

India – Ranthambore, Bharatpur & Chambal

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

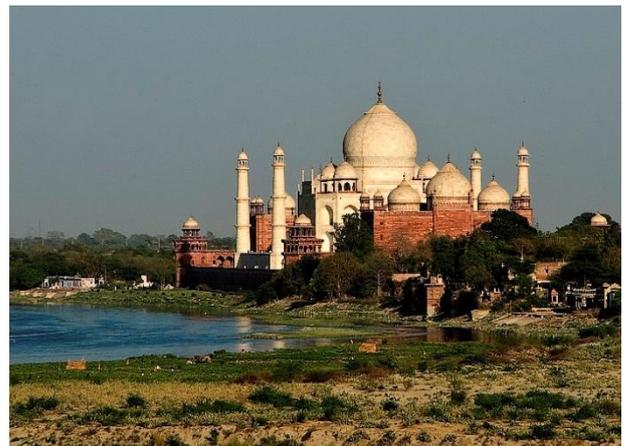
Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London.
Day 2	Delhi.
Day 3/6	Ranthambore Tiger Reserve.
Day 7/9	Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary.
Day 10/11	National Chambal Sanctuary.
Day 12	Visit Agra. Overnight Delhi.
Day 13	Fly London.



Corbett National Park extension

Day 13/16	Corbett National Park.
Day 17	Delhi.
Day 18	Fly London.



Images: Tiger and cubs, Sloth Bear and Taj Mahal



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Dates & Costs

2020

Sunday 15th November – Friday 27th November 2020	£2,995
Corbett extension: to Wednesday 2nd December	£1,795

2021

Sunday 7th February – Friday 19th February 2021	£2,995
Corbett extension: to Wednesday 24th February	£1,795

Sunday 14th November – Friday 26th November 2021	£2,995
Corbett extension: to Wednesday 1st December	£1,795

2022

Sunday 6th February – Friday 18th February 2022	£3,195
Corbett extension: to Wednesday 24th February	£1,895

Sunday 13th November – Friday 25th November 2022	£3,195
Corbett extension: to Wednesday 30th November	£1,895

£500 reduction if booked without flights

Single room supplement

£595 (extension: £795).

Grading

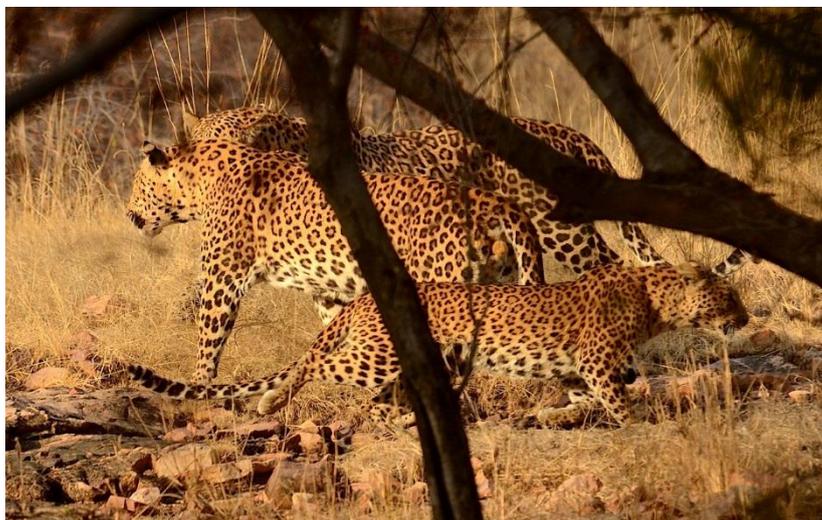
Grade A. This is a gentle wildlife safari, with little walking.



Introduction

A 13-day holiday in search of the birds and mammals of Ranthambore, Bharatpur and Chambal, including cultural visits to Agra and Fatehpur Sikri, plus an optional 5-day extension to Corbett National Park, set in the foothills of the Himalaya.

This new holiday offers a comprehensive introduction to the many fabulous facets of northern India, amongst them three much-loved and iconic wildlife reserves which are home to some of the subcontinent's most enthralling wildlife. In Ranthambore we will search the woodlands, lakeshores and escarpments of this beautiful national park for its top predator, the Bengal Tiger, before moving to the world famous wetlands of Keoladeo



Ghana National Park – more commonly known as Bharatpur – one of India's very best birdwatching sites. We then visit the National Chambal Sanctuary through which the peaceful Chambal River flows, home to Gangetic River Dolphins, prehistoric-looking Gharial Crocodiles and an abundance of birdlife. Each offers a contrasting variety of landscapes and wildlife, to which we will add interest with visits to the greatest monuments of Moghul India – the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri.

