

NOVEMBER 2024

ONE ROOM LEFT!

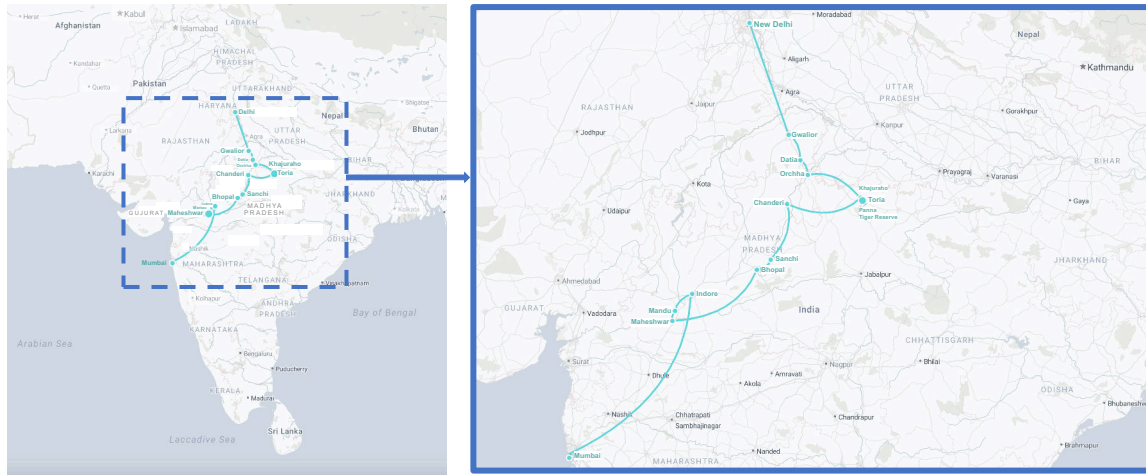


India Design Tour

Textiles, Tigers and Lost Kingdoms:
The road less travelled in central India's Madhya Pradesh –
World Heritage sites, history, architecture & landscape

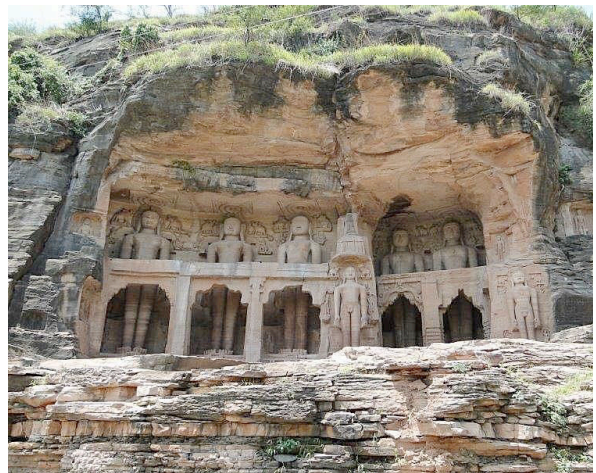
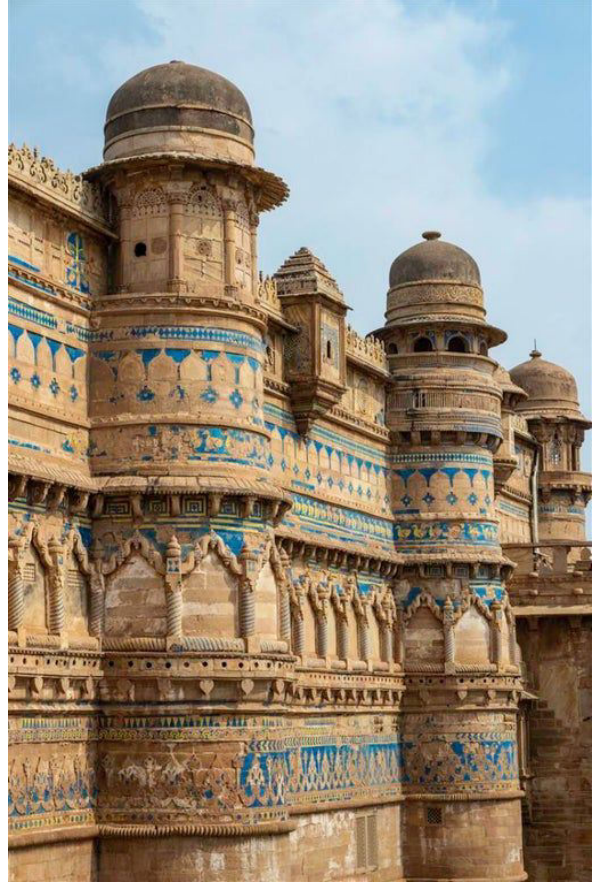
10-23 NOVEMBER 2024

INDIA DESIGN TOUR 10TH TO 23RD NOVEMBER, 2024



AT A GLANCE

Dates	10 th to 23 rd November, 2024 (14 days, 13 nights)
Hotels	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Imperial, New Delhi• Taj Usha Kiran, Gwalior• Sarai at Toria, near Panna Tiger Reserve• Lalit Temple View, Khajuraho• MPT Tana Bana, Chanderi• Jehan Numa Palace, Bhopal• Ahilya Fort, Maheshwar
Meals	Breakfasts daily (13) lunches (9) and dinners (5) as per the itinerary
Transport	Air-conditioned cars and mini coach for ground transport, air-conditioned Executive Class seat on an express train, jeeps for safaris and boats for pottering around on rivers, as per the itinerary
Your Hosts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tour leader – landscape designer, Nicole Court (Sydney based)• Co-host – textile designer, Kinny Sandhu (Delhi based)• Tour manager/expert local guide
Group size	A minimum of 6 guests and a maximum of 12
Pricing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AUD\$14,650 per person, twin share• AUD\$2,600 single supplement
Bookings	A spot on this trip may be reserved with an AUD\$3,660 deposit (please refer to Tour Details on p23 for details of the full payment schedule).
Itinerary Highlights	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staying in royal palaces, guest houses and central India's most charming, and luxurious, boutique hotels• Curated architecture, textile, craft and history-focused excursions for an insider's perspective into Madhya Pradesh• Naturalist-led walks and safaris• UNESCO World Heritage sites• Special dinners under the stars• Post-tour trip to Mumbai (3 nights, see pages 19-22 for the details)
Best time of year to visit?	November-February. Sunny 28°C days and 16°C nights in November makes for lovely travelling weather.



