓ Goa - Relax by the azure waters of India's Arabian coast

Trip Essentials

Accommodation: 18 nights Simple Hotel
5 nights Simple Overnight Train
1 night Simple Camping
6 nights Standard Hotel
1 night Simple Homestay

Included Meals: 26 breakfasts, 1 lunch, 2 dinners

Start Point: Join trip: Delhi
End Point: Trip ends: Goa
Transport: 4WD, Rickshaw, Bus, Train, Boat, Public Bus, Taxi

Countries: India

North India Explorer + South India Explorer

This epic adventure across the length and breadth of India offers the fantastic opportunity to discover the country's many highlights and meet the friendly locals as we travel by bus, train and boat. We roam through the bustling city of Delhi, explore the 'Pink City' of Jaipur and watch the sun rise over the magnificent Taj Mahal. Travelling south to the Coromandel Coast we find ancient beachside temples, majestic palaces and former colonial towns. Trip highlights include the boat trips along the Ganges in the north and Kerala's backwaters in the south. Staying with local families we experience their generous hospitality and learn about traditional life. We finish the journey on Goa's Arabian shores with time to relax on its beautiful beaches.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Accommodation Grade: Simple

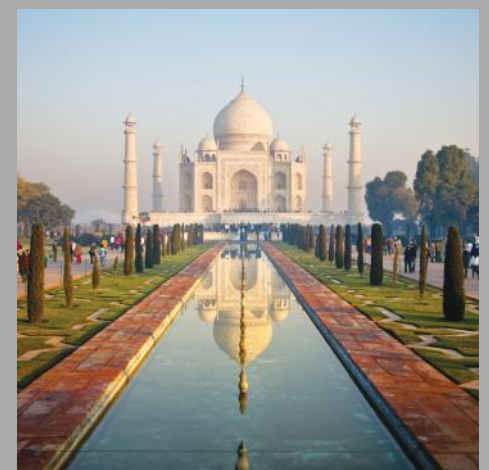
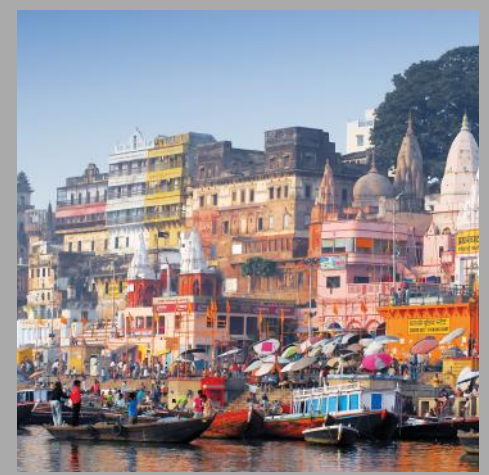
No-frills accommodation which includes berths on sleeper trains, rooms in village houses, boat cabins, campsites, huts and simple family-run lodges, guesthouses and hotels. Sleeping arrangements are simple and amenities are adequate, sometimes with en suite facilities and occasionally communal.

Tour Style: Simply

If your idea of adventure travel is to experience everyday local life in a country then try one of our Simply Explore tours. These grassroots adventures are flexible, affordable and fun

Tour Pace: Moderate

These moderately paced tours provide some busy days with plenty of experiences to enjoy, as well as time to relax along the way.



Your trip itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

Your Tour Leader

A Tour Leader is an integral part of any Explore tour and your tour will be led by one of our experienced tour leaders who have been handpicked and expertly trained. We believe that our Tour Leaders are the key to the success of our tours; they are passionate travellers who are bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Your tour Leader will also take care of all the planning and organisation throughout your journey. Their passionate approach will make this tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others.

DAY 1 Join Tour Delhi

Our tour begins this afternoon in the bustling capital of Delhi. Our hotel is located in the Karol Bagh district of Old Delhi and home to a large market and interesting streets perfect to stretch our legs and soak up the sights and smells of India.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

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 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 2 Optional Old Delhi tour. Overnight train to Udaipur

This morning you have the opportunity to join a guided tour (optional) to see the sights of Old Delhi. A great way of travelling around this city is by metro or cycle rickshaw (please note that these transport costs are an additional cost). This former capital was founded in the 17th century by Moghul emperor Shahjahan. It includes a magnificent blend of architectural splendour and vibrant chaos, the very image of an Indian city all of which is centred on the bustling Chandi Chowk Bazaar. On this tour, you'll see the bazaar and the spectacular Jami Masjid Mosque, the largest in India and Shahjahan's magnificent swan song. We will meet back at the hotel later to then transfer to the Nizamuddin station where we will board an overnight train to take us to the beautiful lakeside city of Udaipur.

