

# TRACKS SAFARIS

## WE GET YOU CLOSER



### **14 NIGHT LUXURY WILDERNESS HOLIDAY**

**Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Panna Tiger Reserve, Khajuraho, Agra and Delhi**







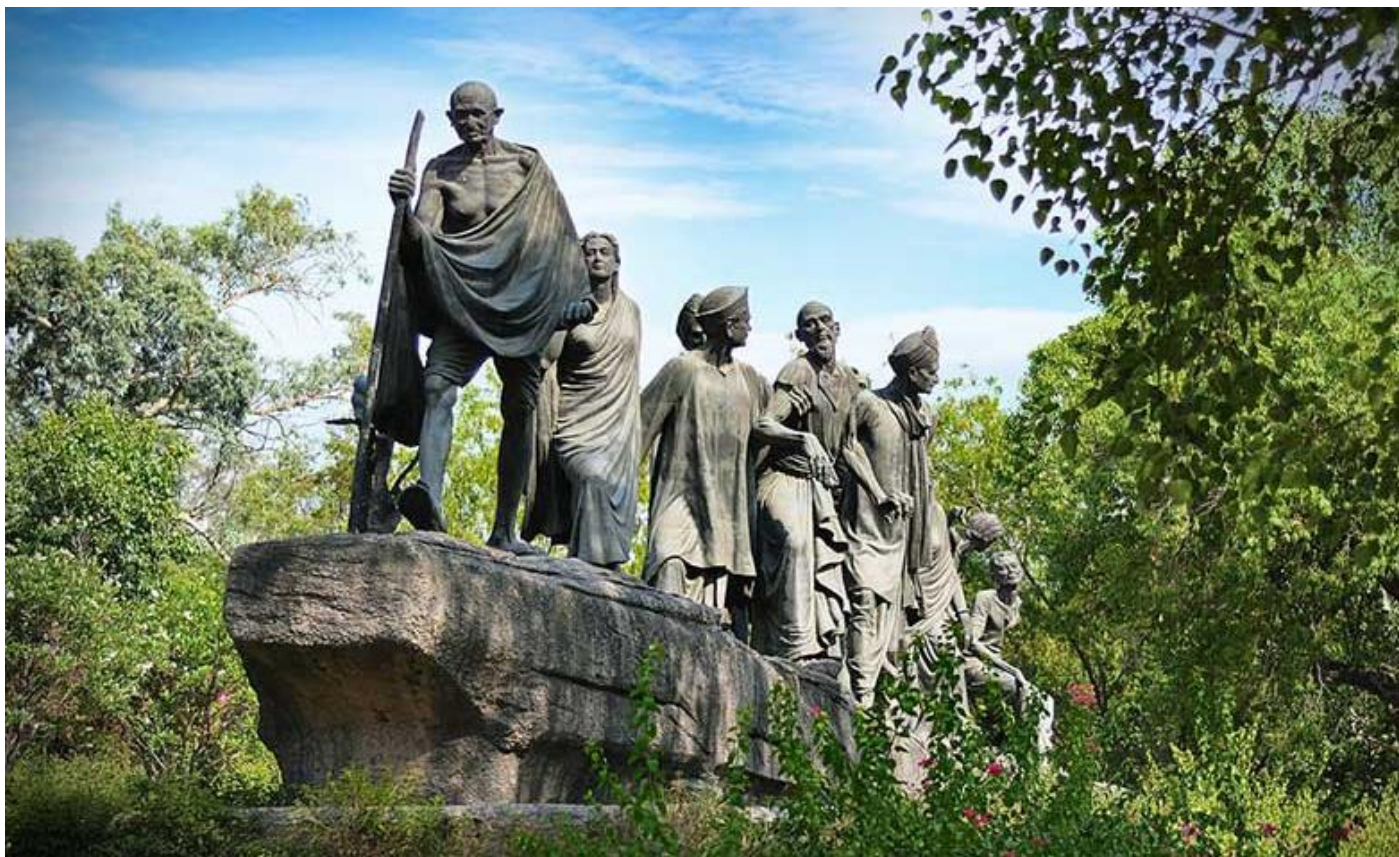
Madhya Pradesh is the true center and heartland of India. Its forests were made famous by Rudyard Kipling and many have subsequently been turned into National Parks in order to preserve their unique, rich and varied wildlife. Its better-known parks of Pench, Kanha and Bandhavgarh protect tiger, leopard, wild dog, gaur (Indian Bison), monkey and deer as well as many reptiles and birds. Some parks in Madhya Pradesh which are relatively recently discovered parks (in terms of tourism at least) are Panna and Satpura. Though not as popular as Kanha and Bandhavgarh, these parks today offer a much richer wildlife experience.

