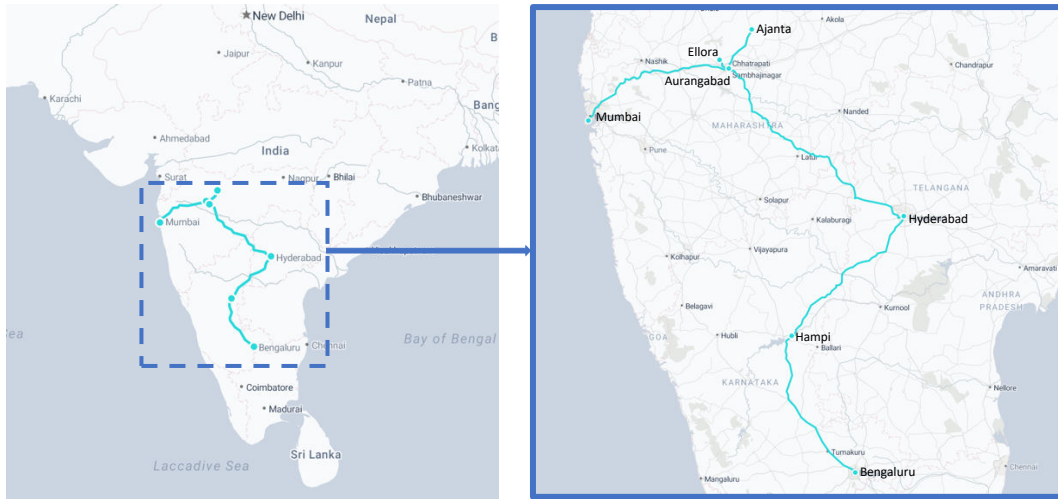




India Design Tour

The Deccan Plateau: Art, architecture and design across
Central India's iconic landscapes and UNESCO World Heritage Sites

BOOKINGS CLOSE 4 JULY



AT A GLANCE

Dates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30th August to 11th September 2025 (13 days, 12 nights)
Hotels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taj Bangalore, Bengaluru • Evolve Back Kamalapura Palace, Hampi • Taj Falaknuma Palace Hotel, Hyderabad • Gateway, Aurangabad • Taj Mahal Tower, Mumbai
Meals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakfasts daily (12) lunches (x) and dinners (x), as per the itinerary
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private transfers to and from the airport • Private air-conditioned vehicles for ground transport • Domestic flights (4) – economy with 25kg checked luggage allowance)
Your Hosts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour leader – landscape designer, Nicole Court (Sydney based) • Tour manager/expert local guide
Group size	A minimum of 6 guests and a maximum of sixteen (bookings close 4 July)
Pricing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AUD\$16,950 per person, twin share • AUD\$3,500 single supplement
Bookings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A deposit of AUD\$2,500 deposit is required to reserve a spot on this trip (please see Tour Details on p22 for the full payment schedule)
Itinerary Highlights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curated art, architecture, garden, textile, decorative arts and history-focused excursions for an insider's perspective into Central India • UNESCO World Heritage sites (5) and UNESCO nominated World Heritage sites (3), including visits to Ancient India's most beautiful art sites – Ajanta Caves and Ellora Caves • Staying in India's most luxurious hotels, including the Taj Falaknuma Palace in Hyderabad and the iconic Taj Mahal Palace & Tower in Mumbai • Exploring the hauntingly evocative landscapes and ruins of Hampi • Shopping for spices, perfume oils, slippers, fabrics, ribbons and pearls in the cobbled lanes of the bazaars of the old city of Hyderabad
Best time of year to visit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the monsoon has finished, the Deccan landscapes are at their lushest and greenest, making late August/September a special time of year to visit this part of India • 29-34°C days and 20-24°C nights makes for lovely travelling weather



HAMPI'S BOULDER-STREWN LANDSCAPES

INDIA IS VIVID, EXCITING, AND OVERWHELMING, with kaleidoscopic beauty in all directions. The very air is electric, multidimensional. Women in pink, red, indigo, or orange saris float past. Temple bells ring, pilgrims chant, car horns honk, roaming dogs bark, and jasmine and roses and street food scent the air. Everything is on the move.

You are invited to join us on the India Design Tour in August/September 2025 for a “conscious luxury” journey through Central India on the Deccan Plateau.

On this journey, there will be plenty of “National Geographic” moments when we visit some of India’s greatest UNESCO World Heritage sites – breathtaking rock temples, forts and atmospheric ruins in the countryside – as well as experiencing the architecture, art galleries, food, and shopping in India’s most cosmopolitan city, Mumbai. Most of these locations see relatively little foreign tourism, making them even more rewarding for those who explore the heartland of India.

The sights we will see on this tour, such as the 2nd century BC Ajanta Caves murals, are straight out of the pages of the ancient history and art history texts we studied at school. The caves include paintings and rock-cut sculptures that are considered to be the finest surviving examples of ancient Indian art. Even the story of how these caves were re-discovered – by a British officer on a tiger-hunting party in 1819 – sound like a swash-buckling tale from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

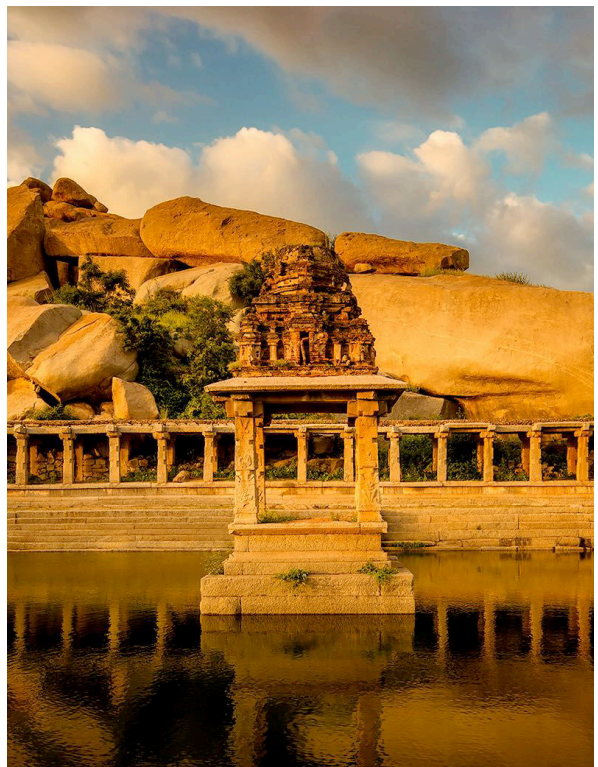
The pace of the trip allows for plenty of lingering over tea on the terrace. From arriving at an extraordinary palace in a horse drawn carriage whilst being showered with rose petals, to listening to haunting Qawwali music (the music of mystical Islam), to having your own fragrance made from natural perfume oils, looking in wonder at some of the world’s best cave paintings and sculptures, walking through our favourite neighbourhoods in Mumbai to look at art deco architecture and art galleries, having your butler draw you a rose and jasmine-infused bath in a one of India’s best palace hotels, to lunch in a beautiful garden, and many other surprises, we have allowed plenty of time at each destination so that we can immerse ourselves in the rhythm of each place.

This tour is an opportunity to experience a unique perspective of India, through the eyes of a designer. Our tours are intimate, with 6-16 guests – small enough to offer personalised boutique experiences, yet large enough to connect with a group of like-minded travellers who have shared interests in art, architecture, design and textiles, and who love good food and beautiful hotels.

