

# TRACKS SAFARIS

## WE GET YOU CLOSER



### 12 Night Red Pandas and Tigers

**Pench and Kanha Tiger Reserves & Singalila National Park**



#### **An Introduction**

India is full of wonderful species waiting to be seen and appreciated, one amongst these and undoubtedly one of the cutest creatures of them all is the Red Panda. It is also the only “panda” species in the world. The Giant Panda is a bear. The eastern Himalayas is the only place where one can find the red pandas. This program here is a great combination of unique along with the more easily seen wildlife in the Indian subcontinent.

Our itinerary takes you to two states in India – West Bengal in eastern India to Singalila National Park and to Madhya Pradesh in Central India to Kanha Tiger Reserve. The regions differ vastly in the terrain, birdlife as well as mammalian life forms.

Singalila National Park is one of the most exotic Himalayan forests in India. It is a wilderness located on the Singalila Ridge at an altitude of 7000 feet to 12000 feet above sea level with an area of 78.6 square kilometers.

This is a Birding Paradise as well. More than 300 species of birds have been recorded here. It has a huge list of exotic birds, like- Blood Pheasant, Satyr Tragopan, Kalij Pheasant, Brown and Fulvous Parrotbills, Rufous-vented Tit, and Old World babblers like the Fire-tailed Myzornis and the Golden-breasted Fulvetta, Rosefinchs, bull finches, Wren Babblers, Laughingthrushes, Nuthatches, Tree creepers, Yuhinas, Minivets, Partridges and many more.



There are an estimated 32 Red Pandas within the limits of Singalila. Apart from the Red Panda, other mammals found here are- Himalayan Black bear, Clouded Leopard, Leopard, Leopard Cat, Himalayan Serow, Barking Deer, Yellow-throated Marten, Wild Boar, Pangolin, Pika and many other Eastern Himalayan exotics.

Pench and Kanha on the other hand are excellent for exploring the deciduous central Indian jungles. Of course, the highlight of this region is the Bengal Tiger, Leopard, Asiatic Wild Dogs along with a huge diversity of birds that are quite different to the ones that you find in Singalila.

### **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 1400 hrs). After lunch our tour expert shall meet you in your hotel and give you an overview of Delhi.

This is followed by a tour which will showcase some of the heritage and key sites of Delhi about along with an optional visit to the MUST art gallery. This is a unique gallery that showcases tribal art from various parts of the country and in doing so support the artists and their artforms.

**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 flight for Bagdogra. On arrival 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 - 3hours. 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 – 2.5hrs. 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.

Interesting article on the land rovers: <https://www.landrover.in/explore-land-rover/myland/myland-journeys/70-years-of-landrover.html>

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 shall brief you a little 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 THREE, FOUR AND FIVE

These next three days are dedicated to exploring the surrounding forests for Red Panda and the other denizens that 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. 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 spotters should return to the lodge by 0730 – 0800 with news. If the red panda has been spotted the guests would then be accompanied to where it has been seen. Once sighted guests can observe the panda for approximately 15-30 minutes.

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

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. 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 one can follow, do 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 boys running the lodge put on a show with music in the evening – it is a very casual affair to celebrate the evening. Alternately there is a small TV screen where documentaries can be played, or you can watch a presentation on the park.

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



## **DAY SIX**

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 SEVEN**

This morning after breakfast to head back to Bagdogra. We can take a detour (an extension of around 2 hours) to Latpanchar to do some more birding. Latpanchar is especially visited to see the colourful Rufous-necked Hornbill.

Once you are at Bagdogra airport you will check in for your flight to Delhi and on arrival you will be received representatives who will accompany you to your hotel to ensure a speedy check-in. Remainder of the evening is at leisure.

**Overnight will be at a hotel in Aerocity, Delhi on a dinner, bed and breakfast basis**

#### **DAY EIGHT**

Early this morning we take an early morning flight from Delhi to Nagpur. On arrival, you will be received by our representative who will accompany you to Le Meridien Hotel on the edge of the city for breakfast. After breakfast continue onwards by road to Pench Tree Lodge. The drive to the lodge should take about 3 hours.

This afternoon, once you are settled in take your first jeep safari into Pench Tiger Reserve. Pench Tiger Reserve lies partly in the state of Madhya Pradesh and partly in Maharashtra. We shall be visiting the part that lies in Madhya Pradesh. The park derives its name from the Pench River which is the main lifeline of the park and a key water source. It has an appealing landscape of dry and moist deciduous forest and Teak is the major tree of the region along with a mix of Saja, Mahua and Indian Ghost trees. The vegetation is of undulating scrublands as well as bamboo patches around hilly areas.

The park has 39 recorded species of mammals, 210 species of migrant and resident birds and estimated 30 species of reptiles and is known for good sightings of tiger, leopard, wild dogs, jackals and many other mammals and birds.

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



## **DAY NINE**

We have planned two jeep safaris into Pench Tiger Reserve for you today. Safaris in the tiger reserves are controlled by the government and they allow two visits each day for about 3 hours each. The safaris timings are decided on the changing sunrise and sunset patterns – you take your morning safari from sunrise (0600) to about 0930-1000, the afternoon safari is from 1500 to sunset (usually around 1800).

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



## **DAY TEN**

This morning take you last safari into Pench Tiger Reserve. On returning to the lodge wash and change and after lunch we shall drive down to Kanha Tiger Reserve. The journey to Kanha should take approximately 3.5 hours and on arrival your evening is at leisure. Alternately one can take a nature walk on the lodge grounds itself as the lodge is spread over 110 acres of land which is largely forested and connected to the tiger reserve.

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

## **DAYS ELEVEN AND TWELVE**

We spend these two days exploring Kanha Tiger Reserve. We have planned 4 safaris on these days.

Kanha is one of the larger tiger reserves and one of the older reserve forests in India. The area was declared as reserve forest in 1879 and upgraded as the Banjar Valley Reserve in 1933. The region was ruled by the Rajput dynasties from sixth to twelfth century and then ruled by the Gond Kings till the British took over in 1818. Kanha had been the dwelling place of the nomadic 'baigas' – who practiced shifting cultivation (dhya) till 1868 – when the Land Settlement Act prohibited it. In 1973 the park became one of the first (of nine) 'Tiger Reserves'. Now the park encompasses 1949 sq. kilometres of pristine forests.

Some of the grasslands that exist today in the park were locations where the Baiga tribes practiced shift cultivation. Today they house the variety of deer species. The most unique of these is the hard ground Barasingha. This species thrives on a very specific type of grass and when this was replaced their population dipped drastically and reached the brink of extinction. The species was then bred in an enclosure in one part



of Kanha zone. Since then the population has bounced back and forest department is now trying to relocate and build an alternate population in Satpura Tiger Reserve.

**Overnight will be at Singinawa Jungle Lodge.**



### **DAY THIRTEEN**

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 and 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.





After an early lunch you will drive to Jabalpur airport – the journey to Jabalpur should take about 4.5 hours and on arrival you will be met and assisted to board your flight to Delhi or your international flight home.



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