Our holiday begins with a flight to India's capital city, Delhi, from where we take an early morning train to Ranthambore National Park, arguably India's most beautiful Tiger reserve. Ranthambore is spread over an area of 392 square kilometres and is bounded by the Banas River in the north and by the Chambal River in the south. We have four nights in Ranthambore, based at the comfortable Pug Mark Lodge. From here we will take morning and afternoon game drives through park's dry deciduous forest and around the lakes – which form the centrepiece of the reserve – in search of the elusive Bengal Tiger and the wonderful variety of other mammal and bird life which lives in its shadow. Whether or not we see a Tiger, we cannot fail to be impressed by the sheer variety of other wildlife that calls Ranthambore home. This might include a chance encounter with a Sloth Bear, Leopard, or perhaps a Chinkara (Indian Gazelle). Marsh Mugger Crocodiles are common in the lakes and Bengal Monitor Lizards are frequently seen around their shores. The park is also home to over 300 species of bird including Black-rumped Flameback, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Purple Sunbird, Rufous-tailed Lark (an Indian endemic), Painted Spurfowl, Jungle Bush-quail, Small Minivet and Stork-billed Kingfisher. In addition, we have a chance of finding up to five species of owl, amongst them Brown Fish Owl, Dusky Eagle Owl and Collared Scops Owl.

We bid Ranthambore farewell and next travel by express train to Bharatpur. The Keoladeo Ghana National Park – as Bharatpur is less commonly, but correctly, known – offers a spectacle of birds that is unsurpassed on the Indian subcontinent! The series of man-made jheels (shallow lakes) that form the heart of the reserve were constructed in the 18th and 19th centuries and used by the Maharajahs of Bharatpur from 1850 onwards to attract wildfowl to this man-made hunting preserve. Their phenomenal success in this aim provides us today with an unrivalled variety and number of waterbirds including Sarus Crane, Black-necked Stork and Cotton Pygmy Goose. Overhead soar many

different birds of prey, whilst surrounding bush, forest and grassland provide cover for a wonderful selection of passerines, such as Siberian Rubythroat, Tickell's Warbler and Orange-headed Thrush, together with mammals including Jungle Cat, Nilgai and Blackbuck. We will spend three nights at this wildlife haven before proceeding to Chambal, stopping en route to explore the fascinating abandoned Moghul city of Fatehpur Sikri.

Finally we will stay for two nights at Chambal Safari Lodge, a former hunting lodge of the feudal chiefs of Jarar, tucked into 130 acres of woodland and pasture. The lodge is ideally located for exploring the reserve and the surrounding farmland, which is best done by boat and jeep. The highlight of our time here will be the boat ride on the calm and gentle waters of the Chambal River, which is the focus for all the sanctuary's wildlife, including the rare Gangetic River Dolphin, Gharial and Marsh Mugger Crocodiles, freshwater turtles and Smooth-coated Otter. The River Chambal is one of the country's most beautiful and least polluted rivers and the National Chambal Sanctuary was created to protect a section of this pristine riverine ecosystem. The river and the adjacent woodlands and fields are a



birdwatcher's paradise and offer an opportunity to look for a wide variety of species such as Indian River Tern, Pallas' Gull, the increasingly uncommon Black-bellied Tern and the bizarre Indian Skimmer which is often to be found resting on exposed sandbars.

Our tour ends back in Delhi, after a stop en route at the Agra's famous Taj Mahal and Agra Fort. However, for those of you wishing to extend your stay, our extension to the north-east into the scenic forested hills and wide river valleys of Corbett

National Park is thoroughly recommended.

Day 1

In Flight

We depart from London on direct British Airways scheduled flight to Delhi at 6.55pm. We will be in flight overnight.

Day 2

Delhi

We arrive in the morning at 8.55am and transfer to our hotel located close to the airport. Our stay in Delhi for this holiday is usually at the 5-star hotel, usually The Holiday Inn New Delhi for a convenient access to the Delhi airport, (we cannot guarantee a particular hotel, but always endeavor to book one of a high standard not far from the airport). The hotel features an array of eclectic and exciting eateries. Whether you're looking for a quick bite while you're on the go or a comfortable setting in which to savour a meal, tantalizing options, are at hand. With a varied variety of three restaurants and lounges at Holiday Inn, you can indulge in different Asian cuisines. We may also make use of its facilities, which include a pool and a spa and health centre before the next phase of our journey. Our stay in

this comfortable hotel is well deserved after a long flight! If we do not stay at the Holiday Inn, a hotel offering an equivalent standard of rooms and service will be used.



In the afternoon there will be a birdwatching trip to Sultanpur National Park and Bird Sanctuary, 13 miles from our hotel. Sultanpur covers 1.5 sq km and was declared a bird sanctuary in 1971 and was upgraded to the status of national park in 1991 by the Haryana Government. This is an ideal birding spot; large numbers of migratory species arrive each year. The habitat is a mix of wetland, woodland and grassland. In the wetland area several trees have been planted on the mounds, which provide good nesting and perching opportunities for birds.

