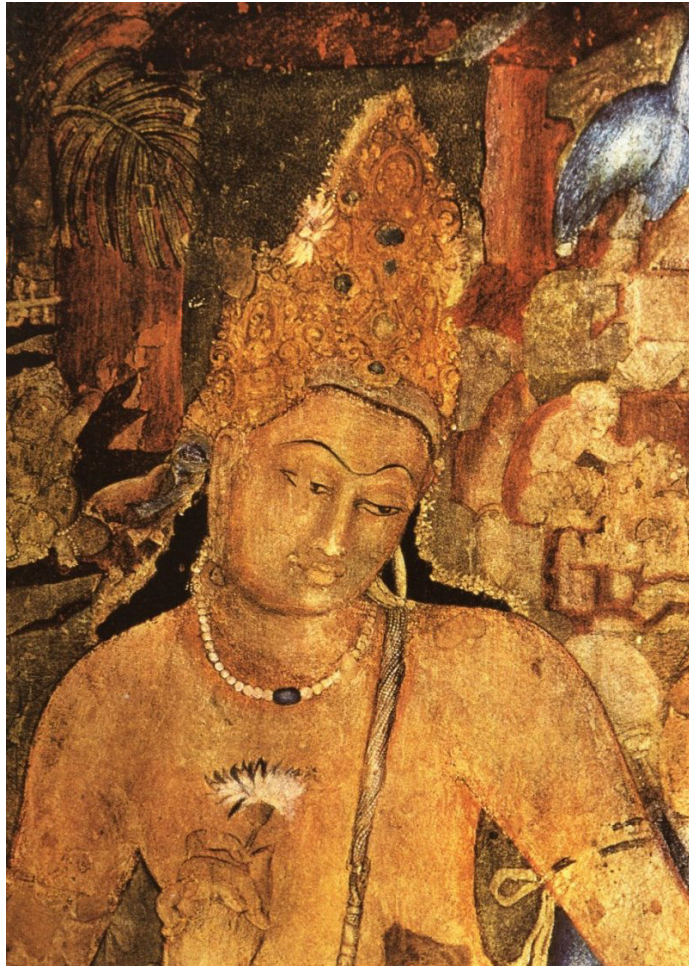




TOUR DATES:  
12-21 FEBRUARY  
2025

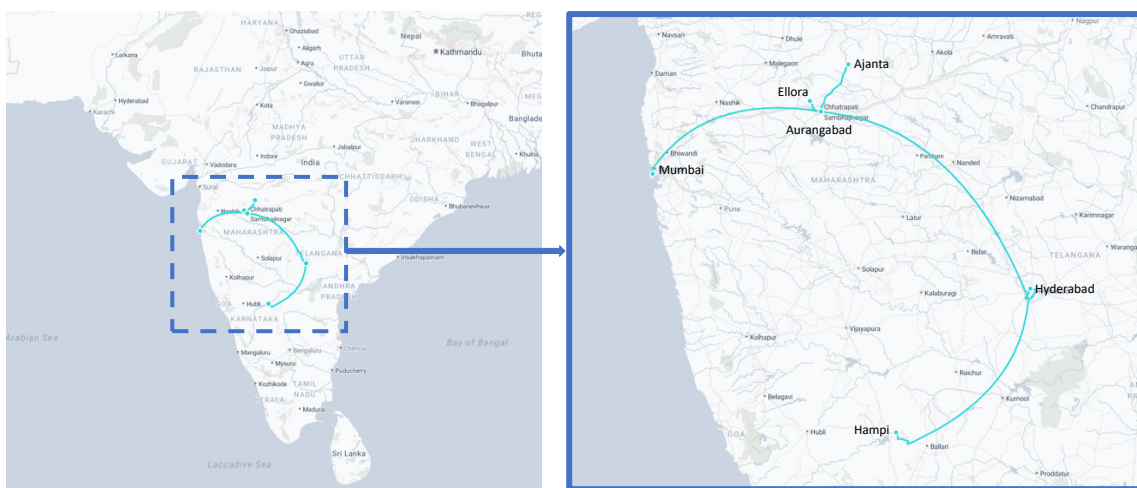


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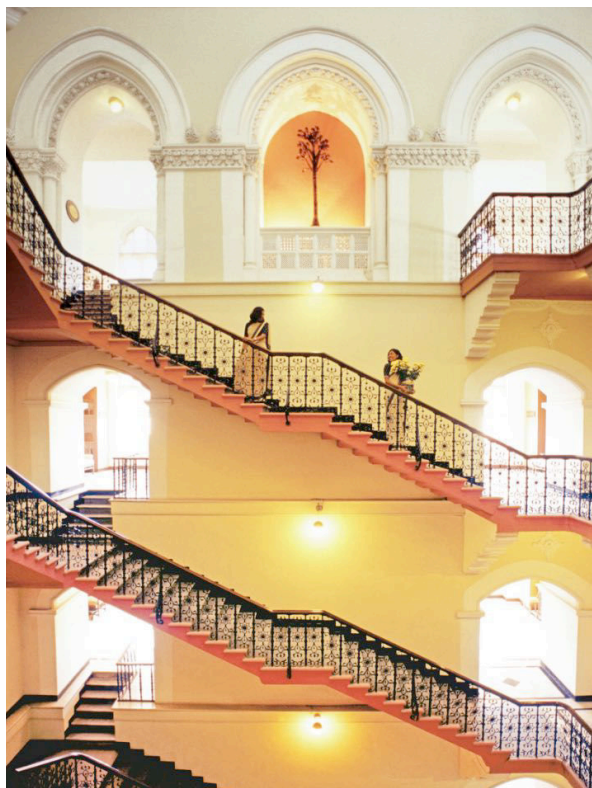
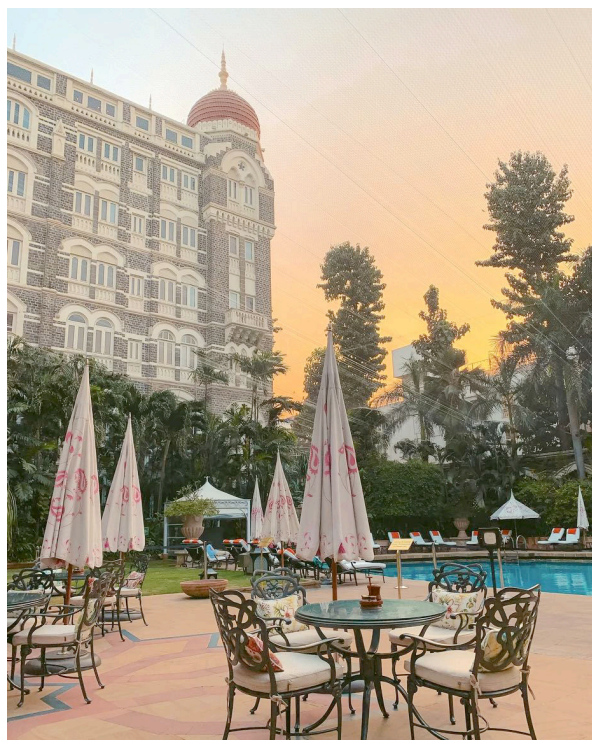
# Central India Design Tour

Art, architecture, design, history & the awe-inspiring landscapes  
of some of India's most extraordinary UNESCO World Heritage Sites



## AT A GLANCE

<b>Dates</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> to 21 <sup>st</sup> February 2025 (10 days, 9 nights)
<b>Hotels</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taj Mahal Palace Tower, Mumbai</li> <li>• Vivanta by Taj, Aurangabad</li> <li>• Taj Falaknuma Palace Hotel, Hyderabad</li> <li>• Evolve Back Kamalapura Palace, Hampi</li> </ul>
<b>Meals</b>	Breakfasts daily (9) lunches (1) and dinners (2), as per the itinerary
<b>Transport</b>	Four internal economy flights, air-conditioned car for airport transfers, air-conditioned coach and cars for ground transport, as per the itinerary
<b>Your Hosts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tour leader – landscape designer, Nicole Court (Sydney based)</li> <li>• Co-host – textile designer, Kinny Sandhu (Delhi based)</li> <li>• Tour manager/expert local guide</li> </ul>
<b>Group size</b>	A minimum of eight guests and a maximum of sixteen