One of the things we love about this state is that much of it really does seem like the rest of India used to be one hundred years ago and when driving between destinations one is privileged to witness this. Drives go through forested areas and villages where most of the population still live in mud and thatch houses which they repaint every year, after the monsoon, in a vivid indigo blue. During November when the mustard crops are ready the brilliance of the yellow against the blue houses is wonderfully eye catching.

Its sites are treasures which are varied and captivating and include the imposing fort at Gwalior and the Scindia palace museum which houses an excellent collection of art; the hugely erotic carvings on the temples at Khajuraho and the forested temples on the river at Orchha. This tour has been planned to give you a balanced holiday experience where you explore villages, remote sites and wonderful jungles yet return in the evening to comfortable luxury lodges to relax and enjoy the sundowners, bush dinners and unwind in beautifully designed lodges which not only offers you creature comforts but also blends in well into the surrounding wilderness.

On this trip the destinations selected for our exploration are: Kanha Tiger Reserve, Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, Panna Tiger Reserve, Khajuraho, Agra and Delhi.





### **DAY ONE**

Arrive into Delhi early morning, you will be received by our representatives and will be accompanied to your hotel. There are no activities planned for this morning in order for you to rest and unwind after a long flight to India. After lunch a city expert shall meet you in the hotel lobby. Before you begin the tour, it is a good idea to get a brief overview of how the city evolved and learn about some key rulers and patrons of the city before you begin your city tour.

The city of Delhi was formed by the amalgamation of many cities – each is of importance at a different time in history. Our tour today takes you back a 1000 years and will explain the advent of political Islam into the country as you visit the Qutub Complex with your tour expert. Learn about life and culture in the country before and after the introduction of Islam.

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

### **DAY TWO**

This morning our aim is to introduce you to the Mughal dynasty in India and the British rule in India. However, we would like this experience to be more than just a run-down the history lane showcasing buildings and monuments. The experience take you to the crafts museum and to the national gallery of modern art to showcase the evolution of art and the impact of various people and cultures on the same. Learn how architecture was impacted and at the same time we also intend to throw so light on Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy that helped win India its freedom.

**Overnight stay will be The Imperial, New Delhi on a dinner, bed and breakfast basis**

### **DAY THREE**

Today we make our way to Central India to begin exploring the diverse wilderness in the Indian Jungles. Early morning check-out and transfer to the airport and fly to Raipur.



On arrival you will be received by our representative who will accompany you to Courtyard by Marriott, where we have planned a break for breakfast before you continue onwards to Kanha Tiger Reserve. The road journey to Kanha should take about 4 hours and we expect you to arrive at the lodge in time for lunch. Settle in and enjoy your lunch.



Kanha Tiger Reserve is one of the oldest as well as the largest tiger reserves in Madhya Pradesh. Sunlight dappling through towering sal trees and grasslands filled with limpid pools, Kanha brings to mind the raw wilderness of the African veldt.

The magnificent forest tract of Kanha National Park straddles the two districts of Mandla and Balaghat in the Central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. These areas have enjoyed protection since 1879 as a reserve forest, subsequently being declared a National park in 1955 and a Tiger Reserve in 1973.

This region used to be a part of 'Gondwana', or land of the Gond tribe which still inhabit the region. The Baiga are the other prominent tribe living here. Located on the Maikal Hills of the Satpura range; Kanha constitutes the classic landscape of the Central Indian highlands with gently sloping hills, misty dense forests and river valleys. Kanha National Park is one of the largest parks in the country spreading over 2000 square kilometres. These jungles are prime tiger habitat and are a conservation success story for Barasingha or the hard ground swamp deer. From about 60 individuals or so in the 1960's to over 750 deer in the recent census, the Barasingha are back from the brink of extinction.

Banjaar Tola Jungle Lodge by Taj Safaris is spread over 90 acres of land adjoining the Kanha forest. Late this afternoon after you have had some rest, we recommend you take a nature walk through the property to tune your senses to the sounds and sights of Indian jungles. A lodge naturalist will accompany you to help you with birding and seeking out interesting lesser fauna that can be found in the property. Overnight will be at Banjaar Tola Jungle Lodge on a full board basis.