Bird species of particular interest includes: White Pelican, Little Cormorant, Painted Stork, Black-headed Ibis, Little Egret, Great Egret, Spot-billed Duck, Eurasian Thick-knee, Red-wattled Lapwing, Black-winged Stilt, Black tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank, Shikra, Grey Francolin, Black Francolin, Indian Roller, White-throated Kingfisher, Crested Lark, Red-vented Bulbul, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Laughing Dove, Spotted Owlet, Magpie Robin, Southern Coucal, Hoopoe, Purple Sunbird, Baya Weaver, Bank Myna, Common Myna, Blue-tailed and Green bee-eaters, Bluethroat, Paddyfield Pipit, and Long-billed Pipit.



Mother and daughter in Delhi

Day 3

Train to Ranthambore

Today we will be transferred to the railway station to board our train to Sawai Madhopur. On arrival we will be driven



Pugmark, Ranthambore

to Ranthambore Pug Mark Lodge where we will be based for our 4-nights stay. 'Pugmark', is a modern 'jungle lodge' consisting of 35 chalet cottages (each room with private facilities), set in 5 acres of grounds and with a swimming pool for use on hot afternoons!

During our stay at Ranthambore our aim will be to observe, enjoy and photograph the Reserve's many species of mammals and birds. Naturally, we will spend a great deal of time looking for Tigers, and with luck we may see and photograph this magnificent animal. Our daily programme will include both morning and evening jeep drives inside the Tiger Reserve. These are, of course, all optional and there may be times when you'd prefer to relax back at the lodge and recharge your batteries, though the more game drives you do, the more you'll see!

Day 4 – 6

Ranthambore Tiger Reserve

Ranthambore is widely considered to be one of India's most beautiful Tiger reserves. Encircled by a series of high escarpments, the forests, lakes and dry scrub that make up the Reserve are dotted with old forts and temples, creating a wonderful atmosphere for both bird and mammal-viewing among a landscape dripping with ancient Rajput history and Rajasthani culture. Ranthambore is perhaps most famous for being designated one of the original nine Project Tiger reserves in 1973, and until recently it provided one of the best opportunities anywhere in India of seeing a Tiger.



Asiatic Jackal

Each morning we will take a safari into the park between 7:30am and 10am, leaving after tea and biscuits between 6:30am and 7am in order to gain our place in the entrance queue. We will return to the Reserve when it opens again at 2:30pm or 3:30pm, depending on the season, and stay there until dusk, at around 6pm (From 1st November to 31st January the Reserve opens in the afternoon at 2:30pm and our stay will last until dusk at around 5.30pm). These timings can change anytime without prior notice. In the middle of the day, after lunch, there will be time to rest or go on short birdwatching walks around the lodge.



Ranthambore National Park

Whether or not you see Tiger on this holiday, you cannot fail to be impressed by the sheer variety and number of other mammals and birds that make the Reserve their home. Common Langurs are abundant, as are both Spotted (Chital) and Sambar Deer; the latter often feeding so far out into the lakes that only their heads show above the water. Nilgai (the largest of India's antelopes) are also fairly common. For the very fortunate there is also a chance of tracking down a Sloth Bear, Leopard, or perhaps a Chinkara Antelope (or Indian Gazelle). Mugger Crocodiles are common in the lakes and Monitor Lizards are frequently seen around their shores. In addition to the mammals and reptiles, we will see a wonderful diversity of birds. Flocks of Peafowl are on almost constant show, while on the lakes Cotton Pygmy Geese, Bronze-winged and Pheasant-tailed Jacanas are common. The surrounding woodland and grasslands hold such species as Black-rumped Flameback Woodpeckers, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Rufous-tailed Lark (an Indian endemic), Painted Spurfowl, Jungle Bush Quail, Small Minivet and Stork-billed Kingfisher. In addition there is also an opportunity to find up to five species of Owl, including Brown Fish Owl, Dusky Eagle Owl and Indian Scops Owl. On our morning and evening game drives we will be accompanied by local spotters, whose expert knowledge of the Reserve is invaluable when tracking down some of the more elusive species.

The spectacular ruins of Ranthambore Fort, whose massive battlements dominate the Reserve, are well worth a visit and afford a wonderful vantage point over the rolling hills which comprise Ranthambore Tiger Reserve, as well as the adjacent semi-desert areas where such dry-country birds as Indian Courser, Yellow-wattled Lapwing and sandgrouse species may be found.

Day 7 – 9

Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary

We will take the early morning train from Sawai Madhopur to Bharatpur for a 3-night stay at this premier Asian birdwatching spot.

On arrival we will transfer to The Birder's Inn, situated just outside the Sanctuary. This small privately owned lodge offers 24 spacious rooms that overlook a garden populated with fruit trees that attract various garden birds. You have all the necessary modern comforts like air-conditioning, swimming pool, hot and cold running water, a multi-cuisine restaurant & grill that serves a delectable variety of dishes. Occasionally one might encounter Indian Civet Cat in the evening near the restaurant and there are regular sighting of Fulvous fruit bat on the royal palm trees.

Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary, also known as Keoladeo Ghana National Park, is without question one of the finest birdwatching locations in Asia. The Sanctuary provides a diversity and abundance of birdlife only equalled in Africa and you cannot fail to be overwhelmed by the sheer number of birds present. This is one of the best times of year to visit Bharatpur and we will see an outstanding range of waterbirds, raptors and some mammals too. The flooded 'jheels' with their shady, tree-lined bunds provide the perfect site for birdwatcher and photographer alike.



Brown Fish Owl

Notable species among the throngs of nesting Painted Storks, Black-headed ibis, Darters and Spoonbills are specialities such as the threatened Black-necked Stork, Knob-billed duck, and the elusive Spotted Creeper. Thousands of ducks crowd the marshes and pools and include, among the more familiar species, hundreds of Ferruginous and Lesser Whistling Ducks, plus smaller numbers of Red-crested Pochards and Spot-billed Ducks. Both White and Dalmatian Pelicans may occur, along with large numbers of Common Cranes; smaller numbers of Sarus Cranes winter at the Sanctuary.

Bharatpur also provides unrivalled opportunities for observing a large range of raptors, including Spotted, Imperial, Steppe and Tawny Eagles, as well as a host of vultures. As the day heats up columns of raptors spiral on the thermals, a single flock of eagles comprising 20 or more birds of four or five different species. The tree-lined edges to the jheels also provide good habitat for a range of wintering and resident passerines. Both Blyth's Reed and Clamorous Reed Warblers are numerous, as are Bluethroats, Yellow-browed Warblers and Oriental magpie-robin. Careful searching should also turn up Siberian Rubythroat and other more elusive species such as Orange-headed Ground Thrush, Dusky Warbler, Marshall's Iora and Large-tailed Nightjar. Other interesting wildlife we could see includes the rare and beautiful Blackbuck, Indian Smooth Otter, Fishing Cat, Soft-shelled Turtle and Indian Python. Nilgai, Sambar, Spotted Deer and Rhesus Macaques are also common.

We will spend most of our time in Bharatpur exploring the many trackways that criss-cross the park, accompanied by our guide. Most of the birdwatching will be done on foot, but we will also make full use of the local rickshaw drivers who provide an indispensable service ferrying birdwatchers and locals alike from the entrance into the heart of the wetland.

Day 10 – 11

National Chambal Sanctuary

In the morning after spending the magical three nights at Bharatpur, we will move on to Chambal, stopping en route to explore the fascinating abandoned Moghul city of Fatehpur Sikri.

We will stay for two nights at the Chambal Safari Lodge, a former hunting Lodge of the feudal chiefs of Jarar converted by the family into a comfortable eco-lodge (with private facilities), nestling in 35 acres of reclaimed woodland surrounded by farmland. The Lodge is ideally located for exploring the area, which is best explored by boat and jeep. We will be taking boat ride on the calm and gentle Chambal River, which is the mainstay for all the Sanctuary's wildlife. There is a wide variety of aquatic life here, and among the many highlights that we will be hoping to see on these water-based wildlife-watching trips are: the Gangetic River Dolphin, Marsh Crocodile, Gharial (fish-eating Crocodile), freshwater turtles and River otters.



Fatehpur Sikri

The River Chambal is one of the country's most beautiful and least polluted river systems and the National Chambal Sanctuary was formed to protect this pristine river ecosystem, complete with its varied flora, aquatic life and avifauna. The areas surrounding the river are a true bird watcher's delight and offer an opportunity to add several species not found at Bharatpur, such as River Tern and the increasingly uncommon Black-bellied Tern, Great Black-headed Gull and the bizarre Indian Skimmer, often to be found resting on sandbars in mid-river.

Other attractions include the beautiful Small Pratincole, the Great Thick-knee and many other waterbirds, including Little and Great Cormorants, Grey Heron, Cattle Egret, Lesser Whistling-duck, the Bar-headed Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Comb Duck, Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Burmese Spot-billed Duck, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Teal, Red-crested Pochard, Osprey, Common Coot, Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed and Kentish Plovers, River and Red-wattled Lapwings, Common and Spotted Redshanks, Common Greenshank, Green, Wood and



Chambal Safari Lodge (left and centre) and birdwatching in the grounds (right)



Gharials on the Chambal

Common Sandpipers, Little and Temminck's Stints, and Pallas's Gull. Other species present in the area include Black Kite, Steppe Eagle, Indian Peafowl, Rock Dove, Eurasian Collared Dove, Rose-ringed (or Ring-necked) Parakeet, Indian Roller, White-throated and Pied Kingfishers, Sand Lark, Plain Martin, Barn and Wire-tailed Swallows, White, Masked and White-browed Wagtails, Large Grey and Jungle Babbler, Common and Bank Mynas, Black Drongo and House Crow.

