

TRACKS SAFARIS

WE GET YOU CLOSER



12 Night Wolves, Hyenas, Big Cats of Western India

Mumbai, Due, Gir, Velavadar, Little Rann of Kutch, Jawai, Delhi



Not many realize that India is home to 10% of the world's wildlife species. The main reason for this is that the country has a huge diversity of landscapes that have helped evolve a huge variety of species. Literally any landscape that you can think of anywhere in the world – we have something similar here. This is given rise to unique and rare mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, insects and the often-forgotten marine life.

Western India is the more arid and dry landscape of India with a large part of Gujarat and Rajasthan being part of the Thar Desert. The region offers a diverse landscape from dry deciduous forests, scrub jungles to savanna grassland to huge flat saltpans – A perfect landscape for lions, tigers, leopards, jungle cats, caracal, desert cats, Indian wolf, striped hyena, Asiatic wild ass and the sloth bear.



DAY ONE

On arrival into Mumbai International Airport you will be met by Tracks Safaris representatives and transferred to your hotel for two nights. If your flight is early then we can arrange an additional tour for you in the afternoon.

Overnight at The Taj Mahal Palace on a dinner, bed and breakfast basis

DAY TWO

Today we have arranged a full day tour of Mumbai which can be tailored to your interests. We have a variety of unique and creative experiences or alternatively you can discover this vibrant and historic city independently.

Overnight at The Taj Mahal Palace on a dinner, bed and breakfast basis

DAY THREE

This morning you will be transferred to Mumbai airport in time to check in for your domestic flight to Diu. On arrival you will be met and have lunch at a local hotel before continuing onwards to Gir National Park.

It is possible to visit to Naida Caves on the way depending on the arrival time of your flight. The caves are a Picturesque network of caves and caverns featuring unique rock formations and sunlit canyons. The caves' origin remains a mystery as it is believed that they were formed by geological forces or due to quarrying done by the Portuguese.

The drive from Diu to Gir National Park should take about 2.5hrs. Remainder of the afternoon is at leisure.

Overnight at Woods at Sasan, Gir on a full board basis

DAY FOUR

Gir National Park was set up in 1965, and a 259-sq-km core area was declared a national park in 1975. Since the late 1960s, lion numbers have increased from under 200 to over 650 (not all these lions live within the park). The sanctuary's 37 other mammal species, most of which have also increased in numbers, include



dainty chitals (spotted deer), sambars (large deer), nilgais (large antelopes), chousinghas (four-horned antelopes), chinkaras (gazelles), crocodiles and rarely seen leopards. The park is a great destination for birders, too, with more than 300 species, most of them resident.

Unlike other parks in the country Gir offers 3 safari excursions into the park per day for tourists – Early morning 0600 – 0900, 0930 – 1200 & 1500 – 1730. Please note timings of the park changes each month depending on sunrise and sunset time so there may be a variance of 15-30 minutes.

We have planned 2 safaris today – early morning & afternoon safari. The safari will be in an exclusive jeep.

Overnight at Woods at Sasan, Gir on a full board basis

DAY FIVE

Besides wildlife, Gir park still is inhabited by human settlements. This community primarily consists of distinctively dressed Maldhari – or herders. The park officials have been trying to resettle these people elsewhere largely because their cattle and buffalo were competing for food resources with the antelopes, deer and gazelles while also being preyed upon by the lions and leopards.

About 1000 people still live in the park, however, their livestock accounts for about a quarter of the lions' diet. Apart from the Maldhari, a tribe of African origin, who were most likely brought to the area centuries ago as slaves, live in the region. If you are interested we can organise a visit to their villages.

Your exploration of Gir National Park continues with two more jeep safari explorations planned today.

Overnight at Woods at Sasan, Gir on a full board basis

DAY SIX

This morning after an early breakfast you transfer by road to Velavadar. The journey can be completed in around 4 hours.



