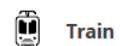
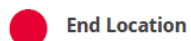
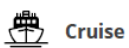
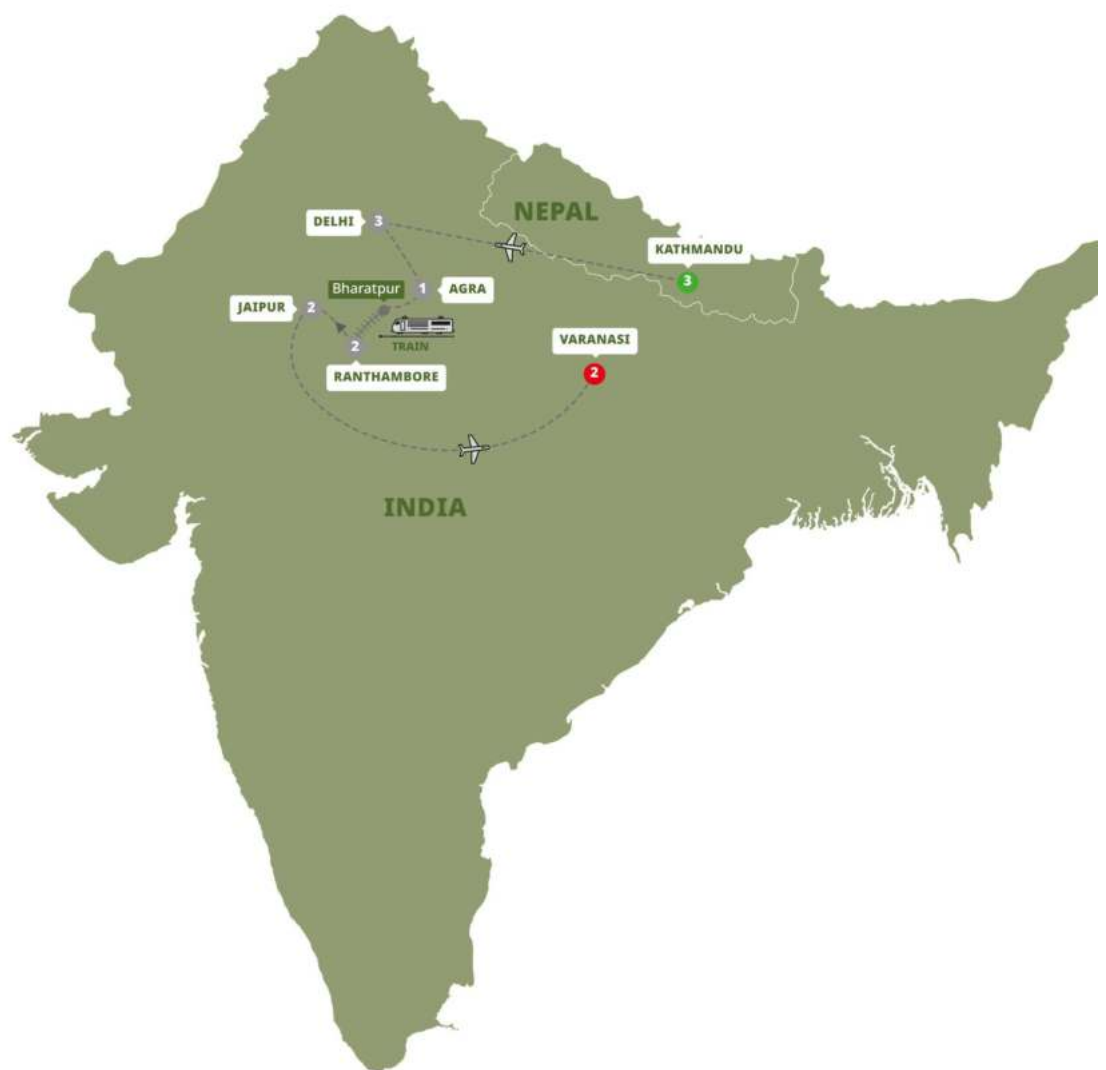


# Best of India and Nepal



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## Day 1 | Welcome to Kathmandu



Keep a keen eye out for the rainbow-colored prayer flags flapping in the wind as your transfer from Kathmandu Airport takes you to your hotel. Spirituality is the cornerstone of Nepalese culture, and this is revealed in the many shrines and temples that dot its capital, which you'll get to explore in the coming days. This evening, enjoy dinner at your hotel.