Day 12

Agra & Delhi

After spending the morning at Chambal, we will drive to Agra in the late morning and enjoy a guided sightseeing tour of the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort. However, these world-famous buildings are not without ornithological interest for those reluctant to abandon birding. The Yamuna River here is always populated by flocks of waders and the skies are filled with Black Kites. Other species we will be looking for include Ruddy Shelduck, River Lapwing, Avocet, Marsh Sandpiper, River and Black-bellied Terns, Pallas's gull and Brown-headed Gulls, Laggar Falcon and Spotted Owlet.



The quieter corners of the Taj gardens might reveal barbets, Grey Hornbills and perhaps a few warblers. Ever-present at every site are the chattering, inquisitive little Palm Squirrels and a fine mixture of colourful butterflies. Today though, the birds take second place to the magnificent buildings, and prime among these is the breathtakingly beautiful white marble monument of the Taj Mahal, one of the best known images of India yet even more splendid in real life.

By the time we are ready to travel by road or board our evening express train to Delhi, we'll have had a wonderfully cultural day.

Arriving in Delhi four to five hours later, we will be transferred to our hotel and check into our 5-star Holiday Inn hotel for some rest and a good night's sleep!

Day 13

London

We transfer to Delhi airport to catch a British Airways mid-morning flight to London. We are due to arrive in London by afternoon.

NB. Please note that the itinerary offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some reordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Corbett National Park Extension

(The minimum number of people required to run this extension is six; however, we may decide to operate it with fewer people, at our discretion, with local guides.)

There is nowhere in the world quite like India and from the moment of arrival in this vast country, every visit is filled with unforgettable memories. While daily life in modern India appears to have many of the trappings of the 21st century in terms of motor cars, computers and so on, underlying this facade is a unique culture which has developed over thousands of years and which permeates every aspect of society.

Arriving from a European background it may sometimes be difficult to understand everything you see, but this is part of the mystic appeal of the country and ensures that no day spent in India can ever be described as boring. One of many paradoxes is that northern India, which has one of the largest human populations in the world, also boasts one of the most diverse avifaunas in Asia, and away from the big urban concentrations the countryside is often breathtakingly beautiful. On this extension we concentrate on the wildlife of the mighty Himalayan mountains and experience several days of sub-Himalayan birding at Corbett (National Park and) Tiger Reserve, where we will hope to see Tiger and Indian Elephant to supplement the wonderful birding. Arguably one of the most picturesque Tiger Reserves in India, Corbett was named in honour of the late Jim Corbett. Corbett is a legendary figure in India's conservation history and he played an important role in helping to create the Reserve.

Many of the birds we are likely to see at Corbett are characteristic of the Himalayan region and there is a good selection of Palearctic rarities to set pulses racing! Early morning inspection of the scrubby bushes around the Jim's Jungle Retreat with mist drifting over the river and a distinct chill in the air can be an exciting experience, as various calls reveal the presence of skulking warblers, one or two Rubythroats and perhaps a flock of Red-throated Thrushes foraging under the bushes! There is always something to see at Corbett and the superlative birding continues outside the Reserve where we will spend several nights at a lodge that provides excellent access to the surrounding forests.