The Blackbuck Sanctuary is a hidden gem, one of the last stands of grassland remaining in the massive alluvial plain running along the Gulf of Khambatt called Bhal. The Bhal is a tapestry of cotton, wheat and other agricultural fields, saline flats, grasslands, pastures, freshwater wetlands and coastal marshes. Nearly forty species of grasses have been identified from Bhal. The dominant grass species are *Dicanthium annulatum*, *Sporobolus virginicus*, *S. coromandelianus* and *S. maderspatensis*.

The national park is a beautiful 35sq km tract of largely treeless savannah grasslands and bushes that makes a stunning and enchanting sight. It is wonderful to watch the grasslands changing colour at different times of the day, and also in different seasons of the year, from bright gleaming greens to golden browns, and the grasses swaying in gentle breezes.

The beauty of the grassland is enhanced by its abundance of wildlife from butterflies and dragonflies to India's largest antelope, the nilgai. Some of the largest herds of Blackbuck antelope can be found here. The key predator of Velavadar is the Indian wolf, an endangered species. Indian wolves generally hunt in pairs or small packs, with one of them distracting the antelopes while the other takes one from a group by surprise. In open country they may give a sustained chase to their prey. Velavadar is also one of the most likely places to view a striped hyena, a species that is rarely seen elsewhere because of its nocturnal habits.

This afternoon take your first drive into the Blackbuck Sanctuary.

Overnight at Blackbuck Lodge Velavadar on a full board basis

DAY SEVEN

We have planned two safaris each day in the Blackbuck Sanctuary today. The grasslands of Velavadar offer close viewing of various species of larks, quails, painted and grey francolin, shrikes, wheatears, sparrow larks and other characteristic birds of the bush. The globally threatened *Stoliczka's* bush chat is one of the specialties of this national park. The tall and striking-looking saras crane is a subcontinent endemic that is seen in flooded grassland areas of the park, while flocks of demoiselle and common cranes gather in winter at the wetlands. River and riverside birds can be watched at the Porvalia and Alang Rivers that run alongside

the park to its north and south respectively, and some of these sites can be prolific for watching flocks of sandgrouse coming to drink

Velavadar is also well-known for its concentration of raptors. Short-toed eagles are often seen, while Aquila eagles like imperial, greater spotted and steppe could also be seen at Velavadar in winter. Other raptors often seen are kestrel, laggar falcon, black-shoulder kite and shikra.

The most spectacular sight is the winter roost of harriers, mostly Montagu's and pallid but also marsh and the occasional hen – thousands of them have been seen settling down to roost among the grasslands on a winter evening. This is widely rated as the world's largest harrier roost. Eurasian eagle owl hunts here and could be seen even in daylight.

Overnight at Blackbuck Lodge Velavadar on a full board basis



DAY EIGHT

After an early breakfast you will depart for the Little Rann of Kutch to explore the Wild Ass Sanctuary and the surrounding region. The journey to Little Rann of Kutch (LRK) should take about 4.5 – 5 hours and you should arrive by lunchtime and settle in before beginning to explore the park this afternoon.

The Rann of Kutch is a geographically unique landscape that was once an arm of the Arabian Sea. As the land separated from the sea by geological forces, it became a vast, featureless plain encrusted with salt that is inundated with water during the rains.

The safari across the Little Rann visits the 'bets', islands on the ancient seabed that are now higher grounds covered with grass and scrub. These 'bets' support a variety of wildlife including the 'Gudkhur' (Asiatic wild ass) that is not found elsewhere. The wild ass is a handsome chestnut brown member of the equus genus (horse family). Capable of reaching high speeds when galloping across the Rann, the wild ass is usually seen in small herds.



The elegant blackbuck (Indian antelope), nilgai or blue bull (India's largest antelope) and the graceful chinkara (Indian gazelle) are other mammals seen at the bets. The main carnivores of the Little Rann of Kutch are the endangered Indian wolf, desert fox, Indian fox, jackals, desert and jungle cats, and a few hyenas.

