

UNLEASHED IN INDIA ITINERARY

DAY ONE

DELHI

Participants will arrive at Delhi's International Airport and be met and transferred to The Manor. Originally built in the '50s in the leafy Friends Colony district of New Delhi, The Manor offers an intimate retreat set in one acre of landscaped gardens, removed from the hustle and bustle of the city. Featuring Italian marble floors, warm wood paneling and silk furnishings, the Manor will be ours exclusively for the night. A celebratory welcome dinner will be served.

DAY TWO

DELHI / BAGDOGRA / RINCHENPONG, SIKKIM

After breakfast we will transfer to the airport in time for our flight to Bagdogra. Upon arrival we will be met and driven five hours north through the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas to Rinchonpong, a picnic lunch served en route. Once we've cleared the border/permit check, we'll cross into Sikkim at Teesta and then drive along the river to Yangsum Farm in Rinchonpong. Sikkim, India's smallest and least populated state, is located in the northeast of the country and shares its borders with Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal. A Buddhist state, Sikkim is home to over 4,000 plant species, including rhododendrons and more than 450 exotic orchids. On the early part of the drive we may sight yaks and monkeys crossing the road. Upon arrival, there will be an orientation talk before the group will be split into two. The first group will experience a home stay at Yangsum Farm and the other will continue to Village House at Resung. This will allow for an even more intimate experience in the home stays, each small and charming and each with its own distinctive brand of hospitality. Both groups will enjoy drinks by the fire and chatting with the hosts. Dinner will be served under the stars at the base of the Himalayan foothills.

DAY THREE

RINCHENPONG, SIKKIM

After breakfast we will begin hiking. These "village walks" will provide snapshots of rural Himalayan life as we traverse terraced foothills and pass through lush green forestry giving us insight into the local cultures of this fascinating region. The first group will hike through Rinchonpong Village to aristocratic Lepcha House and then up to the Resung Monastery for a tour. Resung is beautifully situated on a hill top overlooking the Pelling, Tashiding and Kanchenjunga mountain ranges where on a clear day the famous Pemayangtse, Sanga Choling and Tashiding monasteries are visible. We'll enjoy a picnic lunch and then hike down to the Rinchonpong Monastery built in the 17th century. A fairly active monastery, Rinchonpong houses a school for almost 60 monks ranging in ages from 10 to 22, their prayers and chants fill its interior. The monastery's main statue is quite unique in that it represents a carnal pose of the Adi Buddha. Group Two will begin at the Rinchonpong Monastery and end at Yangsum Farm. Mid-day both groups will meet together for lunch.

DAY FOUR

RINCHENPONG / JORETHANG / GLENBURN

Group One will spend time at Rinchonpong listening to and partaking in some of the Buddhist prayers and chants. After breakfast, everyone will drive about two hours to Jorethang. After a light snack, we will be driven to the Glenburn Lodge for a late barbeque lunch along the river. Afterwards we'll transfer by vehicles to the 1600-acre Glenburn Tea Estate in the hills of Darjeeling where we will spend the evening. With breathtaking views of Kanchenjunga, the world's third highest mountain, Glenburn stretches from an elevation of 3,700 feet, all the way down to the sandy banks of two snow-fed Himalayan rivers. A working tea estate, Glenburn is owned and run by the Prakash family, a dynasty with a 100-year tradition in tea and is renowned for its culinary expertise.

DAY FIVE

GLENBURN / DELHI / OVERNIGHT TRAIN TO JODHPUR

After breakfast, we will visit the Tea Estate and tour the factory where we will learn about the fascinating process of tea making. Afterwards we'll be driven to Bagdogra airport in time for our mid-afternoon flight to Delhi. Lunch will be served en route. Upon arrival in Delhi, we will visit Dilli Haat, an open-air handicrafts bazaar where we'll find all sorts of artifacts and souvenirs from Kashmir pashminas to block print fabrics from Rajasthan. Later in the evening we'll enjoy dinner at a local restaurant before catching the Mandore Express (a first-class air-conditioned overnight train) from Old Delhi to Jodhpur.

DAY SIX

JODHPUR / NIMAJ

We will be met upon arrival in Jodhpur and transfer to hotel Umaid Bhawan Palace for breakfast. Umaid Bhawan is the last of the great palaces of India and one of the largest private residences in the world, set amidst 26 acres of lush garden. It has served as the principal residence of the Jodhpur royal family since the 1940s. We will then drive to Nimaj arriving in time for lunch at Chhatra Sagar. Surrounded by lush green fields of wheat, mustard, cotton and chilies and vast grazing pastures, Chhatra Sagar's tents are pitched on a dam of a hundred-year-old reservoir. Run by the Nimaj family, the tents are fabulous examples of Rajasthani tents and during our stay we will enjoy the entire property and our amazing hosts all to ourselves. After lunch, the day will be at leisure, perhaps to write in our journals or take a walk around the lake. In the late afternoon there will be an optional yoga session, or for those interested a walk by the lake, which will be followed by a cooking demonstration by one of the wives from the family. The Nimaj Family at Chhatra Sagar have become well known not just for their faultless hospitality but also for their wonderful food. Drinks and dinner will be served around a big roaring fire, under the stars with plenty of chatter in the air.