GWALIOR AND ORCHHA

‘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 – a “conscious luxury” exploration of the road less travelled in Madhya Pradesh. We will show you India from a designer’s point of view.

Madhya Pradesh holds enough ancient monuments, wildlife reserves, sacred pilgrimage towns, remote forests and mountain ranges to occupy intrepid travellers for several lifetimes. Yet, compared with other parts of the country, India’s interior sees comparatively few visitors.

Its location in the middle of the Indian subcontinent has always made it a prime target for conquest, with every empire leaving an indelible mark on the region’s architecture, culture and people.

Madhya Pradesh has ancient temples featuring some of the world’s most exquisite (and erotic!) stone carvings, the romantic ruins of abandoned cities built by long-gone Muslim conquerors, 300BC Buddhist stupas raised by a penitent emperor, maharajas’ palaces and some of the oldest prehistoric rock art in the world. Most of these places see relatively little tourism and, as such, are even more rewarding for those who explore the heartland of India.

Through our extensive network of friends, family, and interesting contacts, we have organized visits to Indian craftspeople and special walks with local experts to bring to life the fascinating history and beating heart of this part of the world.

The pace of the trip allows for plenty of lingering over tea on the terrace. From a candlelit dinner in an ancient garden under a starry night sky, searching for tigers on safari, looking in wonder at some of the world’s oldest cave paintings, experiencing living history in 600 year old weaving traditions, birdwatching and picnics, 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.

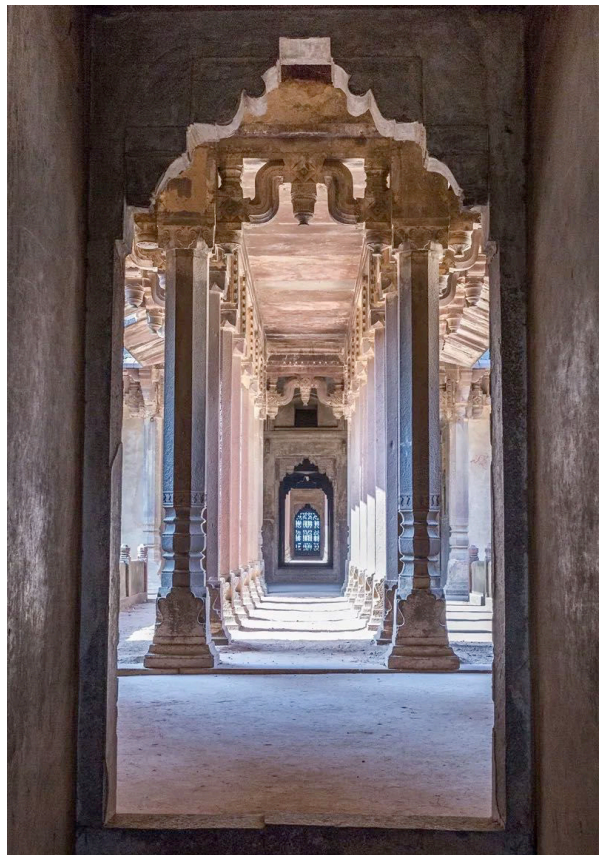
We will tour with 6-12 guests – small enough to tailor boutique experiences but large enough to get to know an interesting group of people.

You don't have to be a designer to come with us - if you are interested in gardens, architecture, design, textiles, good food and beautiful hotels, you will love this trip.

*** 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



DATIA AND ORCHHA

YOUR HOSTS

AN INSIDER'S EXPERIENCE is assured by travelling with these two well-connected India experts: Nicole Court (Sydney-based) and Kinny Sandhu (India-based). Their combined knowledge, experience and list of personal contacts informed the choices they made when curating this tour: the most interesting people to meet and the most intriguing places to experience at each destination. These immersive experiences will tell the story of place and its people who reside here, so that you can sit back, relax and enjoy the magic of India.

Nicole Court

Nicole is a landscape designer who has worked and travelled in India over the past 30 years. She created textile and homewares ranges for ten years for her business, Acorn Trading, which were hand crafted in India and stocked by Australia and New Zealand's best boutique retailers.

A deep love for combining traditional craft skills with a modern living led to a long collaboration with family friend, Kinny Sandhu. A constant inspiration was Kinny's unwavering practice of providing employment to local women, whilst working to the highest design and quality standards.

Nicole's ranges were featured in *Belle*, *Vogue Living*, *Vogue Entertaining*, *Gourmet Traveller*, *Home Beautiful*, *Inside Out*, *SMH*, *The Age*, *Australian House & Garden*, *Marie Claire* and *Elle*. She has been a contributing garden writer for *Landscape Outlook* and is an occasional guest speaker for the Landscape Design Institute, Mosman Garden Club and Ku-ring-gai Horticultural Society. Nicole is passionate and knowledgeable about textiles, design, landscape and architecture, and has great Indian connections.

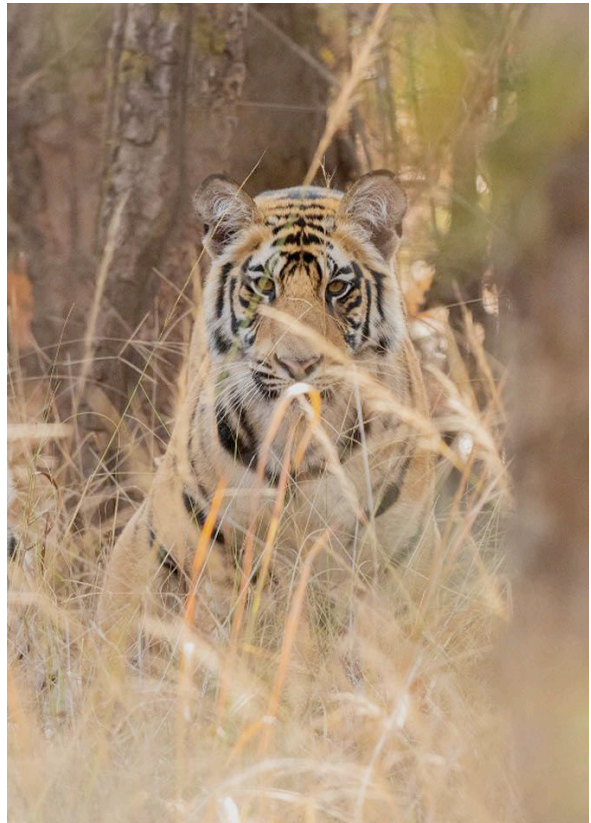
Instagram: @nicolecourtdesign

Kinny Sandhu (née Majithia)