#### **DAYS FOUR AND FIVE**

These two days are spent exploring the jungles of Kanha. Twice daily Safari Drives are conducted by expert naturalists in specially designed 4X4 vehicles. Morning safaris start shortly after sunrise. Along with the thrill of tiger tracking, is a memorable stop for a picnic breakfast. Afternoon safaris last a couple of hours and end at sunset.

Shortly after daybreak, the guests at Banjaar Tola get comfortable in specially designed safari vehicles and make their way towards the Kanha National park. Driven by an experienced naturalist the guests are greeted with dense jungles, grasslands laden with mist and a deep orange orb for a sun in the sky – a typical mystical Kanha morning.

Misty cool mornings are a trademark of the region even during the warmer months and make for fabulous photographic opportunities. Kanha is rich in biodiversity with an excellent population of tigers and leopards. The Barasingha (hard ground swamp deer) are the mascots of Kanha and herds can be seen in grasslands as well as in Tals or ponds feeding on aquatic plants. During the breeding season in winter, it is interesting to watch the big males decorate their antlers with leaves and grass to attract a doe. Bird enthusiasts find Kanha a treasure box of winged gems. Scarlet Minivets, Rosy Starlings and the vibrant blue of Indian rollers are startling in their beauty, while some others have amusing calls.

Kanha vegetation is mixed deciduous with Sal (*Shorea robusta*) as the dominant species. Sal is a towering tree that can grow up to a height of 30 metres and is seldom leafless, making for a green jungle year round. The tree is prized locally not only for timber but for various medicinal uses. The resin obtained from Sal is used to treat Arthritis, while the butter is used for lighting oil lamps.



Bamhani Dadar - one of the highest points in the park - is a rocky plateau that has scrub like vegetation with short hardy plants and grasses. A variety of trees growing on the slopes are Bael or stone apple, Tendu, Jamun or Indian blackberry, Tamarind and Mahua to name a few. Arjuna trees with smooth white trunks are usually found growing on riverbanks while swathes of Bamboo occur intermittently.

Various species of grasses are found in the Kanha meadows, chief among them being 'Kans', from the Saccharum family of which the delicious sugarcane is also a member. Some of the finest specimens of the Crocodile bark trees can be seen in Kanha. As the name suggests this robust looking tree has a bark that resembles the ridged pattern on a crocodile's back. The Kanha jungles have a temperate climate and relatively cool year round. The temperate climes of Kanha abound with myriad fruiting trees and grasslands swaying with succulent grasses. Such natural bounty provides for a thriving and varied animal population at Kanha national park.

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



## **DAY SIX**

This morning take your last drive into Kanha Tiger Reserve. After an early lunch transfer by road to Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve – one of the most popular tiger reserves in the country. The journey to Bandhavgarh should take 4.5 hours and if you depart Kanha by 1400 you should arrive at your lodge by 1900. Your home in Bandhavgarh is Mahua Kothi Lodge by Taj Safaris.

Mahua Kothi is named after the Mahua tree which is prized and revered in the region. The tree flowers in March and April and the flowers are enjoyed by both humans as well as animals as it has intoxicating properties – much like the Marula tree in Africa.

This evening we have planned a Mahua Dinner for you to relax after a long drive. A tall Mahua Tree stands at the edge of the grassland alongside a picture perfect lily pond. Tables are set up under the large canopy of this Mahua tree. Lit by lanterns hanging from branches, this intimate setting is most cheerful and inviting in contrast to the darkness after sunset. The Mahua Dinner chiefly features Indian barbecued dishes. Guests



watch the chefs deftly manoeuvre skewers and breads in the tandoor as they explain the recipes. The Mahua dinner is a unique dining experience accompanied by the occasional calls of frogs from the pond.

**Overnight will be at Mahua Kothi by Taj Safaris on a full board basis**



#### **DAY SEVEN AND EIGHT**

These two days are dedicated to explore and enjoy forests of Bandhavgarh. We have planned 2 safaris on each of these two days.

Bandhavgarh tiger reserve is perhaps one of the most popular tiger reserves in the country. It is also one of the first few parks in the country that was declared a tiger reserve when project tiger began in India. Many also incorrectly consider this to be a park with highest density of tigers in India because sightings of the big cat is so high. Apart from the tiger the other key species to look out for in the park are the leopard, dhole, gaur, sambar deer, spotted deer, barking deer, langur, rhesus macaque, Indian vultures, lesser adjutant storks, crested serpent eagle, crested hawk eagle to name a few.