*** CONSCIOUS LUXURY**

Each hotel has been chosen for its special magic, each one revealing its unique sense of place in a way that only exists in India. The hotels have been chosen from a community of independent hoteliers and hospitality groups who define luxury by the following constants:

- Deliverable community impact including training and employing staff from the local community
- Conservation of nature and wildlife
- Preservation of built heritage
- Promotion of intangible heritage through local experiences
- Sensitive land use and efficient resource utilization
- Sustainable solutions and best practice
- Excellence in service, style and design



HAMPI

YOUR HOST

EMBARK ON AN IMMERSIVE JOURNEY with Sydney-based designer Nicole Court, whose experience and insider connections offer a unique, behind-the-scenes experience of India. Drawing on her extensive network and local knowledge, Nicole has carefully curated this tour, handpicking interesting people to meet and intriguing destinations to explore. Each stop offers a deeper understanding of the place and its people, allowing you to relax and fully immerse yourself in the magic of India.

NICOLE COURT

Nicole Court is a designer with over 30 years of experience working and traveling throughout India. She currently works as a landscape designer in Sydney but has also designed interiors, textiles, homewares and books. For a decade, she created handcrafted textile and homeware collections that were sold to some of the best boutique retailers in Australia and New Zealand. Her ranges gained recognition in leading publications such as *Belle*, *Vogue Living*, *Vogue Entertaining*, *Gourmet Traveller*, *Home Beautiful*, *Inside Out*, *SMH*, *The Age*, *Australian House & Garden*, *Marie Claire*, and *Elle*.

In addition to her design work, Nicole has been a contributing a garden writer for *Landscape Outlook* magazine and has been a guest speaker at the Landscape Design Institute, Mosman Garden Club, and Ku-ring-gai Horticultural Society. Her passion and expertise extend across textiles, design, landscape, and architecture, and her deep connections in India, make her a unique guide for those seeking an authentic experience of the country.

Nicole's family background is rooted in design and travel. Her mother, Dee Court, was an art teacher and textile expert, who led tours to India and Central Asia. Nicole and Dee's extensive travels together instilled a deep appreciation for the craftsmanship and culture of these regions.

Nicole's aunt, Robin Duffecy, an interior designer, writer, stylist, and magazine editor, lived in Delhi many years ago. There, she met renowned writer Patwant Singh at a dinner party on her first night in the city, and the two soon fell in love. Robin's many years in India led to a large network of connections, and her stories from this time became a cherished part of Nicole's childhood, weaving India into her family's mythology.

Over time, Nicole met Robin's friends in India, many of whom became her own close friends, along with their children, who are of a similar age. These enduring relationships form a special bond, connecting Nicole to India in a deeply personal way.

Instagram: @nicolecourtdesign



TAJ FALAKNUMA PALACE HOTEL, HYDERABAD

ITINERARY

DAY 1 • Saturday 30th August

Bengaluru: Upon arrival at Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport, our friendly representative will greet you with a warm smile and a placard displaying your name. You will then be comfortably transferred in an air-conditioned car to the hotel (5 mins drive). Check-in is from 2 pm onwards.

Welcome drinks this evening on the rooftop of a fashion designer's home.

Accommodation: *Taj Bangalore (Deluxe Room)*

Taj Bangalore

Offering an outdoor pool and sun terrace, Taj Bangalore is a contemporary 5-star hotel, located close to Kempegowda International Airport.

DAY 2 • Sunday 31st August

Bengaluru-Hampi: This morning we fly to Vidyanagar (1hr 5 mins) and then drive to Hampi (45 mins). This afternoon there is time to relax and enjoy the hotel, followed by a guided nature walk that focuses on birdlife (over 200 species have been recorded here).

Accommodation: *Evolve Back Kamalapura Palace (Nivasa Suite)* | *Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner*

Evolve Back Kamalapura Palace, Hampi

With its fort-like entrances, stone-paved boulevards, arched hallways and regal chambers, staying in this palatial resort is a luxury experience.

Hampi

Hampi in Karnataka, also known as Vijayanagar, is one of India's most important archaeological sites. The landscape is one of exceptional beauty. Littered with enormous boulders – sculptural, curvaceous, most of them the size of houses – it feels unreal and otherworldly. The boulders are thought to be among the oldest rocks on the planet. Ruins and temples are scattered throughout the landscape in a stunning open museum of history, architecture and religion, juxtaposed with palm groves, banana plantations and paddy fields.

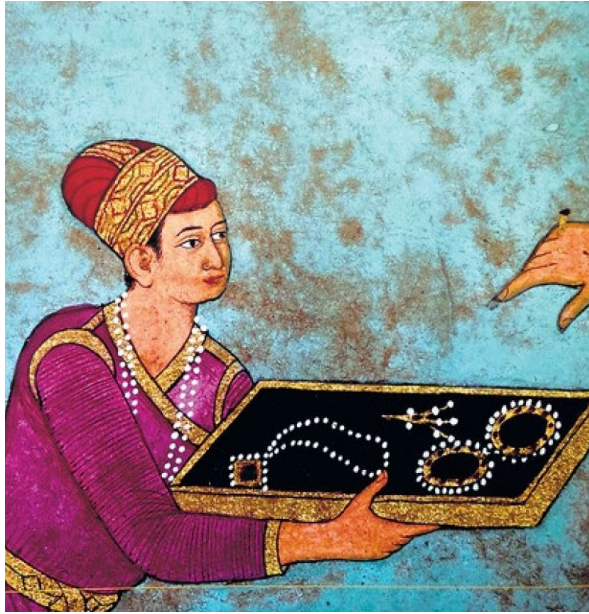
It was once a splendid Hindu metropolis at the centre of an empire of unparalleled power and riches. Though it was a contemporary of Renaissance Florence and Tudor England, Vijayanagar seemed to belong to an earlier era, the kind of lavish oriental capital you might expect of an Egyptian pharaoh or a Tang-dynasty Chinese emperor.

In the 16th century, Hampi was the world's largest city– larger than Rome, Baghdad or Istanbul. “*The city is such that the pupil of the eye has never seen a place like it, and the ear of intelligence has never been informed that there existed anything to equal it in the world*”, marvelled a 15th century Persian ambassador Abdul Razaak. There were opulent palaces, marvellous temples, massive fortifications, baths, markets, aquaducts, pavilions and stables for royal elephants. This was a city whose merchants traded in diamonds, pearls, horses, fine silks and brocades.

Today, the remarkably well-preserved remains at the site of the kingdom's capital are one of India's most loved UNESCO World Heritage sites and a destination for Hindu pilgrims.

DAY 3 • Monday 1st September

Hampi: We will explore the lost city of Vidyanagar, the ‘City of Victory’, this morning with an expert guide whose stories and in-depth knowledge of this site will bring to life its history, mythology, architecture, commerce and political life.



SHOPPING IN THE BAZAARS OF HYDERABAD

Hampi consisted of an urban core, separated from the sacred centre by ancient canals and waterways throughout the valley. Here you will find an extraordinary landscape strewn with many temples, excavated remains of palaces, bath houses and a hundred-columned audience hall.

There is the fascinating 'King's Balance' where the kings were weighed against gold or grain for distribution to the poor and we will visit the zanana enclosure to see the beautiful Lotus Mahal, an ancient palace built in a distinctive lotus-like structure. Another highlight will be the grand, Indo-Islamic structure once used to house the royal elephants.

We will watch the sun set from Hemakuta Hill this afternoon. From the top, there are 360° views over this hauntingly evocative landscape, with its distinctive boulders.

Accommodation: *Evolve Back Kamalapura Palace (Nivasa Suite)* | *Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner*

DAY 4 • Tuesday 2nd September

Hampi: Today we will explore the once-bustling old market, before taking a boat down the Tungabhadra River to the sacred centre to see the Vittala Temple, a masterpiece of Vijayanagara architecture. The journey through the rocky ravines is dotted with remains of temples and pavilions. The temple courtyard's ornate stone chariot (illustrated on the ₹50 note) is the temple's showpiece and represents Vishnu's vehicle with an image of Garuda within.

This afternoon, there will be the opportunity to visit the new Hampi Arts Centre (45 mins drive). Designed by architects SP+A, on an 18-acre site, it offers artists spaces for creative work, and galleries for displaying art, including exhibition spaces, studios, residency apartments and gardens.