Overnight: **Simple Overnight Train**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 3 Arrive Udaipur

Arriving early this morning, we travel to the hotel by taxis/auto rickshaws. Once settled in, we will explore this city on foot. Set before the serene backdrop of forested hills this is without doubt one of Rajasthan's most elegant and sublime settings: a city of temples, palaces and gardens that is considered by many to be amongst the most beautiful in the state. Founded in 1559, by Maharaja Udai Singh II, today it encompasses some of the finest architectural examples of Rajput design and excess anywhere in India. Your tour will take in the lakeside ghats and the dhobi wallahs, who come down to the shore to wash clothes before the setting of Udaipur's regal grandeur. We will also visit the intricate carvings of the Jagdish Temple, home to a black stone image of Vishnu as Lord of the Universe, before moving on to view the exterior of the City Palace, one of Udaipur's most iconic buildings. Over the next 2 days there will be ample opportunity to re-visit some of these places in your own time.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 4 Free day in Udaipur

In a state filled with testaments to a golden age of Indian nobility, the City Palace is the largest of its kind in Rajasthan, a magnificent edifice of towers and cupolas, halls and balconies that overlooks the waters of Pichola Lake. There is the option today to visit this extraordinary setting. Other possibilities for today include a boat trip on Lake Pichola or you can hire a bike and venture into the surrounding countryside. This is a great way of seeing the contrast in local life between the village and city. Other alternatives further afield include visits to the Eklingi Temple, whilst a sunset cruise on Lake Pichola, presents this idyllic setting in all its glory. Please be aware that during the dry season the water levels on the lake can drop considerably, and in the event of a poor monsoon season can dry up completely.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 5 AM train to Ajmer. Transfer to Pushkar by jeep

A morning train takes us on to the city of Ajmer, a famous Muslim pilgrimage centre that is home to the tomb of a 13th century Sufi saint. Our train should get us into the city around lunchtime. From here we then drive by jeep to the nearby town of Pushkar, an important Hindu pilgrimage place which is the setting each autumn for one of the most famous camel fairs in Rajasthan. Set besides the shores of Lake Pushkar, to the north-west of Ajmer, this tranquil little town is one of the oldest in India and is referred to as one of the 5 sacred dhams of the Hindus, boasting one of the few temples to Brahma - the Hindu god of creation, that can be seen anywhere on the planet. This afternoon has been left free to enjoy at your leisure.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 6 In Pushkar

For those that wish, this morning offers a chance to take a hike up into the nearby hills to watch the sunrise from the Savitri temple (optional). Dedicated to Brahma's first wife, the temple lies at the end of a long series of steps that run behind the Brahma Temple and from its lofty vantage point the views out across to the lake and the surrounding desert offer a breathtaking setting from which to watch the arriving dawn. The rest of the day is then free to explore a little more of Pushkar, taking in its lake or visiting some of its colourful bazaars, before the opportunity to take a late afternoon optional camel safari out into the desert.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 7 AM local bus to Jaipur. PM orientation tour

Catching a local bus this morning we head for the fabulous 'Pink City' of Jaipur, a city steeped in the rich heritage of the Rajput princes. The journey should take around 3 hours and on arrival we will transfer to the hotel by taxi. Being the capital of the state of Rajasthan, Jaipur is considered by many to be one of the finest planned cities anywhere. The usual Indian urban chaos is replaced with wide streets and formal gardens. This afternoon we have planned an orientation tour of this city on foot, following which you might like to take in the unique majesty of the Hawa Mahal, the famous 'Palace of the Winds', whose extraordinary facade of red and pink sandstone towers some five storeys above the city streets. Other options include the remarkable 18th century observatory of Jantar Mantar, the fascinating creation of Maharaja Jai Singh II, which houses a collection of astronomical instruments capable of measuring time to an accuracy of 2 seconds, including the largest sundial in the world. Another alternative is a visit to the opulent splendour of the City Palace, a rich fusion of Moghul and Rajasthani design that houses an armoury and a museum that is home to a dazzling array of costumes, manuscripts and inlaid grandeur.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 8 AM optional visit to Amber Fort

This morning there's the chance to pay an optional visit by taxi or rickshaw to the once mighty Rajput capital of Amber and its magnificent fortress. Lying at the mouth of a rocky mountain gorge, overlooking Maatha Lake, the fort is a stunning creation of white marble and red sandstone that contains a dazzling mix of Hindu and Muslim ornamentation, including the breathtaking mirrored halls of the Sheesh Mahal. Today it presents visitors with a staggering insight into the lives of the Rajput rulers. The rest of the day is free for personal activities.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 9 AM train to Agra. PM free