**Meals:** Dinner

**Hotel:** Hotel Crowne Imperial

## Day 2 | Stupas and Temples of Kathmandu and Patan



Your first stop today is the UNESCO-listed shrine of Swayambhunath. Uncover its history spanning millennia. Admire the galleries of prayer mills and gleaming white stupa, whose gilded spire provides the colorful eyes of Buddha a lofty vantage point from which to survey the surrounding valley. Share the intricately carved stone façades with the resident monkeys and admire the artistry of Nepalese craftsmanship. You'll see all this as you walk through the remnants of Buddhist and Hindu iconography, said to be around 2000 years old.

Proceed to the heart of the old town and Durbar Square, another UNESCO World Heritage site. Here you will gain a deeper understanding of its role in the centuries of rule over this mountain kingdom. See the traditional pagoda-style architecture reflected in the temples and palaces that surround the square – the Hanuman Dhoka palace complex, the Mahadev Temple, the House of the Goddess Kumari and Taleju Temple. After some free time for lunch, journey to nearby Patan, renowned for its collection of ancient temples, carvings and palaces, which you will see first-hand during a visit to Patan Durbar Square, a generic name given to plazas and areas located opposite Nepal's old royal palaces. Delve into the ancient Buddhist heritage of the City of Beauty and visit the Krishna Temple and Golden Temple.

Later, MAKE TRAVEL MATTER® Experience during your visit to the Tibetan Refugee Camp, which features a handicraft center and provides shelter to the families of Tibetan refugees who fled the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959. Among these were gifted Tibetan carpet weavers whose talents remain on display today at the Jawalakhel Handicraft Center. You could choose to buy some of the traditional Tibetan handicrafts as a memento of your trip. Then it's back to Kathmandu for a well-deserved evening at leisure.

**Meals:** Breakfast

**Hotel:** Hotel Crowne Imperial



## Day 3 | Explore Kathmandu



The UNESCO-listed city of Bhaktapur and its impressive Durbar Square are the main attractions today. While the city is rebuilding its fallen temples, it remains a cultural center. Stroll along narrow alleys and admire artisans at work. Watch how they weave cloth, carve timber and make pottery, which dries in all its terracotta brilliance in open squares for all to admire. Dive Into Culture and join a local potter for a workshop to learn how Bhaktapur has been a pottery center for centuries. You'll see first-hand how traditional techniques are still used. Large spinning wheels are coaxed into action with a long stick and the rapid stirring of the talented potters to shape all sorts of ceramics out of lumps of clay. Get your hands dirty and hone your own pottery talents as you make your own creation to take home as a memento of your visit.

If you have time, stop in one of the squares and sample the famous Juju Dhau, Newari yoghurt treat, enjoyed in a 'takeaway' pottery bowl. Later, return to the hotel and enjoy some free time. You could consider joining an Optional Experience to witness a poignant Aarti ceremony at Pashupatinath Temple on the banks of the Bagmati River.

**Meals:** Breakfast

**Hotel:** Hotel Crowne Imperial

### OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES:

**Market, Boudhanath Stupa and Sunset Aarti Ceremony** - Enjoy a walking tour through the bustling streets of Thamel – a shopper's paradise selling singing bowls, all types of jewelry, clothes, Pashmina shawls, rice paper items, trekking gear and handicrafts amongst a treasure trove of other items. Afterwards visit Boudhanath Stupa, one of the most important stupas outside Tibet and the largest in Nepal. According to legend the king constructed the stupa as an act of penance, but this was destroyed by Mughal invaders in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, so the current stupa is a more recent construction. The influx of a large number of refugees from Tibet to the area led to the construction of more than 50 gumbas (Tibetan Buddhist monasteries) around the stupa. Later witness a truly mesmerizing ritual, an Aarti (prayer) ceremony at the Pashupatinath Temple on the banks of the River Bagmati, the holy river that runs through the temple. As the sunsets, the priests begin their melodious chants and prayers as they take oil lamps and move them around in a circular motion. Bhajan (songs with a religious theme) are sung by devotees during the ceremony creating an enchanting atmosphere.

