

# TRACKS SAFARIS

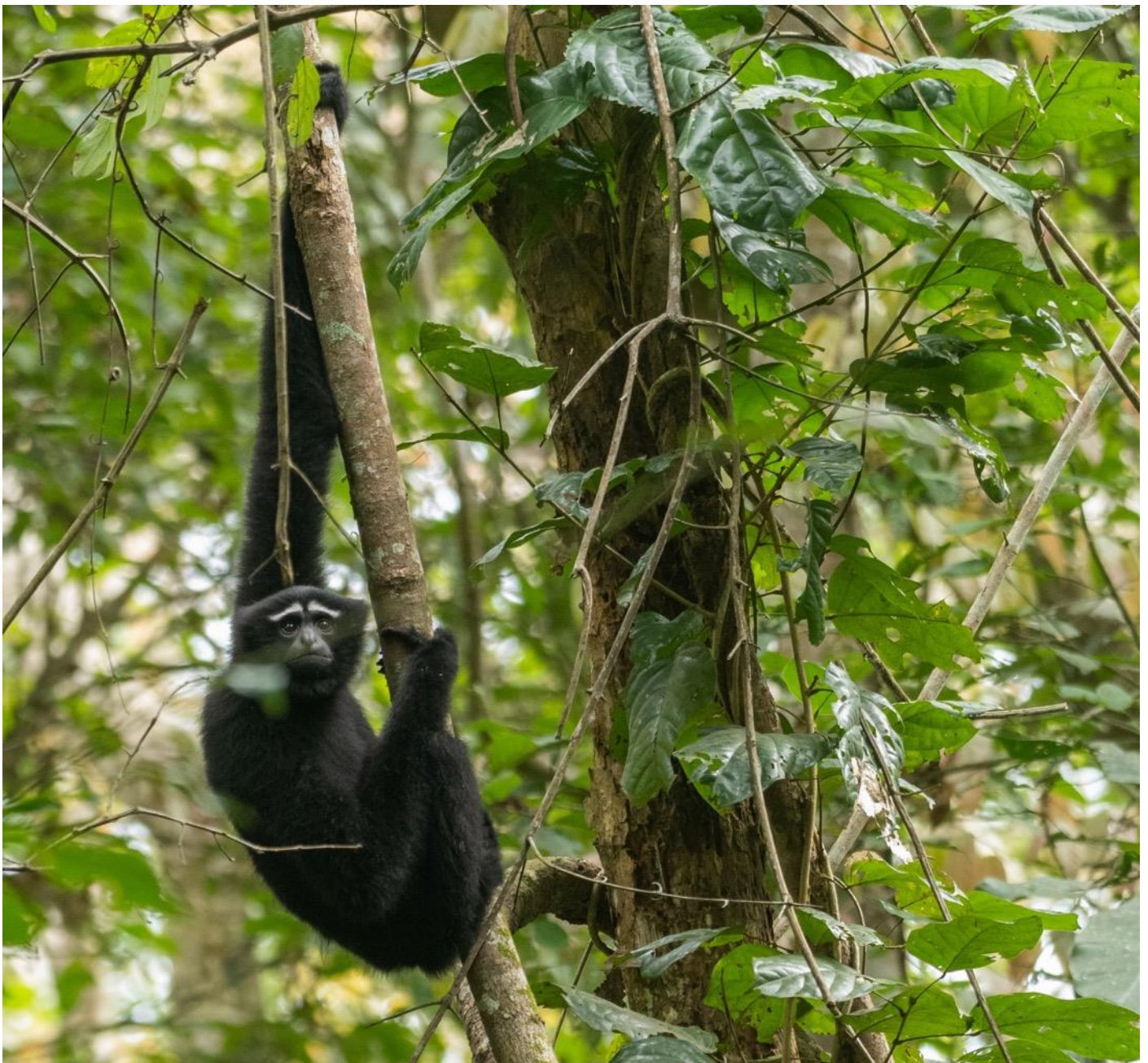
## WE GET YOU CLOSER



**14 NIGHT WILDLIFE OF EASTERN INDIA**

**TIGERS OF THE SUNDERBANS, ASIATIC RHINOS AND RED PANDAS**

**Sundarbans Tiger Reserve, Kaziranga Tiger Reserve, Gibbon Sanctuary and Singalila National Park**







The eastern states of India though a little difficult to access and not as well organised as central India, are home to an amazing diversity of wildlife. In this itinerary we will be taking you from the high reaches of the Himalayas to the world's largest delta and mangrove forests. We will visit tropical evergreen forests as well as flood plains of the mighty Brahmaputra. In this adventure we will explore the natural heritage of Assam as well as West Bengal.