Accommodation: *Evolve Back Kamalapura Palace (Nivasa Suite)* | *Meals included: Breakfast, Dinner*

DAY 5 • Wednesday 3rd September

Hampi – Hyderabad: This morning we will drive to Hubballi (3hrs 15mins drive) to fly to Hyderabad (1hr 25min).

After we have settled into our fabulous hotel, the Falaknuma Palace, palace's resident historian will take us on a tour for an insight into the lifestyle of the Nizam's family, followed by afternoon tea in the most atmospheric room in the palace, the Hookah Lounge.

We will also tour the dining room with its table that seats 101 guests, the Jade Room, which houses a rare collection of gems and cut glass chandeliers, and the Nizam's library which houses 6,000 books.

What was once the sole preserve of visiting royalty – King Edward VIII and the last Russian emperor, Tsar Nicholas II – is now ours to enjoy, including a 24/7 butler service. The butlers provide personalised assistance, including catering to your requests and, our favourite, preparing rose and jasmine-infused baths – heavenly!

Accommodation: *Taj Falaknuma Palace (Palace Room)* | *Meals included: Breakfast, Afternoon Tea*

Taj Falaknuma Palace

The Taj Falaknuma Palace is an astonishing Indo-Saracenic fantasy from 1884. This majestic hilltop palace, formerly the residence of the super-rich sixth Nizam of Hyderabad, is now Hyderabad's most luxurious hotel. Each guest is greeted at the gatehouse in the same manner as the former royal residents of the palace – with a horse-drawn carriage to take you to the palace entrance where you will be welcomed with a shower of rose petals.

With a leafy pool and peacock-dotted gardens, it is a romantic oasis filled with fascinating interiors, art, furniture and family treasures from its heyday. With 200 uniformed staff in attendance, you will be looked after royally. This is one of India's best palace hotels.



HYDERABAD

Hyderabad, the City of Pearls

Founded by the Qutb Shahi dynasty in the late sixteenth century, the city of Hyderabad boasts a unique royal heritage of palaces and tombs, monuments and mosques. With fabulous wealth generated from nearby diamond mines and pearl trading, the city's rulers amassed an astonishing collection of art and antiques, and many pieces are showcased in former royal residences.

Hyderabad continued to be a deeply oriental city until the turn of the 20th century. Elephants were used as transport by boys going to school, and it was not uncommon to see nobility mounted on gorgeously caparisoned horses with rich trimmings, surrounded by armed guards in procession as they wended their way along the narrow streets.

Steeped in history, the Old City of Hyderabad is one of India's most evocative ancient quarters. Exploring the lanes of this district, with its chai shops and spice merchants, we will encounter a busy mix of colour and commerce. Looming over the Old City is some of Islamic India's most impressive architecture, in varying states of repair.

Once one of India's richest princely states, Hyderabad is renowned as the source of the magnificent Koh-i-Noor diamond, as well as its notoriously pleasure-loving nizams. The seventh Nizam was the richest man in the world during the late 1940s, and was the fifth richest person of all time.

DAY 6 • Thursday 4th September

Badshahi Ashurkhana: The Muslim kingdoms of the Deccan plateau in India flourished from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Ruling from their fortified capitals, the sultans built sumptuous palaces, mosques and tombs and patronised artists who produced outstanding paintings, textiles and objects. Many of these buildings and some works of art still survive as testimony to the remarkable talents of their builders and craftsmen.

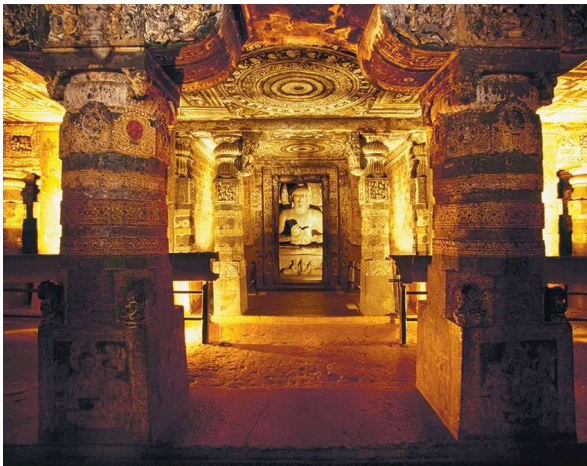
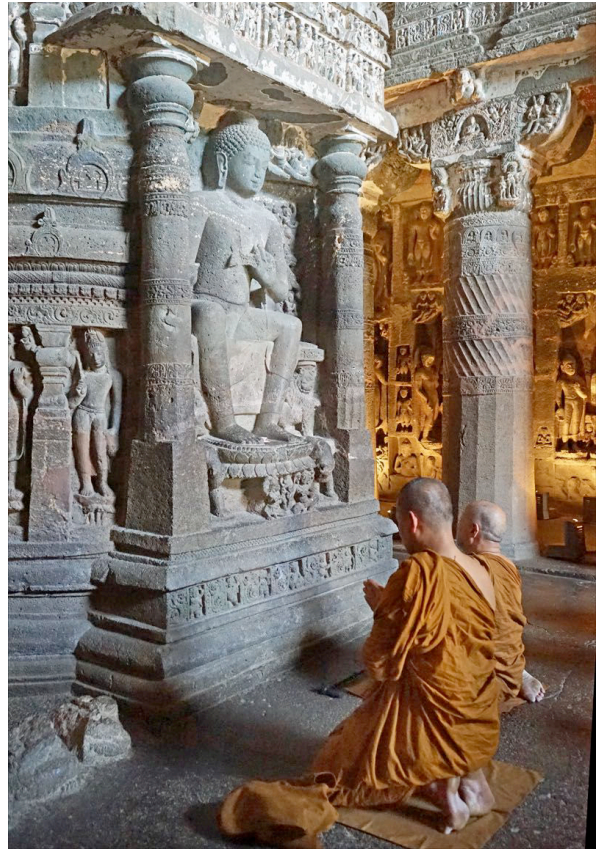
The ethnic and religious links which existed between the Deccan and Iran and Turkey, for example, are clearly discernible in Deccani architecture and painting in places such as Badshahi Ashurkhana (c.1611), which we will visit this morning to see its exquisite panels of mosaic tiles. This is one of the most original decorative schemes of its kind anywhere in the Muslim world and it has survived in beautiful condition for over four centuries.

Chowmahalla Palace: Next we will visit the Chowmahalla Palace. Set in a walled compound, it is a haven of peace after the clamour of the Charminar markets. This 18th- and 19th-century palace compound, was the main residence of several nizams. It has a magnificent durbar (royal court) hall where nizams held ceremonies under enormous chandeliers of Belgian crystal. Its side rooms house a fascinating collection of the nizams' personal possessions, including a 1911 yellow Rolls-Royce.

Charminar: We will continue to explore the old city. The old walled city area is anchored by Hyderabad's most famous landmark, a square archway built in 1591 called the Charminar (which has been nominated to become a UNESCO World Heritage site).

Old bazaars with narrow cobbled lanes lined with rows of tiny shops selling spices, grain, perfume oils and old coins surround the Charminar. The pearl market has varieties of seed pearls, rice pearls and round pearls, sold loose-weight or strung into jewellery. Laad Bazaar, a narrow street, is the traditional centre for bridal accessories and bangles (Hyderabad is particularly noted for its glass bangles – they are dazzling). We also will visit a traditional bakery for Irani chai and delicious Osmania biscuits, a Hyderabad speciality.

The rest of the afternoon is free to relax and enjoy our palace hotel. You may like to swim or lounge under one of the gorgeous umbrellas by the pool – the Taj Falaknuma Palace has one of



THE PAINTED CAVES AT AJANTA

the most beautiful pool settings in India. We can also organise a game of croquet on the lawn or you may like to explore the fragrant gardens full of strolling peacocks.