<b>Pricing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AUD\$12,950 per person, twin share</li> <li>• AUD\$2,950 single supplement</li> </ul>
<b>Bookings</b>	A spot on this trip may be reserved with an AUD\$2,500 deposit (please refer to Tour Details on p21 for details of the full payment schedule).
<b>Itinerary Highlights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert guided art, architecture, garden, textile, decorative arts and history-focused tours that showcase the best of central India, including some of Ancient India’s most beautiful art sites – Ajanta Caves, Ellora Caves and the ruined city of Hampi</li> <li>• Visits to five UNESCO World Heritage sites and three tentative UNESCO World Heritage sites</li> <li>• Staying in India’s most luxurious hotels, including the iconic Taj Mahal Palace in Mumbai and the Falaknuma Palace (where the Nizam of Hyderabad hosted King George V and Queen Mary, and the last Emperor of Russia, Tsar Nicholas II)</li> <li>• Walk with a naturalist in one of India’s most extraordinary landscapes</li> <li>• Morning yoga classes</li> <li>• Listening to the haunting melodies and hypnotic rhythms of qawwali music, which is rooted in the mystical tradition of Sufism</li> <li>• Shopping for spices, perfume oils, slippers, fabrics, ribbons and pearls in the cobbled lanes of the bazaars of the old city of Hyderabad</li> </ul>
<b>Best time of year to visit?</b>	Sunny 25-33°C days and 17-20°C nights in February makes for lovely travelling weather.



