

# TRACKS SAFARIS

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**10 NIGHT PHOTOGRAPHIC SAFARI TO CENTRAL INDIA  
TADOBA, PENCH AND KANHA TIGER RESERVES**







## An Introduction

This itinerary has been designed for someone keen on wildlife photography and creates an opportunity to get the best chance to photograph some iconic wildlife of India such as the Bengal Tiger, Leopard, Gaur, Golden Jackal, Sloth Bear and the Melanistic Leopard - or the Black Panther if you are lucky.

We recommend this itinerary to be explored at two different times of the year to showcase very different perspectives of the jungle. If you, as a photographer, enjoy lush green background and thick winter coats of wildlife and the rising mist on the river on an early morning drive, you should plan your visit in November and/or December. These are months of the year just after the monsoons and the life in the park is thriving. It is also a great time to explore macro photography. Massive wood spiders would have built their webs across trees and the morning dew caught on these strings makes for stunning macro photographs. It is also the time of the year when frogs, dragonflies, spiders, butterflies will be more active. Needless to say, the foliage too will be thicker making it a bit more challenging to seek out the big cats. However, the slanting rays of morning light filtering through the trees will transport you into the scenic jungles that you once imagined in the Jungle Book.

Should you be keener to photograph big cats and larger mammals and get more opportunity to find them, the warmer and drier months of March and April will be ideal. The foliage has already dried out and withered away letting you see deeper into the thicket. Mercury by now will be creeping closer to 40 degrees and waterbodies would be far and few. This is the time when chances of finding animals near waterbodies goes up and they are out in the open, giving us the photographer better opportunities. It is a perfect time to photograph tigers lounging in water bodies.

The parks envisaged for this experience are Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, Pench Tiger Reserve and Kanha Tiger Reserve. Tadoba today gives one the highest probability to see the Bengal Tiger in the wild in India. It is also one of the three parks which has a melanistic leopard giving you the chance of photographing the Black Panther. Pench offers a great opportunity to photograph the Leopard, Golden Jackal, Dhole and on rare occasion the Indian Grey Wolf. Kanha is probably the largest of the three parks and is the only park



home to the Hard ground Barasingha It is also a forest largely dominated by the Sal tree making it greener and cooler than the other two. One has a good chance to find the Sloth Bear along with the Bengal Tiger.



#### **DAY ONE**

On arrival into Delhi International Airport you will be met by Tracks Safaris' representative and transferred to your hotel (check-in time is 1400 hrs). This afternoon we can choose to either explore the cultural side of Delhi or visit a bird sanctuary nearby which can often make for an excellent getaway for bird photography.

**Overnight stay will be at Aerocity Hotel, New Delhi on a dinner, bed and breakfast basis**

#### **DAY TWO**

Early this morning transfer to the airport to board the flight for Nagpur. On arrival you will be received by our representative who shall accompany you to Le Meridien Hotel on the outskirts of the city for breakfast before continuing onwards to Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve. The journey to Tadoba will take about 2.5 hours by road and lunch will be at the lodge. You will embark on your first safari into Tadoba after lunch.

Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve came into prominence about a decade ago with exceptionally good sightings of tigers and there was no looking back from that point onwards. We think today it offers a very high probability of sighting tigers. Other key species found in Tadoba are the sloth bear, Indian leopard, jungle cat and a huge diversity of prey base. In the last few years Tadoba has also got a black panther – a melanistic leopard who has currently established itself close to the Tadoba Lake.

#### **Photography Tips:**

Our focus when in Tadoba will be to maximise our chance to see and photograph the Bengal Tiger. We will also spend some time exploring the territory of the melanistic leopard. Unlike many melanistic leopards, this one is not completely black showing its rosettes through the dark fur giving it a very unique look. The leopard has been around for a couple of years and is becoming bolder with the passing time, however in a tiger

dominated landscape it is still a leopard and will give very little time, so it is best to be ready to fire when in its territory.