The park was the hunting preserve of the erstwhile ruling family of the state of Rewa and Maharaja Martand Singh captured the first white tiger in this area in 1951. Mohan as he was fondly named is considered to be the white tiger whose gene is found in all white tigers around the world today. Please also note that there are no white tigers found in the wild anymore.

The four main zones of the park are Tala, Maghdi, Khitauli and Panpatta and together they form the core of the 'Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve'. The area is known for its biodiversity and lists under North Indian Moist Deciduous Forests. The vegetation is chiefly Sal trees in the valleys and on the lower slopes, gradually changing to mixed deciduous forest on the hills and the drier areas to the south and west.

On one of these evening we have planned a Chaupal Dinner – Chaupal is a Hindi term for a community meeting place in a village and usually forms a hub for socialising for locals. The Chaupal at Mahua Kothi is located beside the organic kitchen garden. This clearing with a packed earth floor surrounded by row upon row of tomatoes, lettuce, spring onions and other greens makes for a most inviting alfresco dining spot. A

dinner here features intimate table set up for guests, a bonfire around which are placed string beds made comfortable with mattresses and bolsters. An old open Jeep forms the bar and guests can watch live spit (skewer) roasting, customary khud (pit) cooking with local Baghelkhandi flavours. Tribal dancers perform an ancient routine and guests are welcome to join in. The ambience recreates an authentic experience of a traditional local feast for guests to enjoy.

**Overnight will be at Mahua Kothi by Taj Safaris on a full board basis**



## **DAY NINE**

This morning take you last drive into Bandhavgarh tiger reserve. After an early lunch transfer by road to Panna tiger reserve. The drive to Panna should take about 4 hours and is scenic with large stretches through forests interspersed with villages and farmlands.

Your home in Panna is Pashan Garh Lodge by Taj Safaris. Pashan Garh or 'stone fortress' is a cluster of 12 stone cottages huddled atop a small hill, with a sweeping view of dense foliage. Set in 200 acres of private wilderness; this luxury jungle lodge draws inspiration from the dry-packed stone houses of the Panna region.

The large and airy guest areas boast open courtyards and a stone deck overlooking the expanse of the forest down a gentle slope. A lookout tower offers a perfect perch for bird watching by day and stargazing after sundown. A rectangular pool under shady trees invites guests for a refreshing dip. Vintage table lamps, rich textiles and an array of other treasures bring softness and warmth to the chunky stone interiors of the common areas.

This evening we have planned a small stargazing activity. The Taj Safari lodge in Pashan Garh is located in pristine jungle environments, where guests have the luxury of viewing a vast expanse of very starry skies. After a day of adventure and excitement in the jungle, watching the brilliant night sky is a very relaxing activity. The constant North Star and the Milky Way are especially exciting to young guests. Listen to interesting trivia and stories as naturalists acquaint you to the life of the night sky.

**Overnight will be at Pashan Garh on a full board basis**





## DAY TEN

This morning we would like to offer you a little break from the jungles and show you interesting cultural aspects of the region. After an early breakfast we make our way to Khajuraho which is around 1.5 hours by road. Khajuraho is a city that is home to Hindu and Jain temples which today are a UNESCO world heritage site. The temples are famous for their nagara-style architectural symbolism and their erotic sculptures. Most Khajuraho temples were built between 950 and 1050 by the Chandela dynasty. Historical records note that the Khajuraho temple site had 85 temples by the 12th century, spread over 20 square kilometres of these, only about 25 temples have survived, spread over six square kilometres.

Explore the temple complex and time permitting visit Ranah Falls before returning back to the lodge for lunch. Late afternoon or early evening we have planned a village visit to give you an insight into the lives of those who call these remote lands home.

Pashan Garh is surrounded by miles of open forests which enfold several old human settlements. The two charming villages that guests often visit are Amjhiriya and Manki. Amjhiriya lies along the main road beside a manmade lake. This village comprises almost exclusively of cattle herders. Manki is tucked away amid the wilderness and accessed by driving about twenty minutes on a dirt track. Residents of Manki keep cattle as well as being seasonal farmers who migrate to towns for work in the hotter months.