The parks envisaged in this itinerary are the Sundarbans National Park, Kaziranga National Park, Hoollongapar Wildlife Sanctuary and Singalila National Park. Both the Sundarbans as well as Kaziranga National Parks are UNESCO world heritage sites. They are home to a wonderful diversity of wildlife.

In our adventure we shall be searching for the following species:

**Mammals:** Bengal tiger, leopard, fishing cat, leopard cat, jungle cat, Asiatic elephant, one-horned rhinoceros, wild water buffalo, hoolock gibbon, capped langur, smooth coat otters, red panda, yellow throated marten, swamp deer, hog deer and the slow loris to name a few.

**Birds:** Pallas fish eagle, grey headed fish eagle, pied harrier, marsh harrier, lesser adjutant stork, Asian openbill stork, black necked stork, oriental pied hornbill, great Indian hornbill, brown fish owl, dusky eagle owl, great white pelicans, ruddy shelducks, mallards, bar headed geese, northern Shoveller, purple sunbird, green-tailed sunbird, fire-tailed sunbird, collared kingfisher, black capped kingfisher, brown winged kingfisher

**Reptiles:** Saltwater crocodiles, water monitor lizards, a variety of sea turtles and snake species such as king cobra, Russell's viper, Python, keelbacks and vine snake to name a few.



## **DAY ONE**

On arrival into Delhi International Airport our representative will receive you at the airport and transfer you to your hotel (check-in time is 1400hrs). Time at leisure to rest from the long flight. After lunch, our tour expert shall meet you in your hotel and give you an overview of Delhi which will be followed by a city tour.

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

## **DAY TWO**

Early this morning transfer to the airport to board the first flight for Kolkata and on arrival our team will receive you at the airport. We recommend that you have your breakfast at a hotel near the airport before you embark on your journey to the Sundarbans.

If you choose to take a traveling naturalist to accompany you through the trip, then your naturalist will meet you at the hotel for breakfast and continue travelling with you for the remainder of the journey. It is highly recommended that a travelling naturalist accompanies you as not only are they knowledgeable in the field while on a safari, they will also be great people to travel with on the long journeys from one park to the other, ready to answer any questions that may arise with regards to culture, agriculture, politics or more.

The journey to Singalila is completed in two parts:

**Part 1:** Drive from Kolkata airport to Gothkhali Jetty, a drive of 3hrs.

**Part 2:** At the jetty you take a boat journey of 2hrs to get to Sundarbans Tiger Camp. You should arrive at the camp in time for a late lunch. After lunch you can rest from the long journey or maybe explore the ground of the camp with the naturalists learn about the flora and fauna of Sundarbans.

**Overnight will be at Sundarbans Tiger Camp on a full board basis**





### **DAYS THREE AND FOUR**

Sundarbans is vast and spread out and accessing the further points is not possible if you focus on short safaris, thus we have planned two full day private safaris. The picturesque landscape and the variety of birds that inhabit Sundarbans National Park are the ideal settings for photographers to capture the raw, natural beauty of the park. It is advisable to carry a bean-bag or stabiliser as the boats move due to the tidal change. Twice a day the whole forest sinks due to diurnal tide. Low tide and high tide determine what time one can venture to certain parts of the park. Spend the two days exploring these unique mangrove forests of the largest River Delta in the world. Returning to the camp in the evening.

**Overnight will be at Sundarbans Tiger Camp on a full board basis**

### **DAY FIVE**

This morning you will transfer back to Kolkata in the similar way that you arrived in the Sundarbans – first half of the journey by boat and the remainder by road. The rest of the day is at leisure.

NOTE: Depending on the tides and should there be enough time we can do another short boat safari this morning before departing for Kolkata.

**Overnight will be at Hotel near the airport on a full board basis**

### **DAY SIX**

After an early breakfast you will transfer to the airport to catch a flight to Jorhat, in Assam, arriving by lunchtime. Jorhat is part of the Assamese tea growing region.

Our home for tonight will be the Thengal Mansion – a heritage hotel. Constructed in 1929, Thengal Manor is a beautiful mansion, which is now a popular heritage hotel in Jorhat. It was also the site of the event of



launching of 'Dainik Batori', the first daily newspaper in the Assamese language. This is your access point to a very unique wildlife sanctuary in India, visited by only a few – the Hoollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary.



