

## IN INDIA

The second largest country in the world, with well over one billion citizens, India is an amazing land of colorful contrasts, full of history and traditions, natural beauty, and man-made wonders. It stretches from the beaches of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean to the world's highest peaks in the Himalayas. There is a lot to see and do here, and this trip does all of this and more.

BY LARRY OLMSTED



TAJ MAHAL / AGRA

## 1 ARRIVE IN DELHI

Upon landing you enter a different world, with the scent of cardamom and curry, the sight of brilliant silk saris, and the sound of Bollywood songs. Begin with a guided drive through Delhi, marveling at its cultural and historical center. Many visitors opt to don traditional Indian outfits, and if so, you'll visit a highly regarded designer such as Sabyasachi for elaborate hand-embroidered clothing. If golf is your thing, Micato will arrange a tee time at the **Delhi Golf Club**, one of the oldest in Asia. Whenever you arrive at **The Imperial Hotel**, with its sweeping staircases, exquisitely carved stones, and rows of stately palms, your room will be ready, and you will be swept back in time to the glamorous days of the Raj. Dinner tonight is at **Spice Route**, where the Southeast Asian cuisine is designed to reflect the historic journey of spices from the Malabar Coast in Kerala through Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Indonesia to Thailand and Vietnam.

## 2 EXPLORE DELHI

Visit **Old Delhi**, with its twisting maze of streets and buildings spanning the ages. Each lane specializes in a different commodity, such as brightly colored bangles, brass artifacts, gold jewelry, and brilliantly dyed fabrics. Your guide will acquaint you with the vibrant flavors of Indian cuisine during lunch at a local restaurant. Next, visit the spacious, tree-lined avenues of **New Delhi** and the **India Gate**, a triumphal war memorial arch, along with the **Rashtrapati Bhavan**, the grandiose official residence of the President of India. Visit **Humayun's Tomb**, where Emperor Humayun lies buried in this magnificent red sandstone monument. Cocktails and dinner are at the Delhi home of your hosts, Shumita and Bharat Soni, friends of Micato's owners. Soni's grandfather was the contractor hired by the British government to build New Delhi, and he can answer practically any question about the city.

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## THE EXPERTS

With so much to see and do across this massive canvas, there are difficult choices to be made, and while India has luxury hotels and experiences to rival those of any nation, it also can be a quagmire of hard-to-negotiate dysfunction. For the first-class traveler, it requires expert, insider knowledge—with the highest level connections. That is where **Micato** comes in, an award-winning luxury travel specialist covering India and Africa since 1966, whose family owners have roots in Goa. Having won virtually every top industry accolade, there simply is no better choice, and for this reason Micato's clientele has included presidents, celebrities, and royalty, from George W. Bush to Heidi Klum and Blair Underwood. Micato specializes in bespoke travel, with an itinerary customized to a client's preferences and fully accompanied by an expert tour director, many of whom are from prestigious families, descendants of ruling classes, and have special privileges and access that can be extended to their guests. Micato also handles every element of the trip seamlessly, from hotel and air check-ins to luggage transfers, making the experience completely carefree.

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14 DAYS

PEACOCKS IN RELIEF / INDIA



IDYLIC PAVILIONS / THE OBEROI RAJVILAS, JAIPUR



MIST-SHROUDED VALLEY / INDIA

### 3 BOLLYWOOD DREAMS

This morning, you will visit the **Bangla Sahib Gurudwara**, the famed Sikh holy shrine. A private tea tasting has been arranged at **Mittal's Tea**, a specialty store whose owner is passionate and knowledgeable about one of India's most famous products. Dinner is at **Bukhara**, where President Clinton dined during his state visit, and afterwards, you will be escorted to the **Kingdom of Dreams** to enjoy a production of *Zangoora—The Gypsy Prince*, the first Bollywood musical in India. This extravaganza is exhibited in a new entertainment complex showcasing India's rich culture and electrifying storytelling.

### 4 MONUMENT TO LOVE

Today's highlight is a guided tour and private photo session at the **Taj Mahal**, Shah Jahan's enduring monument to his love, and a shining vision of pure white marble. Afterwards, check into the **Oberoi Amarvilas** hotel where you will enjoy an interactive cooking demonstration and lunch with Mughlai cuisine. Later, see the other wonders of Agra and the Mughal Empire: A magnificent fort, fascinating tombs, and the scenic Yamuna River. Tonight's resort consists of intricately carved pavilions set amongst terraced lawns situated directly across from the Taj Mahal.

### 5 RANTHAMBORE NATIONAL PARK

Board a private chartered flight to **Ranthambore National Park**. Upon arrival, proceed to the **Oberoi Vanyavilas**, a luxury resort bordering the park, from which you will leave for game-viewing drives. Ranthambore was once the hunting reserve for the Maharaja of Jaipur. Declared a game sanctuary in 1955, it later came under the auspices of **Project Tiger** and, in 1980, became a national park. The open bush and dense forest is home to the Bengal tiger, the world's largest cat, at around 500 pounds. Less than 2,500 survive worldwide, and nearly 2,000 are in India.

## 14 DAYS

### 6 UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH THE BENGAL TIGER

Enjoy morning and afternoon game drives. In addition to tigers, numerous animals can be viewed, including antelope and several species of deer. A large number of birds are also found within Ranthambore's borders, over 300 different species, especially wild peacocks with their iridescent plumage. But it is the tigers everyone comes to see. Micato can arrange a private viewing session with the park's game warden. The luckiest visitors catch a glimpse of tigers hunting or females taking care of their cubs. Adding to the magic is **Ranthambore Fort**, built by the Mughals, balanced on a hilltop and often shrouded in mist, with magnificent views from its 1,000-year-old ramparts.