Tigers in Tadoba landscape have been studied well and they seem to work in a particular routine which our naturalists are quite aware of. Since this is a thick bamboo dominated forest, we track using the timing of each individual to appear near a waterbody of its choosing. Of course, we will listen to alarm calls and look for pugmarks, but this system has proved quite successful in the past.

There are also some individuals that we should try and seek in the park as they make for impressive images such as: Chotta Matka (image above - a massive male tiger weighing about 280kgs). He is usually found in Navegaon region of the park. Another impressive tiger is Matkasur (he is the father of Chotta Matka and a massive male himself). We will also look for Maya who is bold and spirited tigress and has given many litters to the park.

Please note safaris in all the tiger reserves in Indian forests are controlled by the government and they allow the tourists two 3 hours safaris each day – one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. The entry exit times are dictated on sunrise and sunset times.

Also note that some of these parks are very popular and can get crowded so it is advisable to reach the gate early (as advised by lodge naturalists). The idea is to be the first to enter as tigers often walk on dirt tracks and if you are the first few vehicles to arrive you might find one on the track or next to it. It also allows you to place your vehicle as per the lighting conditions. Note when the opportunity comes across be quick to photograph as vehicles often tend to crowd and might ruin your shot.

Please adhere to the policy of “shoot first and argue later” as very often it will not be fair, but opportunity will be lost. Be open to moving about within the confined space of the jeep, stand on the seat to get a clearer view. Please also remember others in the park are not photographers so they are not thinking if they are coming in between your shot.

Do share Camera gear that you plan to carry as it helps us plan the following:



- Number of people per vehicle
- Camera Fee
- Bean bags in the vehicles (on special request) – they seemed to be a better option than monopods or tripods.

**Overnight will be at Bamboo Forest Lodge on a full board basis**



### **DAYS THREE, FOUR AND FIVE**

These next three days are dedicated to exploring Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve. The Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve is the second largest park in Maharashtra with a core area of 625 sq. km and a bigger buffer zone of 1102 sq. km. The park derives its name from the legend Taru who was a village chief who was killed in a mythological encounter with a tiger. A shrine dedicated to the God Taru now exists beneath a huge tree, on the banks of the Tadoba Lake. 'Andhari' is derived from the name of a river with the same name. The park today is one of the best places to see the Bengal Tiger in its natural habitat.

We have planned two safaris on each of these three (3) days. All meals are included. Breakfast is usually a picnic breakfast on the morning safari while other two meals are at the lodge.

**Overnight will be at Bamboo Forest Lodge on a full board basis**

### **DAY SIX**

This morning we enjoy a more leisurely breakfast at the lodge as we do not have a safari planned this morning. After breakfast we transfer by road to Pench Tiger Reserve – about 4.5 hours away. You should arrive in time for lunch and a short time to settle into your room before heading out on your safari in Pench Tiger Reserve.

Pench Tiger Reserve derives its name from the Pench river which is the lifeline of the forest. Unlike Tadoba which was covered in Bamboo, Pench is a more open landscape. The predominant tree here is teak. The teak tree has very large sized leaf which helps it absorb a lot of sunlight and generates a lot of food for the tree to grow quickly, however, the same leaf and its large surface area causes a lot of evaporation thus the tree drops its leaf quicker than the other trees. This causes a large part of the forest to lose its cover and

the forest dries out quicker than other parks. However, this also means that you have better visibility here than in other jungles.



Pench also boasts of one of the highest numbers of prey base for the predators in any of the central Indian jungles. So, there is always something there to see and the park houses a good number of predators ranging from jackals, wild dogs, wolves to leopards and tigers.

**Overnight will be at Pench Tree Lodge on a full board basis**

#### **IMPORTANT NOTES & TIPS FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS**

Pench & Kanha both come under the state management of Madhya Pradesh, who have introduced some important rules in the last two years to prevent jeeps from exceeding speed limits and to prevent gathering of too many vehicles together for a longer duration. They addressed these issues by putting in GPS which monitors speed, routes and stoppages ensuring that no one breaks any rules. One is not allowed to drive more within the park at more than 25kmph.