Is this India's most well-connected woman? A member of high society, she was born at the height of her philanthropic, entrepreneurial and cosmopolitan family's powers, then one of the wealthiest families in India – her family's estate even has its own steam engine. Kinny has wonderful family stories, such as the time when her father and uncle were the first to fly into Kathmandu, landing on the golf course in their plane – and the king of Nepal came out to greet them. Kinny's great-aunt is Amrita Sher-Gill, India's Frida Kahlo, and one of the greatest avant-garde women painters of the early 20th century. Kinny's mother was a code breaker in the Australian Navy and met a dashing Indian Air Force officer in Melbourne during World War II when he was posted there as an attaché. Kinny straddles two worlds, with extensive family in both India and Australia.

Kinny is a designer and maker with a passion for India's hand crafts and the welfare of those in her local community. She has been producing hand-stitched textile ranges for local and international designers for 40 years. She runs a quilting and embroidery production unit on her farm, is an accomplished artist and is an indigo grower and natural dye producer. She and her husband split their time between their homes in Delhi, Nainital (in the foothills of the Himalayas) and their farm (about 4 hours east of Delhi).

Instagram: @kinnysandhu @taraiblue



THE SARAI AT TORIA AND PANNA TIGER RESERVE

ITINERARY

DAY 1 • Sunday 10th November

A VIP experience awaits you on arrival at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport. You will be met at the gate (as soon as you get off the plane!) and escorted through passport control and customs and whisked off to The Imperial hotel in an air-conditioned car (30 minutes drive). Check in from 2 pm onwards.

Accommodation: *The Imperial (Heritage Room)*

The Imperial

Staying at this grande dame is an immersion in nostalgic, old-fashioned elegance – think gardens, verandas, vintage rattan furniture, wheeling fans and art. This oasis of calm is the most delightful hotel in Delhi and is owned by Kinny's sister's family.

DAY 2 • Monday 11th November

Delhi – Gwalior: Leisurely morning at hotel, including a welcoming get-together where you will meet your hosts, Nicky Court and Kinny Sandhu, and fellow guests. Wander in the beautiful grounds, peruse the art collection or have a swim in the Imperial's elegant pool.

We transfer to Nizamuddin railway station in the early afternoon to catch the express train to Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh. Travelling by train is a quintessential Indian experience. We take care of everything so that you can sit back and enjoy the fun and slight chaos of an Indian railway station – it also happens to be the fastest way to reach Gwalior (2 hr 58 mins in an air-conditioned Executive Class carriage).

Accommodation: *Taj Usha Kiran Palace (Heritage Room) | Meals included: Breakfast*

Taj Usha Kiran Palace

We will arrive at this palace hotel in a horse drawn carriage to experience a royal way of life. This meticulously restored palace was built for the Prince of Wales' visit in 1880.

MADHYA PRADESH

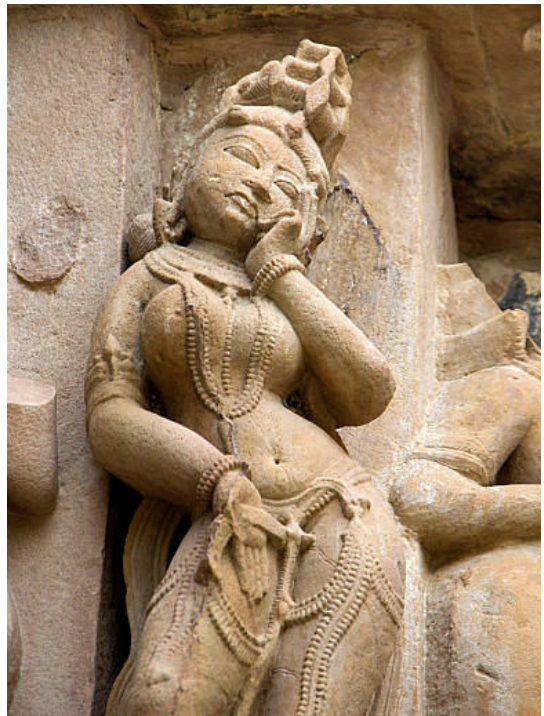
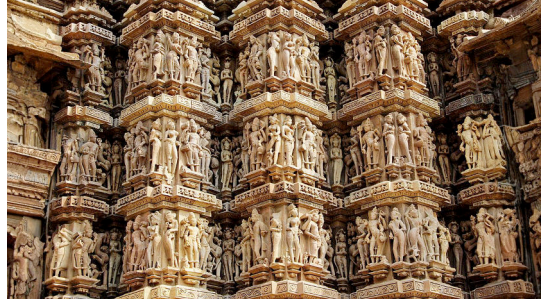
Madhya Pradesh's location in the middle of the Indian subcontinent has always made it a prime target for conquest. Every empire worth its arrows made incursions into these dusty plains, leaving an indelible mark on the region's architecture, culture and people. It has ancient temples featuring some of the world's most exquisite (and erotic!) stone carvings, ghost cities forged by Muslim conquerors, Buddhist stupas raised by a penitent emperor, palaces of maharajas and some of the oldest rock art in the world. Most of these sites see relatively little tourism and, as such, are even more rewarding for those who explore the heartland of India.

DAY 3 • Tuesday 12th November

Gwalior: We will start our day with a visit to the very grand Jai Vilas Palace, which was built in 1875 by the fabulously wealthy Scindia family. Think stuffed tigers and chandeliers so heavy that elephants had to be dangled from the ceiling to prove it could take the weight.