Day 13

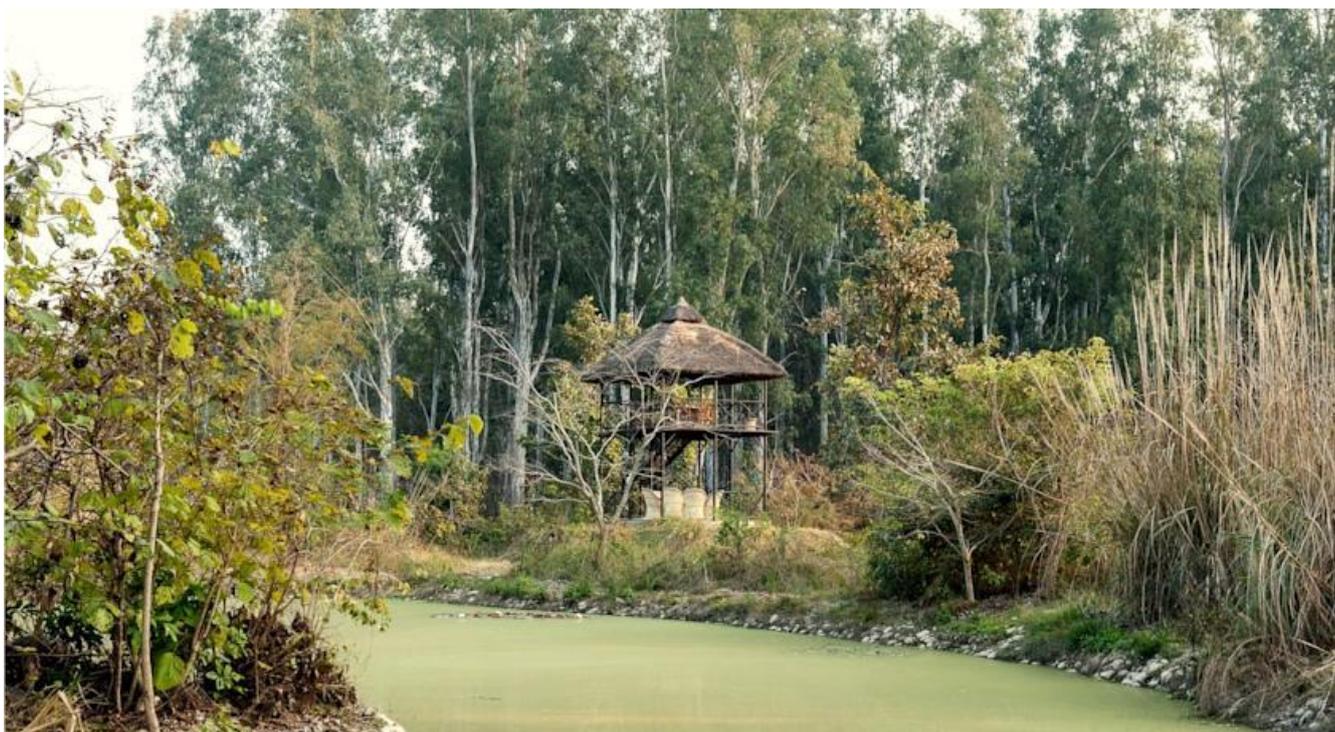
Corbett Tiger Reserve

We will be transferred to the railway station to board the early morning train to Kathgodam. The train is scheduled to reach Kathgodam at around 12noon. We will then transfer by road to our lodge, Jim's Jungle Retreat, an eco-conscious wildlife lodge, located on the southern periphery of the Corbett Tiger Reserve. We will stay there for four nights including a night inside the park, subject to availability. The lounge of the lodge is built in local Gujjar style, with mud and thatch, it houses the only television should you wish to catch up with the goings-on in the real world. Slide shows and topical wildlife films are screened in the evening, either inside or in the bush, often leading to animated discussions on wildlife conservation. A waterhole-shaped swimming pool with lounging recliners can provide for hours of rest and relaxation.



The dining area, inspired architecturally by a Gujjar thatch and mud hall, is open to the forested surroundings and offers a unique mix of cuisines from the days of the Raj and local Kumaoni delicacies. Interpreting the planting project to the guests is vital for its success. The purpose at the lodge is to inspire enthusiasm and interest for the Indian jungle and its protection. Protecting the forests is the starting point for conserving all wildlife including the tiger. Fortunately this is something everyone can contribute to but they first need to understand the vital role plants play in the world. Once at the retreat, the naturalists will be happy to walk you on one of our specially developed interpretation trails. Jim's Jungle Retreat is situated in a delightful location where White-capped River Chats and Plumbeous Redstarts flit among the boulders and Brown Dippers plunge in and out of the torrent. Wallcreepers not infrequently explore the rocky shoreline here and the shaggy crested Crested Kingfisher is another regular visitor. The surrounding forests are rich in birdlife and, unlike the nearby Tiger Reserve, it is possible to explore these on foot which greatly increases the list of potential bird species we could see. Sensational birding is assured with possibilities including Crested Serpent Eagle, Collared Falconet, Plum-headed and Slaty-headed Parakeets, Brown Fish-Owl, Blue-bearded Bee-Eater, Great Hornbill, Bronzed Drongo, Bar-winged flycatcher-shrike, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler, White-crested Laughing-Thrush, Yellow-bellied Fantail-Flycatcher, White-tailed rubythroat, Spotted Forktail, Yellow-cheeked Tit, Velvet-

fronted Nuthatch and Oriental White-Eye to name just a few. The passage of a mixed-species feeding flock will cause a few minutes of chaos as the bushes appear to rain birds and we are just as likely to encounter such a party in the gardens of the hotel as in the forest. One of the great things about this area is that every outing seems to bring a new selection of birds and surprises occur with each excursion. Even meal times are not safe from interruption as the restaurant windows afford a good view of the gardens and many a meal has been temporarily abandoned when a passing raptor or a new flycatcher attracts attention. Although deemed to be safe for walking, one sometimes speculates whether Tigers will respect the ill-defined boundary of the Tiger Reserve and Leopards certainly wander freely although they are always hard to observe.