Accommodation: *Taj Falaknuma Palace (Palace Room) | Meals included: Breakfast*

DAY 7 • Friday 5th September

British Residency: Have you read William Dalrymple's book, *The White Mughal*? This morning we will visit the recently restored British Residency, once the seat of British India's power in Hyderabad. The main building of the Residency is a colonial style palatial building, commissioned by James Achilles Kirkpatrick, popularly known as the White Mughal and immortalised by William Dalrymple's book.

Kirkpatrick was a soldier of the British East India Company. He was also an excellent diplomat and rose to the position of British Resident of Hyderabad. But history remembers him for his love affair and marriage with Khair un Nissa, the grandniece of the Nizam's prime minister. He adopted the Indian style of living and preferred to dress in Mughal style and smoke the hookah. The British Residency has been recently restored and is a fine example of colonial architecture.

Paigah Tombs: Then, inside the heart of Hyderabad's old city, we will visit one of its best kept secrets, the beautiful Paigah Tombs. Built in 1786, they remain mostly forgotten. The Paigahs were the most influential aristocrats of the erstwhile princely state of Hyderabad, second only to the Nizams. Decorated with exquisite perforated screens called *jali*, this complex is an oasis of quiet and calm.

The subject of one of India's most ambitious heritage projects, these magnificent domed granite tombs form part of a huge archaeological park that is steadily being renovated by the Aga Khan Development Network. All in all there are 40 mausoleums, 23 mosques, a hammam and several pavilions located in landscaped gardens. Seven of the eight Qutb Shahi rulers were buried here under great domes mounted on cubical bases, many of which have beautiful colonnades and delicate lime stucco ornamentation.

Qutab Shahi Tombs: We will walk through the restored gardens of this peaceful oasis in the heart of Hyderabad. The subject of one of India's most ambitious heritage projects, magnificent domed granite tombs form part of a huge archaeological park that is steadily being renovated by the Aga Khan Development Network. There are 40 mausoleums, 23 mosques, a hammam and several pavilions located in landscaped gardens. Seven of the eight Qutb Shahi rulers were buried here under great domes mounted on cubical bases, many of which have beautiful colonnades and delicate lime stucco ornamentation. The complex has been nominated to become a World Heritage Site.

Qawwali: This evening, we will enjoy a qawwali performance. Emerging in the subcontinent in the 13th century, qawwali singing is closely linked with Sufism – the mystical, esoteric form of Islam. An acoustic framework for powerfully moving vocal improvisation is provided by the harmonium, table and clapped hands or clicked wooden blocks. Hyderabad is one of the best places to hear its haunting, passionate refrain.

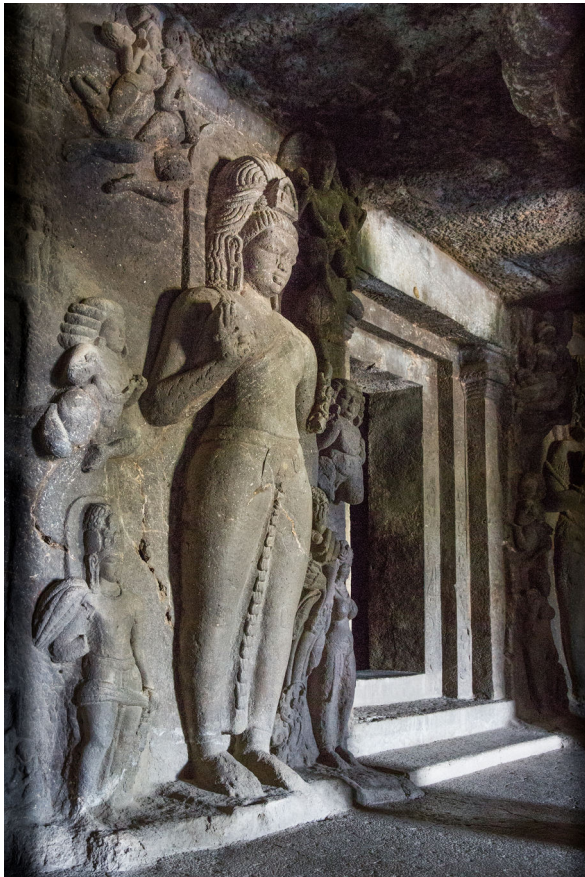
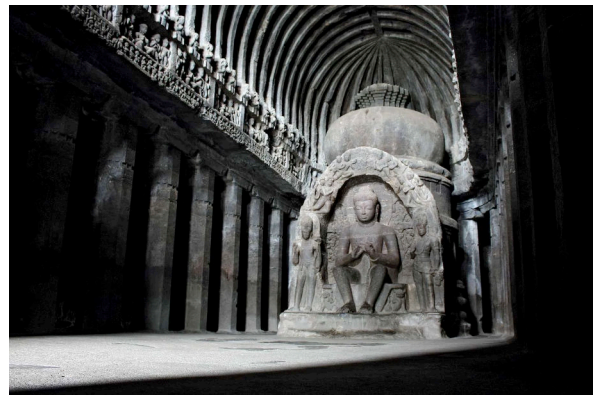
Perfume: Hyderabad is also known for its perfumers. There will be an opportunity to have a perfumer mix you a custom scent (at an additional cost).

Accommodation: *Taj Falaknuma Palace (Palace Room) | Meals included: Breakfast*

DAY 8 • Saturday 6th September

Hyderabad – Aurangabad: This morning is at leisure to enjoy the hotel before we leave for the airport after lunch to catch our domestic flight to Aurangabad (1hr 30mins).

Accommodation: *Gateway, Aurangabad (Deluxe Room) | Meals included: Breakfast*



ELLORA CAVES

Gateway, Aurangabad

Vivanta by Taj is inspired by palace architecture and is the best hotel in Aurangabad. Rooms have views over lush gardens and there is a lovely pool.

Maharashtra

Best known for its bustling capital, Mumbai, Maharashtra is a state with a varied landscape of verdant hills, scenic coastal plains and busy urban centres. The hills of the Western Ghats run parallel to the narrow Konkan coast, while cradled in the centre is the Deccan Plateau, formed from black volcanic lava 70 million years ago. It is to this part of the state that we travel next.

The Deccan Traps – a large igneous province of west-central India – are located within the Deccan Plateau. The term ‘trap’ is derived from the Swedish word for stairs (*trapp*) and refers to the step-like hills forming the landscape of the region. Consisting of many layers of solidified lava, up to 2 kilometres thick, the Deccan Traps cover an area of about 500,000 square kilometres, with a volume of about 1,000,000 cubic kilometres. The Deccan Traps are one of the largest volcanic features on Earth, taking the form of a large shield volcano.

From the 2nd century BC, this area saw a great flowering of art and architecture, most clearly represented in the famous UNESCO World Heritage sites of the Buddhist caves at Ajanta and the rock-cut temples at Ellora. These magnificent caves are among the most important monuments in India, featuring some of the world’s most exquisite rock carvings.

In later centuries, its prosperity and position between the Muslim-dominated north and the Hindu-ruled ‘deep south’ meant that it was much fought over. The first independent Muslim rulers, the Bahmanis, led a highly cosmopolitan society populated not just by Indians but also Persians, Turks, Arabs and East Africans.

In ancient times, Middle Eastern traders established early Christian and Muslim communities on the west coast but the first real encounter with Islam in the Deccan heartland was in the thirteenth century when the Delhi sultans conquered the region. In 1347, Zafar Khan (Alauddin Bahman Shah) managed to break away from the sultanate and established the Bahmani dynasty in Daulatabad.