TAJ MAHAL PALACE HOTEL, MUMBAI

**‘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 central India. We will show you India from a designer’s point of view.

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.

On this journey, there will be plenty of “National Geographic” moments when we visit some of India’s most breathtaking rock temples, forts and atmospheric ruins in the countryside, as well as experiencing the architecture, art galleries, food, shopping and glamour of India’s most fast-paced and cosmopolitan city, Mumbai. This will be a bucket-list trip, taking in some of the greatest UNESCO World Heritage sites in India. Most of these places see relatively little 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 Indian art to be found anywhere. 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*.

As well as celebrating the artistic and architectural wonders of India, our journey will, in the words of William Dalrymple in *The Golden Road*, ‘highlight India’s often forgotten position as a crucial economic fulcrum, and civilisational engine, at the heart of the ancient and early medieval worlds and as one of the main motors of global trade and cultural transmission in early world history, on par with, and equal to, China. Over the course of more than a thousand years, Indian religions, philosophies and sciences spread out in all directions and Indic religions have now dominated Asia’s religious, theological, philosophical, cultural, economic and political discourse for almost 2,000 years.’

The pace of the trip allows for plenty of lingering over tea on the terrace. From a candlelit dinner under a starry night sky in a boulder-strewn landscape scattered with exquisite ruins, listening to a Qawwali performance (the music of mystical Islam, played with the aim of achieving a state of spiritual ecstasy), having your own fragrance made from natural perfume oils made from flowers and herbs, 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, eating delicious local food, visiting the flower markets, having your butler draw you a rose and jasmine-infused bath in a one of India’s best palace hotels, to 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 8-16 guests – small enough to tailor boutique experiences but large enough to get to know an interesting group of people who share the same interests.

You don't have to be a designer to come with us - if you are interested in gardens, art, 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