An early morning transfer to the railway station sees us catching the train to Agra, once the capital of the Moghul Empire. Littered with some of the country's most opulent and spectacular buildings, Agra provides a perfect setting for some fascinating sightseeing. The rest of the day has been left free to enjoy at your own pace. One option for the afternoon is take an optional tour of the abandoned city of Fatehpur Sikri. Founded in 1569, it was for a brief time the capital of the Moghuls under Akbar the Great. However, the city was then deserted just 16 years later following the emperor's death. Today it remains a ghostly testament to the majesty and power of 16th century Moghul India and presents a perfectly preserved example of an imperial court.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 10 In Agra. Overnight train to Allahabad

This morning we make an early start and take a rickshaw ride to visit one of the most universally recognised buildings on earth; The Taj Mahal. Built by the emperor Shahjahan to honour the memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz, it was once described by Rudyard Kipling as 'the embodiment of all things pure'. Built of marble and decorated with the most exquisite inlay work, it required the labours of 20,000 men and is estimated to have cost something in the region of 3 million rupees (at today's prices around \$70 million). Here, you can watch the sunrise over this iconic masterpiece before breakfast, after which the rest of the day is free to enjoy as you wish. You may also like to visit the city's imposing fort, whose grandeur and importance has seen it inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Another recommendation is the exquisite Itimad-ud-Daulah on the east bank of the river, a 17th century tomb built for the Emperor Jehangir's chief minister, which mirrors the marble majesty of the more famous Taj Mahal (hence its rather apt title of 'Baby Taj'). There is also a possibility of returning to the Taj Mahal, to watch the sunset later this afternoon, before we catch the overnight train to Allahabad. Please note: There is currently a restoration project taking place at the Taj Mahal, which involves applying a mud pack to the outer walls of the monument. In order to carry out the work, temporary scaffolding is being erected around the minarets and portions of the main dome. The work is being carried out in phases and is expected to continue until January 2017.

Overnight: **Simple Overnight Train**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 11 Arrive Allahabad. Drive to Batoli Ghat and board boats

We arrive in Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh early this morning and, after a chance to freshen up in a nearby hotel, we continue by road to Batoli Ghat on the shores of the sacred Ganges. Boarding our boats in the afternoon, we then begin our two day journey to Varanasi, drifting downstream in traditional crafts towards the historic walls of Chunar Fort. Overlooking the waters of the Ganges, the fort is steeped in five centuries of Indian history, providing us with a fascinating place to stop and explore, before we continue on to our simple overnight camp on the sandy beaches that line the banks of the river. Two-man tents, foam mattresses and blankets are all provided - we recommend that you bring your own sleeping sheet or lightweight sleeping bag.

Overnight: **Simple Camping**



Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 12 Sail to Varanasi

We set sail again this morning, passing through a rural landscape of timeless villages and ageless landscapes and on towards the holy city of Varanasi. We hope to stop at the school in Sherpa village, before ending our journey at the Asi Ghat in Varanasi, from where we transfer to our hotel by taxi. One of the oldest Hindu pilgrimage centres in India, Varanasi is believed to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on earth with its age making it contemporary with the ancient Thebes and Babylon. Lying on the banks of the sacred River Ganges, it is steeped in the lore and traditions of Hinduism, and since its inception as one of the principal centres of Shiva worship some 1200 years ago, it has attracted devotees from across the world to its myriad of temples and ghats. Believed by many to be the place where the material and spiritual worlds cross, countless thousands come here to cleanse themselves along the banks of the Ganges and partake in the rituals of Aarti. This evening there should be an opportunity to attend an optional classical music performance.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available



Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 13 In Varanasi

This morning there is the chance to take an optional dawn boat ride along the Ganges. Here you will see the city bathed at first light and pilgrims performing the puja ceremony to the newly awaking sun. Or you can make a trip by taxi to the nearby site of Sarnath - one of the holiest sites in Buddhism. This is where the Buddha preached his first sermon following his attainment of enlightenment. This remarkable site is home to the Dharmarajka Stupa and the Dhamekh Stupa, the spot where Buddha first adopted the teachings that were to form the very principles of the Buddhist faith. The entire area constitutes the most expansive collection of Buddhist temples and monasteries on earth and represents one of the four holiest Buddhist sites in the world. Late afternoon in Varanasi provides the perfect opportunity to enjoy an evening sunset boat ride along the sacred Ganges, hopefully catching sight of the local priests performing the revered Aarti ceremonies. Varanasi can boast some 80 or so riverfront ghats, including a number of 'burning ghats' where public cremations take place along the water's edge. Please be aware that photography is forbidden at the cremation ceremonies.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available



Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 14 In Varanasi. Overnight train to Kolkata

Today is a free day to explore. You may like to take the time to see the old city and the river-front by taxi, bicycle and rickshaw, or perhaps immerse yourself into the eclectic mayhem of the city's narrow streets and alleyways, a truly unforgettable experience that provides an incredible insight into traditional Indian life. Later this afternoon board an overnight train to Kolkata.

Overnight: **Simple Overnight Train**



Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 15 Free day to explore Kolkata

Once the capital of British India, Kolkata (Calcutta) has had a turbulent past. It was central to the struggle for Indian independence and thousands of Bengali refugees came here at the start of the 1900's. It is a city of striking contrasts and can be overwhelming initially, but the unusual sights, pungent smells and the chaotic sounds of the country's second largest city are an experience unique to India. Arriving early morning, the rest of the day is free to explore. You could visit St John's Church and the many historic Raj buildings around Dalhousie Square. Or you can take in the Jain and Kali temples or the magnificent marble dome of the Victoria memorial, which is where the grandeur of European and Mughal influences come together in a blaze of white marble. There is also the flower market and clay modeller's village of Kumartuli, where the potters spend all year creating a wealth of images and idols for the annual festivals.



Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 16 Fly to Chennai and transfer to Mamallapuram

Today we leave north India and fly south to Chennai. After collecting our bags we exit the airport and make our way to Mamallapuram, set 2 hours along the coast from Chennai on the shores of the Bay of Bengal.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 17 Take a walking tour to the Shore Temple of Mamallapuram

Mamallapuram was the chief harbour of the Pallavas Kingdom some 1200 years ago and a number of superb examples of its masterful carvings still exist in the so-called pagodas (actually 'rathas'). This morning there's the option to take a tour with your tour leader to view some of the areas most celebrated structures, including the 7th century Shore Temple - a UNESCO World Heritage site - and Ajuna's Penance, the world's largest bas-relief and one of the most impressive friezes in India. Although both have suffered at the hands of centuries of natural erosion, a remarkable amount of detail still remains amongst the carvings. We will also explore the fascinating reliefs of the Mandapa Cave temples and the Five Rathas, 7th century monolithic temples that were sculptured out of the very rock that surrounds them. The rest of the day is then free to enjoy some of the many attractions of the area, perhaps relaxing on the beach, or exploring by foot or bicycle.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 18 Free time to explore before overnight train to Madurai

Another day in Mamallapuram offers the opportunity for some more personal exploration, with the chance to visit the either the nearby sights of Pondicherry or perhaps the Hope Foundation School at Pudipattinam. Pondicherry offers a charming mix of French colonial and Tamil heritage, whilst the school at Pudipattinam has been supported by Explore since the 2004 tsunami and is an inspiration to all who visit. Following dinner this evening we transfer to the railway station to catch the overnight train to Madurai and the cultural heartland of the Tamil and Dravidian cultures.

Overnight: **Simple Overnight Train**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 19 Time to explore Madurai's Meenakshi Temple

Arriving very early this morning, the rest of the day is free for sightseeing. Some of the options available include the stunning Tirumalai Nayaka Palace and the 16th century Meenakshi Temple, whose imposing gopurams (monumental gates) and dominating towers rise above the chaotic exuberance of the seemingly endless throngs of pilgrims. Another possibility is a visit to the exquisite Hindu Temple of Brahadeswara, a World Heritage site that encompasses some 400 years of the Chola Empire and includes within its main shrine the largest Lingham (the sacred Shiva fertility symbol) in India today. You may of course just wish to wander Madurai's vibrant streets, soaking up the colour and noise of its many bazaars and perhaps searching for a bargain or two amongst its myriad of craft and carpet shops.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 20 Drive across the Cardamom Hills to Quilon

Quilon lies in India's beautiful southwest, amongst the lush landscapes and hidden channels of Kerala and this morning a private bus takes us across the Cardamom Hills, towards the glittering waters of the Arabian Sea. The journey will take us a good part of the day, covering some 260 kms and crossing the cool foothills of the Western Ghats, through an ever-changing landscape of plantations and verdant greenery. Quilon itself lies along the shores of Ashtamudi Lake and has long been a major trading centre in this region. Indeed, this was one of the earliest centres of Christian activity in the region and provides us with our gateway into the remarkable natural beauty of India's Arabian coast.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

