



Highlights of Northern India: Delhi, Varanasi & Agra

11 days | 13 days with Mumbai extension

The graceful bulbs of the Taj Mahal. The old, ornate walls of the Khajuraho temples. The flickering candlelight of the Ganga Aarti, Varanasi's daily ceremony honoring the holy Ganges River. Northern India's arresting monuments and heritage richly reward travelers who make the journey—and as you make your way from the buzz of Delhi to the peace of the Panna Tiger Reserve, you'll find your heart growing fuller with each stop. With an extension to Mumbai waiting in the wings, this itinerary shows you India's many marvelous faces. Which will be your favorite?



Your tour package includes

- 8 nights in handpicked hotels
- 8 breakfasts
- 5 lunches
- 5 dinners with beer or wine
- 12 guided sightseeing tours
- Expert Tour Director & local guides
- Private deluxe motor coach
- 1 on-tour flight
- 1 train ride

Included highlights

- Jama Masjid
- Sarnath Buddhist Temple
- Aarti Ceremony in Varanasi
- Ganges River boat ride
- Varanasi heritage walk
- Panna Tiger Reserve game drive
- Khajuraho temples
- Orchha Fort complex
- Taj Mahal
- Agra's Red Fort
- Humayun's Tomb in Delhi

Tour pace

You'll walk for about 1.5 hours daily across moderately uneven terrain, including paved roads and cobblestone streets, with some hills and stairs.

Group size

15–30

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Overnight Flight → 1 night

Day 1: Travel day

Board your overnight flight to Delhi today.

Delhi → 2 nights

Day 2: Arrival in Delhi

Welcome to India! After arriving in Delhi, make the short transfer to your hotel with your groupmates. You'll touch down later in the evening, so use the rest of your day to settle into your room, grab a bite to eat at your hotel, catch up on sleep, and look forward to the rest of your journey.

Day 3: Sightseeing tour of Old Delhi

Included meals: breakfast, welcome dinner

Finish shaking off that jet lag during a leisurely morning spent in the comfort of your hotel. Then, meet up with your Tour Director and set out for Old Delhi. Built on the order of Shah Jahan, the fifth Mughal Emperor, this walled city was dubbed Shahjahanabad upon its completion in 1648 and served as the capital of Mughal India for over 200 years. Wind through its narrow lanes on a guided sightseeing tour and bask in its highlights.

- See the black marble pedestal and eternal flame of Raj Ghat, an enduring tribute to Mahatma Gandhi built on the site of his cremation. Then, visit a nearby museum dedicated to the "Father of the Nation," filled with photographs and books documenting his life.
- Tour the exterior of Jama Masjid, the former imperial mosque of the Mughals. Immediately recognizable by its twin sandstone minarets and three onion-like domes, this immense marble structure is one of Delhi's most iconic sites. Enjoy a reverent moment with your thoughts as you take in its courtyard.
- Split into groups and get ready to crank up the volume—and speed—on a rickshaw ride through Chandni Chowk. Since opening in

the 16th century, this market has ballooned into one of the largest in India. Zip through the streets of the "Moonlight Square," feeling awed by the sights, smells, and sounds of this bustling bazaar.

Wrap up your first full day in India with an included welcome dinner, served with beer or wine at a local restaurant.

Please note: Women will be given robes to wear over their clothes at Jama Masjid.

Varanasi → 2 nights

Day 4: Flight to Varanasi, Sarnath Buddhist Temple & Ganga Aarti

Included meals: breakfast, dinner

Today, trade India's cultural capital for its spiritual one as you board a flight to the holy city of Varanasi. Once you leave the airport, you'll go sightseeing with your Tour Director. Take a closer look at one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world and get a primer on the traditions of Buddhism—a minority religion in the country.

- Visit Sarnath, a pilgrimage site and hallowed ground in the Buddhist faith. It was here that Siddhartha Gautama—better known as the Buddha—delivered his first sermon to five former companions, laying out core tenets of what would come to be known as Buddhism.
- Explore the temple complex, learning about its different stupas and abbeys. Most of these were built in the third century B.C. by Ashoka the Great, leader of the Mauryan Empire. In the wake of a bloody war, he instituted a policy of dhamma—righteous conduct—and was drawn to Buddhism, becoming a generous patron of various monasteries. Sarnath memorializes that legacy.

