EXPLORE! Tour Notes

PRICE GUARANTEE 100% NO SURCHARGES

Kolkata to Amritsar (RBA 2016)

RAIL JOURNEYS

TRIPDURATI
16
DAYS

Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Moderate

Tour Type: Small Groups
Accommodation Grade: Standard

Trip Code: RBA

Trip Highlights - Kolkata to Amritsar

- ✓ Bodh Gaya - Visit to the spiritual centre of Buddhism
- ✓ Varanasi - Soak up the atmosphere in this sacred Hindu city
- ✓ Agra - Watch the sunrise over the beautiful Taj Mahal
- ✓ Delhi - Explore Old and New Delhi
- ✓ Shimla - Ride the narrow gauge 'Toy' train
- ✓ Amritsar - Experience the captivating atmosphere of the Golden Temple, the sacred heart of the Sikh faith

Trip Essentials

Accommodation:	14 nights Standard Hotel 1 night Simple Overnight Train
Included Meals:	15 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 0 dinners
Start Point:	Join trip: Kolkata
End Point:	Trip ends: Amritsar
Transport:	Rickshaw, Bus, Train, Boat
Countries:	India

Kolkata to Amritsar

Travel on India's extensive rail network from Kolkata in the Bay of Bengal to Amritsar's Golden Temple. We travel to India's holiest places including the birthplace of Buddhism in Bodh Gaya and the sacred city of Varanasi. We also sail along the Ganges in a fishing boat and ride on a steam train to an old Himalayan hill station. Travelling mainly by train we get a chance to mix with local families and really get under the skin of the country.

Why Book this trip

This tour is ideal for anyone wanting to experience India's fantastic rail network. Travelling mainly by train it's a great opportunity to mix with local families and really get under the skin of the country.

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: Standard

Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

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.

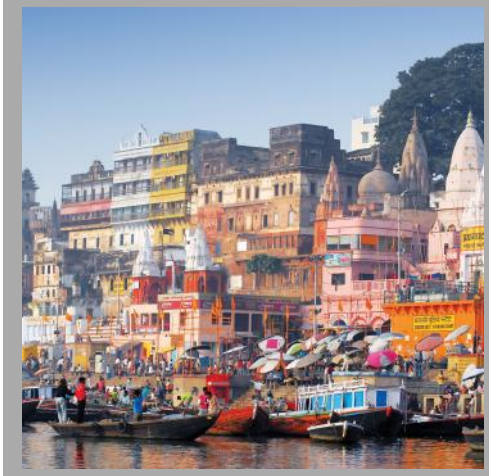
Your trip itinerary

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 in Kolkata

Our tour begins this evening in 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. Flights to Kolkata often land in the middle of the night, so we are aware that some customers may get to the joining hotel in the early hours of day two. Although the trip is advertised to begin on day one, there are no planned activities, which means you're welcome to arrive on day two if this helps with making your travel plans.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: None

DAY 2 Explore Kolkata's temples and flower market

This morning is free to relax, then this afternoon we intend to explore something of this most interesting of cities, with a tour of some of its major sights. We plan to visit St John's Church and the many historic Raj buildings around Dalhousie Square, the Kali temple and the magnificent marble dome of the Victoria memorial, where the sumptuous grandeur of European and Mughal influences come together in a blaze of white marble.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3 Free time in Kolkata to visit Mother Teresa's house

This morning we'll continue our exploration of Kolkata with a visit to the colourful flower market and the clay modeller's village. The potters here spend all year creating a wealth of images and idols for the annual festivals and, as the time approaches for the models to be prepared for the coming pujas, the streets are filled with an overwhelming display of brightly coloured and richly attired idols. We'll also visit Kolkata's wonderfully intricate Jain temple which is set in beautiful gardens and is an important pilgramage site for Jains from all over India. The afternoon is left free to discover more of the city. You may wish to visit the Mother Theresa Home and Orphanage. This remarkable woman, born in Serbia in 1910, has become synonymous with the city of Calcutta. A member of the Order of the Loreto nuns, she was sent to India in 1937 and spent the next 60 years attempting to alleviate some of the appalling poverty that first assailed her on her arrival here, self sacrificing acts that saw her beatified by the Vatican in 2003.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4 Travel to the Buddhist town of Bodh Gaya

A free morning affords an opportunity to explore a little more of the city. You may wish to travel to the Dakshieswar Kali Temple and the Ramakrishna Mission. Transferring to the railway station later this afternoon we then continue our journey by train, heading for the important Buddhist pilgrimage site of Bodh Gaya, in the Bihar province on the plains of the eastern Ganges. It was here that the Lord Buddha attained enlightenment, making the town an important mecca for pilgrims from across India and the rest of the Buddhist world.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5 See the Bodhi tree. Take a train to Varanasi

