

North India Women-only Cultural Tour 2013

Itinerary dates: October 24 – November 10, 2013

Highlights

- * Visit the iconic **Taj Mahal**
- * Enjoy a spectacular evening of **Diwali festivities** at Chambal Safari Lodge
- * Take a trip to the **ancient temple complex** at Bateshwar
- * Have **lunch at the home of a Jodhpur family**
- * Watch a **live Bollywood performance** which is a feast for the senses
- * Visit **handicraft workshops** benefiting a village's poor children

Itinerary

Day 1

October 24, 2013 – Arrive Delhi (Meals: none)

Upon arrival at the airport (usually late evening), you will be met by a driver and transferred to your hotel. Overnight at [Oberoi Maidens Hotel](#) or similar in Delhi.

Day 2

October 25, 2013 – Delhi (Meals: B, L, D)

On this, your first full day in India, the group will tour **both Old and New Delhi**. You'll start by visiting **New Delhi** with its **wide tree-lined boulevards** and upscale homes. You'll see **beautiful parks**, the magnificent **Parliament Building**, **Rashtrapati Bhawan** (the official residence of the President of India) and **India Gate**. You'll also see some of New Delhi's more interesting sites including **Qutab Minar**, the 72.5 meter tower that dates back to the 13th century, and **Humanyun's Tomb** (built in the 16th century).

After lunch, you'll tour Old Delhi which is filled with **street markets** and **bazaars** found among a **maze of narrow lanes**. You'll visit the famous **Red Fort**, the **Jama Masjid Mosque** and bustling **Chandni Chowk** – an area known for its variety of street stalls and shops – and take a rickshaw ride through this area.

You'll then experience Old Delhi during a **walking tour** and see it from a completely different perspective. You'll explore the gullies (streets) of **Shahjahanabad** and take a walk through a **local bazaar** with a chance to experience a variety of snacks (chat) and see some of the **oldest shops** producing these world-famous treats.

After the walking tour, you'll be welcomed into a **traditional Hindu home** (haveli) for a demonstration and tasting of home-style Indian vegetarian cooking. Though this is not a cooking lesson, you can participate in the preparation if you like. This haveli is a wonderful building built in the style of traditional Mughal architecture and is a very special chance to get a glimpse of daily life in the city. Dinner and overnight at [Oberoi Maidens Hotel](#) or similar in Delhi.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Today will be a **fantastic introduction** to not only the city of Delhi but also to India itself as you'll see a wide cross-section of life and culture.

Day 3

October 26, 2013 – Delhi – Jodhpur – Rohet (Meals: B, L, D)

After breakfast, the group will transfer to the airport to board a flight to **Jodhpur** (known as the Blue City because of the color of many of its buildings). Upon arrival, you'll make your way through the busy streets and proceed directly to the **home of a local family**. Here, you'll get to see what a **typical Rajasthani home** looks like, experience the **hospitality** for which India is so famous and enjoy a **lunch of traditional dishes** served in every Jodhpur house.

After lunch, you'll tour the area, visiting **Mehrangarh Fort** and **Jaswant Thada**, a marble memorial to Maharaja Jaswant Singh. Some sections of the thin marble walls are translucent (often referred to as something of a **miracle**). You'll also visit **Umaid Bhawan Palace** – the only Indian palace built in the mid-20th century and a good representation of Indo-colonial style.

In the late afternoon, you'll visit **Sambhali Trust** to learn about their projects.

NOTE – a portion of your tour cost will cover a donation made to Sambhali Trust. This organization provides underprivileged Rajasthani women and girls with educational, vocational and social skills to help them become confident and financially independent. They work specifically with Dalit (untouchable) women and girls, who usually have little or no access to education or basic health services.

In the afternoon, you'll drive to **Rohet**. Dinner and overnight at [Rohetgarh Hotel](#) or similar in Rohet.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** You'll be **deeply touched** by the good work of the Sambhali Trust and you'll get to learn about the confidence and skills the organization instills upon its beneficiaries.

Day 4

October 27, 2013 – Rohet (Meals: B, L, D)

You'll have the morning at leisure to enjoy and explore the small village of Rohet (and the beautiful hotel).

In the afternoon, you'll take a jeep safari to the nearby villages of **Rabari and Bishnoi**, where locals maintain very traditional tribal lifestyles.