Adult: 52.00 USD

## Day 4 | Kathmandu to Delhi



Your soulful encounter with Nepal at its end, but your journey through India is just beginning. Transfer to the airport for your onward flight to Delhi. India's vibrant capital extends a lively welcome, launching an unforgettable experience through northern India's most exquisite sights. This evening, join your Travel Director and fellow travelers for a Welcome Dinner.

**Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

**Hotel:** Park Plaza CBD Shahdara

## Day 5 | Discover the Delights of Old Delhi



Savor the scents of spice as you embark on an exhilarating rickshaw ride, navigating the busy streets of Old Delhi. See the Red Fort, a sandstone fortress which once housed the emperors of the Mughal dynasty for centuries.

Next, Dive Into Culture as you ride through the colorful Chandni Chowk market and watch it come to life as the day's trading begins amidst the sounds of enthusiastic salesmen and endless traffic. Visit Jama Masjid, one of the largest mosques in India. Admire its ornate façades before boarding a waiting vehicle to drive to Raj Ghat, a memorial dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi. Pay tribute to this beloved figurehead, who led the campaign for India's independence from Britain. You'll come face-to-face with the site where he was cremated following his assassination in 1948. Today the simple square platform of black marble is surrounded by a tranquil park, befitting of its status as a place of contemplation.

Your next stop is Agrasen Ki Baoli, one of the most noteworthy stepwells in Delhi. Hidden amidst the cacophony of Delhi's streets and business towers, this ancient water reservoir rises from the depths of the earth to stand atop 103 stone steps. Spend a few moments of serenity amidst its centuries-old ornate arches before returning to your hotel for an afternoon of leisure or consider one of our Optional Experiences.

**Meals:** Breakfast

**Hotel:** Park Plaza CBD Shahdara

### OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES:

**Discover the Lotus Temple and Dilli Haat** - Join your Travel Director for a visit to the Lotus Temple, an architectural marvel famous for its unique lotus structure which has won several awards for its style of building. It is composed of 27 free-standing marble-clad 'petals' arranged in clusters of three to form nine sides, with nine doors opening onto a central hall with a height of slightly over 34.27 meters and a capacity for 2,500 people. It is a modern style non-religion-oriented temple open to all and is surrounded by nine ponds and gardens covering 26 acres in total. Afterwards spend some time browsing at Dilli Haat INA, an open-air food plaza cum craft bazaar which was established to encourage arts and crafts in India. It has food stalls representing each state in India and offers a complete variety of tasty Indian snacks from across the country. Products on offer also include many ethnic creations such as rosewood and sandalwood carvings, colorful fabrics and drapery, gems, beads, brassware, metal crafts, and silk and wool fabrics.

Adult: 24.00 USD

## Day 6 | See the Sights of Delhi



This morning, embark on a guided walking tour to discover the work done by the Salaam Baalak Trust, a MAKE TRAVEL MATTER® Experience. This non-profit organization that aims to provide a caring environment for street children. Later, we'll walk through the bazaar of Paharganj, rubbing shoulders with the locals who flock to the market to shop everyday.

Escape the noise and head to New Delhi, designed and built by the British in the 1920s. Your first stop here is a visit to the UNESCO-listed Humayun's Tomb, the earliest example of Mughal architecture in India. Recently renovated with the gardens restored to their former glory, you'll see first-hand why it served as the inspiration for the design of the famous Taj Mahal. Enjoy local flavors for lunch at a restaurant near India Gate, then head to the Qutub Minar complex, also a UNESCO listed site. This fluted 'Victory Tower' is decorated with elaborate inscriptions, geometric carvings and elegant balconies.

Returning to your hotel later, drive past Lutyens' Delhi to view the elegant colonial façades leading British architect Edwin Lutyens left behind on the cityscape. You'll have the rest of the afternoon at leisure, or perhaps join one of our Optional Experiences.