This morning we will join the constant flow of the faithful to visit some of the most important sites in the Buddhist world. Whilst the original Bodhi tree under which Prince Siddhartha Gautama achieved enlightenment over 2600 years ago no longer remains, its ancestral descendants still occupy the same spot and we will visit it, along with the majestic Mahbodhi Temple this morning. Built in the 6th century AD on the site of an original temple erected by the emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BC, this magnificent building, topped by a towering 50m high spire, was declared a World Heritage Site in 2002 and is one of the oldest brick built Buddhist temples in India. We will also visit the 25m high Great Buddha Statue, before taking an early afternoon train east, towards the holy city of Varanasi, certainly one of the oldest Hindu pilgrimage centres in India and believed to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on earth, its age making it a contemporary with ancient Thebes and Babylon. Lying on the banks of the sacred River Ganges, Varanasi 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. It is believed by many that this is where the material and spiritual worlds cross and countless thousands come here to cleanse themselves along the banks of the Ganges and partake in the rituals of Aarti. On arrival in the city we will transfer to our hotel, where we will spend the next two nights.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6 Visit Sarnath's temples and sail on the Ganges

This morning we make a short journey north, to the sacred site of Sarnath, the cradle of Buddhism, where the Buddha preached his first sermon following his attainment of enlightenment. We will visit the main shrine, the Dharmarajka Stupa and the Dhamekh Stupa, the spot where he first espoused the teachings that were to form the very principles of the Buddhist faith. We will also see the nearby Ashoka Pillar and the monastery, the centre pieces of what is in effect probably the most expansive collection of Buddhist temples and monasteries on earth. At its height this remarkable site housed over 1500 monks, before its decline and subsequent destruction by Muslim armies saw it all but disappear. It was rediscovered by British archaeologists in the middle years of the 19th century, since which it has recaptured some of its original prestige and now represents one of the four holiest Buddhist sites on earth. Returning to Varanasi after our visit we will spend the afternoon exploring the old city and the riverfront by cycle rickshaw and on foot, before an evening sunset boat ride along the sacred Ganges itself, 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.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 7 Free morning before an overnight train to Agra

It is possible this morning to take an optional dawn boat ride along the Ganges, when the city is bathed in the glow of the early morning and the pilgrims are practising the puja ceremony to the newly awaking sun. The rest of the day is free to explore more of this most fascinating of cities at your leisure, immersing yourself in the eclectic mayhem of the city's narrow streets and alleyways, a truly unforgettable experience and an incredible insight into the lives and cultures of traditional Indian life. Late this afternoon we will transfer back to the railway station for the overnight sleeper train to Agra.

Overnight: **Simple Overnight Train**

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 8 Discover the deserted city of Fatehpur Sikri

Once the capital of the mighty Mughal Empire, the city is littered with some of the country's most opulent and iconic buildings, and the sandstone majesty of its imposing fort is no exception. Built by Emperor Akbar and then embellished by his grandson, Shah Jahan, the fort was once a great city, with palaces, mosques and halls all lying behind the protective embrace of 20m high walls. There will be some free time to wander the city, perhaps taking in the rich elegance of the exquisite Itimad-ud-Daulah, a 17th century tomb built for the Emperor Jehangir's chief minister that mirrors the marble majesty of the more famous Taj Mahal (hence its rather apt title of 'Baby Taj). This afternoon we will visit the nearby abandoned city of Fatehpur Sikri, lying to the west of Agra and, for a brief time, the capital of the Mughals under Akbar the Great. Founded in 1569 it was deserted just 16 years later following the emperor's death and today it remains a ghostly testament to the majesty and power of 16th century Mughal India. Visiting the site with a local guide we take in the splendour of its perfectly preserved imperial court and the grandeur of the 5-storey Panch Mahal. We will also see the courtyard and pachisi board, where the emperor played an Indian equivalent of chess, using slave girls as pieces. Perhaps the finest of all the city's monuments though is the lotus shaped carved central pillar of the Diwan-i- Khas (Hall of Private Audience), a magnificently column of matchless proportions that supports the vaulted roof of Akbar's old debating room.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 9 Visit the Taj Mahal at sunrise. Travel to Delhi

This morning we have an early start as we head for the iconic magnificence of one of the most universally recognised buildings on earth, and surely the greatest testament to love ever constructed. Built by the emperor Shah Jahan to honour the memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz, the building took some 22 years to complete and was once described by Rudyard Kipling as 'the embodiment of all things pure'. Built of marble and decorated with the most exquisite inlay work, the Taj Mahal required the labour of 20,000 men and is estimated to have cost something in the region of 3 million rupees (at today's prices that equates to around $70 million). In the afternoon we travel to Delhi. 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: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 10 Explore New Delhi and the narrow lanes of the old city