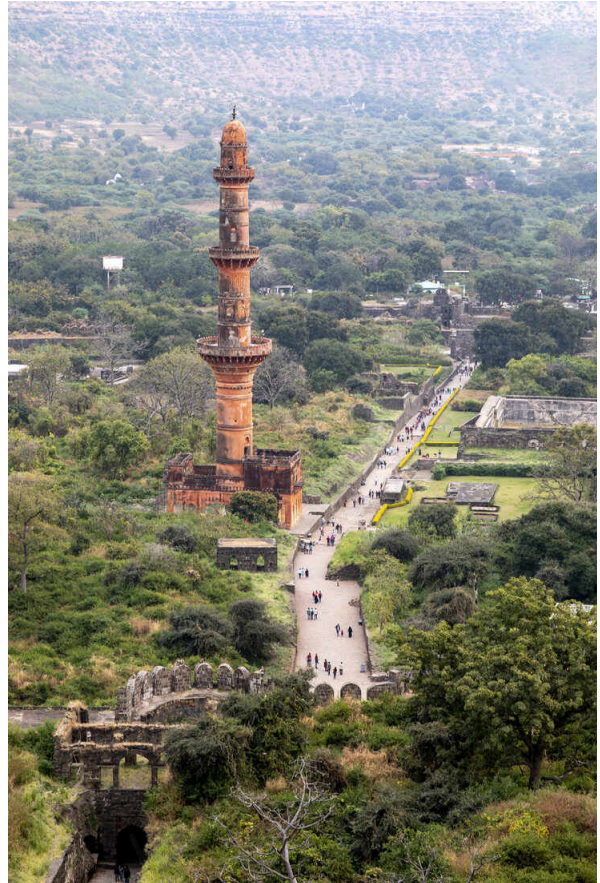
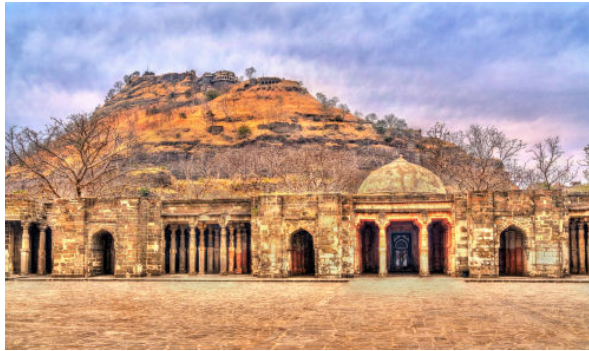
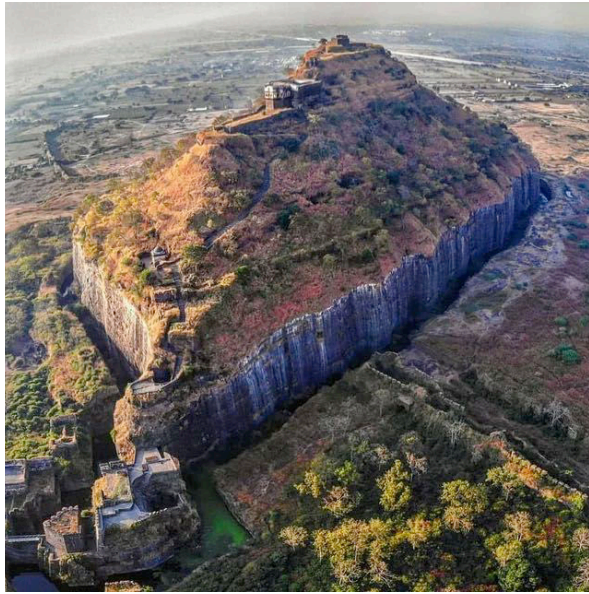
We will be based in Aurangabad for our visits to Daulatabad, the Ellora Caves and Ajanta Caves.

DAY 9 • Sunday 7th September

Ajanta Caves: This morning we will drive (2hrs) to see “The finest gallery of pictures to survive from any ancient civilisation” as historian John Keay described the Buddhist cave murals at Ajanta. Forgotten for nearly 1,000 years, this jungle site was only rediscovered by a party of British tiger-hunters in 1819, when they stumbled onto what was soon recognized as one of the great wonders of India: the painted caves of Ajanta. On the walls of a line of thirty-one caves dug into an amphitheatre of solid rock lies the most beautiful and ancient paintings in Buddhist art, the oldest of which date from the second century BC—an otherwise lost golden age of Indian painting.

Along with the frescoes of Pompeii, the fabulous murals of Livia’s Garden House outside Rome, and the encaustic wax portraits of the Egyptian Fayyum, Ajanta’s walls represent perhaps the most comprehensive depiction of civilized life to survive from antiquity.

The second century BC was a period of great expansion of international trade, and these monasteries, remote as they may seem now, were originally built on the great trade routes of their time. The valleys they crown once saw the frequent passage of caravans bringing luxury goods—ebony, teak, and sandalwood, ivory and translucent Indian textiles, pepper and cinnamon—to the coast where they would then be shipped, usually by Jewish and Greek middlemen, to the Red Sea and thence to Rome.



DAULATABAD

Today, it is classified as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The frescoes and sculptures date from around 200BC to 650AD, a period when Buddhism was acquiring some of the sensuousness of Hinduism. People used to the idea of Buddhist thought being essentially a negation of the senses will be startled by the voluptuousness of much of the imagery. Even today, the colours of these murals glow with a brilliant intensity: topaz-dark, lizard-green, lotus-blue. Even the pigments used in the paintings indicate international trade connections—the blue, for example, was obtained from lapis lazuli imported from Iran and Afghanistan.

Accommodation: *Gateway, Aurangabad (Deluxe Room) | Meals included: Breakfast*

DAY 10 • Monday 8th September

Ellora Caves: We will drive to Ellora this morning (1 hour) to see the Buddhist, Hindu and Jain cave temples that are among the most important monuments in India. Ellora's recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site is grounded in its unique artistic achievement and the way that it brings ancient India to life. The rock-cut temples, particularly the Kailasa Temple, represent a technological feat unparalleled in its time. One of India's greatest monuments, this astonishing temple, carved from solid rock, was built by King Krishna I in AD 760 to represent Mt Kailasa (Kailash), the god Shiva's Himalayan abode. To say that the assignment was daring would be an understatement. Three huge trenches were bored into the sheer cliff face, a process that entailed removing 200,000 tonnes of rock by hammer and chisel, before the temple could begin to take shape and its remarkable sculptural decoration could be added. Covering twice the area of the Parthenon in Athens and being half as high again, Kailasa is an engineering marvel that was executed straight from the head with zero margin for error.

Lunch today is in a beautiful garden on an organic farm.

Daulatabad: This afternoon we will visit the ruined but truly magnificent hilltop fortress of Daulatabad, which sits atop a 200m-high stone outcrop (30 mins drive). Built by the Yadava kings in the 12th century, it was originally conceived as an impregnable fort, surrounded by 5km-long battlements. There is also a deep moat (which was filled with crocodiles) that is crossed by a single bridge – and then there is a dark labyrinth!

The climb to the summit takes about an hour, and leads past an ingenious series of defences, including multiple doorways designed with odd angles and spike-studded doors to prevent elephant charges. The views from the top are spectacular. A tower of victory, known as the Chand Minar (Tower of the Moon) was built in 1435. It is 64m high and was originally covered with Persian glazed tiles.

Bibi Ka Maqbara: At sunset, we will visit a 17th century Mughal gem, the Bibi Ka Maqbara, also known as the Mini Taj. There are beautiful Persian gardens on all sides.