Finally, in the afternoon, you'll indulge yourself in a hands-on cooking class followed by a wonderful dinner that you've helped prepare. Dinner and overnight at [Rohetgarh Hotel](#) or similar in Rohet.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** The **Bishnois** are a community famous for their **rich cultural Rajasthani life** and their true love for **nature and animals**. They are the protectors of this area which is dominated by deer and antelope, often seen grazing in the fields.

Day 5

October 28, 2013 – Rohet – Deogarh (Meals: B, L, D)

After an early breakfast, the group will drive to **Deogarh** (approximately 6 hours away). Upon arrival, you'll check in to your **magnificent hotel** – which is a castle that dates back to medieval Rajasthan – and enjoy lunch. In the afternoon, you'll have some **leisure time** to relax or perhaps hike in the hills or take a walk through the village.

In the evening there will be a **cultural performance** by local artists and musicians. Dinner and overnight at [Deogarh Mahal](#) in Deogarh.

Day 6

October 29, 2013 – Deogarh (Meals: B, L, D)

This will be another day to fully enjoy the area and take advantage of a number of activities available. This might include a **morning walk with breakfast** served along the way, a **Jeep drive** into the **peaceful countryside** or a walk in the woods or village. If you're interested, you may arrange (at your own expense) a **relaxing massage** by an expert Ayurvedic masseur from Kerala! Dinner and overnight at [Deogarh Mahal](#) in Deogarh.

Day 7

October 30, 2013 – Deogarh – Jaipur (Meals: B, L, D)

After breakfast, the group will drive to **Jaipur** (approximately 6 hours), stopping for lunch along the way. Upon arrival, you'll check in to the hotel and have time to freshen up before some sightseeing.

In the afternoon, you'll explore the **local colorful bazaar**. Here you can **souvenir shop** and also **sample some local vendor foods** and sweet treats. You may also get your hands **painted with henna** from roadside mehendiwalas (ladies that specialize in painting hands with henna). Dinner and overnight at the [Alsisar Haveli](#) or similar in Jaipur.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Known as the **Pink City**, the origins of Jaipur can be traced back to the 18th century, during the reign of Jai Singh II who ascended the Amber throne in 1699. Today it has grown into a bustling metropolis yet retains its character and charm. Jaipur is filled with **massive forts, magnificent palaces, exquisite temples** and **lush gardens**.

Day 8

October 31, 2013 – Jaipur

Today, you'll take a full day-tour of **Jaipur**, starting with the **Amber Fort**. You may ride an elephant or choose to walk the short distance to the **main palace**. This is an extremely well-preserved building and delightful to explore. You'll have a chance to visit the **Hall of Victory** (glittering with mirrors), **Jai Mahal** and the **Temple of Kali**.

In the afternoon, your city tour will continue with stops at the **Jantar Mantar** (Astronomical Observatory) and the **Maharaja's City Palace**. Dinner and overnight at the [Alsisar Haveli](#) or similar in Jaipur.

Day 9

November 1, 2013 – Jaipur – Kukas (Meals: B, L, D)

After a leisurely breakfast, you'll drive to the **sleepy village of Kukas** (about 1 hour away) and check in at the Tree of Life Resort. After a wonderful lunch, your afternoon is free to explore the local area by foot or you may choose to relax at the resort with its lovely spa.

In the late afternoon, the group will visit a **nearby village**, where you'll have an opportunity to visit a family and perhaps join them for a cup of tea in their home. Dinner and overnight at [Tree of Life Resort](#) in Kukas.

NOTE – There are limited rooms available at the Tree of Life. As a result, those joining the group late may incur an additional surcharge of approximately \$55 for a necessary room upgrade.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** The tree of life, common among many cultures, symbolizes eternal life. This resort is set on **7 serene acres of land** and was built using local architectural style and design – with extensive

use of sandstone and lime reflecting Rajasthan's long architectural history. It will be a **welcome break** from the hustle and bustle of India.

Day 10

November 2, 2013 – Kukas – Karauli (Meals: B, L, D)

Early in the morning, you'll have a chance to **take a yoga class**. For **yoginis of all levels**, this gentle routine will be a great way to start the day. After breakfast, you'll **visit the Kukas School** which is supported by the Tree of Life Resort. (Note that because this is Diwali Festival time, there's a chance the school will be closed on this day.)

