

India & Nepal – A Quest for the Red Panda

Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London.
Day 2	Delhi.
Day 3	Fly Bagdogra; transfer to Darjeeling.
Day 4/10	Singalila National Park (The Habre's Nest Resort, Kaiakata).
Day 11	Fly Delhi.
Day 12	Fly London.

Ranthambore Extension

Day 12/15	Ranthambore National Park.
Day 16	Delhi.
Day 17	Fly London.

Dates and costs

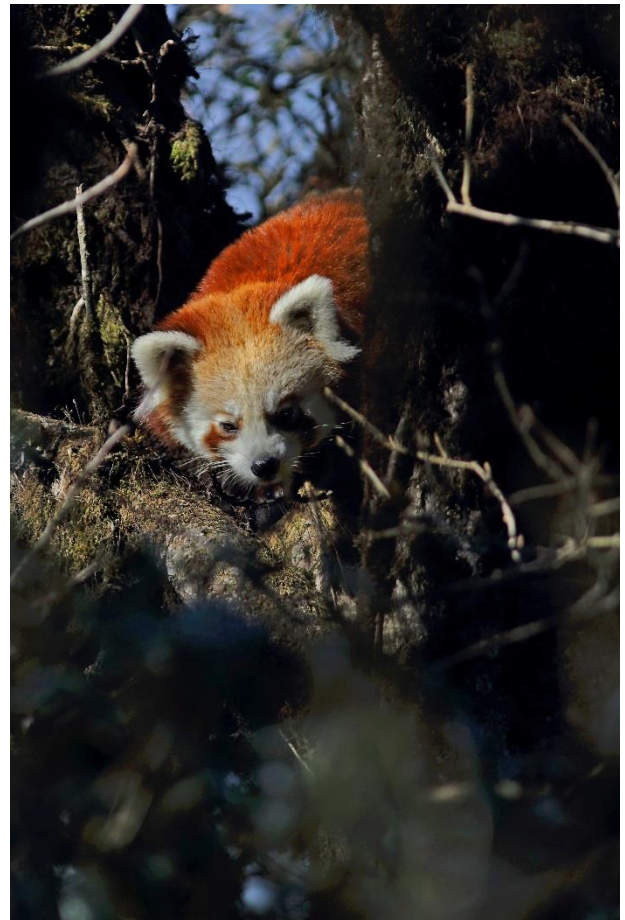
See next page for a complete list

Single room supplement

Main tour: £1,995 (Ranthambore extension: £395).

Focus

Red Panda, birds and other mammals.



Red Panda



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Dates and Costs

2019

Saturday 23rd March – Wednesday 3rd April 2019 Cost: £4,495

Extension to Ranthambore National Park: to Monday 8th April Cost: £1095

Saturday 23rd November – Wednesday 4th December 2019 Cost: £4,495

Extension to Ranthambore National Park: to Monday 9th December Cost: £1095

2020

Saturday 28th March – Wednesday 8th April 2020 Cost: £4,495

Extension to Ranthambore National Park: to Monday 13th April Cost: £1095

Saturday 21st November – Wednesday 2nd December 2020 Cost: £4,495

Extension to Ranthambore National Park: to Monday 7th December Cost: £1095

£500 reduction if booked without flights (land-only trip Delhi/Delhi).