It is interesting to see the similarities in the lodge architecture with the flat roofed stone houses of the villages. Evenings provide photographic opportunities as large herds of cows return home. The region being rich in diamonds, it is not unusual to see prospectors sifting earth in fields hoping to find a shiny rock that will change their fortunes. Guests are welcome to join in, on condition that they will have to hand over any precious finds to the landowner.

**Overnight will be at Pashan Garh on a full board basis**





### **DAYS ELEVEN AND TWELVE**

Panna Tiger Reserve faced a big blow in 2008 when it lost all its tigers to poaching. Today Panna is a success story for tiger rehabilitation as tigers were again introduced into the forest and today the tiger population is more than 40 adults. Key to this success was the protection that was given to the big cat – all breeding females even today are radio collared and there is a team dedicated to monitor each tiger's movements.

Situated on the Bundelkhand plateau, this forest was once a popular Shikargah - or hunting ground - for the local nobility, now a thing of the past. The park is one of the most dramatic with plateaus, hills, gorges, waterfalls and the river Ken running through the forest. Panna is a glowing testimonial to a successful effort in tiger conservation.

The park is especially good for raptors and is an excellent destination for birders, but its grasslands and dry forest also reveal a number of ungulates and small carnivores and can provide wonderful sightings of tigers and leopards. The park today is home to tiger, leopard, dhole (Asiatic wild dog), sloth bear, jungle cat, rusty-spotted cat, Indian gazelle (Chinkara), Blue bull, sambar deer, spotted deer along with honey buzzard, red-headed vulture, Indian vulture, crested serpent eagle and crested hawk eagle to name a few.

We have planned 2 safaris on each of these two days to help you explore Panna tiger reserve.

**Overnight will be at Pashan Garh on a full board basis**

### **DAY THIRTEEN**

This morning marks the end of your safari experience on this tour. We spend most parts of today making our journey to Agra. The journey is broken into 2 parts:

**Part 1:** Pashan Garh Lodge to Jhansi: This part of the journey is by road transfer and takes about 5.5 hours. We recommend an early breakfast and depart the lodge by 0730. You should arrive in Orchha by 1200. We break here for lunch at Amar Mahal before heading to Jhansi railway station which is about 20 minutes.

**Part 2:** From Jhansi we board the Gatiman Express at 1500 and will arrive in Agra at 1750.

Our representative shall meet you at the station and will take you to your hotel. Remainder of the evening is at leisure

**Overnight will be at ITC Mughal on a full board basis**





#### **DAY FOURTEEN**

The city of Agra, the quintessence of the grand Mughal era, reigns to this day in the public mind as the embodiment of royal grace, imposing architecture and power. Agra is globally renowned as the city of the Taj Mahal. But this royal Mughal city has, in addition to the legendary Taj, many monuments that epitomize the high point of Mughal architecture. No tour to India can be complete without paying a visit to this erstwhile capital of the Mughals and the city of the Taj Mahal, the world's most beloved monument.

You begin exploring the city today. In your city tour today explore Itmad-ud-daulah, Agra Fort and the Taj Mahal. Time permitting visit John Helsing's tomb.

**Overnight will be at ITC Mughal on a full board basis**

#### **DAY FIFTEEN**

This morning you will be transferred to Delhi by road. Should you enjoy birding we strongly recommend exploring Keoladeo Ghana Bird Sanctuary – a UNESCO world heritage site for a few hours before continuing onwards to Delhi. The drive to the bird sanctuary should take just over an hour.

The sanctuary was created 250 years ago and is named after a Keoladeo (Shiva) temple within its boundaries. Initially, it was a natural depression; and was flooded after the Ajan Bund was constructed by Maharaja Suraj Mal, then the ruler of the princely state of Bharatpur, between 1726–1763. The bund was created at the confluence of two rivers, the Gambhir and Banganga. The park was a hunting ground for the Maharajas of Bharatpur, a tradition dating back to 1850, and duck shoots were organised yearly in honour of the British viceroys.

This sanctuary is an excellent place to see heronries of Painted Storks, Black-headed White Ibis, Asian Openbill Stork and Eurasian Spoonbills. It is also home to flocks of migratory ducks and geese such as



Northern Shoveller, Northern Pintail, Common Pochard, Crested Pochard, Great White Pelican and the Black-necked Stork. It is also a good park to see different types of Bitterns.

Lunch will be at Laxmi Villas Palace. After lunch continue back to Delhi. The journey to Delhi International airport should take about 4hours. On arrival you will be met and assisted to check in for your international flight back home.



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