DAY SEVEN

NIMAJ / NARLAI

For those who wish to be woken early, tea or coffee will be served in bed, just in time for sunrise. Seeing the sun rising over the beautiful Rajasthani landscape, shimmering in the lake as it rises is a magical experience at Chhatra Sagar. This morning there will be an early morning yoga session and a bird walk by the lake for those interested. After breakfast we'll visit the farmers who work on the land belonging to the Nimaj Family, where we'll see rural Rajasthan at its most real, and also visit the fields where they grow their own organic vegetables and grains. Throughout we will be accompanied by members of the family, who will give us fascinating insights into how the people in this area live and work. After an early lunch we'll depart for Narlai by road, about a three-hour drive. Midway between the princely cities of Jodhpur and Udaipur, we'll arrive at the charming fortress retreat Rawla Narlai where we'll be shown our rooms, which we'll discover to be each distinctly different and unique as we soak in the Rajput hospitality. Tonight, we'll enjoy a relaxed drink in the courtyard followed by a traditional Rajasthani dinner.

DAY EIGHT

NARLAI

This morning, after an early breakfast, we'll walk into the village of Narlai. As many of the villagers prepare to leave for their day's work in the fields by mid-morning, we'll be walking through its narrow lanes just as the village is coming to life. It is a very authentic experience and our reception is very special where our presence is not considered one of a visitor but of a cherished guest. Narlai is very untouched by modernization and visitors are rare. During our walk, we'll visit an active Hindu Temple and also one of the many examples of Jain Temples in this village. Towards the end of our visit we'll reach the village school, where we'll visit with the students in different classrooms and take part in a short lesson. Lunch will be served at Rawla after our return from the village. This afternoon we'll relax by spending some time poolside, or in the walled garden adjacent to it for some traditional Indian lawn games. A group of women and their daughters from Narlai village will be amongst us in the gardens, to give massages on the traditional charpoy beds and to paint with henna (known locally as Mehendi) on our hands and feet. For those who want to be more active, there will be an opportunity to go horse riding in the stunning countryside. Or take a walk up the fairly steep rock that is the center of the town and one that is topped by a magnificent statue of the Elephant Headed God, Ganesh. In the early evening you will all be presented with a Sari, and one of the women from the village will come to each of our rooms to show us how to tie and wear it! Drinks this evening will be in the courtyard as the sun is setting, all of us adorned in traditional Indian dress. A special dinner will follow.

DAY NINE

NARLAI / UDAIPUR

This morning we'll be driven to Udaipur, one of the most beautiful and enchanting cities in all of India and a wonderful place to shop. And shop we shall! Udaipur's back streets are like an Indian's version of Aladdin's Cave where amongst many things, traditional Rajasthani clothes, silver jewellery, sequined colourful bedspreads and home furnishings can be found. Lunch will be at Shiv Niwas, one of the few hotels situated inside the Palace walls, followed by a visit to the Main Palace where we'll be given a guided tour of one of the most stunning, and important, Royal Family homes in Rajasthan. Just before we leave Udaipur we'll have one more opportunity to shop, at a reputed Arts and Antiques emporium, where we find fine examples of the miniature paintings Udaipur is famous for, as well as many beautiful traditional object d'arts. By late afternoon we'll drive a short distance to the opulent 18th century Devi Garh Fort Palace. On tap for tonight will be cocktails on the Fort's Sunset Terrace and a private dinner within the Palace.

DAY TEN

UDAIPUR / DELHI

This morning we will be at leisure to enjoy the hotel's excellent facilities including a full treatment spa, an early morning yoga class, or a bit of final shopping. After lunch we will depart for the airport and catch our flight back to Delhi to freshen up at a local hotel in time for our international flights home.

OPTIONAL POST-TOUR TAJ MAHAL EXTENSION:

DAY TEN

DELHI

Arrival into Delhi's International airport from Udaipur where we'll be met and transferred to The Manor Hotel.

DAY ELEVEN

DELHI / AGRA

This morning after breakfast we'll be driven to Agra, a four-hour trip by vehicle. Upon arrival we'll check into our deluxe rooms at the Oberoi Amarvilas set in elegant Mughal gardens with reflection pools and pavilions and terraced lawns. In the late afternoon we will have a guided sightseeing tour of Agra city, including a visit to Agra Fort, where Shahjehan was imprisoned by his son. Here we'll see the art and crafting of the white marble that has made the area so famous, the Pearl Mosque and the Halls of Public and Private Audience. Finally we will then tour the incomparable Taj Mahal. The Taj Mahal truly is one of the wonders of the world. The Taj Mahal is a monument of love built by the Mughal Emperor Shahjehan in 1630 for his Queen Mumtaz Mahal to enshrine her mortal remains. For twenty-two years 20,000 men laboured day and night to build this masterpiece, which has held the world awestruck ever since. Back at the Oberoi, a pre-dinner spa treatment may be on order. Later, dinner will be on our own, in one of their many restaurants or in the privacy of one's room, each with its own breathtaking view of the Taj, man's greatest monument to love.

DAY TWELVE

AGRA / DELHI

After breakfast we'll be driven back to Delhi and have the afternoon free for leisure and shopping. Late in the evening we will catch our international flights home.