Gwalior's hilltop fort is one of the most impressive in India, stretching majestically along the top of a 3-km long plateau overlooking Gwalior. It is full of fascinating palaces, temples and museums which we will visit this afternoon. The 15th century Rajput palace at the northern end of the citadel retains much of its original Afghan-style turquoise, blue and green tiling, in intricate bands of geometric patterns and animal figures above domed kiosks and pierced-stone jali windows. It is now considered the only intact pre-Mughal palace in India.

Accommodation: *Taj Usha Kiran Palace (Luxury Room) | Meals included: Breakfast*



THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE-LISTED TEMPLES AT KHAJURAHO

DAY 4 • Wednesday 13th November

Gwalior – Datia – Orchha – Toria: Up next are two of the loveliest places in Madhya Pradesh, Datia and Orchha. A maze of flying walkways, domed pavilions, hidden passages and terraces looking across the rooftops of the old quarter, Datia Palace (1hr 20 min drive) is one of the most beautiful medieval monuments in India. Sir Edwin Lutyens, architect of New Delhi from 1912 to 1930 (but best loved for the gardens he designed with Gertrude Jekyll in England), considered Datia Palace to be “*one of the most interesting buildings architecturally in the whole of India*”. He incorporated aspects of this palace in the interior design of New Delhi’s North and South Blocks that include the President’s House and the Secretariat Building.

Orchha (1 hr drive) was the capital of the Bundela dynasty from 1531-1783 CE, Orchha's monuments, gardens, temples, and murals as an ensemble, represent remarkable evolution in town planning, fortification of settlement, in buildings, garden design and art. It is being considered for UNESCO World Heritage status. We love its laid-back atmosphere and its Mughal-influenced Rajput architecture. Drive to Sarai at Toria (2hrs 45min).

Accommodation: *Sari at Toria (Cottage)* | **Meals included:** *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Sarai at Toria

Set on eleven acres, the Sarai at Toria is a beautiful riverside retreat close to the UNESCO World Heritage-listed erotic temples of Khajuraho and the Panna Tiger Reserve. Eight large, very comfortable cottages are spread around the grounds with thick mud walls and a wonderful rustic-chic aesthetic. The retreat is the inspired vision of Dr. Raghu Chundawat, one of the world’s leading tiger biologists, and his wife Joanna Van Gruisen, wildlife photographer, writer and conservationist. They manage the Sarai at Toria in an environmentally and socially responsible manner, providing comfort and indulgence while protecting the natural and cultural environment. It is a haven of peace and tranquility.

Panna Tiger Reserve

Panna Tiger Reserve is a little known gem. It is one of India’s most dramatically scenic parks and is an excellent place to see a variety of central India’s wildlife. It is an excellent destination for birders but its grasslands and dry forest also reveal a number of ungulates and small carnivores and can provide wonderful sightings of a leopard or tiger.

DAY 5 • Thursday 14th November

Toria: This morning we have organised a jeep safari. Hopefully, we will see a tiger!

A relaxing day today – unwind, pick a book from the library and relax in the open-air pavilion overlooking the river or claim one of the strategically placed hammocks, day beds and benches – perfect for reading or dozing. It is also lovely to go for walk around the property or down to the river. Our host, Raghu, is a wonderful cook, as well as tiger biologist. We will join him for an interactive cooking session this afternoon.

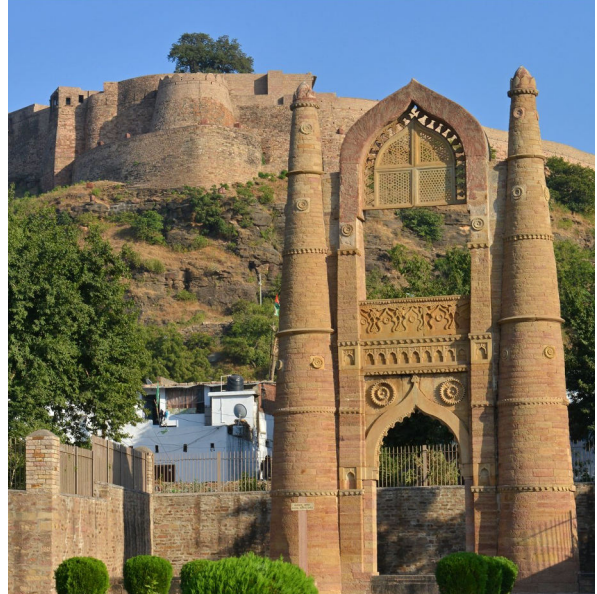
At sunset we will look for kingfishers, storks, ducks and eagle owls whilst we are quietly paddled down the river Ken in flat-bottomed boats.

Accommodation: *Sari at Toria (Cottage)* | **Meals included:** *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

DAY 6 • Friday 15th November

Toria: This morning we will stroll down hedge-lined paths and through the fields to have a cup of tea at the local village, where the Sarai at Toria supports the local school. This afternoon we have organised a jeep safari inside Panna Tiger Reserve.

Accommodation: *Sari at Toria (Cottage)* | **Meals included:** *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



CHANDERI

DAY 7 • Saturday 16th November

Toria – Khajuraho: The grounds of the Sarai at Toria provide some wonderfully peaceful areas in nature to enjoy yoga sessions. Each room has a yoga mat and there is a yoga teacher living nearby who can come, on request, for individual or group sessions (at an extra charge).

This afternoon we will visit the UNESCO World Heritage site of Khajuraho (30 mins drive). It comprises of many fabulously carved sandstone temples that are over a thousand years old. They are considered to be some of the best preserved antiquities in India. While famous for the sensuous art depicted, they are also fascinating for the display of everyday life of the people and the court in the 10th and 11th centuries. Enjoy the sound and light show (subject to operational status during the time of travel).

Accommodation: *Lalit Temple View (Temple View Room)* | *Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch*

Lalit Temple View

The hotel's contemporary rooms overlook the Khajuraho temples, which are only 500 m away.

DAY 8 • Sunday 17th November

Khajuraho – Chanderi: We will drive to Chanderi this morning (5hrs 30mins). Chanderi is famous for its hand-woven saris, which are among the finest in the country. This afternoon we will visit a traditional weaving community to see these gossamer light silk and cotton textiles with gold zari borders that are still woven by hand – a tradition that goes back to the 13th century.