MUMBAI ARCHITECTURE

## 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.

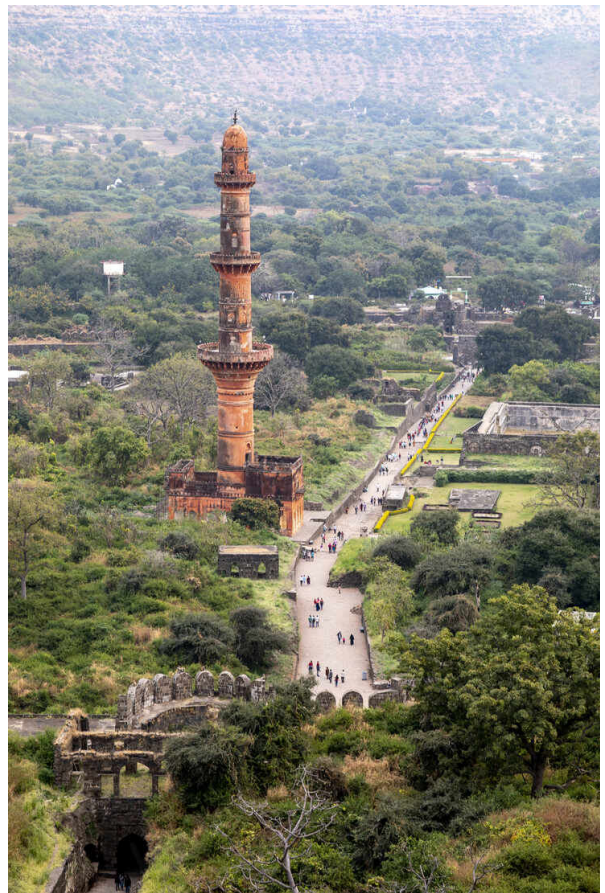
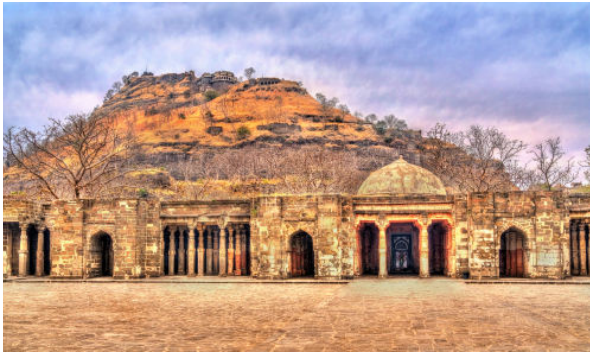
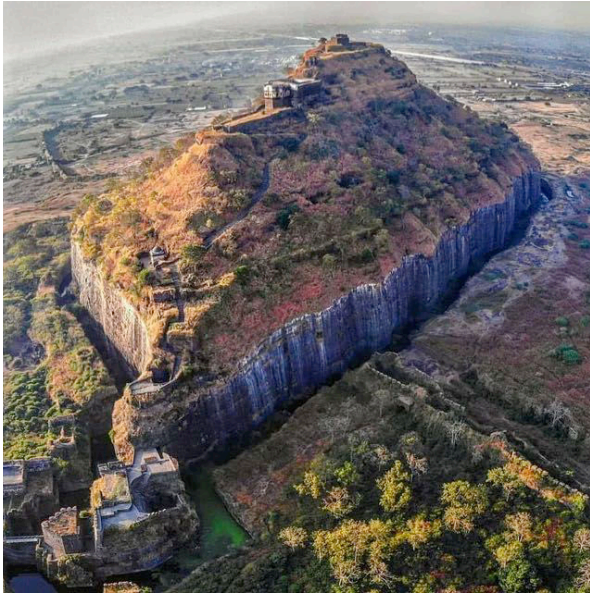
*Instagram: @nicolecourtdesign*

### 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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*



DAULATABAD

## ITINERARY

### DAY 1 • Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> February

A VIP experience awaits you on arrival at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj 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 Taj Mahal Tower in an air-conditioned car (approx. 40 minutes drive). Check in from 2 pm onwards.

**Accommodation:** *Taj Mahal Tower, Mumbai (Superior Room Sea View Room)*

#### *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 2 • Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> February

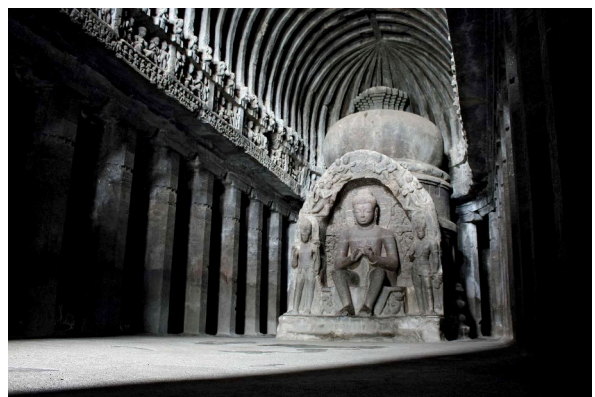
**Mumbai:** Leisurely morning at hotel, including a welcoming get-together where you will meet your hosts, Nicky Court and Kinny Sandhu, and fellow guests. Enjoy the heritage interiors and beautiful grounds of our iconic hotel, the Taj Mahal Palace. You might like to peruse the in-house art gallery, enjoy the views over Bombay Harbour or have a swim in the elegant pool.

This afternoon we will take you for a walk to visit the Keneseth Eliyahoo Synagogue, the recently restored David Sassoon Library and some of Mumbai's UNESCO World Heritage-listed 19<sup>th</sup> century High Victorian Gothic style and Art Deco buildings (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.

We fly from Mumbai to Aurangabad this evening (1 hr 5 mins).