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

**Hotel:** Park Plaza CBD Shahdara

### OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES:

**Delhi's Heritage Park: Sunder Nursery** - Visit the Sunder Nursery with a Local Specialist and discover the fascinating Biodiversity Zone as well as the stunning gardens inside the nursery such as the Paradise Garden, Water Garden and Sunken Garden. Dating back to the 16th century, this spectacular heritage park complex is a treasure trove of attractions. It covers an area of 90 acres and boasts several UNESCO World Heritage monuments, 300 plant and tree species, marble fountains, raised sandstone pathways and around 80 resident bird species. After discovering the nursery's main attractions on a walking tour with the Local Specialist, enjoy some free time to explore further at your leisure.

Adult: 24.00 USD



## Day 7 | Sunset at the Taj Mahal



It's time to leave Delhi behind, bound for the Uttar Pradesh city of Agra. There are many reasons to love Agra and its own 'monument to love', the Taj Mahal, is perhaps the most captivating of all. Marvel at its elegant marble façades awash with the sunset's rose and golden hues. Admire this well-preserved landmark from all sides and take time to contemplate the magnificence of this man-made wonder before re-joining your fellow travelers.

This evening, you could choose to end a memorable day at an optional sound and light show prior to dinner.

**Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

**Hotel:** Saura Hotel

### OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES:

***Mohabbat-E Taj Show*** - Spend a memorable evening getting to know the epic love story of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal in a thrilling Bollywood-style show. The 90-minute song and dance performance paints a vivid tale of how Shah Jahan built the iconic Taj Mahal after his beloved wife Mumtaz died in childbirth. The show features the largest replica of the Taj Mahal, made in pure white Makrana marble, just like the real mausoleum. Performed by over 80 talented artists dressed in dazzling costumes, this is sure to be a night to remember!

Adult: 57.00 USD

## Day 8 | From the Taj to the Tigers



There's more to Agra than the Taj Mahal, as you'll discover during your visit to the UNESCO-listed Agra Fort. Walk through the chambers of this 17th-century residence, once home to Mughal emperors before the capital moved to Delhi. You'll then explore Fatehpur Sikri, the once-grand 'Ghost Town' built by Emperor Akbar and abandoned soon after. Its red sandstone buildings remain hauntingly intact. After visiting Bharatpur, board a train to Ranthambore: where you'll stay at The Shergarh Resort, one of our Stays with Stories. This simple, family-run hotel was founded by a local who grew up near the park and now supports his village through tourism.

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## Day 9 | Roam Ranthambore in Search of Tigers



Head out on an early morning game drive, one of the best times to spot the elusive Bengal tiger. Animals spotted and breakfast eaten, visit Dhonk Textile Studio, a MAKE TRAVEL MATTER® Experience, where local women create handcrafted textiles as part of a conservation initiative that supports ethical livelihoods and protects wildlife. Enjoy some time to unwind before heading back into the park for your second game drive, making the most of your last chance to spot Ranthambore's incredible wildlife.

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**Hotel:** The Shergarh Resort

## Day 10 | Onwards to Jaipur



Continue your journey to Jaipur, the Pink City. After some free time for lunch, join a workshop on hand-block printing, one of the most famous traditional art forms of Rajasthan. A Local Specialist will show you the tricks of the trade as you observe how the prints are handmade using small wooden blocks and hone your own block-printing skills. Later, Dive Into Culture and see the talents of local craftspeople on display during a visit to a local market. Admire the colorful textiles and perhaps buy a memento or two to take home. Jaipur is particularly renowned for its embroidery and blue pottery.

This evening, join a local family for an exclusive Be My Guest experience with dinner in their home and savor some of the regional delicacies.

**Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

**Hotel:** Club Mahindra Resort

## Day 11 | Explore Colorful Jaipur



One of today's highlights is a visit to the UNESCO-listed Amber Fort. But first, stop to admire the red and pink façades of the Palace of Winds, whose latticed windows once revealed the outside world to the sheltered ladies of the royal household.