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 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 21 Take a motorboat through backwaters to our homestay

This morning we will cruise through the Backwaters by public motor boat from Quilon to Allepey, a journey time of some 8 hours and the perfect way to observe the colourful comings and goings on the waterways. Boats are the villagers' lifeline, acting as taxis, mail delivery, school buses and even cargo vessels. You may see great pyramids of coconuts or even the odd buffalo being carried along in this time honoured fashion! Along the narrow channels the industrious villagers survive on narrow spits of land, keeping cows, pigs, chickens and cultivating vegetable gardens. Even the shells from the fresh water mussels are burnt to make building lime, and coir is used for just about everything. This evening we stay in a traditional homestay, a fantastic opportunity to learn more about life in the Backwaters. In the late afternoon our hosts can organize a trip by traditional canoe.

Overnight: **Simple Homestay**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 22 Drive to Kochi and explore the fort area

Continuing north today, we head for the bustling port of Kochi (Cochin) by private bus. With a beautiful natural harbour that earned it the title of 'Queen of the Arabian Sea', Kochi, as you might expect, was founded on trade, originally with the arrival of Jewish and Arab spice traders in the first century AD. Its prosperity and importance increased even more with the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century, to be closely followed by the Dutch and the English, an eclectic heritage that helped produce a fascinating mix of styles and influences. This afternoon we will enjoy a short orientation tour around Fort Kochi on foot. You can find the oldest church and the oldest synagogue in India amongst its winding streets. We will take in the architectural charm of the Church of St Francis, where Vasco do Gama was buried for a while, as well as the port's famous cantilevered Chinese fishing nets.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 23 Visit the Jewish Quarter or see Kathakali dancing

Today is left free to explore at your leisure. Fort Kochi is the oldest European settlement in India (1500), with a mix of English, Dutch and Portuguese architecture, making it a fascinating city to wander and discover either on foot or by auto-rickshaw. The Mattancherry Palace was built by the Portuguese in the 16th century, but extensive renovations by the Dutch some hundred years later earned it the name 'The Dutch Palace' and today it houses some of the best murals in India, depicting scenes from the Ramayana and other great legends. There is the option of taking a ferry across to nearby Ernakulam, or perhaps visiting the sumptuous grandeur of the Tripunithura Hill Palace, the impressive former residence of the Maharajas of Kochi. Kochi is also home to the famous Kathakali dance, thought by some to be the very essence of the culture of Kerala, portraying as it does events from the great Indian epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Its origins may have come from traditional temple rituals and from an art form known as Koodiyattam. It is the face make up which makes this dancing so unique and dancers can take up to three hours painting their faces - the features are heavily emphasised as it is the facial expressions and co-ordinated eye movements which are important in the dance. This evening there may be an opportunity to view one of these remarkable performances for ourselves (optional).

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 24 Travel to the hill station of Ooty

A morning train to Coimbatore takes us back across the Western Ghats, towards the old hill stations of the British Raj. After the short train ride we switch to a bus and drive the remaining distance to Ooty.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 25 Take a ride on the Toy Train

Today we take a short circular journey on the 'Toy Train' the only rack and pinion railway in Asia. Pulled by steam and crossing forested hills and girder bridges, the blue and cream carriages hark back to a golden age of engineering, when seemingly no hurdle could halt the ever-expanding British Empire. The railway itself can boast an interesting array of statistics, including a gradient of 1 in 12, no fewer than 208 curves and an impressive 13 tunnels. Given the terrain over which it has to negotiate it is also probably the slowest train in the country, averaging just 10.5km an hour. Whilst traditionally the Toy Train was pulled by steam engines these days they

are mostly pulled by diesel engines. The rest of the afternoon is free to explore something of Ooty's natural and colonial charms at your leisure.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 26 Travel by public bus to Mysore

Departing Ooty today we take a public bus north, to the city of Mysore, famed for its silk and sandalwood as well as its Dasara festivities. The so called 'City of Palaces', it was, until the middle years of the last century, the heart of the regal state of Mysore. Today it is renowned as the cultural capital of Karnataka. Depending upon our departure time from Ooty, there may be time later this afternoon for some exploration of the city before dinner.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 27 Discover Mysore before the sleeper train to Hospet

Today there's a chance to visit some of the cities cultural highlights, including the sumptuous grandeur of the Maharajah's Palace. Originally built in the 14th century, the palace has undergone two subsequent re-buildings (the most recent being in 1912 when the palace was redesigned by the English architect Henry Irwin). Today it is an opulent mix of Hindu and British architecture, filled with stained glass, mirrored halls and a fascinating mix of the elegant and the gaudy. The Chamundi Hills that overlook the city are home to the towering Sri Chamundeswari Temple and the giant representation of Shiva's sacred bull, Nandi, which was carved from a single piece of rock in the 17th century and is one of the largest in the country. Later today we depart the city and board the overnight train to Hospet, our gateway onto the fabulous World Heritage sites of Hampi.