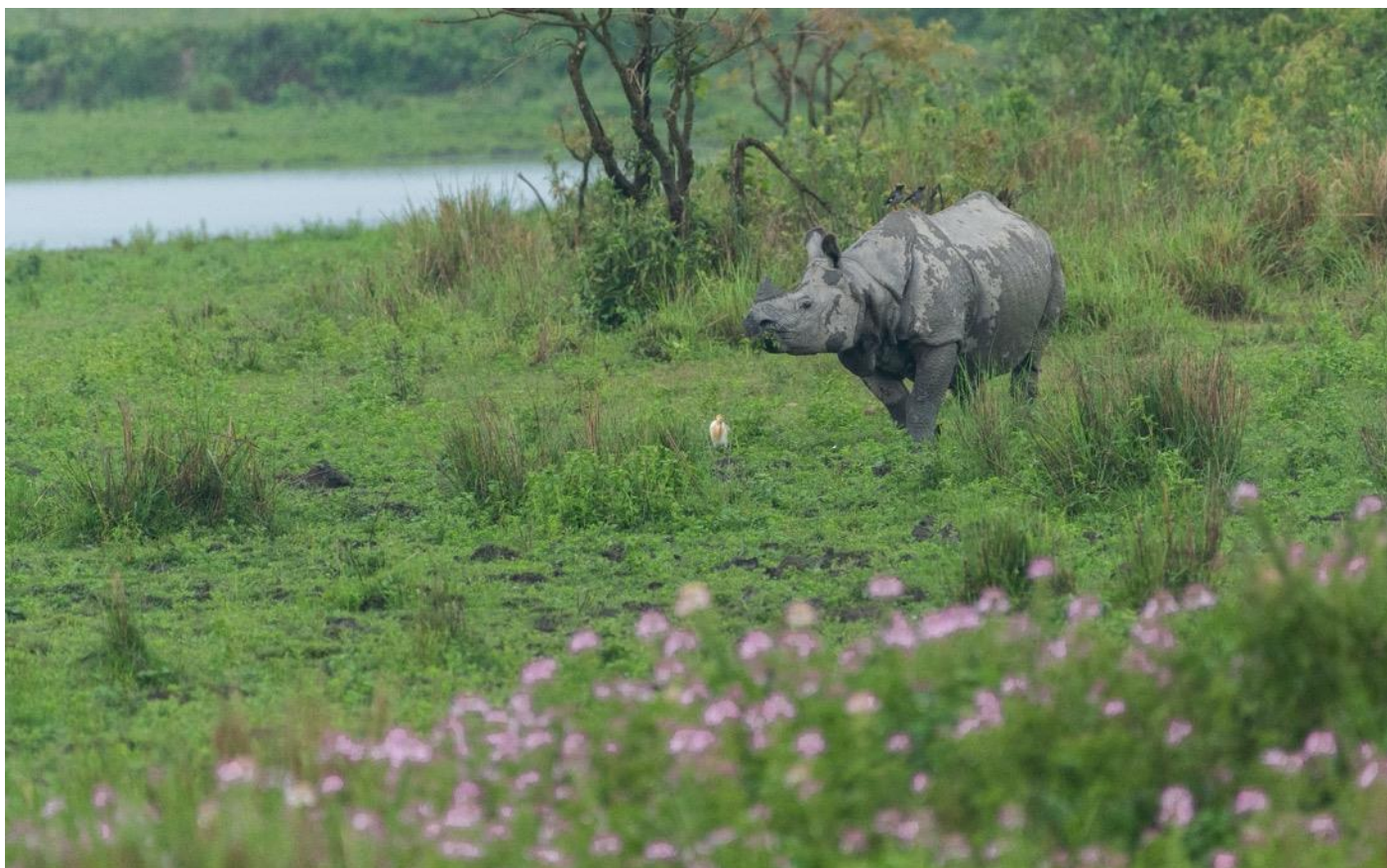
Formerly known as the Gibbon Sanctuary, it is an isolated protected area of evergreen forest. The sanctuary was officially constituted and renamed in 1997. Set aside initially in 1881, its forests used to extend to the foothills of the Patkai mountain range. Since then, the forest has been fragmented and surrounded by tea gardens and small villages. In the early 1900s, artificial regeneration was used to develop a well-stocked forest, resulting in the site's rich biodiversity. The Hoollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary contains India's only gibbons – the hoolock gibbons, and North-eastern India's only nocturnal primate – the Bengal slow loris.