**Accommodation:** *Vivanta by Taj, Aurangabad (Deluxe Room) | Meals included: Breakfast*





ELLORA CAVES

### *Vivanta by Taj, Aurangabad*

Vivanta by Taj is inspired by palace architecture and is the best hotel in Aurangabad. Rooms are luxurious and contemporary in their design, with views over lush gardens and 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 Bhamani dynasty in Daulatabad.

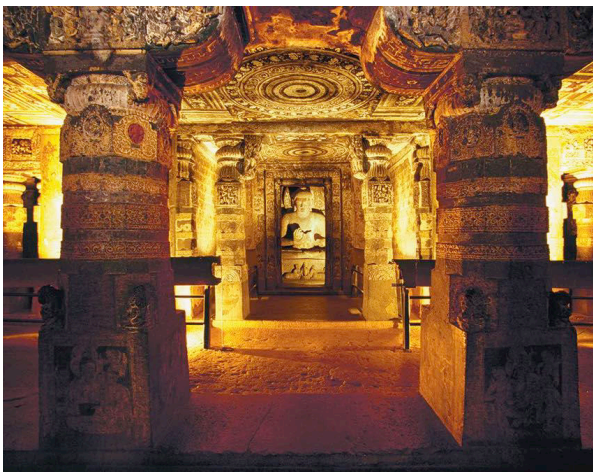
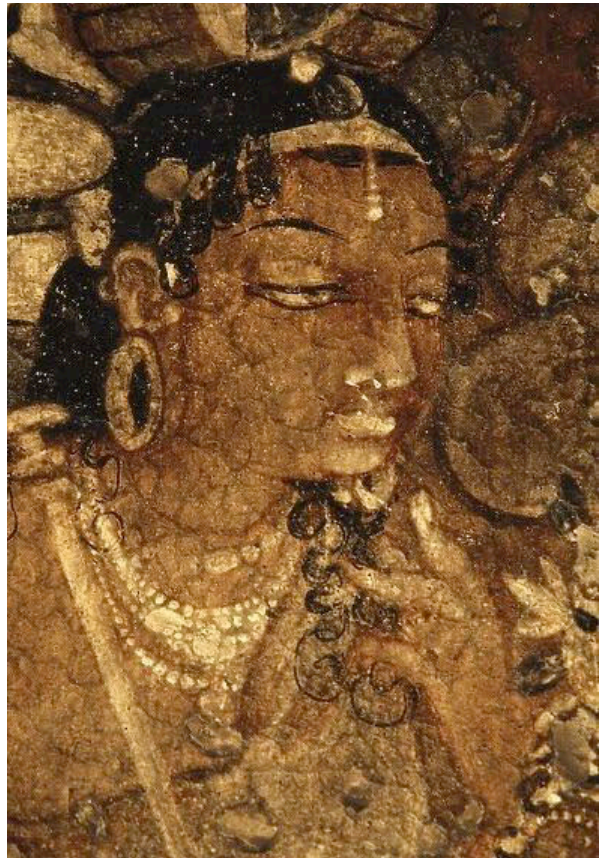
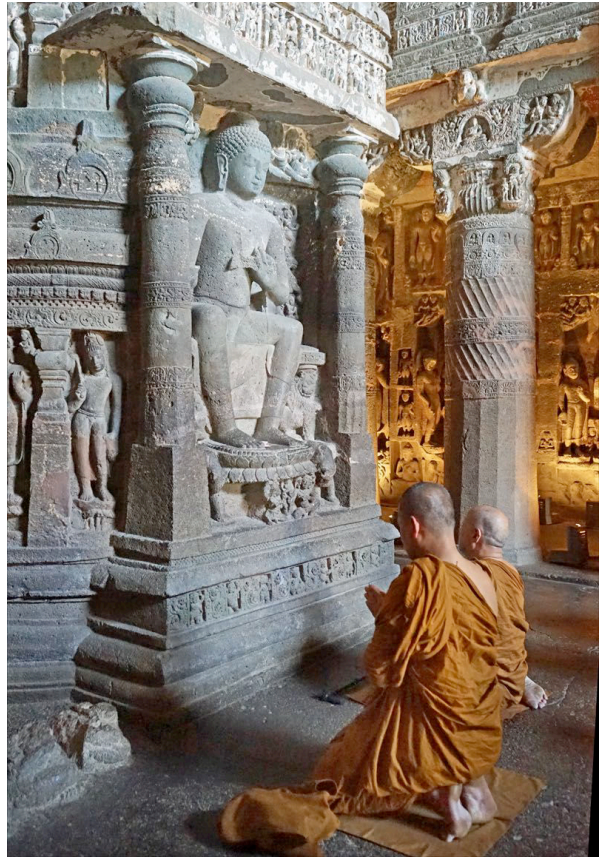
We will be based in Aurangabad for our visits to Daulatabad, the Ellora Caves and Ajanta Caves.