Overnight: **Simple Overnight Train**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 28 Transfer to the ancient Vijayanagar capital, Hampi

Arriving in Hospet early this morning we continue on to Hampi by taxi. The flourishing capital of the Vijayanagar Kings between the 14th to 16th centuries, Hampi was once the powerbase of one of the largest Hindu empires in Indian history. The sudden destruction of the city, following the Battle of Taikota in 1565, saw it abandoned by its people, leaving behind a ruined city that, even today, still conjures up something of the spirit of its long departed occupants. This afternoon you can choose to explore something of the ruins, or just enjoy a stroll through the wonderful countryside that surrounds these ethereal structures.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 29 A free day to explore the ruins and temples of Hampi

At its peak, Hampi was reputedly the size of Rome, with nearly half a million people occupying its city streets. Today has been left free to explore its numerous temples and monuments, one of the most remarkable examples of South Indian Dravidian architecture anywhere in India. There are the stunning carvings that adorn the temples of Virupaksha and Vittala, the sculptured pillars of the Ramachandra Swami Shrine and the wonderful two-storied Lotus Pavilion, all providing rich testament to one of the most powerful Hindu dynasties that ever existed.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 30 Take the day train to Goa

We catch another train this morning, crossing over the Western Ghats to Margaon in Goa, the one-time Portuguese colony on the Arabian Sea. Under Alfonso de Albuquerque, the Portuguese landed here in the 16th century, capturing the original Arab trade settlement and building a city festooned with gardens and fountains, monasteries and churches, most of them sadly now gone. Goa became a rich source of trade, bringing east and west together to trade pearls and rubies, exotic spices and Chinese porcelain. This eclectic mix of cultural influences has had a marked effect on the region, with Catholicism still firmly entrenched and the Portuguese custom of afternoon siestas still widely practised in the heat of the afternoon. Food too plays a big part in Goa's heritage, with pork

vindaloo being a particularly popular dish and the locally brewed feni - a spine-tingling spirit made from coconut or cashews - providing a favoured tiple.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY **31** Free time to explore Panjim or relax on the beach

A free day today, you may choose to tour a spice plantation or to explore Panaji, Goa's easy going capital; a friendly, sleepy town of narrow winding streets and whitewashed shuttered houses. The Malabar beaches here are very long and very white against the turquoise waters of the Arabian Sea and close to the capital you can find the superb beaches of Gaspar Dias and Dona Paula. Please be aware though of the strong undercurrents that can make some of these offshore waters dangerous. It is also possible to explore the beautiful Goan countryside by bicycle.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY **32** Tour ends in Goa

Our tour ends this morning after breakfast.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Accommodation Notes

Accommodation in India is as varied as the country itself. On our tours we stay in a mix of hotels, heritage properties, camp sites and homestays. Standards do not equate to standards in the UK and it's best to approach each type of accommodation with an open mind. Service can be slow in places especially when travelling with a group. For the most part hotels do not have heating so in the winter months it can be chilly and if you feel the cold you may wish to ask for extra blankets. Hot water is not always available 24 hours a day in some of the smaller properties, and with a group staying you might find if you are showering last you may miss out on the hottest water.

Several nights on this trip are spent on overnight trains. Although the sleeping arrangements are quite basic, this is a fun, economical and very authentic way to travel in India. We will usually be in 2 tier class which consists of two bunk beds in a four berth cabin, separated from the aisle by a curtain. Clean pillows, sheets and blankets are distributed to all passengers in the evening. The air conditioning can make the carriage very cold so it is a good idea to have something warm to wear in bed. Occasionally we will be in a three-tier carriage which is very similar to the two-tier, except there are three bunk beds each side and no curtain.