This evening, head to the ghats (bathing steps) along the banks of the sacred Ganges to experience the Aarti, or the daily ceremony of light devoted to Ganga, goddess of the river. Look on as sadhus (Hindu ascetics) and pujaris (dedicated priests) perform the ritual, ringing bells, sounding conch shells, and chanting a string of mantras. Tiered brass lamps emit a

warm glow, creating a hypnotic aura that only intensifies as the ceremony crescendos. As it draws to a close, watch devotees send diyas—candlelit flower bowls—floating down the river as a final offering to Ganga. Head back to your hotel with a full heart and freshen up before reconvening for an included dinner, served with beer or wine.

Day 5: Sightseeing tour of Varanasi

Included meals: breakfast, lunch

Venerated as one of the Sapta Puri—the seven chief Hindu pilgrimage sites—the city of Varanasi thrums with spiritual energy that emanates from its temples, sacred pools, and shrines. This ancient settlement has nurtured a beautiful culture as well, and with your Tour Director leading the way, you'll experience it all by land and water.

- Begin your day by boarding a boat and sailing up the Ganges to the ghats you saw yesterday. Locals use these centuries-old steps to enter the holy river, bathing in its waters to purify their souls.
- Arrive at the ghats, disembark, and take an in-depth heritage walk through the heart of Varanasi. Sync up with the beat of the city as you wander through the stalls of its bazaar, pass its temples, and stroll by its ashrams—spiritual hermitages that are said to emit positive energy.
- Look on as your jaunt takes you past the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, which is dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva. As one of 12 jyotirlinga shrines venerating his different manifestations, it's thought by some to be the holiest house of worship in Hinduism.

Wrap up your walking tour by heading back to your hotel for lunch. Not quite ready to call it a day? Examine yet another cultural cornerstone by adding this evening's excursion. The history of Kathak dance dates back to 400 B.C., when ancient bards—known as kathakar, or "storytellers"—roamed Northern India. Join tonight's optional outing for an introduction to this powerful art form.

+ Kathak Dance Performance & Dinner

Khajuraho → 2 nights

Day 6: Transfer to Khajuraho

Included meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Board your bus and bid farewell to Varanasi, setting your sights on the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Khajuraho. Make a pit stop for lunch as you drive through the central state of Madhya Pradesh. Arrive at your hotel and dust off a day of travel during an included dinner, served with beer or wine, before turning in.

Day 7: Panna Tiger Reserve game drive

Included meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Before striking out for Khajuraho's famous temples, take a game drive through the Panna Tiger Reserve. Once ravaged by illegal poaching, this protected habitat now rivals Ranthambore for sightings of the elusive Bengal tiger. Intense conservation efforts helped the local tiger population rebound from zero; today, you might just spot one of these regal creatures.

- Hop aboard an open-air safari vehicle and set off into the reserve with your driver-guide. As they navigate, they'll call out the pristine environment surrounding you—the plateaus, gorges, waterfalls, and forests that form the UNESCO-recognized Panna Biosphere Reserve. They'll also educate you on the park's dark recent history; habitat destruction and poaching nearly wiped out its resident Bengal tigers, but diligent work helped bring them back from the brink.
- Hear how the Panna Tiger Project endeavored to relocate villages that were previously in the center of the park; plant native species to restore the habitat for tigers and their prey; reintroduce tigers to the area; and clean the waters of the Ken River. (That last project helped make the Ken one of the purest rivers in the country!)
- Keep an eye out for more than 200 species of birds, as well as tigers, leopards, chinkaras, and other endangered flora and fauna.

Enjoy an included lunch before continuing your adventure through the reserve this afternoon. After a long day of game drives, return to your hotel and get cleaned up for an included group dinner, served with beer or wine.

Please note: As of 2022, there were roughly 60 tigers in the Panna Tiger Reserve—a relatively small number in such a large area. They're also notoriously reclusive, so while you may see signs of recent big cat activity, we can't guarantee a tiger sighting.

Agra → 2 nights

Day 8: Sightseeing tour of Khajuraho temples, Orchha & evening train ride to Agra

Included meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Ready for even more UNESCO-recognized monuments? Today begins with a trip to the Khajuraho temples. Built roughly 1,000 years ago by the Chandela civilization, the 20 or so remaining buildings are prized examples of the Nagara-style architecture typical of Hindu and Jain temples in Northern India. Roam the temples, taking in thousands of sculptures depicting scenes from daily life and other, more sensual moments.