Grading

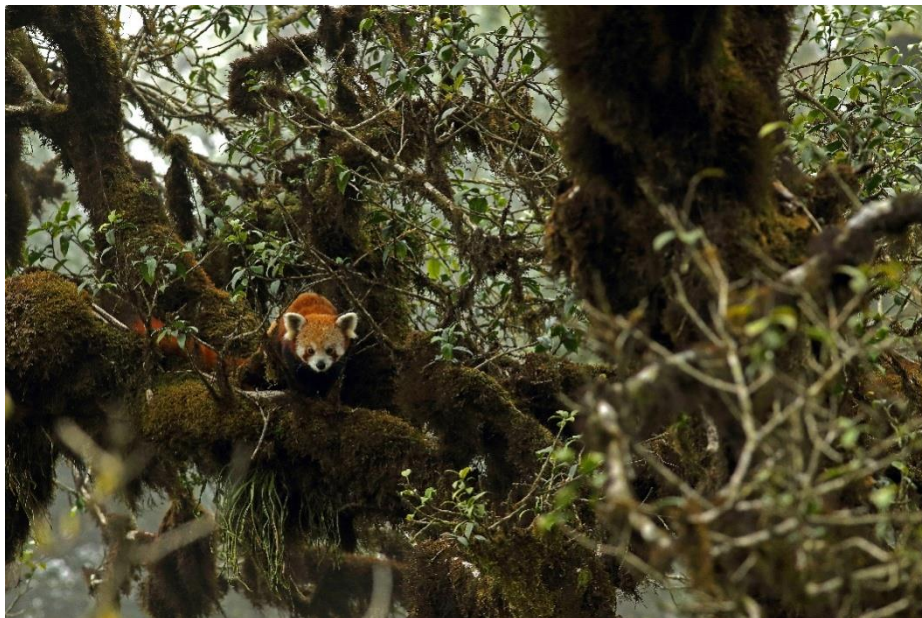
Grade B. Day walks only. There will be some more demanding walks on steep terrain at high elevation (up to 3,660 metres). The walks depend directly on the Red Panda sightings. We have been lucky with sightings recently with many sightings happening within 500 metres from the homestay, in this case everyone walks to the Red Panda. Land Rovers will be on standby for the duration of the stay, so if sightings happen far away from the homestay then the Land Rover can be used. In the Nepal side we are allowed to go off the track and sometimes Red Pandas are found on steep slopes. At this time we will be dropped till the last motor-able point after which we will have to walk. Porters and guides will be with us at all time to assist and the good part is that when Red Pandas are seen they generally do not move much so we can take our time to reach. On the extension we will be exploring the Ranthambore national park from jeeps or canters.





Introduction

Our exciting new 12-day holiday to Singalila National Park, a protected area of Himalayan forest straddling India and eastern Nepal, in search of the elusive Red Panda, as well as an exciting variety of other mammals and birds.



A small population of one of the world's most endearing and endangered mammals, the Red Panda, lives in the high remote forests of Singalila National Park. The reserve lies in the foothills of the Himalaya, mainly within the Indian state of West Bengal close to the town of Darjeeling, with Sikkim and the towering peak of Kanchenjunga – the world's third highest mountain – to the north. To the south and east Singalila crosses the border into Nepal's Ilam

district and also protects a small area of the remote Tinchule Forest. There are less than 10,000 Red Pandas left worldwide and seeing one can never be guaranteed. However, by teaming up with a dedicated group of 'Red Panda Guardians' (employed by the Red Panda Network, a US-based conservation NGO), along with other experienced guides and trackers, we believe we have a winning combination and a very high chance of success!

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.

The middle part of the day will be free, allowing you time to sample some of Delhi's avian and historical sights, or to just relax and recover after your flight.

Day 3

Fly to Bagdogra; transfer to Darjeeling

Today we'll fly to Bagdogra in the north-eastern corner of India. The flight gives spectacular views of Mount Kanchenjunga (weather permitting) including distant views of the world's highest peak, Everest. On our arrival at Bagdogra, our tour leader and a private vehicle will be waiting for us and we'll drive for three hours to Darjeeling for the overnight stay in a comfortable tourist hotel. Darjeeling is a small town which the British tea planters and the Raj used as a summer capital to escape the searing heat of the plains lower down in Kolkata. The season promised frequent tea parties and discussions around polished tables in quaint and beautifully located bungalows where life had its own rhythm.

Day 4 – 10

Singalila National Park (The Habre's Nest Resort, Kaiakata).

In the early morning, we will be transferred to Manebhanjan. On our arrival at Manebhanjan, we will change our vehicles to Land Rovers, pick up a porter, and take the entry permission to start our journey to Kaiakata (Singalila National Park).



Singalila National Park is part of the eastern Himalaya and encompasses the Singalila Ridge, which is covered by dense bamboo, rhododendron, oak and magnolia forest at an altitude of between 2,000 and 3,600 metres. The park's mixed deciduous and conifer forest, old trees and dense understorey of bamboo provides an ideal habitat for Red Pandas and other mammals such as Yellow-throated Marten and Barking Deer. The park is also home to over 300 species of bird including Kalij Pheasants, Satyr Tragopan (normally seen in between late February and April), Brown and Black Throated Parrotbills, Rufous-vented Tit, Fire-tailed Myzornis and Golden-breasted Fulvetta, plus an exciting variety of other rosefinchs, bullfinches, wren-babblers, laughing-thrushes, nuthatches and minivets!

Our base for 7 nights is Habre's Nest Homestay, a rustic, but clean and comfortable, guesthouse situated on the park's border with India and Nepal, at an altitude of 2,900 metres. Set

amongst stunning views, its four twin-bedded rooms feature en suite facilities and balconies, and, as such, the homestay makes an ideal base for our daily excursions into the park. Singalila's small resident population of Red Pandas is protected by a team of 'Red Panda Guardians'. Tashi, co-owner of our homestay, is one such guardian, and he generously donates 20% of Habre's Nest's income to Red Panda conservation. We will set out each day on foot with our dedicated team of trackers in search of this endearing mammal, entering the park through the Indian side, but covering key sites in both the Indian and Nepalese sections.