Continue with a visit to the ornate City Palace, an impressive complex of buildings from different eras and gardens in the heart of the Old City. Enjoy some time for lunch before visiting the UNESCO-listed Jantar Mantar Observatory, featuring the world's largest sundial. Later, perhaps join our optional *Aarti* ceremony, offering a blessing to one of the Hindu deities and hopefully receiving one in return.

This evening, we'll toast to shared memories over a delicious local Farewell Dinner with those guests ending their journey in Jaipur.

**Meals:** Breakfast, Farewell Dinner

**Hotel:** Club Mahindra Resort

### OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES:

***Aarti Ceremony at the Birla Temple*** - Experience India's rich spirituality at the Birla Mandir, one of the most famous temples in Jaipur, dedicated to the Hindu Gods Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi. The temple is made of pure white marble and houses beautiful sculptures of Hindu Gods, Goddesses and mythological scenes. Witness the enchanting Aarti (religious ceremony), with an up-close view of the priest who has a tray with a small bell and offerings of food, water, flowers and incense. A traditional 'Aarti lamp' is passed around the deity, accompanied by singing, and the ceremony ends with everyone sharing the food that has been offered to the Gods.

Adult: 20.00 USD



## Day 12 | Venutre to Varanasi



Depart Jaipur this morning and board your included flight to embark on a pilgrimage to the sacred city of Varanasi to explore the city's role as the center of Hindu religion. There's a palpable sense that life begins and ends on the shores of Ganga Mata (Mother Ganges), but local spirituality extends beyond the sacred waters of the river. The city is also renowned for its ancient temples and old ghats that lead down to the river. You'll see all this and more, but first there's free time for lunch before the sightseeing.

Next experience a rural way of life while visiting weavers in Varanasi, where a Local Specialist reveals the centuries-old silk weaving tradition. Your visit during this MAKE TRAVEL MATTER® Experience will help the community's efforts to keep this extraordinary tradition alive. You'll see first-hand how the talented weavers create beautiful silk fabrics. These are used to make the famous Banarasi silk saris, highly sought after for weddings and other special occasions.

Later this evening, feed your soul as you cruise down the River Ganges to witness the ritual of Aarti. Watch as the delicate diya, laden with candles and tiny flowers, float down the river. After this poignant ritual, return to the hotel for dinner.

**Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

**Hotel:** Madin



## Day 13 | Witness Local Life Along the Ganges



Admire the changing light as the sun rises over the Ganges, and the sights and sounds of Varanasi come to life along the banks of the river. Observe locals taking their morning bath in the holy water and worshipping the rising sun. Afterwards explore the city on foot, the best way to immerse yourself in the day-to-day of the oldest living city of the world. You'll have an opportunity to visit Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Varanasi's main temple. Demolished and rebuilt many times over its history, the temple is a sight to behold with its towering spire and domes made of pure gold. Return to your hotel for breakfast and some free time. Perhaps choose to join our Optional Experience to watch a live performance of Indian classical dances known as *Kathak*.

This afternoon, visit Sarnath, one of the four holy Buddhist sites sanctioned by the Buddha himself for pilgrimage. Explore the spectacular collection of Buddhist artifacts dating back to the 3rd century BC and see the Lion Capital of Ashoka with its inverted lotus carving, adopted as the national emblem of India. Continue to your hotel for an evening at leisure.

**Meals:** Breakfast

**Hotel:** Madin

### OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES:

***Kathak Dance Performance*** - Take a stroll with your Travel Director to a nearby dance center for a live performance of the Indian classical dance Kathak, organized especially for you. The city of Varanasi has been a cultural hub since ancient times and Indian dance forms have evolved over the centuries. Kathak is one of the main genres of ancient Indian classical dance which is believed to have originated from the traveling bards of North India referred to as Kathakars or storytellers. Enjoy a performance of around 90 minutes that incorporates legends from ancient mythology where the stories are communicated through rhythmic foot movements, hand gestures, facial expressions and eye movements.

Adult: 56.00 USD

## Day 14 | Farewell Varanasi



Your spiritual and cultural encounter with India at its end, it's time to bid farewell to Varanasi. Take a transfer to the airport for your onward flight.

**Meals:** Breakfast