Later, the group will drive about 4 hours to the ancient city of **Karauli**, in time for a late lunch.

In the afternoon, you'll walk or go by camel cart to see this **600-year-old city** where you can visit local handicraft shops such as those making **laquerware, bangles, wooden toys, bamboo items, traditional sweets** and more.

You'll then visit the 500-year-old **city palace** which is full of **frescos, fine stone carvings and paintings**. Before returning to the hotel, you may also visit the famous **Lord Krishna Temple** (Madan Mohan ji) which is in the city palace campus. At night there is an **evening Aarti** (prayer). Dinner and overnight at the [Bhanwar Vilas Palace](#) or similar in Karauli.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** **Karauli** is somewhat off the beaten path, therefore not as touristy as many places in India. But it's here you'll get a sense of **royal history and beauty**. Known for its red sandstone, it is also considered a **holy place** to many Indians.

Day 11

November 3, 2013 – Karauli – Chambal (Meals: B, L, D)

In the early morning, you'll have another option to take a **morning yoga class** on the palace terrace (from where you can also **view the sunrise!**).

After breakfast, you'll enjoy a tour of the area which includes an **organic dairy and farm** (including horses).

In the evening, the group will celebrate **Diwali**, the **festival of lights**, which is recognized all over India by welcoming the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi.

You'll **join a family for a Puja** (prayer) ceremony. There'll be an offering of flowers, sweets and money and the evening will end in a fireworks display.

Dinner and overnight at [Chambal Safari Lodge](#) in Chambal.

NOTE – Chambal is a bit more rustic than the other hotels on this tour but it is still quite comfortable.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** **Diwali** celebrations will be a highlight of the tour. You'll get to experience the **local culture and religion** during a very auspicious time. The night will be filled with a **sumptuous variety of traditional Indian cuisine** including home-cooked food and sweets! (Alcohol will be available but not included in the cost of the tour.)

Day 12

November 4, 2013 – Chambal (Meals: B, L, D)

Before breakfast, the group will head out to the nearby **Chambal River**, where you'll take a **boat ride**

along this protected waterway. **Trained naturalists** will accompany the group and provide expert information on the local wildlife. This is a very relaxing and special experience.

After the boat ride, you'll return to the lodge for breakfast and then have some **time to explore the beautiful surroundings**, perhaps visiting the nearby village or enjoying the peaceful garden.

In the late afternoon, the group will set out to visit the **Bateshwar Temples**, an ancient complex located on the Yamuna River. Dinner and overnight at [Chambal Safari Lodge](#) or similar in Chambal.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** The **Bateshwar Temples**, located just 6 miles away, include of more than **100 temples** dedicated to the **Hindu God, Shiva**. You'll be visiting during the **annual animal fair** which coincides with the most auspicious period for praying at Bateshwar and is an important time for saints, sadhus, tradesmen and villagers.

Day 13

November 5, 2013 – Chambal – Agra (Meals: B, L, D)

In the morning, the group will depart for **Agra**. Your first stop is **Agra Fort**, a massive structure with a 70-foot high, 1.5-mile long wall encompassing an astounding collection of well-preserved buildings, many of them completed during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan.

Later, you'll visit the **mausoleum of Itmad-Ud-Daulah** and then drive to **Mehtab Bagh** to see the Taj Mahal from the back side of Yamuna with the **Taj's reflection in the river**. Dinner and overnight at the [Radisson Blu](#) or similar in Agra.

★ **HIGHLIGHT! HIGHLIGHT!** The **Taj Mahal** is a breathtaking memorial to Shah Jahan's wife, Mumtaz Mahal. It took 22 years to complete and was designed and planned by Persian architect Ustad Isa. It's recognized for its **stunning design, perfect symmetry** and its **elegant domes, intricately carved screens** and some of the **best inlay work ever created**.

Day 14

November 6, 2013 – Agra – Delhi (Meals: B, L, D)

You'll get an early start on this day to enjoy **sunrise at the Taj Mahal**, the most iconic of all sights in India. You'll return to the hotel for breakfast and then drive to Delhi (approximately 4 hours). Depending on the time, lunch on this day will either be at a restaurant in Agra or midway between Agra and Delhi.