Chanderi is being considered for UNESCO World Heritage status as an Iconic Sari Weaving Cluster of India. Rooted in history and maintaining continuity as a contemporary garment, the sari survives as a living traditional clothing. Traced to the Vedic civilization (1500-500 BCE), evolving with cross-cultural influences of trade, confluences of techniques and patterns, the saree still has innovations in its production processes. As an unstitched garment for women, it has no parallels in terms of versatility, richness of colour, texture, and variety of weaving techniques using different kinds of yarn, including cotton, silk, gold and silver thread.

Accommodation: *MPT Tana Bana (Standard AC Room)* | *Meals included: Breakfast*

MPT Tana Bana

Tana Bana is a simple, comfortable guest house in a charming town that rarely sees foreigners.

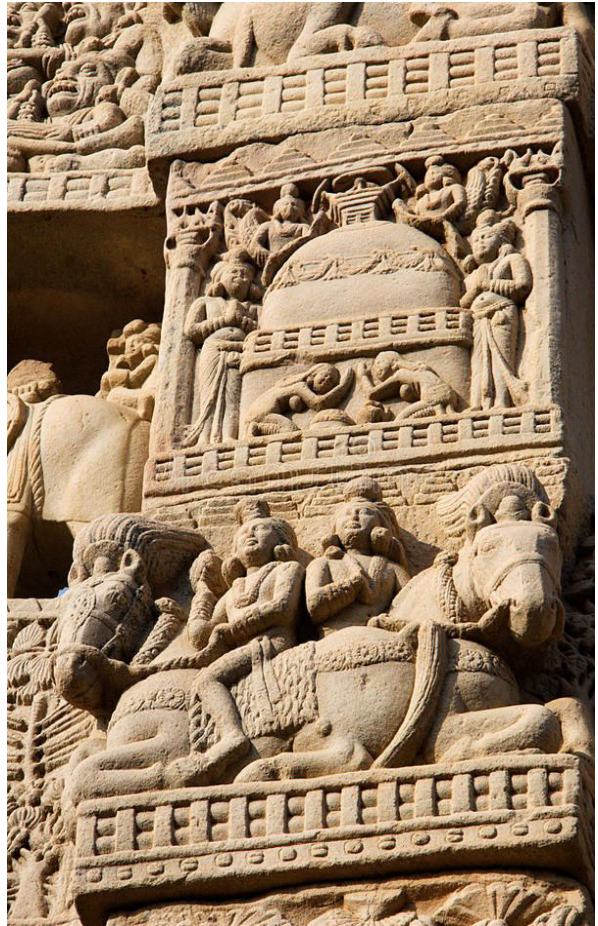
Chanderi

Chanderi was once a prosperous city of traders and merchants, due to its strategic position on one of the great trade routes of the subcontinent. The 13th century Moroccan visitor Ibn Batuta remarked: "it is a big city with thronged marketplaces". The three storied shops, projecting one over other, originally planned to be on the level with riders on elephants, on horses and on foot, give a unique profile to the street. It is full of ancient alleys and beautiful temples that were built in its heyday. This 11th century town is known for its Mughal fort and is famous for its elegant hand-woven Chanderi saris. The living tradition of weaving has been prevalent for six hundred years and continues to sustain almost half of the population of Chanderi.

DAY 9 • Monday 18th November

Chanderi: A morning visit to another of Chanderi's weaving communities to see pre-loom activities will be followed by a visit the town's Mughal fort and other 15th century monuments with their intricately carved walls that were once studded with lapis lazuli and jasper.

This afternoon we will explore the town's sandstone havelis and ruined caravanserais lining the winding lanes. A caravanserai was a roadside inn where travellers (caravaners) could rest and recover from the day's journey. Caravanserais supported the flow of commerce, information and



UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES: 3RD CENTURY BC BUDDHIST SANCHI AND STONE AGE BHIMBETKA

people across the network of trade routes covering Asia, North Africa and southeast Europe. We will visit the weavers again this afternoon to see them in action before they finish for the day.
Accommodation: *MPT Tana Bana (Standard AC Room)* | *Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch*

DAY 10 • Tuesday 19th November

Chanderi – Sanchi – Bhopal: An alternative vision of India awaits at the UNESCO World Heritage listed Buddhist monuments at Sanchi (4 hrs drive). Here, the great Buddhist emperor Ashoka raised a mighty stupa as penance for the suffering he wreaked on the people of Kalinga in Odisha during his empire-building rampage.

The historical Buddha lived and died on the plains between Nepal and northern India, but it was Ashoka who did the heavy lifting to spread Buddhism to every corner of the subcontinent. In contrast to the militaristic bombast of Gwalior, and the erotic abandon of Khajuraho, Sanchi was built from a position of introspection. Haunted by his legacy, the repentant Ashoka raised one of the first Buddhist stupas in India, adorning the gateways surrounding the stone-faced dome with panels telling the life story of the Buddha and his own righteous reinvention as a Buddhist convert. This was not just an architectural statement of Ashoka's commitment to living a better life – as we wander through the gardens around the great stupa, we will see the remains of temples, monasteries, assembly halls and shrines, recalling Sanchi's status as a great centre for spiritual learning. Afterwards, we drive to the city of lakes, Bhopal (1hr 30min drive).

Accommodation: *Jehan Numa Palace Hotel (Palace Room)* | *Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch*

Jehan Numa Palace

Built in British colonial style in the 19th century by the son of the ruling Begum, this heritage palace hotel is located on the slopes of the Shyamla Hills, within walking distance of the lake. In the mornings watch the horses train on the rather surreal horse track that runs around the hotel. Think raj-era charm and lovely gardens.