Food & Drink

Included meals: 26 breakfasts, 1 lunch, 2 dinners included in the price of this trip. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Trip

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the trip price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

India

Lunch £: 6.00

Dinner £: 8.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

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India

Bottle of Beer £: 1.40

Water £: 0.50

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Delhi - Metro - 32INR, Old Delhi by rickshaw - 100INR, Jami Masjid shoe cover charge - 20 INR

Udaipur - Boat hire on Lake Pichola - 300INR, Bike hire 200INR - , City palace entrance charges 75INR

Pushkar - Camel Safari 500 INR

Jaipur - Rickshaw for visit to City Palace and Hawa Mahal 200 INR, City Palace entrance 300 INR, Observatory entrance 100 INR , Hawa Mahal entrance 50INR Excursion to Amber Fort by car 350 INR, Entrance to Amber Fort 150 INR

Agra - Rickshaw to Agra Fort (return) 200 INR Entrance fee to Agra Fort 300INR Rickshaw to 'Baby Taj' 200 INR Entrance fee to 'Baby Taj' 110 INR Rickshaw to Fatehpur Sikri 10INR0 (one way) Fatehpur Sikri entrance fee 260INR.

Varanasi - Sunrise visit to the Ghats by boat 500INR, Sunset Arti Ceremoni by boat 600INR, Sarnath entrance fee 105INR

Kolkata - Car to Flower Market & Clay Modellers village 250INR

Mamallapuram - Temple tour Car and entrances 500 INR, Return taxi to Pondicherry 2150 INR, Visit to Hope School 350 INRMadurai

Meenakshi Temple - entrance 5 INR, transport by tuk tuk 250INR. Gandhi Museum entrance 50 INR

Mancombo - Traditional wooden canoe ride 200 INR

Kochi - Harbour Boat Cruise 300 INR, Kathakali Dance 250 INR, Mattancherry Palace entrance 90 INR, Synagogue entrance 5 INR,

Tripunithura Hill Palace, taxi and entrance 500 INR,

Mysore - Taxi to visit Maharajas Palace 200INR, Palace entrance 250INR, Chamundi Hill entrance 100INR

Hampi - Entrance to Elephant Stables and Vittala Temple 250 INR

Goa - Spice plantation tour 350 INR

Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Tipping - Local Crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly, you should allow £40 for tipping.

In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Foreign Exchange

India

ATM Availability: ATMs are available in most large cities in India but they are very limited elsewhere so please do not rely on this.

Credit Card Acceptance: Very rarely, only in the larger outlets.

Travellers Cheques: Opportunities to exchange are limited.

Local Currency: Indian Rupee Recently new 500, 1000 and 2000 rupee notes have been brought in to circulation and as the old notes are no longer accepted there have been some cash flow issues. You don't need to worry about being given old notes as it's very easy to tell the difference, the new notes are pristine in comparison with most Indian money which is fairly tatty.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: GBP/US\$ are the best currency to change into local currency.

Where to Exchange: The Indian rupee is a restricted currency and it is best not to obtain in the UK as rates are very poor. You can either change money at the airport on arrival or in major towns during the tour. Your Tour Leader will advise you on the best places in each town. Both GBP and USD cash are easy to exchange at the airport and at hotels however you will be restricted to changing £60 cash at a time and it's not possible to change money at these locations using a credit or debit card.

Joining your Trip

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

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The Adventure Travel Experts

CAMPBELL IRVINE
DIRECT TRAVEL INSURANCE



Travel Insurance is essential. If you have not already arranged cover, please contact our recommended Travel Insurance providers www.campbellirvinedirect.com/Explore who offer Travel Insurance specifically designed to cover travel with Explore or call **Campbell Irvine Direct** on Tel: 020 7938 1734

Explore Worldwide is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Travel Aware

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at www.explore.co.uk/travel-safety

We strongly advise that you register with the FCO to receive updates to the travel advice for your chosen destination. A hard copy of the current FCO Travel Advice for your chosen destination is available by contacting cr@explore.co.uk or 01252 379438.

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Visa Information

India: Holders of passports endorsed 'British citizen' may be eligible for the e-Tourist Visa to enter India.

The visa can be applied for through the official Indian government visa website only - <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html>. Please check all eligibility criteria that can be found on the website but important points are listed below -

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You must be arriving into one of 24 selected entry points which can be found via the official Indian Government website link above. However, you can exit from any of the authorised immigration check posts in India.

Passports must have at least 6 months validity from the date of arrival in India and at least two blank pages for stamping. The visa application will take approximately 4 days to process.

It is valid for 60 days from the date of arrival in to India, and double entry is permitted on the e-Tourist visa. You can only obtain 2 e-visas for India in a calendar year.

The visa costs \$75. Biometric data will be collected on arrival in India.