With one major complex down, head to the small town of Orchha to visit another. Connected to land by an elegant arched bridge, the Orchha Fort complex sits atop a river island and contains a collection of 16th-century palaces, temples, and gardens. Enter this vestige of the Bundela Rajputs after an included lunch and examine its Mughal-inspired architecture and beautifully preserved murals.

Depart Orchha, rolling on to nearby Jhansi.

There, board a first-class car on the Gatimaan Express—India's first semi-high-speed train—and travel in style to the city of Agra.

Once there, transfer to your hotel and sit down to an included dinner, served with beer or wine.

Please note: Shoes must be removed when entering the temples. A separate portage service will transfer your luggage from Jhansi to your hotel in Agra; you won't have to bring your bags aboard the Gatimaan Express.

Day 9: Sightseeing tour of the tomb of I'timad-ud-Daulah, Agra Red Fort & the Taj Mahal

Included meals: breakfast

Begin your final full day on tour with a free morning in Agra. If you'd prefer to rise with the sun, add today's morning excursion and enjoy an invigorating yoga practice in view of the city's most treasured monument: the Taj Mahal. Once you've freshened up, meet your group for the day's first guided sightseeing tour. Your target: the tomb of I'timad-ud-Daulah, the lavish final resting place of the Mughal official Mirza Ghiyas Beg. It was built as a loving tribute from daughter to father, and its name derives from the title bestowed upon Ghiyas Beg by the emperor he served: I'timad-ud-Daulah, or "Pillar of the State."

- Walk across its manicured gardens, set out in a perfect cross. (Fun fact: The only asymmetrical parts of the entire complex are the cenotaphs of Ghiyas Beg and his wife, Asmat Begum, laid side-by-side for eternity in the main tomb.)
- Enter the mausoleum with your Tour Director

and come to understand why it's known as the "Baby Taj." Its use of white marble, red sandstone, and vibrant stone inlays marks a transition between eras of Mughal architecture, leading some to consider the tomb a first draft of the Taj Mahal.

Leave the tomb of I'timad-ud-Daulah behind and cross the Yamuna River, making the short trek to some of Agra's most famous landmarks. Up first: the semicircular walls of the Red Fort. Hewn from rust-colored stone accented by splotches of cream, this UNESCO World Heritage Site has kept watch over Agra since the 16th century. Enter through its imposing gates and stroll along its grounds, learning about the fort's importance to successive Indian dynasties.

From there, move on to the Taj Mahal, India's crown jewel and a testament of undying love. Commissioned by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his dear wife, Mumtaz Mahal, the sprawling white marble complex is symmetrical in nearly every way—from its soaring onion dome to the minarets framing it against the horizon. Embark on a sunset tour of this Wonder of the Modern World and let yourself get lost in the moment.

Please note: Shoes must be removed when entering the tomb of I'timad-ud-Daulah.

+ Yoga Lesson with Taj Mahal Views

Overnight Flight → 1 night

Day 10: Transfer to Delhi, Humayun's Tomb & departure

Included meals: breakfast, farewell lunch

Make the trip back to Delhi, where you'll celebrate your tour alongside your fellow travelers over a farewell lunch. But before saying goodbye to each other and India, make one final sightseeing stop. Rising up from an urban green space, the red sandstone walls of Humayun's Tomb pay striking homage to the eponymous 16th-century Mughal ruler. Enter the mausoleum with your Tour Director and explore yet another prime example of Islamic architecture. From there, transfer to a dayroom before going to the airport for your overnight flight home. (If you're staying on for the extension to Mumbai, your day's just revving up.)

Arrive Home

Day 11: Arrival at home

Arrive home today.

+ Mumbai extension

Bollywood studios, skyscraping architecture, history that stretches for centuries—what's not to love about Mumbai? There's always something happening in India's most populous city, and you'll get a tantalizing taste on this two-night extension.

Mumbai → 2 nights

Day 10: Transfer to Delhi, Humayun's Tomb & flight to Mumbai

Included meals: breakfast, farewell lunch, dinner

Today follows the same outline as day 10 of the main itinerary: a farewell lunch followed by a Tour Director-led sightseeing walk through the grandeur of Humayun's Tomb. Instead of retreating to a dayroom, though, you'll make for the airport, boarding a flight south to seaside Mumbai—India's largest city and financial hub. Touch down, transfer to your hotel, and settle in before joining up with your fellow travelers for an included dinner, served with beer or wine.