Bhopal

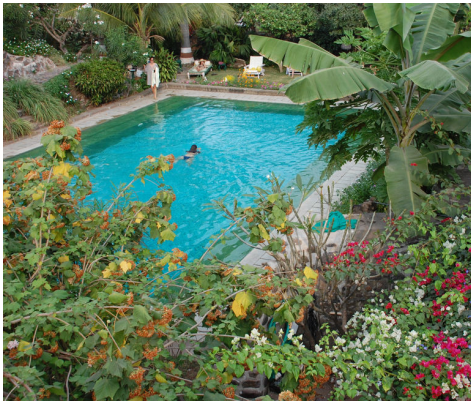
Bhopal is located on the shores of three lakes. About a quarter of Bhopal's population is Muslim and this place is home to interesting history: four female Islamic rulers, known as the Begums of Bhopal, developed the city in the 19th and early 20th centuries. North of the lakes is the old city, a labyrinth of mosques and bustling bazaars. South of the lakes is more modern, with wide roads, some excellent museums, and upmarket hotels and restaurants nestled comfortably in the Arera and Shyamla Hills (where we are staying). Bhopal is one of the greatest centres of art and culture in India, and is well endowed with art galleries, museums and theatres.

DAY 11 • Wednesday 20th November

Bhopal: This morning we will drive south of Bhopal to see the Paleolithic rock shelters of Bhimbetka, located high above the plains in the jungle foothills of the Vindhyan Mountains (1 hr drive). These UNESCO World Heritage caves offer up a staggering array of rock art, varying in age from 12,000BC to 300AD. There are over 700 different caves and the rock art contained within them is thought to be some of the oldest in the world. They resemble those found in Australia's Kakadu National Park and France's Upper Palaeolithic Lascaux cave paintings.

This afternoon, we will explore Bhopal. The city is built around green hills and lakes and is home to some of central India's most beautiful architecture. Echoing Lahore, Peshawar and old Delhi, the streets of the old town are a colourful labyrinth of narrow streets and fascinating bazaars, spectacular mosques and exquisite palaces.

Accommodation: *Jehan Numa Palace Hotel (Palace Room)* | *Meals included: Breakfast*



AHILYA FORT, MAHESHWAR

DAY 12 • Thursday 21st November

Bhopal – Maheshwar: We drive to Maheshwar this morning (6 hr drive). After lunch there will be time to stroll through the courtyards and gardens, have a swim in the pool or a game of petanque, claim a secluded nook to read your book, watch the activity on the river below or have an afternoon snooze.

Tonight, we will walk down to the river and set off in hand-poled traditional wooden boats, gliding through hundreds of flickering lamps, whilst being serenaded by local musicians, for a special dinner by candlelight in a nobleman's private garden.

Accommodation: *Ahilya Fort Heritage Hotel (Princely Superior Room)* / *Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Ahilya Fort Heritage Hotel

Mick Jagger, Demi Moore and Sting have all stayed here, and this year, it joined Condé Nast Traveller's India Gold List 2024 as one of the top 5 hotels in India ("a preferred redoubt of the well-travelled"). It has also been listed on 'Best Hotels in the World – Town & Country Travel 100', 'Best Hotels in India, The Telegraph UK' ("Prince Richard Holkar runs the best heritage hotel in India") and 'Travel + Leisure: Editor's Choice Awards: The Hot 30'.

This 18th-century sandstone fort on the banks of the Narmada River was restored by the descendants of Queen Ahilyabai Holkar, of the Maratha Empire. Since its partial conversion to a hotel by Prince Richard Holkar in 2000, it's become a place to sink into the slower, spiritual side of India—on birdsong-filled terraced gardens over-looking the river or in the fort's 250-year-old Ganesh temple, with its enormous bell suspended from an ancient champa tree.

Nineteen rooms are scattered over six buildings and intricate maze-like ramparts. The prince is intimately involved, designing and planting the hotel gardens and insisting on conscious hospitality, from strict rules around plastics and waste water to supporting the local Rehwa Society, which has revived the dying art of Maheshwari hand-weaving. Lunch is generally light western fare prepared with produce gathered in the morning from the organic garden. Dinner is a traditional thali with regional specialities and dishes prepared with a 'Holkar twist'. Meals are served in surprising nooks: in the garden, under a lush canopy of vines, or on a rounded rampart. There are modern baths and comfortable beds with mosquito nets, yet the traditional simplicity of this 18th century royal dwelling is preserved. It is one of the loveliest places to stay in India.

Maheshwar

The peaceful riverside town of Maheshwar has long held spiritual significance – it is mentioned in the Mahabharata and Ramayana, and still draws sadhus and pilgrims to its ancient ghats and temples on the holy Narmada River. Away from the ghats and historic buildings, brightly painted wooden houses with overhanging balconies line the streets. Maheshwar is a captivating place that packs a lot of punch in a very small area. The ghats are a whirl of colour and interest and the compact old quarter is a pleasure to explore. In many ways, Maheshwar is a sort of refined, spit-shone Varanasi in miniature and it is well off the beaten tourist path. A place to encounter old India at its best.

DAY 13 • Friday 22nd November

Maheshwar: This morning we will attend Lingarchan Puja, a daily ritual dating from the time of Queen Ahilya Bai which is still performed every morning by eleven Brahmins. They painstakingly make thousands of shivalings out of earth, which culminates in prayers asking for the protection of the inhabitants of the Holkar State.



TEXTILES

Afterwards we will visit the Rehwa Society and the Ahilya School (5 min walk). The not-for-profit Rehwa Society was started in the late 1970s by Sally and Richard Holkar, with the objective of reviving the ancient hand weaving craft of Maheshwar and giving employment to women. Today over 80 weavers are at work, whilst their children are at school next door, and these beautiful textiles are famous throughout India. We will then explore Maheshwar on foot.

We will cross the river (20 min boat ride) for a walk through local villages and the surrounding countryside this afternoon (45 mins walk). The at sunset we will go for a boat ride to Baneshwar Temple, considered to be the Centre of the Universe. Watch the sun setting as we glide down the Narmada to the temple. Afternoon tea will be served and we will release oil lamps as an offering to the river.

