



# ROCKJUMPER

Wildlife Tours

India

Nature Manitoba

13<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> March 2019 (12 Days / 11 Nights)



Tiger by Adam Riley

## Introduction

Home to over a billion people in arguably the world's richest cultural landscape, India is a country with no equal. This great nation boasts a staggering geographical diversity ranging from deserts and forests to tropical, palm-lined shores and snow-capped peaks. India is of course also famous for its rich avifauna and iconic mammalian megafauna, foremost of which is the regal Bengal Tiger.

This majestic cat, the largest of all felines, may sadly be the first of the big cats that we condemn to extinction, and the opportunity to encounter this magnificent beast is the apex of India's wildlife highlights. This tour includes the famous Ranthambore National Park, where excellent opportunities exist for seeing Tiger. Bandhavgarh, located in the state of Madhya Pradesh within the heart of India, is widely considered another of the best reserves to encounter this threatened species. We will of course not ignore the other wildlife of these bountiful reserves and excellent chances exist for other iconic species such as Leopard, Dhole (Indian Wild Dog) and Sloth Bear to mention a few.

Our tour also takes a look at India's rich cultural heritage as we take in iconic sites such as the magnificent Taj Mahal and Fatehpur Sikri. In addition to this, incredible birding opportunities exist within the various tiger reserves and at sites like Bharatpur, where the stately Sarus Crane and a plethora of migratory waterbirds can be found.

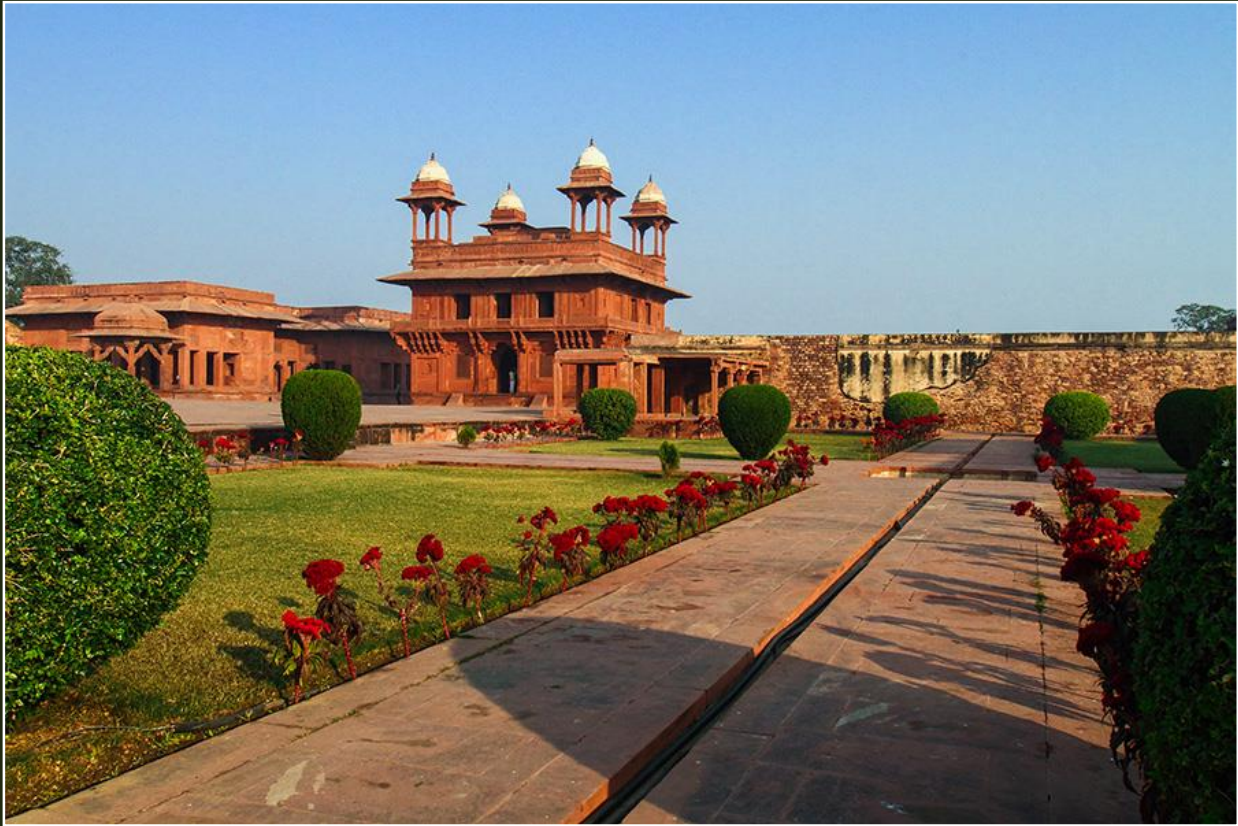
This exciting tour visits some of the most remarkable cultural and wildlife sites in this fascinating country, and promises to be a trip of a lifetime!