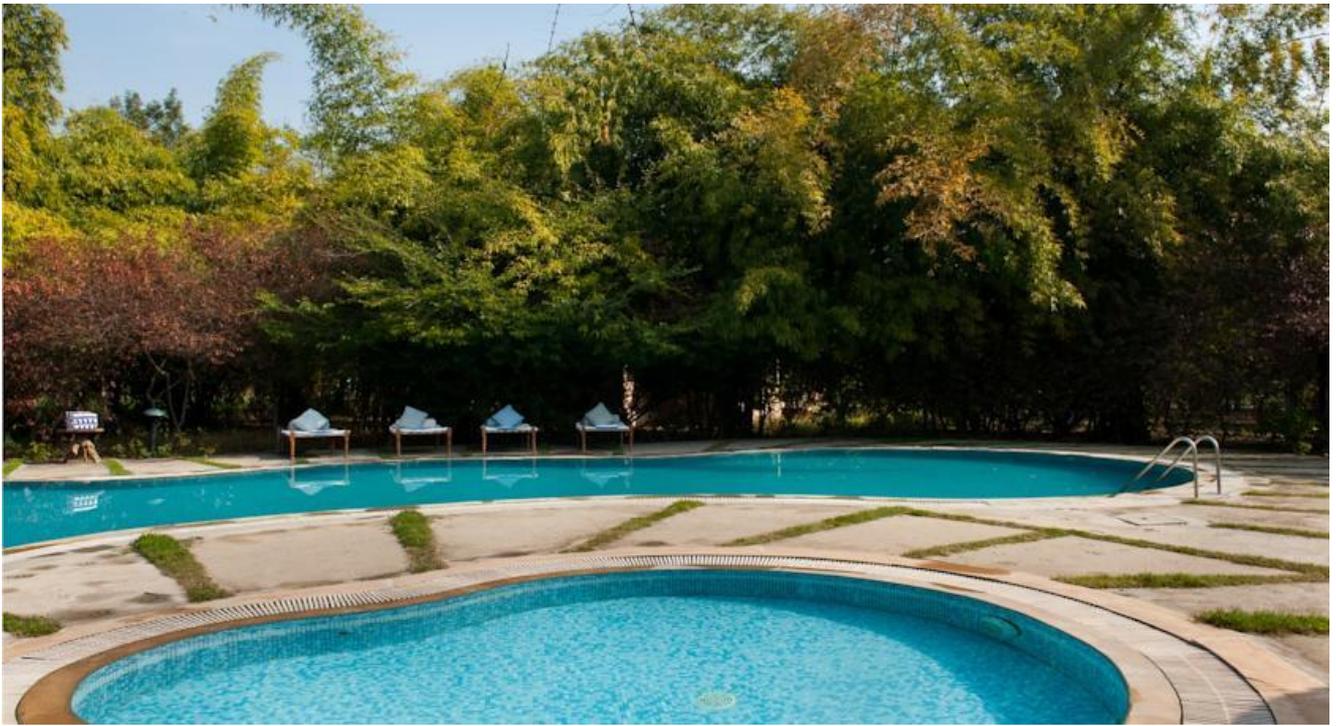
Day 14 – 16

Corbett Tiger Reserve

We will enjoy the game drives on open jeeps to look for Tigers. With a count of 164 Tigers, Corbett has the largest wild Tiger population of any protected area on the planet. Except in a few designated areas, we'll be confined to the safety of the jeeps as Corbett also supports a healthy population of Asian Elephants.

If you are lucky to stay inside the park then ornithological advantages of the location will soon be apparent. The bushes and trees around the compound are alive with birds early in morning and a walk along the trails can produce a stream of exciting finds including wintering thrushes, Siberian Rubythroat, Smoky Warbler and a number of flycatcher species. Inspection of the river might reveal Goosander, Black Stork, and the trio of birds associated with Himalayan streams: Plumbeous Redstart, River lapwing and Pied Kingfisher. Further scans could locate Pallas's Fish Eagles or Ospreys perched on dead trees in the distance, or bizarre Great stone-curlew standing morosely on muddy islands. A superb Pallas's Gull might glide in to settle on the bank, one of a small wintering flock on a nearby reservoir, and other rarer waders and waterbirds are always possibilities.

Forests cloak the surrounding hills and at one or two of the spots where we can get down from the coach to walk round we will have the opportunity to see some of the woodland inhabitants such as hornbills, woodpeckers and barbets. There are also large expanses of open grassland in Corbett, particularly around Dhikala, where Black Francolin fly up from underfoot and a variety of buntings may be identified. Hen Harriers patrol these areas, often in company with other raptors, and at night several species of owl take their toll on the small creatures living there. Add to this mixture a miscellany of babblers, flycatchers, bulbuls, sunbirds and many other wonderful bird species and it is easy to understand why many regard Corbett to be one of the best Indian reserves.