Accommodation: *Abilya Fort Heritage Hotel (Princely Superior Room) / Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

DAY 14 • Saturday 23rd November

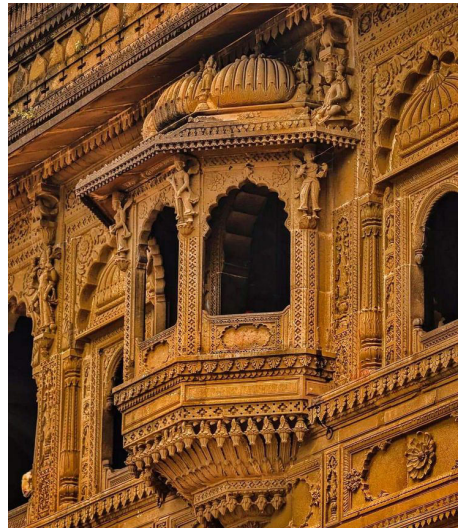
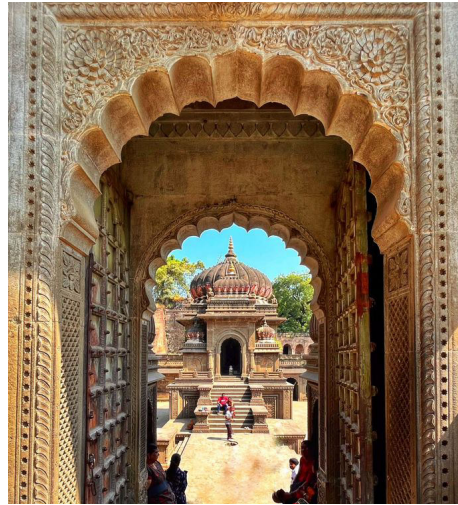
Maheshwar – Mandu – Indore: India is awash with ruined cities that expose the glory of past empires. Karnataka has Hampi, where Hindu Vijayanagar fell to the Deccan sultanates in 1565, and Uttar Pradesh has Fatehpur Sikri, the once-grand capital abandoned by the Mughal emperor Akbar in 1585. Not to be outdone, Madhya Pradesh serves up its own achingly atmospheric lost city at Mandu, perched atop a green-capped plateau rising between rocky ravines.

Founded by Afghani rulers, Mandu rose as an independent kingdom in the early 15th century, and its rulers filled the plateau with palaces, mosques and mausoleums of striking grace and sensitivity before finally being abandoned in the 1730s. We will drive here this morning (1hr 10 mins). It is possible that we may have Mandu almost entirely to ourselves to experience the ruined archways that open into ceremonial courtyards, stepwells and sundered pleasure gardens.

We have organised a special farewell lunch to celebrate and reflect on our travels before we say goodbye – an elegant al fresco picnic (laid out with tables and chairs, linen, glassware and cutlery), served by a uniformed waiter, at one of Mandu's secluded ruins, with a breathtaking view of the plateau below.

Afterwards we will drive to Indore airport (1hr 50min hours) for your departure flight to connect with your international flight home.

Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch*



MANDU AND MAHESHWAR

POST-TOUR EXTENSION: MUMBAI (BOMBAY)

AT A GLANCE:

- Visit Mumbai with tour leader Nicky Court, co-host Kinny Sandhu and local experts
- Sunday, 23rd November – Wednesday, 26th January (3 nights)
- AUD\$3,600 per person, twin share
- AUD\$1,200 single supplement
- Post-Tour Extension inclusions: Domestic airfare (Indore to Mumbai economy-class return) with 20 kg luggage allowance, accommodation, meals, touring, activities and admissions, as indicated on the itinerary below, as well as air-conditioned ground transport with expert driver, tips and gratuities, and airport transfer
- Minimum of 6 guests (revised pricing will be offered if there are less than 6 guests)

DAY 14 • Saturday 23rd November

Indore – Mumbai: For those you who would like to explore Mumbai with tour leader Nicky Court, co-host Kinny Sandhu and specialist local guides:

Fly from Indore to Mumbai (1hr 25min flight) this afternoon. Evening at leisure.

Accommodation: *Taj Mahal Palace Hotel (Superior Room Sea View)* | *Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch*

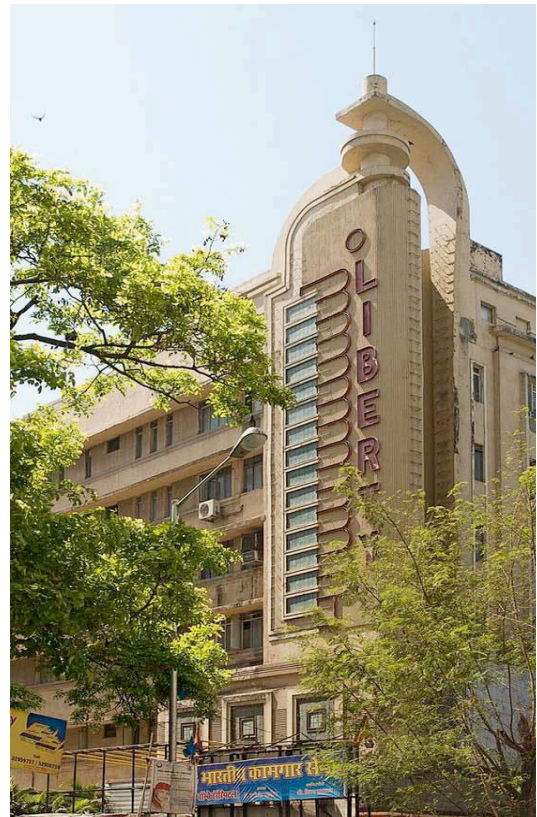
Taj Mahal Palace Hotel

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 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.



MUMBAI

DAY 15 • Sunday 24th November

Mumbai: We will head out early to experience the bustling morning life of Mumbai for a glimpse into the industrious nature of the city's inhabitants, their vibrant culture, community businesses and the logistics of food distribution.

The day will start at Sassoon Dock, to see the Koli fishing community in action – they sort, auction, and sell an astounding 120 tonnes of fish every morning. As we continue to explore, we will pass by hundreds of vendors sorting newspapers in seven different languages, encounter milkmen transporting their canisters and bread being distributed. And we will visit a bustling market where over 150 tonnes of fresh vegetables and fruits are sold daily.

Then we will share the intriguing history of the textile mill industry in Mumbai, which came into existence as a result of the American Civil War (yes, you read that correctly!) – the mills had a transformative impact on the city and its development. Lastly, we will experience the vibrant atmosphere of the city's largest wholesale flower market before heading back to our hotel.

This afternoon we will take you for a walk to explore the UNESCO World Heritage-listed areas nearby, including 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. We will also visit some of our favourite buildings including the Keneseth Eliyahu Synagogue, the recently restored David Sassoon Library and some of Mumbai's art deco treasures (Mumbai has the world's second-largest collection of Art Deco buildings, second only to Miami). We will finish with a wander through Kala Ghoda, the city's art district.

