

INTIMATE INDIA

(dates to be confirmed)

GUJARAT



DEPARTURE

Leaving the bitter chill and long, dark nights of the UK behind, you depart from London Heathrow on an overnight flight to the sunnier climes of Mumbai.

DAY ONE

Arrive into Mumbai International airport and transfer to a small hotel near the India Gate for a therapeutic sniff of sea air, a lime soda at Leopolds Café and a long, deep restorative sleep to help your body clock adjust to the five and a half hour time difference.

DAY TWO

After a leisurely breakfast, we catch the short Jet Airways lunchtime flight to Bhuj and check into our hotel. After sorting out our necessary village and alcohol permissions (I will explain!), we have time to unwind and wander round the busy streets of Bhuj before returning to our hotel in time for a Gujarati thali dinner there.



DAY THREE

Today we explore Bhuj more fully. Bhuj is the capital of the Kutch region of Gujarat. and was once an historic walled city of considerable importance but was devastated in the earthquake of 2001 when 10% of its population were killed. However, there remains an intriguing atmosphere and some historic buildings like the Aina Mahal and the Prag Mahal, the local museums and the fascinating bazaars, full of Kutch embroideries and handicrafts.



DAY FOUR

Today we we drive south to the charming old port town of Mandvi on the Rann of Kutch. We check in to the comfortable tented beach resort for lunch. In the afternoon we explore the charming local town of Mandvi where flamingoes paddle around the ribs of vast wooden ocean going dhows being built by hand for many decades of work at sea then return to enjoy a relaxing stroll or even a camel ride along the beach before supper.



DAY FIVE

You may want a refreshing swim in the safe calm sea waters, or linger over breakfast in the fresh air. We visit the nearby Indo-Edwardian Vijay Vilas Palace then drive north to our stylish desert hotel in the small tribal village of Hodka with comfortable tents or Bhunga (mud houses). Relax as the sun sets on the desert landscape.



DAY SIX

Hodka lies at the heart of the embroiderers' villages of Kutch. After breakfast, we will drive to Dhordo, a Muslim village, to visit and to see the precise and detailed embroidery of the Mutwa tribe. Back to the hotel for lunch, and then a visit to Hodka itself, a Hindu village with quite a different style of embroidery.

DAY SEVEN

Today we can venture further afield to other embroiderer's villages in the area, driving through dramatic desert roads with many species of birds and a flat, pale landscape all around. We can visit several villages and even head for the nearby Pakistan border if we choose!

DAY EIGHT

We will check out of our hotel after breakfast for the long drive to the city of Gondal. We will stay overnight in an historic palace Heritage hotel, complete with vintage car collection and a non-veg menu! Optional early evening visit to the Swaminarayan temple.

DAY NINE

We will have a little time in Gondal before leaving the city for the drive to Palitana, where we will check into a modest but comfortable Heritage homestay (India's B&B) in Adpur, at the foot of Shatrunjaya Hill. Palitana is a very rural location. Although being non-a/c, (all rooms have fans) this homestay is family run and highly recommended.

DAY TEN

Today we will need a good breakfast and an early one! After a very early wake-up call, we drive into Palitana to start the climb of 3,500 steps (taking around 3 hours on a good day) up the hill to the breathtaking 853 Jain temples at the top. These temples are considered to be the most important Jain temples anywhere. No-one is allowed to sleep on the hill as the temples were built to be an abode of the gods, and the view you will see as you climb is heavenly. Don't worry if this climb sounds too daunting - there are many dholi's (porters) with canvas hammocks who wait at the entrance to carry the more easily daunted pilgrims to the top... for a modest fee.

DAY ELEVEN

Tired climbers will be glad to know that this will be a physically undemanding day. After a relaxed breakfast, we will drive north to our next desert resort situated in Dasada. On the way, we will take time to stop for lunch at the Rajmahal Palace in Wadwhan, in the heart of one of the old Gujarati Rajput princely states.

In Dasada, we will check into our comfortable local styled Bhunga (mud huts) decorated with mirrorwork, carpets and painted walls, and with en suite open air showers. Time to enjoy a dip in the pool here before watching the sun go down.





DAY TWELVE

Free day to rest and relax. Time, also, to take a morning wild bird desert safari, visit the endangered Asiatic Wild Ass sanctuary or an afternoon village safari which might include the nomadic Rabhari tribespeople if their travels bring them near Dasada.



DAY THIRTEEN

After an early breakfast, we leave for a full day's drive and sightseeing. We will go first to the impressive Sun temple in Modhera, then on to Pathan to see the stepwell there. Also in Pathan, we will visit a Patola weaver. There used to be many families weaving these complicated double ikat fabrics, but now there are just three families left. Patola saris are extremely expensive due to the intricate work involved in making them and have been given to royalty as precious gifts. We travel on, reaching Ahmedabad in the late afternoon. We check in to our smart hotel, once a wealthy merchant's house, and enjoy a delicious meal in the hotel rooftop restaurant under the stars.

DAY FOURTEEN

This morning, we visit the Calico Museum, a world famous textile Museum of great interest. It will put into context all the things you have seen on the tour. Luckily, we have managed to arrange a definite booking here. We will drive on to the intricately carved Adalaj stepwell, built in 1499. Afternoon free in Ahmedabad, to explore, or simply sit and watch the world go by while you sip a rose lassi or sandalwood sherbet.



DAY FIFTEEN

Today is our last day in Gujarat. We can enjoy a 'Heritage walk' around the palls (alleys) and havelis of old Ahmedabad, or wander freely around the busy bazaars and streets of this fascinating city. Time to pack before a last evening meal in Agashaye, the hotel's rooftop restaurant.

DAY SIXTEEN - HOME

A brutally early start takes you to the domestic airport for the 07.20 domestic flight to Mumbai, linking with your international flight back to the UK, arriving into London Heathrow in the evening of the same day.