This morning we explore the colonial grandeur of New Delhi. The Indian capital has long been a phoenix, rising again and again out of its own ruins and is essentially a city divided in two: a magnificent living monument to the grandiose designs of the Moghals and the British. New Delhi was the creation of the British Raj of the 1930s and its streets are filled with a rich collection of the architectural creations of Edward Lutyens. Our tour this afternoon will include many of the sites of New Delhi and give us the opportunity to see for ourselves this vibrant city of bustling bazaars and historic sites. Following the broad expanse of the Rajpath (Kingsway), we will visit the towering memorial arch of the India Gate, a testament to the 90,000 Indian troops who lost their lives during WWI and the fighting along the Northwest Frontier during the early years of the 20th century. We will view the imposing buildings of the Indian Parliament, as well as the Moghal majesty of Humayun's Tomb, a 16th century mausoleum commissioned by the emperor's Persian born wife and considered by many to be one of the best examples of Moghal architecture in the country. We also visit the towering Qutub Minar, a spectacular 13th century edifice made of sandstone and marble that towers some 73m above the city and heralded the final demise of the Hindu kings and the arrival of the Muslim sultans. After lunch we take a tour of Old Delhi by metro and cycle rickshaw. This old city, the former capital of the 17th century Mughal emperor Shan Jahan, is a magnificent fusion of grandiose architecture and vibrant chaos, centred around the Chandni Chowk Bazaar, an eclectic cacophony of noise, colour and deafening barter that is so essentially Indian. Our sightseeing takes in the spectacular Jama Masjid Mosque, the largest in India and Shah Jahan's magnificent swansong. Taking 14 years to complete, the mosque is a majestic structure, featuring four towers, three gateways and two towering minarets that stand some 40m high. Built from sandstone and marble its vast courtyard can hold upwards of 25,000 worshippers and from the top of the southern minaret you can get a clear view of the colonial designs of Edward Lutyens across the city.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 11 Travel on the Jan Shatabdi and Toy Train to Shimla

Departing the Indian capital this morning we take a train to Kalka, just to the north of Chandigarh. From here we transfer to a narrow gauge track and continue to Shimla on the remarkable 'Toy Train'. Climbing from the plains below, the train negotiates a meandering journey of some 93km, ascending over 1600m towards the cooling heights of the old British hill station. Whilst traditionally the Toy Train was pulled by steam engines these days they are mostly pulled by diesel engines. The journey takes us through an incredible 103 tunnels and past some of the most scenic landscapes in the region, before reaching the town itself, stretched out along a crescent shaped ridge, its alpine style houses shaded beneath dense forests of fir.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 12 Take a walking tour to see Shimla's Vice Regal Lodge

With a full day in Shimla we have an opportunity to explore this beautiful setting further, first with an orientation tour of the town, taking in some of its colonial ambience. The opening of the Kalka-Shimla railway at the turn of the 20th century allowed the well to do families of the Raj to escape the heat of Kolkata and Delhi and spend the hot summer months amongst the cool landscapes of these verdant hills. We will take in the ageing charm of the Christ Church and Scandal Point, where the mock Tudor architecture presents a quite surreal imitation of Old England against the magnificent backdrop of the Himalaya. Whilst following the ridge there is an opportunity to visit the Viceregal Lodge, the former residence of the British viceroy and site of a number of important negotiations that preceded Indian independence.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 13 Free time to explore the former hill station of Shimla

A free day for personal exploration in Shimla. Various optional walks are also available today, such as the 2km walk up to the Jakhu or 'monkey' Temple, which provides some inspiring panoramic views. Dedicated to the monkey god Hanuman the site is, as you might imagine, inundated with monkeys, many who find no trouble in chancing their arm at mischief and mayhem, so be careful of bags, food and anything that isn't firmly nailed down! Back in town, the bazaar is renowned for its selection of locally made woollen shawls, as well as a range of other locally produced handicrafts.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 14 Travel to the holy Sikh city of Amritsar