Most of the vegetation within Hoollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary is evergreen in character and is composed of several canopy layers. It is home to 7 species of primates – hoolock gibbon, capped langur, stump-tailed macaque, northern pig-tailed macaque, eastern Assamese macaque, rhesus macaque and the Bengal slow loris. It is also found in the park are the tiger, leopard, Asiatic elephants, jungle cats, wild boars and 3 species of civets.

The isolation of the park by numerous tea gardens creates a geographic barrier for migrating animals. The growing populations of tea garden workers also threatens the habitat since many people rely on the forest for firewood, traditional medicine and food. Large quantities of leaves and grass are collected from the forests to feed cattle. During the rainy season, herbicides and pesticides from the tea gardens wash through the sanctuary.

After having lunch and settling-in you will take a short visit to the park. The park is to be explored on foot. An armed forest guard accompanies you during your exploration. Please note larger mammals are rarely seen in the park, our aim here is to explore the primate variety in the park. The biggest danger and the reason for the armed guard accompanying you are the passing herds of elephants going to or coming from Nagaland.

**Overnight will be at the Thengal Manor on a full board basis**



## **DAY SEVEN**

Early this morning we go in to explore the Gibbon Sanctuary. Morning is a better time to explore. Please note you will often find these primates in high canopies and might have to go off the path to get a better look. In doing so we need to be aware that these evergreen forests are also home to leeches. These are much smaller than the ones that you find in evergreen forests of Borneo, but after you visit a thorough check is advisable.

You shall return to the Manor for a late breakfast, following which you will check-out and make your way to Kaziranga National Park. The journey to Kaziranga will take you about 2.5hrs by road.

Your home at Kaziranga will be Diphlu River Lodge, located at the edge of a river creek that divided the buffer from the core area of the park. The creek often attracts a lot of wildlife and thus the bar and dining area of the lodge overlooks this creek from where one can spend time birding or might even find the one horned rhinoceros.

Diphlu is perhaps the best lodge in the park's vicinity. In April 2016, Diphlu River Lodge was honoured to have had the opportunity to host the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, HRH Prince William and Catherine Middleton, on their state visit to India.

This afternoon take your first jeep safari into Kaziranga National Park.

**Overnight will be at Diphlu River Lodge on a full board basis**

## **DAYS EIGHT AND NINE**

We have planned two safaris for each of these days in different zone for you to explore the park in its entirety.

Kaziranga National Park situated in Assam is a UNESCO world heritage site recognized as the single largest undisturbed and representative area in the Brahmaputra Valley floodplain. The fluctuations of the





Brahmaputra River result in spectacular examples of riverine and fluvial processes in this vast area of wet alluvial tall grassland interspersed with numerous broad shallow pools fringed with reeds and patches of deciduous to semi-evergreen woodlands. Kaziranga is regarded as one of the finest wildlife refuges in the world. The park's contribution in saving the Indian one-horned rhinoceros from the brink of extinction at the turn of the 20th century to harbouring the single largest population of this species is a spectacular conservation achievement.

It was inscribed for being the world's major stronghold of the Indian one-horned rhino, having the single largest population of this species, currently estimated at over 2,000 animals. Along with the one-horned rhinoceros it is also home to other globally threatened species such as the Bengal tiger, Asiatic elephant, wild water buffalo, eastern swamp deer, hog deer, capped langur, hoolock gibbon and the sloth bear. Along with the mammalian species the park is also home to numerous avian species and the count of the same will be close to 300 species.

The park today has 3 zones which the guests can explore – Baguri, Kohora and Agaratoli (range offices as marked on the map). Whereas most lodges are located close to Kohora gate, Diphlu River Lodge is located close to Baguri zone.

**Overnight will be at Diphlu River Lodge on a full board basis**

#### DAY TEN

After the morning safari you will check out and transfer to Guwahati by road. The journey to Guwahati will take about 4 hours and the remainder of the day is at leisure.

**Overnight will be in Guwahati on a full board basis**

#### DAY ELEVEN

Early this morning transfer to the airport and catch a flight to Bagdogra. Our team will receive you at the airport. The journey to Singalila is completed in two parts:

**Part 1:** Drive from airport to Manebhanjan (park entry gate). This is a drive of about 2.5 – 3 hours. Bagdogra as a small army cantonment town. We slowly climb up from Bagdogra to Manebhanjan. The journey is scenic and there will be lots of opportunities to do birding as we climb (though we shouldn't break for too long as we need to get to Manebhanjan before 1400 when park gates close).