### **DAY 3 • Friday 14<sup>th</sup> February**

**Daulatabad:** This morning 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. Imagine what it must have looked like!

**Ellora Caves:** We will drive to Ellora afterwards (20 mins). These Buddhist, Hindu and Jain cave temples are among the most important monuments in India. An archaeological marvel spanning over 2 kilometres, it features 34 monasteries and temples intricately carved into the basalt cliffs and embellished with a profusion of remarkably detailed sculptures. Dating from A.D. 600 to 1000, this UNESCO World Heritage Site stands as an outstanding example of co-existence and religious tolerance.



THE PAINTED CAVES AT AJANTA

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.

**Accommodation:** *Vivanta by Taj, Aurangabad (Deluxe Room)* | *Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch*

#### **DAY 4 • Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> February**

**Ajanta Caves:** “The finest gallery of pictures to survive from any ancient civilisation” is how 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.

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:** *Vivanta by Taj, Aurangabad (Deluxe Room)* | *Meals included: Breakfast*

#### **DAY 5 • Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> February**

**Aurangabad – Hyderabad:** This morning we fly to Hyderabad (1 hr 25 mins). After we have settled into our fabulous hotel, the Falaknuma Palace, we will visit the old city. Steeped in history, thronged with people and buzzing with commerce, it is one of India's most evocative ancient quarters. 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). Looming over the old city is some of Islamic India's most impressive architecture (in varying states of repair) and nearby stands one of the largest mosques in India.

Old bazaars with narrow cobbled lanes lined with rows of tiny shops selling spices, grain, perfume oils and Hyderabad specialities surround the Charminar. The pearl market has varieties



TAJ FALAKNUMA PALACE HOTEL, HYDERABAD

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). We also will visit the Nimrah cafe and bakery for Irani chai and delicious Osmania biscuits, a Hyderabadi speciality.

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 (jalīs), this complex is an oasis of quiet and calm.

Later this afternoon, the Falaknuma Palace's resident historian will take us on a tour for an insight into the lifestyle of the Nizam's family. There is a magnificent dining room with a table that seats 101 guests, vast drawing rooms, the Jade Room, which houses a rare collection of gems and cut glass chandeliers, and the Nizam's library. It houses 6,000 books and is a replica of the library at Windsor Castle. The diverse collection includes books of Urdu poetry, Persian travelogues, HG Wells first editions, and the very first set of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 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.

You may like to ask your butler to draw you a rose and jasmine-infused bath tonight to finish a wonderful day.

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

### *Taj Falaknuma Palace*

Up on the hill, the Taj Falaknuma Palace is set amongst landscaped lawns and fragrant gardens full of strolling peacocks. 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.

This majestic hilltop palace, built in 1894 and formerly the residence of the super-rich sixth Nizam of Hyderabad, is now a serene luxury hotel. 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, 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.



SHOPPING IN THE BAZAARS OF HYDERABAD

**DAY 6 • Monday 17<sup>th</sup> February**

Start the day with a complimentary yoga class by the pool.

**Golconda:** This morning we will visit the greatest of all royal residences, Golconda Fort, which predates Hyderabad by centuries. One of India's most impressive fortified monuments, it is in ruins today, though its scale is tremendous. In the 16th century the Qutb Shahs made Golconda a fortified citadel, built atop a 120m-high granite hill surrounded by mighty ramparts, ringed by crenellated fortifications, 11km in perimeter. Golconda's massive gates were studded with iron spikes to obstruct war elephants. The views of the city from the fort are truly spectacular.

Once upon a time, the mines of Golconda were the only known source of diamonds in the world, and merchants from as far afield as Persia, Africa, the Ottoman Empire and Europe travelled here to purchase them. World famous gems that originated in the kingdom, and which were once stored in the Golconda sultan's treasuries, include the Koh-i-noor (now set in the British Crown Jewels), the Blue Hope Diamond ('Le Bleu de France', now on display at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC) and the Regent Diamond (set in the crown of King Louis XV for his coronation in 1722, and later mounted in the hilt of Napoleon Bonaparte's sword, where it became one of the most iconic symbols of French imperial power (now on display at the Louvre).