There is a time limit of 10min for stoppage at a particular spot, beyond this time limit you need to drive around and can return back to the spot. This is important as again at the time of sightings you need to be quick in getting yourself into position and taking pictures.

Even though there are different entry gates all the vehicle explore the same area using different routes.

Since wildlife tourism in India is still evolving there is still quite a bit of tiger craze amongst the tourist please do inform your lodge naturalist that you are interested in search for and photographing leopards. Pench is home to some bold male leopards, lodge naturalists are aware of their territories and key areas where one can spend time looking for them.





#### **DAY SEVEN**

We have planned two more safaris today to explore Pench Tiger Reserve. India is also home to another interesting animal called “Gaur” – often referred to as the Indian Bison. It is the tallest wild cattle species in the world with height ranging from 4ft 8in to 7ft 3in at shoulder.

**Overnight will be at Pench Tree Lodge on a full board basis**

#### **DAY EIGHT**

This morning we take our last safari into Pench Tiger Reserve.

**Note: All parks in the state of Madhya Pradesh remain closed for safari on Wednesday afternoon, so we use this time to transfer to the next park. We need to plan dates for the tour accordingly.**

After lunch we transfer by road to Kanha Tiger Reserve. The journey to Kanha should take about 3.5-4 hours by road. Kanha Tiger Reserve is the largest tiger reserve in the state of Madhya Pradesh – spread over 1949sq.km of which 940sq.km is the core area and the remainder is the buffer forest.

The park is situated in the Central Indian Highlands, which are part of the extensive tableland that forms India’s main peninsula. The highlands once were continuous forests and accounted for a significant part of the country’s wilderness areas and wildlife habitats. Today, these forests have become fragmented and survive in parks such as Panna, Bandhavgarh, Kanha, Pench and Sanjay Dubri.

**Overnight will be at Singinawa Jungle Lodge on a full board basis**

#### **DAYS NINE AND TEN**

It is uncertain to bring forward a relevant cause for calling it ‘Kanha’, however, people often associate its origin from the Kanhar River, or the dark black soil found in the area. Before the British took over the land in 1818, it was ruled by the Gond Kings and prior to them by the Rajput dynasties. The land accommodated the nomadic or ‘Baiga’ tribes for several years-while they practiced shifting cultivation (dhya) until the 1868 when the act was prohibited by the Land Settlement Act.

This area came to be known as the reserve forest in the year 1879; it was upgraded as 'The Banjar Valley Reserve' in 1933 considering the plight of forest land restoration. The years 1947 to 1951 witnessed a great uproar from the native community and governance as the Raja of Vijayanagaram shot 30 tigers in Kanha. In 1955 ultimately the region was declared as National park. Later the park was fragmented into 2 sanctuaries Banjar and Hallon. In 1973, the park became the first in the league of Tiger reserves in the country. Presently, the reserve encompasses 1949 sq.km. of serene forestland.

You begin your explorations of Kanha this morning. We have planned two safaris for you on each of these two days to help you explore the beautiful Sal forests of Kanha and give you time to take some fabulous wildlife photos.

**Overnight will be at Singinawa Jungle Lodge on a full board basis.**

#### **DAY ELEVEN**

This morning take your last safari of the trip in Kanha Tiger Reserve. The reserve is today divided into 4 major zones – Mukki (close to which Singinawa is located), Kisli, Kanha and Sarhi. Ideally, we would like to showcase Kanha & Kisli zones as well, however, safaris in India are on a first come first serve basis and availability of the same needs to be checked.

Of the three parks that have been visited currently, Kanha is the only park which is home to the hard ground Barasingha. This deer species was almost extinct when they created an enclosure in Kanha zone and bred the deer. Today the population of the Barasingha is thriving and plans are in place to re-introduce it to other parks that may be ideal for it. After an early lunch you are transferred to Jabalpur airport to catch your flight to Delhi. The journey to Jabalpur should take about 4.5 hours and you will be met on arrival and assisted to



check in for your flight. Since air India arrive on the international terminal, it will be easy for you to transfer to the international departures and check-in to your international flight back home.





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