## Your tour at a glance

Itinerary Outline: India Nature Manitoba	
Day 1	Arrival in Delhi and overnight
Day 2	Delhi to Ranthambore National Park via train
Day 3 & 4	Ranthambore National Park
Day 5	Ranthambore to Bharatpur via train
Day 6	Bharatpur to Agra via Fatehpur Sikri
Day 7	Agra and overnight train to Jabalpur
Day 8	Jabalpur to Bandhavgarh
Day 9 & 10	Bandhavgarh
Day 11	Bandhavgarh to Khajuraho
Day 12	Khajuraho to Delhi and depart



## Your main tour in detail



Fatehpur Sikri by Markus Lilje

### Day 1: Arrival in Delhi and overnight

On arrival in the bustling capital city of Delhi, we will transfer to our hotel for the night where we can rest and prepare for our exciting Indian adventure.

*Overnight Ashok Country Resort or similar*

### Day 2: Delhi to Ranthambore National Park via train

We will catch the express train to Ranthambore this morning departing at 07h40. Located in the Sawai Madhopur district of south-eastern Rajasthan, Ranthambore National Park is one of India's largest parks, protecting over 380 square kilometres (almost 1400 square kilometres including the buffer zone) of a rich mosaic of deciduous woodland, bamboo thickets, lakes and marshes. Dominated by the 10th century Ranthambore Fort which sits atop a plateau 700ft above the plains, this scenic reserve contains high concentrations of herbivores such as Chital (Spotted Deer), Sambar and Wild Boar, and it is this abundance of prey species that supports one of the healthiest populations of Tiger anywhere on Earth. Over 60 Tigers currently inhabit the park, quite a few of which are habituated to the presence of tourists, and this afternoon will be our first opportunity to view this cat, often regarded as the most spectacular of all the world's felines!

*Overnight Ranthambore Kothi*

### **Day 3 & 4: Ranthambore National Park**

We have two exciting days to explore the park for Tigers, enjoying the area's prolific wildlife as we go. The rangers will be on the lookout for tell-tale signs such as pugmarks or scat in the road, and will be ever alert for the alarm calls of Sambar, Chital and Hanuman Langur - a type of monkey that occurs in these beautiful woodlands. With luck, these will lead us to a Tiger padding along a dusty track or sprawled out in the dappled sunlight of a bamboo thicket. Looking into the amber eyes of this, the largest of all the cats, undoubtedly ranks as one of the world's ultimate wildlife experiences, and is sure to keep us enthralled!

Although the relatively open nature of the terrain accounts in part for Ranthambore's high rate of Tiger sightings, it is the reserve's skilled team of mahouts (elephant handlers) and local guides that has made it one of the foremost parks for seeing this elusive predator. In addition to Tigers and their favourite prey species, we may also come upon Indian Muntjac (Common Barking Deer), Chinkara (Indian Gazelle), Nilgai, Jungle Cat, Golden Jackal, Common Palm Civet, Striped Hyena and if we are extremely fortunate, Leopard and Sloth Bear. The interesting mixture of deciduous woodland and chauras (small wetlands) on the valley floors support good numbers of birds, with arguably the most spectacular of all being the resplendent Indian Peafowl, which is both gaudy and noisy!



**Leopards by Rich Lindie**

Each day we will fortify ourselves with an excellent buffet breakfast before heading into the park, returning late morning for lunch and some downtime, with an afternoon excursion back into the national park.

*Nights Ranthambore Kothi*

**Day 5: Ranthambore to Bharatpur via train**

After a final morning in the park, we will catch an afternoon train to Bharatpur, this journey takes us to our accommodation near the incredible Bharatpur National Park, where we will commence our exploration in the afternoon.