Day 11: Sightseeing tour of Mumbai

Included meals: breakfast

Kick off your time in Mumbai with a panoramic bus tour, disembarking at select spots and enjoying expert commentary from your Tour Director as you go.

- Begin at Dhobi Ghat, the largest open-air laundromat in the world. An estimated half-million articles of clothing make their way through its concrete wash pens each day, all of which are cleaned, dried, and pressed by traditional washers ("dhobis" in the local tongue). Admire this chaotic symphony, then continue rumbling down Mumbai's streets.
- Make a pitstop at Mani Bhavan, the "Jewel House" that served as Gandhi's local headquarters from 1917–34. Nowadays, it serves as a museum; enter to view a library and the room the political leader stayed in, complete with his bed and two spinning wheels.
- Drive past a trio of landmarks: the Bombay High Court, part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site honoring the city's Victorian and Art Deco buildings; the University of Mumbai, main campus of one of the world's largest university systems; and the Gateway of India, a waterfront arch, crafted from basalt, commemorating the visit King George V made to the country in 1911.

- Step inside the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (formerly known as the Prince of Wales Museum) to examine some of the 50,000 archaeological, artistic, and historical artifacts housed within.

Sightseeing complete, spend a free afternoon at your leisure, and prepare for one final stop tomorrow before departing for home.

Overnight Flight → 1 night

Day 12: Sightseeing tour of the Elephanta Caves & departure

Included meals: breakfast

Take to the water on your last day in India, cruising from mainland Mumbai to the harbor island of Gharapuri—the "city of caves." Dubbed Elephanta Island by Portuguese explorers who landed there in the 16th century, it's home to a labyrinth of cave temples, first carved as long ago as 450 A.D. Leave your ferry and venture into the woods, coming across palm, mango, and tamarind trees (and maybe a curious monkey or two). You'll enter the main cave complex, which is bedecked in rock art linked to the cult of Shiva, and converse with a few of the island's 1,200 inhabitants before returning to Mumbai. Then, transfer to a dayroom for some well-earned relaxation before heading to the airport for your overnight flight home.

Arrive Home

Day 13: Arrival at home

Arrive home today.

Customize your experience

Customize your tour by adding excursion options. Excursions offered on the same day will occur at different times, so there's no need to choose. Save \$10 when you book your excursion up to three days before your tour departs.* Excursions requiring advance reservation only list this discounted price. Call or go online to customize your tour: goaheadtours.com/INA | 1-800-597-0350

Day 5: Kathak Dance Performance & Dinner

\$149/\$159* (3 hours, departs in the evening, includes dinner)

Over 100 forms of dance originated in India—including Kathak. Typified by driving beats and powerful storytelling, it's one of eight classical styles recognized by the country's National Academy of Music, Dance, and Drama. This evening, you'll head to a musician's home for an intimate Kathak performance. Follow the thread of an epic tale, woven by the intricate footwork and poignant facial expressions of trained dancers. After the show, relive your favorite moments as you travel to a local restaurant for an included vegetarian dinner. Relax and reminisce, then head back to your accommodations for the night. Please note: No alcohol will be served at dinner.

Day 9: Yoga Lesson with Taj Mahal Views

\$60/\$70* (1.5 hours, departs in the morning)

In the Hindu faith, yoga's more than vinyasas and sun salutations—it's a combination of physical, mental, and meditative practices that opens a path to supreme knowledge and spiritual autonomy. This morning, you'll scratch the surface of this discipline during a traditional class, held in view of the Taj Mahal. Follow your instructor and flow through asanas (poses), limbering up for the day ahead. Wrap up with a cup of tea, drinking in your brew and the tranquil views surrounding you. Please note: You should wear comfortable clothing that you can move and stretch in. This class is suitable for beginners and experts alike, and mats will be provided. Your yogi may not be fluent in English; if this is the case, your Tour Director will help translate.

*Optional excursions may be purchased up to three days prior to departure or while on tour. Pre-purchased optional excursions cannot be canceled within three days prior to departure or while on tour. Select optional excursions require advance booking and cannot be purchased or canceled after the advanced reservation deadline. GAT accepts payment by cash, Visa or MasterCard for optional excursions purchased on tour. Additional fees may apply for optional excursions purchased on tour. Excursions require a minimum number of participants to operate. Details and prices are subject to change. Due to seasonal hours of operation and availability, some excursions may not operate. If this occurs, you will be refunded any payments made for that excursion post-tour. Learn more at goaheadtours.com/terms