The immense wealth from the diamond trade funded a luxurious lifestyle for the Qutb Shahi sultans. The royal court was renowned for its extravagant banquets, intricate jewellery, and ornate clothing. The sultans were also known for commissioning elaborate architectural projects, including mosques, tombs, and royal baths, all of which reflected the dynasty's power and wealth. Golconda Fort has been nominated to become a UNESCO World Heritage site.

**Qutb Shahi tombs:** In the 16th century, while the Mughals were building grand fortifications, mausoleums and mosques in north India, the Qutb Shahi dynasty also built majestic structures in its capital, present-day Hyderabad. Builders and patrons of learning, the Qutb Shahi dynasty ruled the region for 169 years in the 16th and 17th centuries. The complex includes 40 mausoleums, 23 mosques, five baolis (step-wells), a hammam, pavilions and garden structures.

Eight years of dedicated effort by the Aga Kahn Trust and the Department of Heritage to conserve the historic monuments and step-wells, and to restore the landscape, including pathways, water bodies and green spaces covered with grass and fruit trees, has reinstated the original grandeur envisaged by the Qutb Shahi builders. We will visit this ambitious heritage project afternoon. It has been nominated to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We will head back to enjoy our fabulously restored palace hotel – you may like to go for a bicycle ride, swim in the beautiful pool, visit the royal garages to see the fleet of vintage cars or find a quiet spot in the gardens. You could also opt for a relaxing spa treatment or perhaps high tea in the Jade Room with its hand painted ceilings and Belgian cut glass chandeliers (at an extra cost).

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

**DAY 7 • Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> February**

**Hyderabad – Hampi:** Start the day with a peacock-spotting walk in the palace grounds, followed by a complimentary yoga class.

Later this morning we fly to Hubballi (1hr 30 mins) and then drive to Hampi (2hrs 45 mins).

**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.





HYDERABAD

## *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 16<sup>th</sup> 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, aqueducts, 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 8 • Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> February**

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

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 have organised a gentle walk up Hemakuta Hill to see the sunset this afternoon. From the top, there are 360° views over this hauntingly evocative landscape, with its distinctive boulders.

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

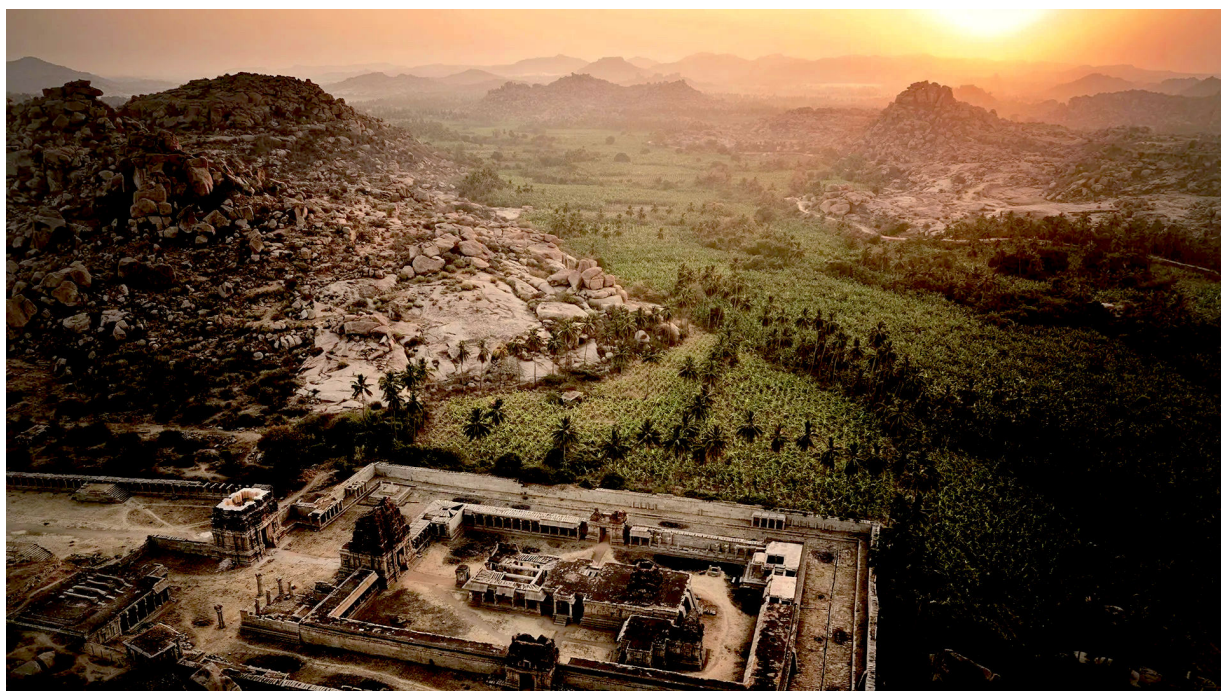
### **DAY 9 • Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> February**