Even the most fanatical of birdwatchers would probably admit that an encounter with a Tiger is pretty special and such a meeting will be a tantalising possibility wherever we go in Corbett. On occasions the daily coach from Ramnagar has been forced to stop because a Tiger was sleeping on the road and every dried up river bed or shady thicket is worth checking in case one of these magnificent creatures has chosen to rest there. Leopards are seen far less frequently but, like their striped relatives, could appear almost anywhere. Herds of wild elephant inhabit the Reserve and can sometimes be observed from Dhikala browsing at the forest edge but, surprisingly for such large animals, they are adept at disappearing into cover. Spotted Deer and Sambar are favourite Tiger prey and both occur throughout Corbett with large herds of the former congregating in the grasslands around Dhikala. The rarer Hog Deer can also be seen here but the widespread little Muntjac is more often heard barking in the forests than seen. Troupes of Grey Langur Monkeys and Rhesus Macaques are almost as much a part of the northern India landscape as the ubiquitous Palm Squirrels but in Corbett they appear much more wary than their urban counterparts, a caution engendered by the desire to avoid ending up as the evening meal of a big cat! Other mammals might include Wild Boar, Yellow-throated Marten, Jackal and perhaps a family party of otters playing beside one of the streams. Big Muger Crocodiles are often on view around the shores of the reservoir and the endangered fish-eating Gharial is another Corbett success story, a reintroduction scheme having raised the population to a healthy level. They have no shortage of food as the rivers are teeming with Mahseer, a large salmon-like fish much prized by anglers.

Day 17

Delhi

After a final morning game drive, we will return to Delhi by train and on reaching Delhi, we will spend our last night on the Indian subcontinent at the hotel close to the airport, such as the 5-star hotel, The Holiday Inn New Delhi for a convenient access to the Delhi airport, (we cannot guarantee a particular hotel, but always endeavor to book one of a high standard not far from the airport). If we do not stay at the Holiday Inn, a hotel offering an equivalent standard of rooms and service will be used.

Day 18

Saturday

London

We transfer to Delhi airport to catch a British Airways mid-morning flight to London. We are due to arrive in London by afternoon.

Grading

This is a wildlife tour, and the walking is graded A (easy).

Weather

The weather from November to February should be mostly fine and sunny by day with temperatures in the region of 10 – 25°C, but the nights can be very cold with frost a possibility. During early morning wildlife trips it can feel bitterly cold until the rising sun warms things up. Rain is possible at this time of year.

Inclusions / Exclusions

The following costs are included in the price of the holiday:

- International flights in economy class.
- Full board accommodation throughout (i.e. breakfast, lunch and dinner) except for main meals required in Delhi (the range of restaurants here is exceptional, and well worth taking advantage of). We use comfortable tourist lodges with private facilities (as described in the text above).
- All transport and guiding.
- All wildlife excursions, park fees and reserve entry fees.

The following costs are **not** included and should be budgeted for:

- Online visa (currently US\$40 plus the bank transaction charges of 2.5%).
- Drinks (though most lodges in the national parks provide boiled drinking water or a bottle of water with their compliments).
- Discretionary tipping.
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs, laundry, camera fees.

Flights

We use the direct scheduled service of British Airways for most of our tours to India from London Heathrow Terminal 5 because they offer an excellent all-round service (including connecting departures from most of the regional airport, though such departures from regional airports will be subject to an additional charge of around £150).

If you would prefer to travel World Travellers Plus (normally available at a supplement charge of around £595) or Business (normally available at a supplement charge of around £2,495) or if you would prefer to travel from regional airports, please let us know at the time of booking so that we can make the necessary arrangements.



Diwali Departure

If your trip co-incides with the festival of Diwali, you can't fail to notice the festive atmosphere in the streets. Your guide will explain the sights and sounds, but here is a little background information to explain the festival. There are several beliefs regarding the origin of Diwali (also known as Deepawali) or 'Festival of Lights'. Diwali is a major Hindu festival and it symbolises the victory of good over evil. The Sanskrit word Diwali means 'an array of lights' and stands for victory of brightness over darkness. Diwali is celebrated in the honour of the return of Lord Rama (a revered Hindu deity and King of Ayodhya) with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana to Ayodhya, from a war in which he killed the demon king Ravana. It is believed that the people lit oil lamps along the way to light their path in the darkness and to welcome them home. People express their happiness by lighting earthen 'diyas' (lamps), decorating their houses, bursting firecrackers and inviting family and friends to their households to join them in a sumptuous feast. The lighting of lamps is a way of paying homage to God for the attainment of health, wealth, knowledge, peace, valor and fame.

The festival falls during some tours and will have some impact on the operation of our tour at that time. The Indian national parks may be closed to visitors for one or two days, so we may not be able to undertake game drives. We apologise for this interruption, should it occur. As compensation you may wish to observe the Diwali celebrations in one of the nearby villages or enjoy the birding walks around the lodge.



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Please provide us with your passport copy, clearly showing your passport number, date of issue, date of expiry and your date of birth at the time of booking. It is important to note that game safaris will be booked using the same passport details that you provide us at the time of booking, and it will not be possible to change these details once they have been booked. (If you renew your passport after booking, please also bring the old passport whose details you gave us at the time of booking as this will also be required).