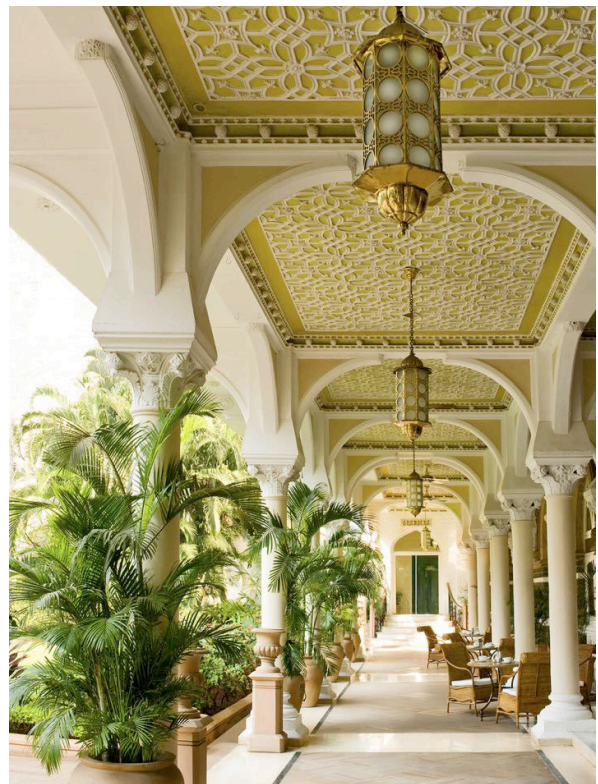
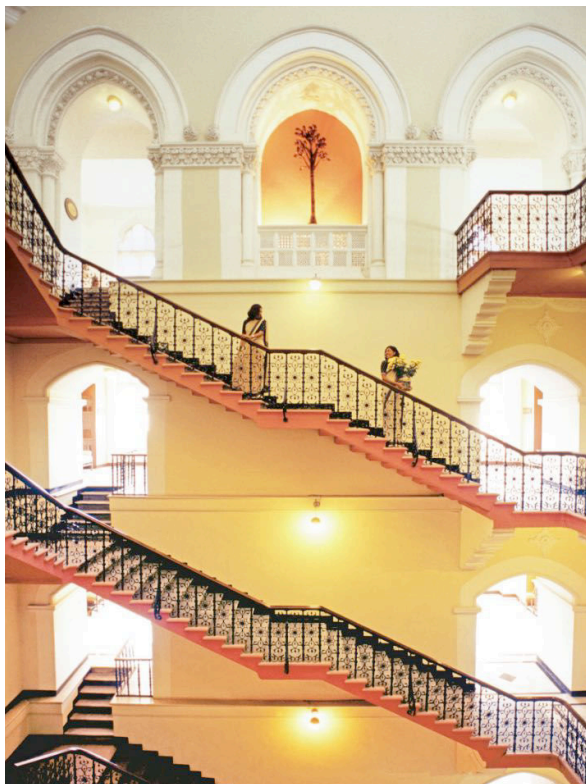
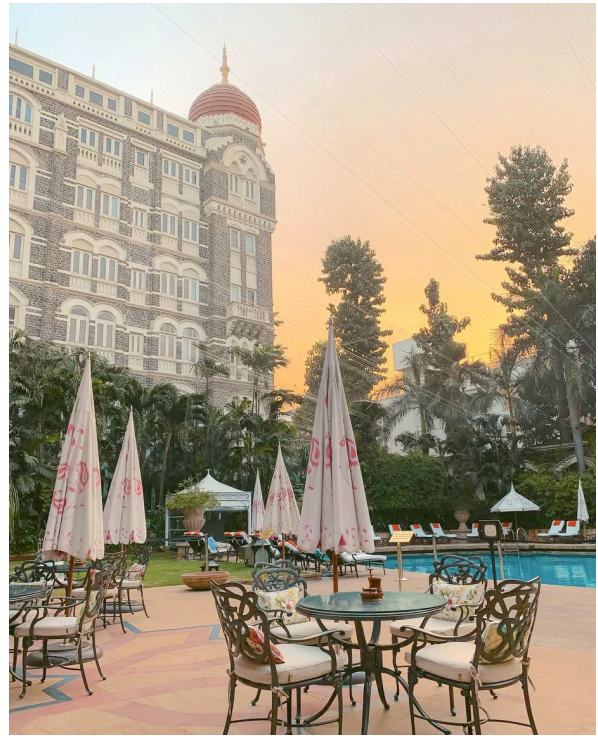
Accommodation: *Gateway, Aurangabad (Deluxe Room) | Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch*

DAY 11 • Tuesday 9th September

Aurangabad – Mumbai: This morning we fly to Mumbai (1 hr).

Mumbai: We will start our time here with a walk, focussing on the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Art Deco architecture of Mumbai (Mumbai has the world's second-largest collection of Art Deco buildings, second only to Miami). We will start with some of our favourites, located opposite the Oval Maidan where the grand Victorian Gothic buildings of the 19th century form a suitably imperious backdrop to the cricket matches held here throughout the day.

This afternoon, enjoy the heritage interiors and beautiful grounds of our iconic hotel. You might like to peruse the in-house art gallery, enjoy the views over Bombay Harbour or have a swim in the elegant pool.



TAJ MAHAL PALACE HOTEL, MUMBAI

You may also like to opt for a walk around the local neighbourhood. We will take you to visit the nearby Keneseth Eliyahoo Synagogue, and we will point out some of our favourite shops. Tucked along the charming streets near the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, Colaba's upmarket boutiques offer a blend of Indian elegance and global style. Think luxurious textiles, handcrafted homewares, and wellness goods, as well as India's top fashion designers.

Accommodation: *Taj Mahal Tower, Mumbai (Deluxe Room wib Sea View)* | *Meals included: Breakfast*

Taj Mahal Palace & Tower

Cossetting guests in old-fashioned grandeur, Mumbai's most iconic hotel is much loved by its well-heeled and glamorous locals. Generations have celebrated life's milestones here, making this more than just the city's best luxury hotel, but part of its beating heart. The architecture is an ornately layered mix of Moorish, Oriental and Florentine styles. Overlooking the Arabian Sea, it opened in 1903 and enjoys the best location in south Mumbai. Heritage sights, fashionable boutiques and excellent restaurants are a short stroll away. The Tower block, built in the 1970s, is quite different in character to the architecture of the adjoining original section but we love the larger windows that really make the most of the sea views. Arguably, the Taj Mahal Palace has best swimming pool in south Mumbai, the best high tea, the best Asian restaurant, the best hotel shops. Service is excellent and staff exude a palpable sense of pride and joy to be working here.

Mumbai

Mumbai is India's most cosmopolitan city. Located on a narrow strip of land that curls into the Arabian Sea, the city has been transformed from a fishing settlement to a sprawling metropolis of over 20 million people in less than 500 years. Mumbai generates nearly 40 per cent of India's GNP and the port handles half the country's foreign trade. It is also the birthplace of Indian cinema and most of the Hindi-language film industry is based here. Just like LA and New York, people come here from all over India, hoping to make it big. Its crowded streets are both dazzling and overwhelming, an interplay of traditional and ultramodern, Indian and global. But underneath the glitter and grime, it is a city of dreams — fast and furious, open-minded and welcoming, India's Maximum City.

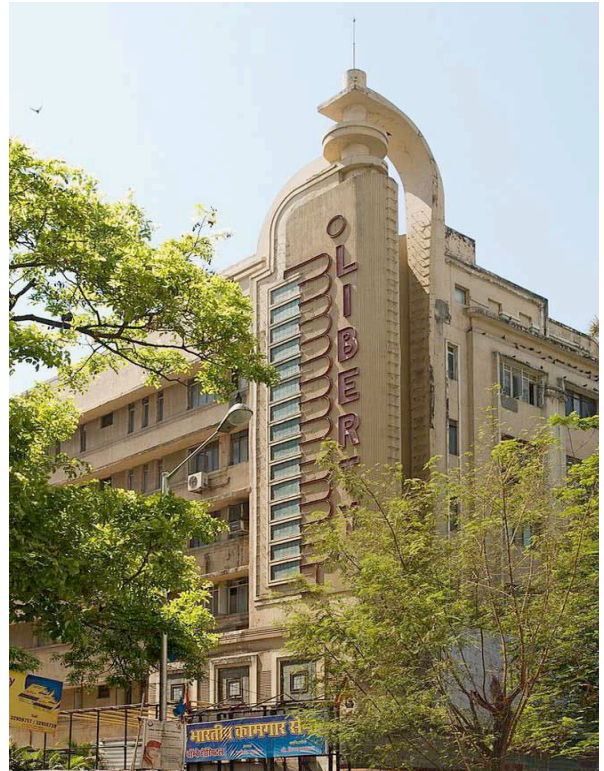
The Victorian Gothic and Art Deco architecture of Mumbai is UNESCO World Heritage listed. In south Mumbai (where we are staying), along Marine Drive, the glittering waterfront thoroughfare, colonial architecture brushes up against Art Deco mansions and Buddhist pagodas, a nod to the city's centuries of Gujarati, Portuguese, and British rule before India regained its independence in 1947.