### 8 UP IN THE AIR

This morning, enjoy a drive along the streets of Jaipur to the **City Palace**, stopping en route to view and photograph the **Palace of Winds**, so called because of the perforated screen facade, which catches the welcome breeze. Finally, visit the **Jantar Mantar**, an 18th-century "calculation instrument," an extravagant observatory used to view and calculate movements of the planets and stars, where you will get a hands-on lesson in ancient Indian astrology. Dinner is at **1135AD Amber**, set inside ancient **Fort Amber**, once home to the royal family.

### 10 CITY OF LAKES

Today, fly to Udaipur, the Venice of the East, famed for its lake system, magical ancient buildings, and white marble palaces. Set in the middle of Lake Pichola, is the **Taj Lake Palace Hotel**, among India's best. Built in a unique blend of Mughal and Rajput styles by Maharana Jagat Singh II in the 18th century, it sits on a four-acre rock foundation. Visit the nearby temples of **Eklingji**—100 ancient temples dating back to the 10th century, all enclosed within the mammoth Great Wall. In the late afternoon enjoy a private boat ride in the royal barge followed by cocktails and dinner on board.

### 7 WELCOME TO THE PINK CITY

After breakfast, drive to Jaipur, India's famous Pink City. The majestic town, steeped in history and vibrant with life, features opulent buildings, colorful bazaars, cavorting camels, and adorned elephants. You arrive at the breathtaking **Rambagh Palace** hotel, former residence of the Maharaja of Jaipur, arrayed with terraced lawns and ornate pavilions. After lunch, enjoy Jaipur's most renowned pastime, elephant polo, the "game of kings." If you're feeling adventurous, you can join a team and go for goals from an elephant's back, but simply witnessing the spectacle can be enjoyment enough.

### 9 VILLAGE LIFE

Venture out of the city for a colorful taste of Indian village life in Samode, first driving through the countryside, past farmers working in fields, wooden carts filled with produce, and women dressed in flowing saris, jugs of water balanced on their heads. This is India at its purest. In town, you will experience the authentic and colorful mosaic of an Indian shopping spree as your guide takes you behind-the-scenes and through the bustling alleyways of an old-world bazaar and spice market. After returning to Jaipur, this evening you will enjoy a private meal at home with a noble family who will share age-old Rajasthani recipes and conduct a casual cooking lesson.

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### 11 PALACE DELIGHT

Udaipur's 16th century **City Palace** is a series of palaces featuring a combination of Mughal and Rajasthani architecture, and lends itself to exploration. Have lunch in the **Sheesh Mahal**, a private venue set in one of the turrets within the **Devi Garh Palace**. After lunch board a bicycle for a unique ride through a village outside Udaipur, known for its beautiful countryside. Or, enjoy coffee or cocktails at **Obero'i Udaivilas**, overlooking Udaipur. Upon return, enjoy a spa treatment afloat on the lake in the hotel's **Jiva** spa boat. Tonight, enjoy a demonstration of the Rajasthani platter, a gastronomic delight of colorful, spicy, and unique dishes.

## 12 BANDHAVGARH NATIONAL PARK

After breakfast, visit Eklingji, an active temple where you can go in and observe the worshippers. If you wish, your guide will arrange for you to string flower garlands and hand them out to the attendees entering the temple, a time-honored tradition. Private plane is the best route to **Bandhavgarh National Park**, with a stop along the way in **Khajuraho**. A UNESCO World Heritage site, Khajuraho is known for its unusual and erotic temple sculptures, with just 22 of the original 85 sandstone temples surviving. Board the plane for the quick hop to Umaria, followed by a short but scenic drive to the national park, arriving in time for an afternoon game drive. Bandhavgarh has the highest density of Bengal tigers in the world, and the saying goes that in other parks you are lucky to see a tiger; here you are unlucky if you don't see one. Spend the night in the **Kutiya Suite** (from \$149 a night) at the **Mahua Kothi Jungle Lodge**, located within the park.

## 13 ELEPHANT SAFARI

After the morning game drive, enjoy tea or lunch with a tiger specialist from the park's ranger headquarters and learn more about these majestic creatures. Several of the park's tigers have names and individual personalities, including the offspring of the late "supermodel" Sita, a female believed to be the most photographed tiger on earth, who has graced the cover of *National Geographic*. There are also about three dozen species of mammals and hundreds of types of birds in the park, including a sizable population of leopards, normally the highlight of an African safari, along with deer, hyena, jackal, monkeys, wild boar, wild dog, and caracal, or desert lynx, another large cat. After lunch, enjoy an unusual vantage point with a safari on the back of an elephant. You will also visit an ancient 2,000-year-old fort within the park, with a 10th-century statue of Lord Vishnu. After this adventure, return to the lodge where staff will prepare an outdoor dinner under the stars with traditional cooking and a display of Indian folk dancing.

## 14 TO MUMBAI AND BACK

This morning, fly to Mumbai, the financial and entrepreneurial capital of India, home to the largest movie industry in the world. Your guide will arrange lunch with a prominent Bollywood film director, a personal friend of Micato's owners. A day room will be available for your use and comfort at the **Taj Mahal Palace & Tower**, the city's best hotel. Then explore the city, beginning with the **Gateway of India**, its most famous landmark. The Indo-Saracenic archway is remembered today as the spot where the British staged their final departure. You can continue touring the city's main sites, including the 1,000-year-old **Elephanta Caves** on **Elephanta Island**, or take a drive down to **Malabar Hill**, the city's upscale seaside promenade, great for people watching. If shopping is your thing, there are a lot of top designers your guide can steer you to. This evening, depart for home.