**Part 2:** Since Singalila National Park falls on the India-Nepal border there is an immigration post where entry is made at Manebhanjan. This should not take more than 10-15 minutes. Next entry needs to be made at the park entry gate. This is also where we would need to change vehicles. Singalila National Park can only be accessed using old Land Rovers. The journey from Manebhanjan to Habre's Nest should take another 2 – 2.5 hours. But now you are climbing from about 6300ft. to 9000ft. The journey is very scenic and through the jungle. The road that you drive up on is the border between the two countries – on the left of the road is Nepal and the right is India.

Note: It is recommended that you get visas for both countries. Although there is no checking on the Nepal side, however, searching for the Pandas and other wildlife will take you into the Nepal side and it is always good to have a visa just in case there is a random check.

You should arrive at Habre's Nest – your home for the next few days at about 1500 – 1530. Have a late lunch and rest. While you enjoy your lunch, your host will brief you about the park and how they conduct the explorations around Habre's Nest. Remainder of the evening is at leisure - should you choose to stretch your legs the lodge naturalist can accompany you on a short hike around the lodge.

**Overnight will be at Habre's Nest on a full board basis**



## **DAYS TWELVE AND THIRTEEN**

These next three days are dedicated to exploring the surrounding forests for Red Panda and the other denizens who call this wonderful forest home.

How the activities would flow on these days is quite flexible, however, this is what it is like on most days:

The spotters and trackers get up before day-break and leave the lodge in search for the red pandas. Most guests would rise at about 0630 – 0700 and walk up to the reception where you can order your morning coffee or tea. It is recommended to see the sunrise here as it is really quite spectacular.

Alternately walk down from your room to the bird hide on the lodge premises about 50m downhill to the edge of the forest. This is where some of the kitchen's vegetable peels end up and it attracts a lot of birds.



Commonly seen here are the Spotted Laughingthrush, Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush, Hoary-throated Barwing, White-browed Fulvetta, White-collared Blackbird and the Yellow-billed Blue Magpie. A regular visitor to the region around the hide is the Yellow-throated Marten which is also one of the key predators of the Red Panda.

The trackers and spotted should return to the lodge by 0730 – 0800 with news. If the red panda has been spotted the guests would then be accompanied to the spot where it has been seen. Guests can observe the panda for 15-30 minutes.



Note: In the past there have been guests who have disturbed the Pandas and so now a time limit has been set. Of course, if you are being respectful you can spend more time with the Pandas.

In case Pandas have not been spotted you still go on a hike exploring the jungles and birding as you go. Should you choose to go a longer distance, a packed breakfast can go along too. Alternately you can have breakfast at about 0730 before you leave for the hike. On most days you return back to the lodge at about 1200-1230. Wash and change rest a little bit and have lunch.

By 1400 on most days clouds tend to move in and depending on the time of the year it may rain or snow. If whether permits take another hike around the lodge later in the afternoon. There are many trails that you can follow and it is advised to take a tracker with you and avoid hiking alone. Some of the tracks do get slippery so be careful while hiking.

Evening tea / drinks can be enjoyed in the rooms which works as a library, reception, sitting area and dining hall. On days that have been successful with Panda sightings the lodge may put on a show with music in the evening or alternately there is a small TV screen where documentaries can be played or you can enjoy a presentation on the park.

**Overnight will be at Habre's Nest on a full board basis**

#### **DAY FOURTEEN**

Having explored much of the region around Habre's Nest we dedicate this day to visit Sandakphu. This is the highest point of the trek at 10,000ft. It is ideal to start very early at 0400 and head to Sandakphu. You have two options – you can trek (It is about 10km away from Habre's Nest – but the last 3km are quite steep and many would find it difficult) or you can drive up to Sandakphu. The reason you come here early is to see the sunrise of the Himalayas. Sandakphu offers a 180 degree panoramic view of the Himalayas with 4 of the world's 5 highest peaks – Mt Everest, Kanchenjunga, Makalu and Lhotse.

Since this region is at a higher altitude the bird life here is different as well. Key species to seek out here are Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch, Bar-throated Minla, Blood Pheasant, Alpine Thrush, Fulvous Parrotbill, Golden breasted Fulvetta and the Satyr Tragopan. Return to the Lodge for lunch. Remainder of the day is at leisure.

**Overnight will be at Habre's Nest on a full board basis**

#### **DAY FIFTEEN**

This morning after breakfast you will transfer back to Bagdogra. We can take a detour (an extension of around 2 hours) to Latpanchar to do some more birding and Latpanchar is especially visited to see the colourful Rufous-necked Hornbill. Once you are at Bagdogra airport you will be assisted to check in for your flight to Delhi and connect with your international flight home.



**TRACKS SAFARIS – WE GET YOU CLOSER TO INDIA!**