DAY 12 • Wednesday 10th September

Mumbai: We will start the day with a visit to a Gothic masterpiece, the Afghan Church. With expert care from the World Monuments Fund India, the church's interior stonework, teak pews, and monumental bell tower were recently restored to their original splendour. Its acoustic purity, warm light, and profoundly spiritual ambiance make stepping inside feel like a moment out of time — a sanctuary not just of faith, but of timeless craftsmanship. It is a hidden jewel of sacred architecture.

Next, we will head to Churchgate Station to see something extraordinary — hundreds of stainless steel tiered tiffin boxes piled high on handcarts and bicycles being pushed through the streets by dhoti-wearing, white-capped tiffin wallahs who deliver piping hot home-cooked lunches to more than 500,000 office workers.

Then we are off to the historic Crawford Market, one of Mumbai's most iconic and historic marketplaces. Built in 1869 and designed by British architect William Emerson, the market blends Norman-Gothic and Flemish architectural styles, complete with a fountain sculpted by



MUMBAI ARCHITECTURE

Lockwood Kipling, Rudyard Kipling's father. Its colonial-era arched interiors, stained glass windows, and ornate stonework have recently been restored to their former glory.

We will also visit UNESCO World Heritage Site, and symbol of the city, the magnificent Victoria Terminus. Built in the 19th century in the Victorian Gothic style, it was from here that the first Indian train departed. It is one of the busiest railway stations in India.

Time for traditional Parsi snacks at a 1920s café that is a window onto the nostalgia of old Bombay. We will finish with some browsing in the art galleries of the city's art district, Kala Ghoda, and some shopping, including a visit to Anita Dongre's flagship boutique in a recently restored 4-storey heritage building.

Accommodation: *Taj Mahal Tower, Mumbai (Deluxe Room with Sea View) | Meals included: Breakfast*

DAY 13 • Thursday 11th September

Enjoy a leisurely morning before checking out by 12 noon, which concludes our tour. You will be transferred to the airport in an air-conditioned car in time for your flight home (please get in touch if you would like a quote for a late check out from the hotel).

Meals: *Breakfast*

TOUR DETAILS

How to Book

- Please email tour leader, Nicole Court, to request a booking form:

nicole@nicolecourt.com.au

- Deposits – to secure your booking, the following is required:
 - (a) AUD\$2,500 deposit per person, at the time of booking
 - (b) Final balance payment for the tour is due no later than 4th July 2025
- The payment schedule will be itemised on the invoice
- A minimum number of 6 bookings is required by 4th July 2025 for the tour to proceed.

If the tour fails to satisfy minimum numbers, the tour may be cancelled or re-costed, we will give you notice on 5th July 2025. If the tour is re-costed, you will have the option to either accept the new cost or to cancel your booking. You must make this election within 24 hours of receiving notice from us. If the tour is cancelled or if you cancel your booking in these circumstances, we will, at your election, refund all payments made (including the deposit) or credit payments towards alternative arrangements within 10 business days.

– Note: Please wait for confirmation from Nicole Court that the minimum numbers have been met before making any travel arrangements, such as flight bookings, as we will not be responsible for any other travel arrangements affected by, or any additional costs incurred, as a result of cancellation in these circumstances.

- Full payment is required at the time of booking for reservations made less than 60 days before departure of trip.

Tour Dates

- India Design Tour: The Deccan Plateau – 30 August to 11 September 2025 (13 days, 12 nights)

Tour Inclusions

- Hotel accommodation, as indicated in the itinerary (12 nights)
- Meals and beverages, as indicated in the itinerary
- Ground transport in air-conditioned coach and cars, with expert drivers
- Complimentary amenities in the vehicle such as bottled water
- Guided touring, activities and admissions, as indicated in the itinerary
- Domestic airfares (4) with 25kg luggage allowance (economy class)
- Airport arrival and departure transfers, as indicated in the itinerary
- Expert guides and drivers, including your tour leader Nicole Court; local tour manager; and 24/7 on ground support
- Tips and gratuities

Tour Exclusions

- International airfares
- Meals not specified on the itinerary
- Alcoholic beverages
- Visa fees
- Health and travel insurance
- Medical emergencies
- Expenses for re-routing due to voluntary or unforeseeable reasons
- Personal expenses for drinks, snacks, telephone calls, laundry, internet (most hotels have free Wi-Fi)
- Video camera fees at museums and monuments

Cancellation terms

- If you wish to cancel your booking, you must provide notice in writing (an email is sufficient)
- Cancellations made over 60 days prior to the tour start date will incur loss of deposit
- Cancellations made 59 to 0 days prior to the tour start date will incur a cancellation fee of 100% of the tour price
- A minimum number of 6 bookings is required by 4th July 2025 for the tour to proceed.

If the tour fails to satisfy minimum numbers, the tour may be cancelled or re-costed, we will give you notice on 5th July 2025. If the tour is re-costed, you will have the option to either accept the new cost or to cancel your booking. You must make this election within 24 hours of receiving notice from us. If the tour is cancelled or if you cancel your booking in these circumstances, we will, at your election, refund all payments made (including the deposit) or credit payments towards alternative arrangements within 10 business days.

– Note: Please wait for confirmation from Nicole Court that the minimum numbers have been met before making any travel arrangements, such as flight bookings, as we will not be responsible for any other travel arrangements affected by, or any additional costs incurred, as a result of cancellation in these circumstances.

Booking Terms and Conditions

Please refer to “India Design Tour August/September 2025 Booking Form with Terms and Conditions” for our full terms and conditions.

Medical

On-call doctors are available at every hotel.

Dietary requirements

Please let us know if you any special dietary requirements when you book and we will confirm if we are able to accommodate them on the Design Tour – we will if we can!

Flexibility about minor changes

So much thought and care has gone into the itinerary of this Design Tour but India always requires some flexibility in regards to minor changes. Any minor changes to the itinerary (eg, an activity occurring on a different day to the dated itinerary) will only ever be made because it improves the flow of the experience. Hopefully this doesn't happen, but if anywhere is unexpectedly closed due to unforeseen events, we will make sure that we do something else equally interesting.

TESTIMONIALS

I HAVE NOW DONE TWO TOURS WITH NICKY. Two unforgettable, wow every single day, in fact, often multiple times a day, wow! moments. It was evident from the moment I landed in Delhi, warmly greeted, walked through the airport, onto a waiting bus and into the comfort of the first of many beautiful hotels. All the way through to the moment I flew out again, filled to the brim with awe and delight.

Every single detail of the tour was thoughtfully curated. Nicky is a natural curator. Her attention to detail. Her love of all things India. Her passion for authentic human experiences all shine through with grace and love. Yes, love. I feel spoilt by my two incredible tours through India with Nicky. I'm not sure there is any other way to do it now!

Sally, Sydney (January 2023 and January 2024)

NICOLE COURT'S DESIGN TOUR WAS A LUXURY TRAVEL EXPERIENCE THAT CANNOT BE MATCHED. Travelling with my sister, for my 50th birthday present, this tour was a complete success for me; the places we travelled to, the experiences that were curated and timed perfectly to build up our understanding of this complex and wonderful and diverse culture and place. I experienced utter beauty and fulfillment in many forms, be it the world class hotels, food or seamlessly planned activities.

Mostly it was a wonderful human experience, feeling safe and totally cared for, allowed me to confidently explore this foreign country, supported and connected to both Nicky, Kinny and Deep our guides, and finding new connections with a fantastic tour group that have ensured I have some wonderful new friends for life. I cannot recommend Nicole Court's Design Tours highly enough.