Usually known simply as “Bharatpur,” a former Maharaja of Bharatpur artificially created the extensive series of shallow ponds as a duck-shooting preserve, but now form part of a wetland sanctuary attracting thousands of wintering waterfowl, waders, cranes, and raptors, as well as a variety of other species in the surrounding woodland.

We will explore the reserve on foot and by means of cycle rickshaw, following the network of raised dykes that criss-cross the labyrinth of ponds. Antelope such as the Nilgai (the mature males are also called Blue Bulls due to their blue-grey color) and Chital (an Indian sub-continent endemic, also known as Spotted Deer) can be seen, and we will likely be overwhelmed by the staggering numbers and variety geese, ducks, storks, cormorants, jacanas, darters, kingfishers, and herons.

*Overnight The Bagh*

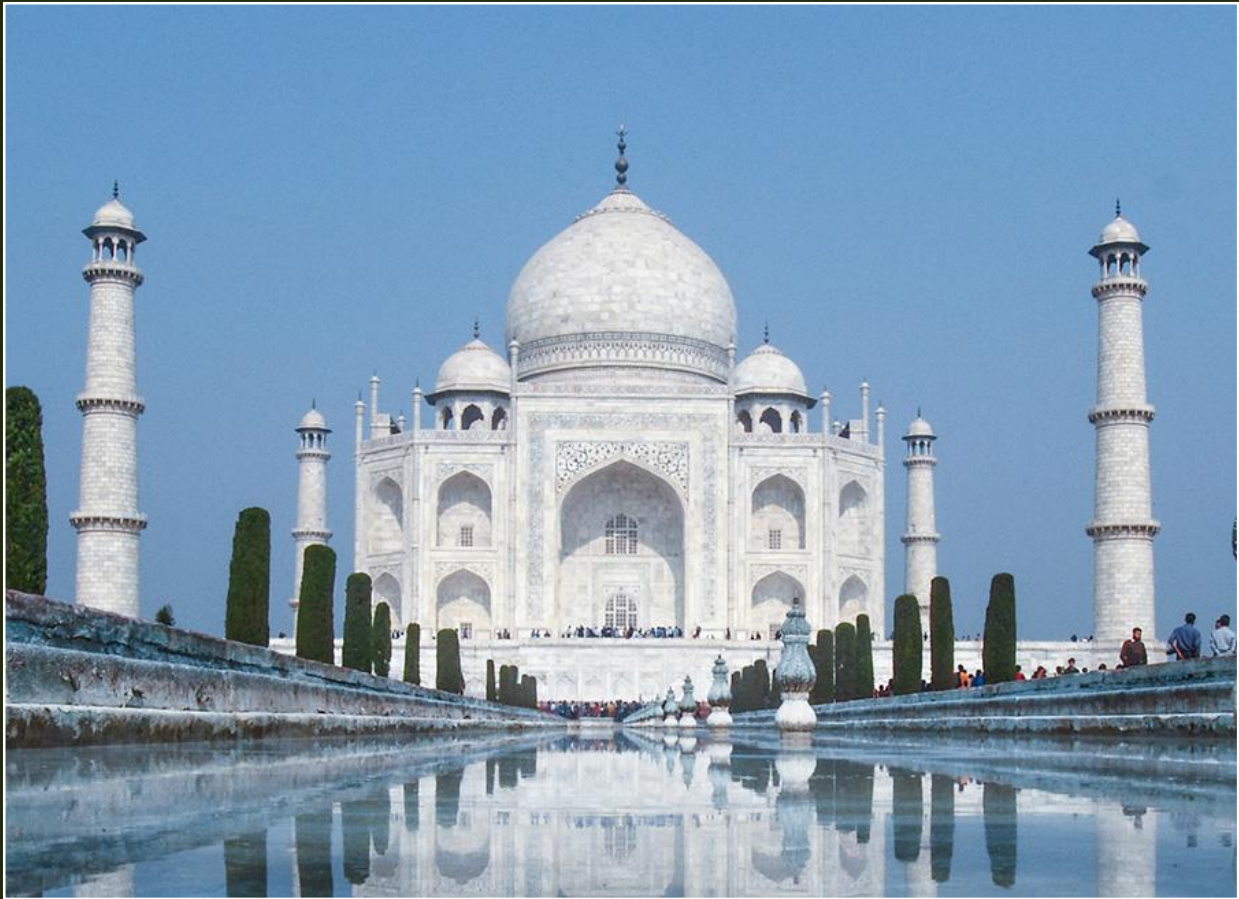


**Chital (Spotted Deer) by Adam Riley**

**Day 6: Bharatpur to Agra via Fatehpur Sikri**

We spend the morning exploring the riches of this amazing reserve. The marshy edges attract a variety of migrant passerines such as the secretive Bluethroat, numerous warblers and 5 species of wagtail, whilst a number of swallows hawk insects overhead. Raptors are often especially well represented at Bharatpur, with concentrations of large migrant eagles that include Asian Imperial and Greater Spotted.