Upon arrival in Delhi, you'll check in to the hotel and will have some time to freshen up before going to see the **Kingdom of Dreams**, a Bollywood musical show which will be a spectacular evening as this theatrical performance is the **ultimate in Indian entertainment**. Located across acres of land, this event distills India into one program and brings to life a blend of India's art, culture, heritage, craft, cuisine and performing arts. Overnight at [Justa The Residence](#) or similar in Delhi.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** This **evening's spectacular extravaganza** will be a befitting end to your trip (a last hurrah, so to speak) if you are departing tomorrow but will get you excited to stay on if you are continuing to Varanasi.

Day 15

November 7, 2013 – Delhi – Flight home (or onward to Varanasi) (Meals: B, L, D)

On this last full day in India, you'll be taken on an **hour-long guided walk** of Delhi through the Salaam Baalak Trusty City Walk. This is led by a young person well-acquainted with street life. While this is a look at India's sadder side, it will be an **enlightening way** to leave the country as you'll have a better understanding of how people learn to survive in the city. All proceeds go directly to helping the Trust

that is behind putting together this tour. (Note that this is not a slum tour but a walk through neighborhoods.)

After lunch, you'll have the rest of the day free for **last minute souvenir shopping** and relaxing. Dinner is included on this day.

You'll have access to the hotel until 7 p.m. (unless overnighing as part of the Varanasi add-on, you'll overnight at [Justa The Residence](#) in Delhi) and you'll be transferred to the airport in time for your late night flight home.

If you are adding Varanasi on to your itinerary, the add-on includes this night in Delhi.



Add-on Option: Varanasi

Varanasi add-on cost includes one overnight in Delhi, 2 nights in Varanasi.

Day 16

November 8, 2013 – Delhi – Varanasi (Meals: B, L, D)

In the morning, you'll be transferred to the airport to board the short flight to **Varanasi**. Upon arrival at Varanasi, you'll check in to your hotel. **(Please note – we book this flight for you.)**

After lunch, you'll drive to **Sarnath**, one of the most **sacred places for Buddhists**. This is where Buddha gave his **first sermon** after attaining enlightenment. You'll visit famous **Dhamaekha Stupa**, **Moolgandha Kuti Vihar** and the **Sarnath Museum**, which has a rich **collection of antiques** from ancient India.

In the late afternoon, you'll return to **Varanasi** and, in the evening, visit the **Ganges** where you'll take an unforgettable **sunset boat ride** before witnessing the evening **Aarti (prayer) ceremony**. Dinner and overnight at [Gateway Hotel Ganges](#) or similar in Varanasi.

★ HIGHLIGHT! The **Aarti** is a Hindu devotional hymn normally sung at the conclusion of any religious ceremony or puja, or simply by itself at sunrise or sunset. This is an **incredibly spiritual event** and one you won't forget.

Day 17

November 9, 2013 – Varanasi (Meals: B, L, D)

In the early morning, you'll drive to **Daswamedh Ghat** and take a boat ride on the Ganges again, this time to see the **cremation Ghats** and to witness the long-held traditions of one of the world's oldest and most important religions. You'll enjoy **sunrise while boating** on the river.

Later in the morning, you'll visit the **Kashi Vishwanath Temple** which is on the way back to the hotel.

In the afternoon, you'll be treated to a **city tour** that includes a visit to **Bharat Mata Mandir** (Mother India Temple), **Durga Temple** and **Benares Hindu University**. Dinner and overnight at [Gateway Hotel Ganges](#) or similar in Varanasi.

Day 18

November 10, 2013 – Varanasi – Delhi (Meals: B, L, D)

In the morning, you'll spend time along the **Ghats** and have one last chance to photograph the pilgrims and devotees as well as the bazaar, filled with **food, religious items** and **souvenirs**.

Today you'll also have a chance to **meet with an astrologer** to see what your future holds!

In the afternoon, you'll transfer to the airport to board your flight for Delhi.

Once in Delhi, you'll check into a hotel to freshen up before transferring to the airport for your evening flight home OR stay the night (additional \$50/double per person or \$65/single) for a flight the following day.

**** Itinerary and hotels subject to change without notice.**