Jacqui Williams, Perth (January 2024)

THE METICULOUS PLANNING OF THE DESIGN TOUR TO INDIA, the attention to detail, lovely surprises along the way, and our extremely knowledgeable guides all made this experience incredibly enlightening, where history, creativity and spirituality entwine, an unforgettable adventure for anyone passionate about design, textiles and architecture.

Spice scents, tiles, saris, hand-painted walls, incense, etched glass, hand-blocked prints, and temple bells have left an indelible mark on my soul. I feel completely spoilt and privileged to have been. It far exceeded all my expectations. I would go again in a heartbeat with Nicole and the team. Highly recommended. A huge thank you. Heart open.

Suzanne Maher, Bellingen NSW (January 2024)

FROM THE EXTRAORDINARY STEPWELLS IN AHMEDABAD, to the spotted leopard spotting, the textile exhibitions and the fabulous palaces of Rajasthan, the India tour was full of surprises and "wow" moments. Along the way the accommodation was superb and the company great fun. Nicky and her team went to no end of trouble to ensure everything went smoothly and that we got the most out of all our visits. Grateful for the opportunity to learn so much about Indian architecture and culture from our expert guides. Highly recommended!

Anne W, Sydney NSW (January 2025)

I'VE BEEN TO NORTH INDIA TWICE BEFORE, but doing a tour with Nicky Court on her Design Tour is by FAR the best way to see India. You see the best of the best along with the chaos, but knowing you are safe and well taken care of. Just sit back and trust! There was something wonderful in every day along with pleasant surprises. We saw the most unique places, beautiful palaces, tombs, and ruins along with how the masses live on the streets, compatibly with cows, dogs, elephants, camels, donkeys, goats, sheep, bicycles, rickshaws, tuktuks, motor bikes, cars, buses, and trucks. The two most challenging components are the air and water quality but that faded as we basked in the glow of all that was so wonderful!!

MJ, Sydney (January 2024)

- What would you do again: All of it
- Funniest moment: Hooning around in tuk-tuks wherever we were
- Favourite hotels: RAAS Jodhpur, RAAS Chhatrasagar and Samode Haveli, Jaipur
- Best meal: The food everywhere was amazing, but it was also about the gin and tonic
- Most enjoyable experience: The colours and the textiles (especially the Calico Museum and the Anokhi Museum), architecture in Ahmedabad, the leopard adventure, the stepwell dinner, bird watching on the lake, palace visits, and the shopping in Jaipur!!

Sarah Ogilvie, Melbourne (January 2025)

IT WAS AN AMAZING TRIP and I would recommend it to other Kiwis and Aussies – I feel that it was the right balance for us and Nicky knows what we want. Going in the winter is highly recommended. The trip was well run and organised. All the hotels were good. Highly recommend this trip to anyone wanting an informative trip to India with no hassles.

Michelle, New Zealand (January 2025)

I'VE RECENTLY RETURNED FROM INDIA and was fortunate enough to be part of Nicky Court's Design Tour. As I was travelling alone, I did have some reservations about how I would manage, never having been to India before and being a little nervous in unfamiliar places. Fortunately, everything was taken care of with thoughtfulness and care. From the moment I alighted the plane until the moment I boarded to return home everything was looked after. The detail of what we did down to where the next clean bathroom would be, were all taken care of. I enjoyed hearing about the history of beautiful buildings. We experienced delicious meals in beautiful locations, from a Mughal-inspired garden to a step well, lit with hundreds of candles. The timing of our glamping in the beautiful wilderness park was impeccable. After a week of taking in so much history, culture and horns beeping it was lovely to enjoy the solitude and see the stars. Nicky and Kinny are both kind and gracious women whose care for others made the trip what it was. Their humbleness and willingness to help with any issue made everything seamless and stress free for the guests. Their knowledge and cultural insight was fantastic and we were well informed throughout the trip, much has stayed with me as I've settled back into life at home. Thank you for everything, I would highly recommend any trip to India that Nicky would organise.

Carla M, Sydney (January 2024)

MY TRIP TO INDIA with Nicole Court was just magical. Their knowledge and care and kindness for us all was outstanding. I have been to India many times but never like this. A small group of like-minded travellers, some were travelling to India for the first time. Everything was organised so it was hassle free. At times India can overwhelm but there

was a great mix of excursions and relaxation. We stayed in luxury small hotels and palaces which were divine. I cannot recommend this trip highly enough or India. India's people, culture, customs are intoxicating and with Nicole you are immersed fully. Thank you so much.

Denise Wright, Melbourne (January 2023)

NICOLE'S INTRICATE DETAILED ITINERARY allowed us the privilege of experiencing unique insights into the personal lives of those connected to art and culture. Traversing through the backstreets, inhaling the flower market scenes, witnessing artisans at work... Nicole certainly gets the balance right: exploring and seeing the essence of each place, as well as having some peaceful times in nature. Nicole and her "on-ground" experienced network gave us a sense of inclusiveness and fine hospitality. Indeed, trust is the word to have as one's mantra, allowing the serendipitous adventure to unfold.

Jane Grossberg, Sydney (January 2023)

NICKY TOOK US ALL ON A MAGIC CARPET RIDE through Calcutta and India's North-East on her Design Tour. I have been to India many times, and I have been on a lot of group tours – this was one of the best I have experienced. Kinny and Nicky were great hosts and showed us things we would never have discovered ourselves, in a less travelled part of India.

Susan B, Sydney (January 2023 and January 2025)

TRAVELLING WITH 'DIETARY REQUIREMENTS' was not a problem with Nicky as our leader. She ensured that all our accommodation chefs were warned in advance and I never ever had an upset stomach. This is a small example of the attention to detail and care Nicky takes in planning her tours. Not to mention the wonderful places and people we saw, and accommodation we stayed in. I highly recommend Nicky's Design Tour.

Karen Robinson, Sydney (January 2023 and January 2025)

I HAVE COME BACK TO EARTH AFTER THE WONDERFUL TRIP YOU ORGANISED FOR US. I feel privileged to have travelled with you in such an understated and interesting way, just how I like it. We could never have envisaged an itinerary like that so thank you. You did it all with calm efficiency. Aditya was very kind and helpful to us. And the driver, what a man, not a worrying moment as he weaved his way amongst all that life along the roads.

Sophie Wilson, Sydney (November 2024)

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR THE MOST MAGICAL AND AMAZING TRIP. We were so well looked after at every moment and felt so safe, secure and well supported. Mum is still buzzing from the trip and her face lights up when people ask her about it. I've made us a photo book and she's showing everyone. Such great memories for us both to treasure.

It was also really special to spend time with you and watch you work and weave your magic. You have a real gift for what you do and you always operate with such grace, authenticity and a real sense of ease and calm. And fun!! So many giggles and so much fun. I can really feel the love in what you do - even though I know it's not always as easy as you make it look.

Lara Esden, Sydney (November 2024)

THANK YOU FOR A MEMORABLE HOLIDAY. I was conscious (but not too) of the hard work that you put in to make it so. On reflection it is hard to pinpoint single events as all the days were so individually rewarding, rather like a colossal film set on a Cecile B. DeMille scale.

Just riding on the coach with kaleidoscopic images of village and road life was fascinating enough to say nothing of the set pieces which will live in both our memories. To cap it all my skepticism about seeing tigers in the wild (a private childhood fantasy bound up with Jim Corbett) was fully bowled at Panna.

We have done a lot of travel in our lives, at coffee today we both reflected that this trip was right up there and gave some insight into Robin and your fascination with the place.

It is no surprise after absorbing *The Golden Road* that India was a very major influence of cultures East and West well before the birth of Christ and will continue to be. We eschewed our hippy peers all those years ago who left to pay homage and I take all that back.

I acknowledge how much personal insight, attention to detail, romance and good taste that endowed this trip, thank you for allowing us to share it.

TW, Sydney (November 2024)