Smaller mammals like hares, gerbilles and hedgehogs, and reptiles like spiny tailed lizard, monitor, red and common sand boa, saw-scaled viper, cobra, dhaman (Indian rat snake), etc, could also be seen during the safaris in the Rann.

Overnight at Rann Rider on a full board basis

DAY NINE

The Little Rann of Kutch is also a birding paradise and has been declared a Ramsar Site. During the safaris in the Rann expect to see large flocks of larks, and other dryland birds like sandgrouse, coursers, plovers, chats, warblers, babblers, shrikes. Among the many winter visitors are the houbara bustard and spotted sandgrouse.

The best birding is at the lakes and marshes in and around the Rann where birds gather in numbers beyond comprehension during the winter months from October to March.

These are the months when demoiselle and common cranes are seen in incredibly large numbers. The wetlands also attract flamingos, pelicans, storks, ibises, spoonbill, a variety of ducks and other waterfowl.

The Rann is also the hunting ground of raptors like the short-toed eagle, aquila eagles, six species of falcon, buzzards and three species of harrier. It is one of the few places where harriers can be seen roosting on open ground at night. Spend the day exploring the sanctuary and the surrounding area.

Overnight at Rann Rider on a full board basis

DAY TEN

This morning you will transfer to Jawai which is around 5.5 hours by road. It is ideal to start early so that you reach Bera Safari Lodge by lunchtime.

Rajasthan has a significant number of birds and mammals and many efforts have been put in to conserve the flora and fauna of this desert state of India. One of them - Jawai Conservation Reserve - was established

in the year 2013. This project was proposed to promote ecotourism and safeguard the wellbeing of flora and fauna in this area.



Ancient Rocks of the pre-Cambrian period form the Aravalli Range which runs diagonally across the state. The southern part of the range is formed by granite and rise to their highest summit Mt Abu. Bera Region lies between Kumbalgarh National Park and Mt Abu Sanctuary - this area has granite hills. These large granite formations are scattered with Anogeissus scrub, and rocky dry river beds and the kopjes are scattered with religious shrines and temples.

The leopards of Bera have accepted these structures as a part of their habitat and it is the most incredible sight to see villagers at prayer and leopards sitting quite calmly, watching the ceremonies. Traditionally the area was maintained for grazing livestock and farming, with the creation of watering holes and feeding stations for wildlife.

There is a healthy population of around 50+ Leopards in the Bera/Jawai Region and it is one of the few places on earth where among human settlements leopards thrive. The area is inhabited by Rabari Tribe (The Shepherds/Herdsman) and where there is prey predators follow.

Some of the other animals found in the area are - Caracal (rare sight), Chinkara, Desert Cat, Indian Wolf, Sloth Bear, Pythons, Jackal, Jungle Cat, Striped Hyena, and the Blue Bulls.

Late this afternoon take your first safari in search of the leopard.

Overnight at Bera Safari Lodge on a full board basis

DAYS ELEVEN AND TWELVE

You continue exploring Bera and Jawai Dam region in search of the various species that call it home.

Overnight at Bera Safari Lodge.

DAY THIRTEEN

This morning make you will be transferred to Udaipur airport which is around 2.5 hours by road in time to check in for your flight to Delhi.

Our representative will receive you on arrival into Delhi airport and transfer you to the hotel.

Overnight at Pride Plaza Aerocity, Delhi on a dinner, bed and breakfast basis

DAY FOURTEEN

Today you will transfer to the airport in time to check in for your international flight home. Alternatively why not spend a couple more days in Delhi to discover this vibrant and fascinating city or extend your Indian adventure – please ask for ideas!



TRACKS SAFARIS – WE GET YOU CLOSER TO INDIA!

TRACKS SAFARIS
WE GET YOU CLOSER