**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.

There will be plenty of time to enjoy the hotel today. You may like to swim or relax and there will also 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, gardens, and a café.

We will enjoy a farewell dinner tonight to celebrate and reflect on our travels before we say goodbye tomorrow.

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



HAMPI'S BOULDER-STREWN LANDSCAPES

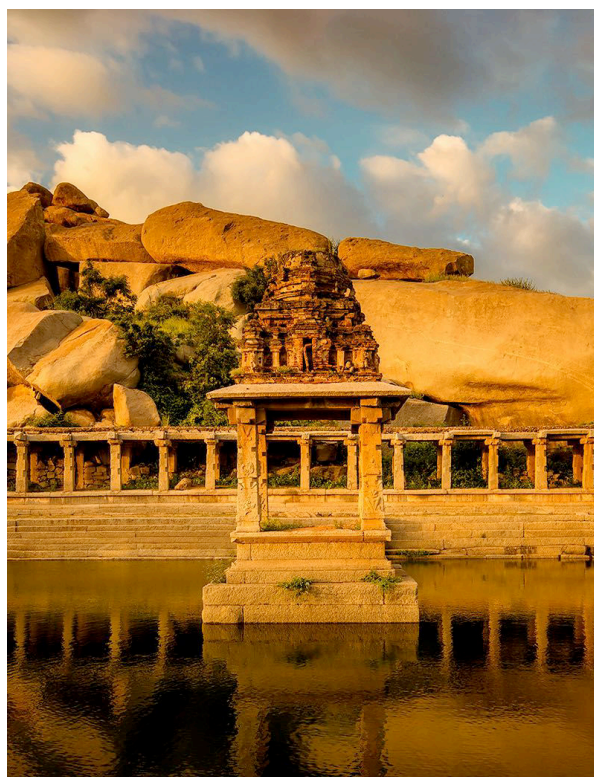
**DAY 10 • Friday 21<sup>st</sup> February**

**Hampi – Vidyanagar Airport:** We start the day with a guided nature walk that focuses on birdlife (over 200 species have been recorded here).

Later this morning we will drive to Vidyanagar Airport (45 mins) to catch a domestic flight to Bengaluru Airport, which will arrive in the early afternoon. This concludes our tour.

From here you can connect with your international flight home. This will work for those of you with flights departing in the late afternoon/early evening, or later tonight. Please confirm your preferred airline's flight departure for your homeward journey before booking, as our domestic flight time may be subject to change. If your preferred airline's flight home has a morning departure, or late night departure time, please get in touch if you would like an airport hotel recommendation.

**Meals:** *Breakfast*



HAMPI

## TOUR DETAILS

### How to Book

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

[nicole@nicolecourt.com.au](mailto:nicole@nicolecourt.com.au)

- Deposits – to secure your booking, the following is required:
  - (a) AUD\$2,500 non-refundable deposit per person, at the time of booking
  - (b) Final balance payment for your tour is due no later than 5<sup>th</sup> December 2024
- Your payment schedule will be itemised on your invoice
- Full payment is required at the time of booking for reservations made after 5<sup>th</sup> December 2024. 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: Central India – 12-21 February 2025 (10 days, 9 nights)

### Tour Inclusions

- 9 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
- Domestic airfares (4) with 20kg luggage allowance (economy class)
- 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 68 days prior to the tour start date will incur loss of deposit
- Cancellations made 68 to 0 days prior to the tour start date will incur a cancellation fee of 100% of the tour price
- A minimum number of 8 bookings is required by 20<sup>th</sup> November 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 26<sup>th</sup> November 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 10 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 February 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

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**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)**

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**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)**

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**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)**

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**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)**

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**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)**

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**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)**

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**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)**

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**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)**