After our morning excursion, we will depart for Agra via Fatehpur Sikri (A UNESCO World Heritage Site). This historical city was constructed by Mughal emperor Akbar in 1570 and served as the empire's capital from 1571 until 1585. Though it took 15 years to build, it was abandoned after only 14 years because the water supply was unable to sustain the growing population. The city includes one of the largest mosques in India, the Jama Masjid; completed in 1571, it could accommodate some 10 000 people! In the mid 16th century and earlier 17th century AD, Agra witnessed a frenzied building activity and it was during this time when the symbol of love, the Taj Mahal was built.



**Taj Mahal by Markus Lilje**

It is often said that the Taj Mahal changes its colours by the minute depending upon the angle of sunrays and it is best seen either by sunset or sunrise. Although the lighting is best in the morning it would be well worth our while to visit the Taj at sunset. The most unusual story about the Taj, is that there might have been two of them. The emperor intended to build a second tomb in black marble, a negative image of the white Taj for Mumtaz. Tragically, before he could begin, he was deposed by his son and imprisoned in the Agra Fort where he remained until his death, spending the rest of his life looking out along the river to the final resting-place of his wife.

*Overnight Clarks Shiraz*

#### **Day 7: Agra and overnight train to Jabalpur**

Today we will rise early for morning coffee and prepare for a truly spectacular sight, the legendary Taj Mahal at daybreak. This white marble monument was built by the Shah Jahan as a memorial to his beloved wife, Mumtaz, and is famous for the elegance of its design and the immense

numbers of intricately carved and inlaid semi-precious stones that adorn its walls. This monument took 22 years to complete and was designed and planned by Persian architect Ustad Isa.

Later today we will visit Agra Fort which is found standing in the middle of the city limits, upriver from the Taj. This truly impressive sandstone fort serves as a constant reminder of the unique history of the region. Agra Fort is a massive structure with 70-foot high (21.34m), 1.5-mile (2.4km) long walls encompassing an astounding collection of well-preserved buildings, many of them completed during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan.

This evening we will catch our overnight train (refer to the 'Please note' section below for more details) to Jabalpur in anticipation of the spectacular Bandhavgarh National Park.

### *Overnight train*



**Tiger by Adam Riley**

### **Day 8: Jabalpur to Bandhavgarh**

After arriving in Jabalpur this morning, we will drive through to Bandhavgarh National Park. Set in the rugged Vindhya hills of central India's Deccan Plateau, Bandhavgarh National Park protects a rich mosaic of deciduous woodland, bamboo thickets, meadows and marshes. This park is an essential stop for any serious Tiger safari, and is renowned for one of India's highest concentrations of this magnificent animal. Although it is a relatively small park, it has a healthy tiger population and offers excellent chances for encountering this magnificent creature. This wonderful reserve also contains high concentrations of herbivores such as Spotted Deer, Sambar and Wild Boar, and it is this abundance of prey species that in turn supports such a large population of Bengal Tigers.

### *Overnight Tiger Den Resort*

## **Day 9 & 10: Bandhavgarh National Park**

Locating the magnificent Bengal Tiger – our quest for the next few days – requires a combination of skill, patience and a sprinkling of luck. Our strategy for finding Tigers in Bandhavgarh will be rather similar to Ranthambore and the open nature of the reserve and network of roads assists us well in our quest.

If we are lucky we may also encounter Dhole (also known as Indian Wild Dog), the sought-after Sloth Bear or the much more frequently encountered Jungle Cat. Leopard, although normally elusive, do occur and we will be sure to keep an eye out for this stunning feline. Indian Fox and Golden Jackal are amongst the other special mammals we hope to encounter; while Bandhavgarh is also home to small numbers of Chausingha (Four-horned Antelope). Hanuman Langur should provide for some amusing encounters and we will be sure to listen out for their “alarm calls”, which may signal the presence of a predator!