Departing Shimla this morning we follow the train track as it winds its way down towards the town of Ambala, to connect with an afternoon train to Amritsar in the Northern Punjab. The holiest city of the Sikhs', Amritsar was founded in 1577 and, in spite of extremist unrest and destructive invaders, it remains the spiritual centre of the Sikh religion, its magnificent Golden Temple acting as a serene centrepiece. After transferring to the hotel there may be an opportunity to visit this landmark monument this evening, to watch the reflective light of the moon playing across the tranquil waters that surround the main shrine, the Harmandir. The temple is home to the revered texts of the Sikh Holy Scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib, and its gilded dome is covered in over 700kg of pure gold. A sumptuous fusion of Hindu and Islamic influences, the temple was the scene of the massacre of hundreds of Sikh protesters in 1984, when the Indian army acting on the orders of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, evicted extremists from the temple, an act that led to the assassination of Indira Ghandi by Sikh bodyguards later that same year.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 15 Visit the Golden Temple and the border with Pakistan

Today we visit the incredible Golden Temple where we need to make sure that we remove our shoes, cover heads and wash our feet before entering. The temple itself is a surprisingly small building surrounded almost entirely by tanks of holy water in which the Sikh pilgrims bathe (the name of the town itself comes from the Amrit Sarovar - the Pool of Nectar). The atmosphere is one of incredible calm, with devotees taking their turn to pass through the main shrine, where there is a continuous and melodic recital (known as the Akhand Path) from the Guru Granth Sahib. This afternoon there will be an excursion to Wagah Border to see the 'Flag Down' ceremony, where the border guards for both India and Pakistan make a rather dramatic display of closing the border gates each day.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 16 Tour ends in Amritsar

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.

Food & Drink

Included meals: 15 breakfasts, 0 lunches,0 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.

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

Varanasi - Sunrise visit to the Ghats: £7.00, Sunset Arti Ceremoni by boat £8.00
Agra - Sunset visit to the Taj Mahal: £17.00
Delhi - National Museum £5.00, National Gallery of Modern Art £5.00, Lotus Temple £4.50

Tipping - Tour Leader

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

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. 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.

Accordingly you should allow approx. £35 for gratuities for local staff.

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

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.

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.

EXPLORE!
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

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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 –

You must be arriving into one of 16 selected entry points, however, you can exit from any of the authorised immigration check posts in India. Entry points are – Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Goa, Kochi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Jaipur, Amritsar, Gaya, Lucknow, Trichy, Varanasi and Ahmedabad.
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 only valid for 30 days and is only allowed for a maximum of two visits in a calendar year.
The visa costs $60.
Biometric data will be collected on arrival in India.

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.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

Vaccinations & Protection

India

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against Tetanus, Infectious Hepatitis, Typhoid and Polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria (eg. Paludrine, Chloroquine, Mefloquine etc.). 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 from mid November to mid February, (especially in December and January) when a windproof jacket, several warm layers, gloves and hat are also recommended. Hotel heating arrangements are not on a par with UK standards and from December to February thermals are also recommended. Local people may be offended by western styles of dress and brief shorts tight fitting clothing etc. should be avoided by both men and women.

Equipment

A torch, water bottle, good quality sunglasses, insect repellent and high factor sunscreen are all essential. You may also find binoculars a bonus.

Footwear

Comfortable shoes & sandals.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and a daypack. Please remember, you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself. You may also find a holdall or a rucksack easier to get on and off train with, rather than a hard case.

Luggage allowance on trip: 20kg

Transport

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. Due to the system for booking train tickets in India, whilst we'll try to ensure groups are as close together as possible, it may not be possible to have customers sat together in the same carriages. In such cases our Tour Leaders will help everyone to find their seats and ensure you get the most out of your journey.

In order to make reservations on Indian trains we require your full passport details. It is important that we receive these details as soon as possible so we are ready to make the arrangements as soon as train tickets are available to buy. For overnight trains it is a good idea to bring a bike lock to secure your bags while you sleep. If you do not wish to carry one with you, your tour leader can help you to purchase one locally before your train journey.

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 & tailormade holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one 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.

Our commitment to the environment

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), Dekamer (a turtle rescue centre in Turkey) and Kids Saving the Rainforest (a wildlife rescue centre in Costa Rica supported through the LATA foundation). We also care passionately about the world's wildlife. We are patrons of the Born Free Organisation and Friends of Conservation.

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

- The Travel Foundation

  Explore are active members and supporters of the Travel Foundation which has established a variety of sustainable tourism projects in destinations and works with industry to improve practice. Visit their website www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk
- Tourism Concern

  Explore support the work of Tourism Concern who campaign for fairly and ethically traded tourism, and are part of its Ethical Tour Operator Group www.tourismconcern.org.uk
- For further information on responsible travel go to www.explore.co.uk/ResponsibleTourism/

Know before you go

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

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 LicenceÂ granted by the Civil Aviation Authority.Â 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: 2016 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2016. 2017/18 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2017.

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