Whether or not we come across one of these secretive and delightful mammals – who are largely arboreal and crepuscular in their habits – Singalila National Park has so much more to offer. The beauty of our surroundings, the lack of other visitors and the reserve's varied birds, mammals and other wildlife are sure to combine to make for a memorable stay.

Image: Satyr Tragopan chances of seeing in March & April



Day11

Delhi

Today we must leave Habre's Nest and say our goodbye to the tour leader before begin the drive to Bagdogra airport, where we catch our plane to Delhi. The flight gives spectacular views of the Himalayas. 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).

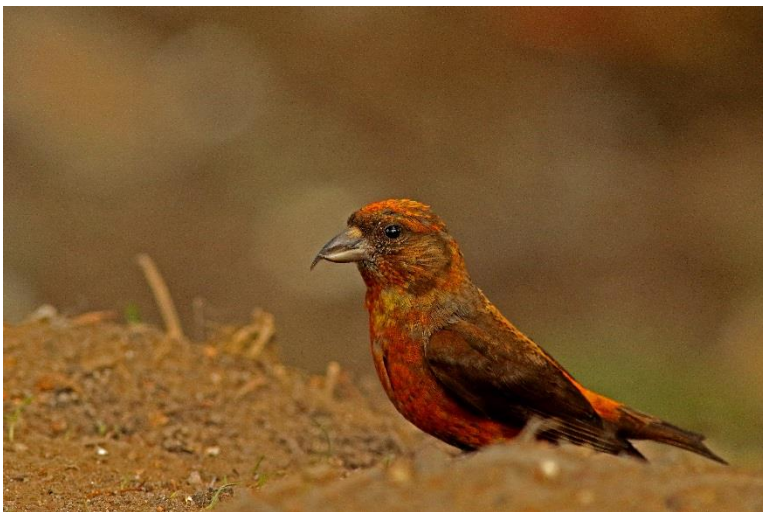


Image: Red Crossbill, chances of seeing in March & April

Day 12

In Flight

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

Ranthambore Extension

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

Day 12

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 to Ranthambore Pug Mark Lodge where we will be based for our 4-night stay. 'Pugmark', is a modern 'jungle lodge' consisting of 36 chalet cottages (each room with private facilities), set in 5 acres of grounds and with a swimming pool for use on hot afternoons! We will enjoy some birdwatching in and around the lodge in the afternoon.



Pugmark, Ranthambore

Day 13 – 15

Ranthambore (National Park &) Tiger Reserve

Ranthambore is considered by many 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. Ranthambore is perhaps most famous for being one of the original 'Project Tiger' reserves and until recently it provided one of the best opportunities anywhere in India of seeing a Tiger. With the recent escalation in poaching right across the subcontinent, there has been a decline in both numbers and sightings. Today Tiger sightings in the park are less frequent than a few years ago when encounters could be almost guaranteed, but if anti-poaching measures are successful it is likely that the population will quickly increase again as on previous occasions when numbers had been reduced in this way.

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.

Whether or not you see Tiger on this holiday (and we have been lucky in the past), 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 feed so far out into the lakes that only their heads show above the water. Nilgai are also fairly common and Barking Deer do occur, although they are somewhat harder to find. For the very fortunate there is also a chance of tracking down a Sloth Bear or perhaps a Chinkara Antelope. 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 also 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 Finch Lark (an Indian endemic), Painted Spurfowl, Jungle Bush Quail, Small Minivet and Stork-billed Kingfisher. In addition, there is an opportunity to find up to five species of Owl, including Brown Fish Owl, Dusky Eagle Owl and Collared Scops Owl. On each of our game drives we will be accompanied by local guides, whose expert knowledge of the Reserve is invaluable when tracking down some of the more elusive species.



From the lodge we will be able to take morning and evening drives into the Reserve in search of its many mammals and birds. In between these there is plenty of opportunity for birdwatching around the lodge. The surrounding deciduous woodland holds a variety of birds, including Rufous Treepie, Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker and Brown Rock Chat. During our final morning we may also visit a small open area close to the lodge used as a helicopter landing pad. This and the adjacent low hill holds a regular flock of Indian Coursers along with Yellow Wattle Lapwing, both Painted and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Eastern Pied Wheatear and Short-toed Lark.