Whilst the online form offers a relatively quick way to apply for a visa, a number of applicants have reported difficulty in completing the form. Travcour will complete the on-line visa on your behalf for a fee of £25 + the visa cost. Please contact them directly if you wish to take up this service.

If you are not eligible for the e-Tourist Visa, please refer to VFS Global to apply for your Indian visa - http://in.vfsglobal.co.uk/how_to_apply.html.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on **0208 5431846**.

Vaccinations & Protection

India

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against Tetanus, Infectious Hepatitis, Typhoid and Polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth> and from your local healthcare provider.

Preparing for your Trip

Climate

India

There is considerable variation between the different regions of India but, in general, the climate is tropical. Summer temperatures on the plains are very hot, but cooled by the South-West Monsoon, which lasts from June- September. During these months it can be very wet and therefore very humid. At altitude, temperatures can become quite cool at night even in the summer and may drop below freezing between December and February so warm clothing is necessary. In the winter, northern and mid India can be very cool, with cold evenings, so warm clothing, including plenty of layers, are essential. The south of India remains warm and sunny during the winter months.

Clothing

In general only lightweight clothing is needed during the day, but bring warmer clothing for the winter evenings in the North from mid November to mid February, (esp. December and January) when a windproof jacket and several warm layers are also recommended. Hotel heating arrangements in the North are not on a par with UK standards and from December to February thermals may be useful. Bear in mind that South India is tropical with high humidity. Lightweights are needed all year round with some warmer clothes for cooler evenings, particularly in winter (Nov-Mar) in the Nilgiri Hills. Due to the high chance of rain between October and December, it is advisable to take a rain jacket or umbrella during this time. Casual clothes are the most practical: tight fitting garments, brief shorts and skirts should be avoided, since they attract unwelcome attention. Shoes must be taken off for temple visit and you must always cover up arms and legs when going inside. You may want to take an old pair of socks to the temples as the floor can get very hot and difficult to walk on.

Equipment

Tents (with mosquito screens), mattresses and 2 blankets per passenger are provided locally for the Ganges river camp - we recommend bringing your own sleep sheet or lightweight bag. Bring a torch and a personal water bottle.

Footwear

Comfortable shoes & sandals

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

It is possible at most stations to pay porters to carry your bags to and from the train however please be aware that the costs can seem high in comparison to other services. Most train stations have several sets of stairs to reach the platforms. It is worth packing light so you can carry everything yourself.

Luggage allowance on trip: 15Kg

Transport

The flights from Kolkata to Chennai is included in the cost of your tour. It is important that we have your passport information at the time of booking in order to book the flights. The flight ticket will be issued locally and will be given to you by your Tour Leader shortly before the flight.

Your passport details will also be used to book tickets on the train journeys included on your tour.

Travelling on an Indian train is a fantastic experience, with millions using the rail network every day it is the perfect opportunity to meet local families.

For all the train journeys on our trips, we will reserve your seats/berths in advance in 2nd class with air conditioning. Whilst we'll try to ensure the group is all together, due to overwhelming demand and the system for booking train tickets in India, it may not always be possible to have everyone in the same carriage and some reservations may be in 3rd class. In such cases our Tour Leaders will help everyone to find their seats and ensure you get the most out of your journey. For overnight trains, each berth is separated by curtains and has 4/6 bunk beds. Bedding (sheet, blanket and pillow) is provided but you may wish to bring your own sleeping liner for added comfort. Train travel in India is safe and civilised but for added security whilst you sleep it may be a good idea to bring a bike lock for your bags. If you do not wish to carry one with you, your tour leader can help you to purchase one locally before your train journey.

Local buses are also used on this tour which helps us to mingle with the Indian people as they go about their daily lives. They are not as comfortable as a private minibus would be but provide an authentic, fun experience that helps us to see the real India.

General Information

Country details

India

Population: 1,210,193,422

Size of Country: 3,287,263 sq km

Major Language: Hindi and English.

Religion: Catholicism, Hindu, Muslim and Sikhism

Time Difference to GMT: +5

Electric Supply & Plugs

India

3 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailor-made holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one of the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, or any number of unusual forms of transport. Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people) and have recently supported women's cooperatives in Borneo and Morocco. We are a member of Tourism Concern's Ethical Tour Operator Group (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) and support their campaign for fair and ethical tourism. We also care passionately about the world's wildlife and actively support and promote the Born Free Organisation and Mahouts Elephant Foundation.

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017.

Trip Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2017 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2017. 2018/19 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2018.

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