

INTIMATE INDIA 2012

TRAINS, TEXTILES, TREATS AND A SUN TEMPLE



FRIDAY 10 FEBRUARY

As the winter chill seems neverending, and spring has not yet arrived, you leave the chilly UK from London Heathrow on an afternoon Emirates flight (changing once comfortably in Dubai), to sunny Kolkata.

SATURDAY 11 FEBRUARY

Arriving into Kolkata (Calcutta) in the morning, we transfer directly to board our ship, Sukapha and relax as we sail out through the outskirts of Kolkata along the great River Hooghly. Unwind in the warm air as we cruise past the Semaphore Tower, Government House, Flagstaff House. We will moor for a drink before dinner then you can retire to your comfortable cabin for a good night's sleep.

SUNDAY 12 FEBRUARY

After breakfast we sail on to, visit the old Dutch cemetery at Chinsura and the Imambura at Hooghly on the way. Tonight's sundowner and dinner is on board, on a mooring in the quiet rural Bengal countryside near Kalna.



MONDAY 13 FEBRUARY

Breakfast over, we land at the country town of Kalna and take cycle rickshaws for a short distance to see a group of some of Bengal's most attractive terracotta temples, as well as the beautiful and unique Shiva temple with concentric rings made up of 108 shrinelets. Kalna is a fascinating village and the people are very friendly, if a little curious as Kalna and its beautiful temples are well off the tourist trail. Later, in the afternoon, we commence the return voyage downstream



TUESDAY 14 FEBRUARY

We continue sailing, leaving the fields behind and arrive again on the outskirts of Kolkata. We sail past fine waterfront buildings and then land at Chandernagore, a French possession until 1950, where we will visit the 18th century church and Dupleix's House with its small museum. We continue down to visit the old Danish colony of Serampore, then sail back into the heart of Kolkata to moor for the night under the famous Howrah Bridge and enjoy dinner on board.

WEDNESDAY 15 FEBRUARY

We will disembark after breakfast and take a morning sightseeing tour of Kolkata, including the Victoria Memorial, South Park Street Cemetery, St John's Church and other colonial relics. In the early afternoon, we check in to the unique and quirky Fairlawn Hotel in Sunder Street, in the centre of bustling Kolkata.



THURSDAY 16 FEBRUARY

We have a full day's sightseeing today which can begin with a visit to Kolkata's incredible flower market, and then include the Kali temple that gave the city its name, the Belur Math temple and the intriguing Marble Palace. We hope to squeeze in a delicious, home cooked lunch in the All Bengal Women's Society, an NGO supporting women and children in Kolkata and Bengal, then head on to Rabindranath Tagore's house and museum, then return to the Fairlawn.



SATURDAY 18 FEBRUARY

We will arrive into Sambalpur at 08.45 and be met by our Orissa tour guide in our private, air conditioned vehicle. Sambalpur is known for its saris named sambalpuri Pata and bichtrapuri, and for cotton tassar. We will freshen up at a nearby hotel, then continue by road through rural Orissa to Sonapur, visiting a textile weaving village on the way. We will check into a clean but very basic hotel tonight, and eat freshly cooked good local food. Bathrooms in the hotel will have a jug and bucket for washing, and hot water will be brought to the rooms whenever required.



SUNDAY 19 FEBRUARY

We leave Sonapur and drive east to Joranda, the holy place of the Mahima Dharma. The Mahima monks pray for world harmony and peace and tend a dhuni, a wood fire that is burned eternally with ghee. We drive on to Dhenkanal to check in to an Orissa style Palace Hotel there.

MONDAY 20 FEBRUARY

We leave to drive the short distance to Nuapatana, famous for its tie dye method of weaving the celebrated Orissa Ikat fabric. We will see every stage of production from silk cocoons through to the completed fabric. We drive on to the temple town of Bhubaneswar so called for its 600 Hindu temples. The city was founded 2,000 years ago in the Chedi dynasty and is now the largest city in Orissa. We will check into our comfortable hotel here and unwind after our journey.



FRIDAY 17 FEBRUARY

This morning we pack our bags to check out of our rooms. The next two nights will be fairly basic, so comfortable clothing will be a good idea, and toiletries should be reasonably accessible. However, today we can visit Kolkata's more elegant side by wandering round to the Indian Museum, browsing in the wonderful Oxford Bookstore then lingering over a smart cup of coffee in Flury's in Park Street. The afternoon is free, but by early evening we meet up again to transfer to Howrah Station to catch the 21.35 Koraput Express sleeper train for our overnight journey to Sambalpur in rural Orissa and the next stage of our tour.





TUESDAY 21 FEBRUARY

Today we will take a heritage walk around the old part of Bhubaneswar city which will include the Mukteshwar, Lingaraja, and Parasuramesvara temples and Bindu Sagar as well as the crafts museum, the local daily market, herbal garden and the 'lively' water tank. We will have lunch in a typical local restaurant. and in the afternoon will visit the unique Sixtyfour Yogini temple at Heerapur village. Back to our hotel for dinner.

WEDNESDAY 22 FEBRUARY

After breakfast, we leave Bhubaneswar to make the easy drive to the seaside town of Puri, taking in the historical Dhauli, and rock edicts if we want, then pausing in Pipli village known for its distinctive applique work. We will arrive in Puri and check into the recently renovated BNR hotel, the Bengal Nagpur Railway Heritage hotel, overlooking the sea. A walk on the beach may appeal after our journey, and then dinner.



THURSDAY 23 FEBRUARY

Our mode of transport today around Puri will be the environmentally friendly 'Greenrider' cycle rickshaws. We will visit the great Jagannath (Krishna) temple at the centre of the town, famed for its huge, ornate Yatra or chariots, decorated and pulled through the streets for festivals, give us the word 'Juggernaut'. We will also have time to visit the beach market, or simply to wander around and explore the town before returning for dinner at the hotel.



FRIDAY 24 FEBRUARY

Today we will resume our normal transport and head out of Puri to the surrounding villages to experience the local culture and crafts, including an artist and painter village, a farmer village and a pottery village. We may even be treated to an informal performance of the gotipua dance performed by the local dancers at the Gurukul school, then we will return to our hotel in Puri.

SATURDAY 25 FEBRUARY

We drive today, our last day in Orissa, to the spectacular Konark Sun Temple, a World Heritage site. This thirteenth century monument is built in the form of the chariot belonging to Surya, the Hindu sun god. The huge wheels carved at the base of the chariot are extraordinary and the roof is over 30 metres high. The entrance is guarded by two carved lions who are each crushing a war elephant. This is a fine way to end our tour of Orissa. After some time here, we drive back to Puri and the BNR hotel for our final dinner together.

SUNDAY 26 FEBRUARY

We make a very early start to drive to Bhubaneswar to catch our train back to Kolkata. We transfer directly from the train to the international airport for our evening flight home.

MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY

We arrive into London Heathrow bright and early in the morning.



India beckons...