Day 16

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). Our stay in this comfortable hotel is well deserved before 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.

Day 17

London

This morning we will transfer to Delhi airport to catch our return flight to London which departs Delhi at 1020 and, arrives back at London at 1520. (Flight timings subject to final confirmation nearer the time of departure.)

N.B. Please note that the itinerary below 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.

Weather

Between November and December in India and Nepal, you can expect dry and sunny weather. Temperatures in lowland Nepal range from 2–4°C in the early morning, to 10–20°C during the day, dropping to 2–4°C again at night. However, as our programme concentrates on the high regions, you can expect cold weather, with daytime temperatures between 5 and 10°C. Nights will be much cooler, and frosts are always possible on this trip. The weather between February and March should be mostly fine and sunny by day, with temperatures in the region of 20 – 38°C, but the nights can be cold. The weather in April should be mostly fine, hot and sunny by day with temperatures in the region of 30 – 45°C. It will be extremely hot



Image: Satyr Tragopan

in the afternoons. Rain showers are possible at any time but unlikely to be prolonged during the times of year we visit India.

Food & accommodation

All accommodation and meals are included, except for main meals in Delhi. You should allow approximately £40 for these. All accommodation on this tour is simple but comfortable, with private facilities.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: visas (India and Nepal), meals in Delhi and in-transit and all items of a more personal nature such as drinks, laundry, souvenirs, and tips for your guide and driver.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Nepal. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.fco.gov.uk/travel regularly prior to travel.

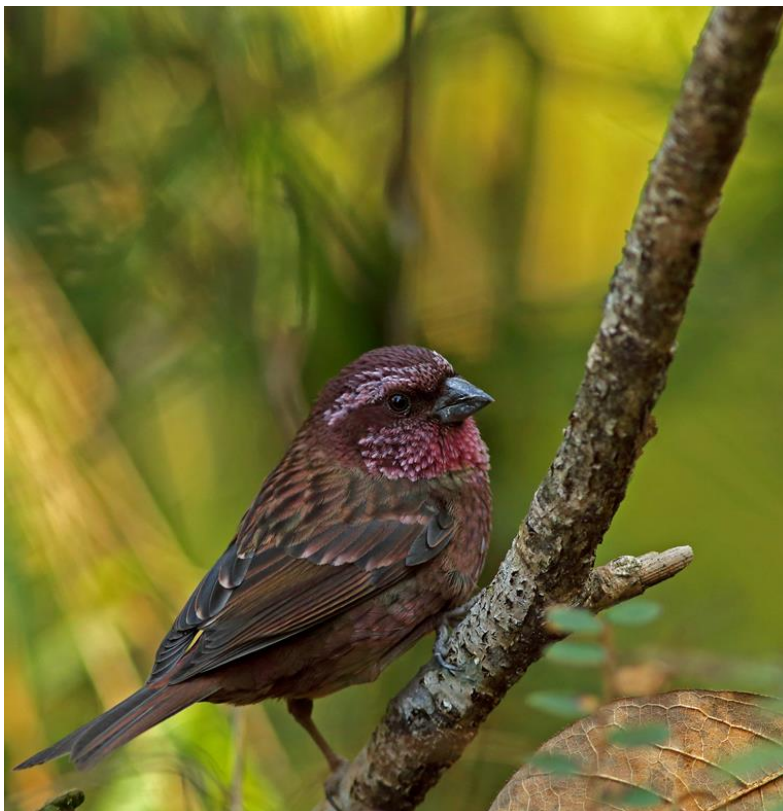


Image: White Browed Rosefinch

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) and competitive fares.

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). If you would prefer to travel from regional airports or fly in business class, please let us know at the time of booking.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of joining any Naturetrek holiday that you are fully covered by personal travel insurance against any possible medical expenses, to include the cost of repatriation and the cost of air evacuation should this be necessary. We ask that you send us the following details before you travel: the name of your insurance provider and a contact telephone number, your policy number, its expiry date, details of the sum insured for medical and repatriation cover and the emergency medical assistance telephone number.

Special permit – important

In addition to entry visas, we will also require a special permit to visit Singalila National Park. Please keep a couple of photocopies of your passport with you on the trip (clearly showing your photograph, passport number, date of issue, date of expiry and your date of birth) to obtain the permit.

Please provide us with your passport details (passport number, date of issue, date of expiry and your date of birth) at the time of booking. It is important to note that arrangements 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).



Image: Black Faced Laughing Thrush

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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Images by

Aly Rashid

Habre's Nest Homestay