Accommodation: *Taj Mahal Palace Hotel (Superior Room Sea View) | Meals included: Breakfast*

DAY 16 • Monday 25th November

Mumbai: After a visit to the Asiatic Society, we will take a leisurely stroll to experience the charm of colonial Bombay before stopping at a traditional Irani café for delicious local snacks. Keep an eye out for something rather extraordinary – the sight of 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.

We will visit UNESCO World Heritage Site, and symbol of the city, the magnificent Victoria Terminus. Built in the 19th century in the High Victorian Gothic style, it was from here that the first Indian train departed. It is one of the busiest railway stations in India. Next up is the beautifully restored Afghan Church. Then we will end with a visit to the Dhobi Ghat, Mumbai's 140-year-old, open-air laundry. Each day half a million pieces of clothing are sent here. Home to the dhobis (laundrymen) and their families (around 200 families), the Dhobi Ghat has seen this occupation passed down from one generation to the next.

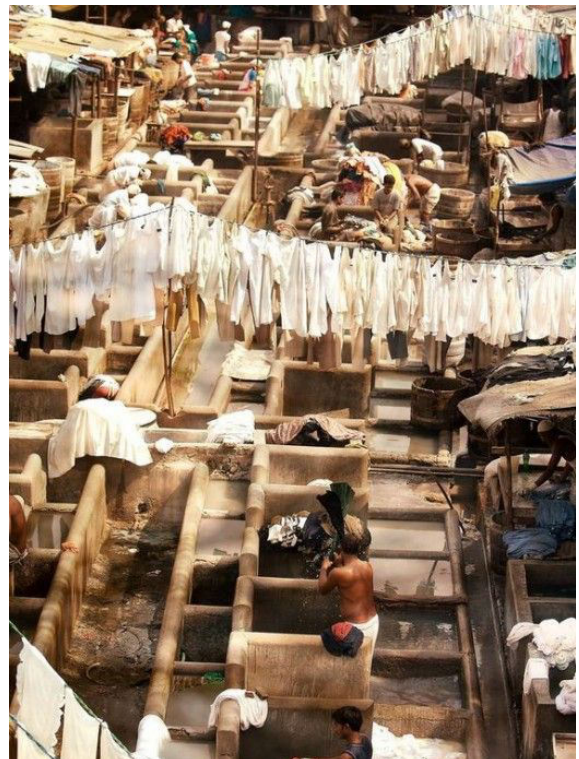
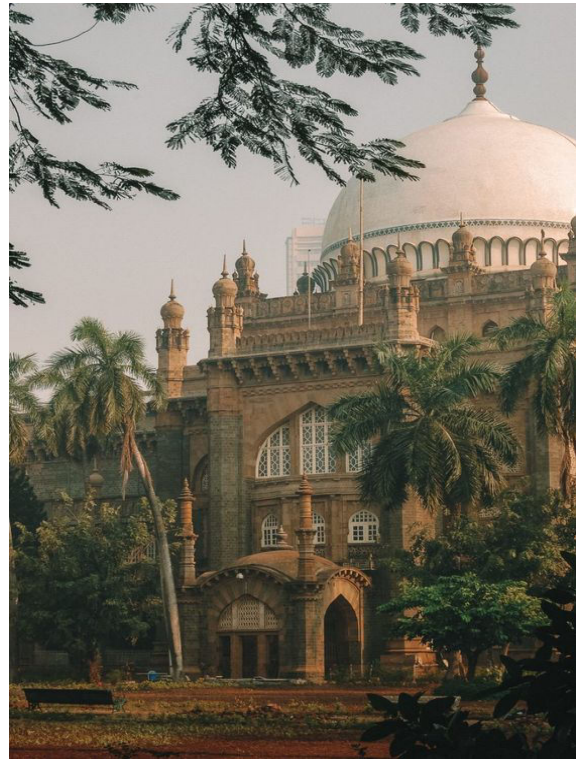
Enjoy a special farewell meal to celebrate and reflect on our travels before we say goodbye.

Accommodation: *Taj Mahal Palace Hotel (Superior Room Sea View) | Meals included: Breakfast, Farewell Meal*

DAY 17 • Tuesday 26th November

Mumbai: Enjoy a leisurely morning before we check out of the hotel by 12 noon, which concludes our tour. You will be transferred to the airport in an air-conditioned car.

Meals: *Breakfast*



MUMBAI

TOUR DETAILS

How to Book

- Please email Nicky Court to request a booking form:

nicky.le.court@gmail.com

- Deposits – to secure your booking, the following is required:
 - (a) AUD\$3,660 non-refundable deposit per person, at the time of booking
 - (b) Final balance payment for your tour is due 70 days prior to departure (1st September, 2024).
- Your payment schedule will be itemised on your invoice
- Full payment is required at the time of booking for reservations made less than 70 days before departure of trip. If Nicole Court Interior and Landscape Design Pty Ltd is unable to confirm your reservation, all deposit monies received by us will be refunded to you.

Tour Dates

- India Design Tour: Madhya Pradesh: November 10-23, 2024 (14 days, 13 nights)
- Post-Tour Extension (optional):
 - Mumbai, November 23-26, 2024 (3 nights)

Tour Inclusions

- 13 nights hotel accommodation, as indicated in the itinerary
- 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 and snacks
- Guided touring, activities and admissions, as indicated in the itinerary
- Airport arrival and departure transfers, as indicated in the itinerary
- Expert guides and drivers, including your tour leader Nicole Court and co-host Kinny Sandu; as well as the tour manager/guide who will be travelling with us; 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 130 days prior to the tour start date will incur loss of deposit
- Cancellations made 69 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 are required by 3rd July 2024 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 2024. 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 14 days 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 or credit payments towards alternative arrangements within 5 business days.

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 November 2024 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 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 entwined, 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, Kinny and the team. Highly recommended. A huge thank you. Heart open.

Suzanne Maher, Bellingen NSW (January 2024)

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)

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 and her co-host Kinny Sandhu 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 and Kinny 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 Kinny, 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)

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)