**Indian Peafowl by David Hoddinott**

Bandhavgarh also has an interesting mixture of birds in its wide habitat variety including the stunning Painted Spurfowl, Black-rumped Flameback, Indian Scimitar Babbler, Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Crested Serpent Eagle, migratory Long-tailed Shrike, Common Iora, White-bellied and Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, the active White-browed Fantail and both Pale-billed and Thick-billed Flowerpeckers. The gorgeous Indian Peafowl known for its long tail feathers and impressive courtship displays is no doubt one of the star birds.

During our stay, we will take time to visit the Bandhavgarh Fort at the highest point in the park as well as Shesh Shaiya, a 12-metre-long reclining statue of Lord Vishnu!

*Nights Tiger Den Resort*

### Day 11: Bandhavgarh to Khajuraho

We have a final early morning to enjoy the riches of this magnificent reserve. After breakfast, we will then drive to Khajuraho, where we will transfer to our hotel for the night.

*Overnight Clarks Khajuraho*

### Day 12: Khajuraho to Delhi and depart

This morning we spend some time at the temples in this area. These fabulous and ancient structures are well known for their erotic carvings but also showcase some amazing artworks. Around midday, we will then catch a flight to Delhi arriving around 16h20, from where the tour will conclude and we will depart on our flights home.

## Financial arrangements

The fee for the 12-day **Private Nature Manitoba Fundraising India Exploration 2019** is:

- **US\$7,150.00 per person sharing** based on 4 participants & 1 Rockjumper Wildlife tour leader
- **US\$6,500.00 per person sharing** based on 5 participants & 1 Rockjumper Wildlife tour leader
- **US\$6,300.00 per person sharing** based on 6 participants & 1 Rockjumper Wildlife tour leader
- **US\$5,500.00 per person sharing** based on 7 participants & 1 Rockjumper Wildlife tour leader
- **US\$5,400.00 per person sharing** based on 8 participants & 1 Rockjumper Wildlife tour leader

The single supplement cost is **US\$695.00** and will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RWT cannot provide you with a rooming partner although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

### This tour includes:

- All accommodation as per the itinerary on a shared basis;
- All meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 12;
- All ground transport including cycle rickshaws at Bharatpur;
- Bottled water;
- All reserve and cultural site entrance fees;
- Gratuities for local staff, drivers, porters;
- Services of a specialised Rockjumper guide and a local English speaking guide/naturalist;

**This tour excludes:**

- International airfares;
- Internal flights (estimated at **US\$286** at time of writing –Khajuraho to Delhi);
- Any drinks other than bottled water;
- Visa fees; and
- Phone calls, laundry, personal purchases and other items of a personal nature;

**PLEASE NOTE:**

- a) The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold (**US\$**), and the actual cost in the other currencies will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency. Please note that even though internal flight costs have been quoted separately, the Rockjumper office will still book these flights for you at no extra charge.
- b) These costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.
- c) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary, accommodations and/or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

**TIPPING:**

As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, if you feel that your Rockjumper tour leader and/or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them. However, we emphasize that such tips should be at your own discretion and based solely on the level of your service satisfaction.

**ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE DETAILS:**

This tour does not include any international airfares. Day 1 of the tour has been set aside as an arrival day and you are welcome to arrive at any time. The tour will begin with a welcome dinner this evening and we will depart Delhi on day 2. Further meeting details in this regard will be forwarded to you in due course.

The tour will conclude in Delhi on day 12 for the main tour. If you would like to arrive early or depart late please do let the Rockjumper office know and we will be happy to arrange extra accommodation for you.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

**FLIGHTS:**

**Internal**

Internal flights are not included in the cost of the tour (please see exclusions above for an estimate of these prices). Should you wish for Rockjumper to book these flights on your behalf this can be added to your tour cost closer to the time of travel. As all tour participants should be on the same flights Rockjumper will provide you with the recommended flights closer to the time

of travel. **However, please DO NOT book your internal flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**

### **International**

New Delhi is the main port of entry for international flights into India for those travelling on this India tour and is well serviced by many of the world's major airlines. As our guests come from all over the planet we do not include international flights in our tour prices. We have the capacity to advise you on the best route according to your preferences but your local travel agent will best be able to book these flights for you. If you would like further assistance kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

**IMPORTANT: please DO NOT book your international flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour. We strongly advise ALL guests to purchase travel / medical insurance for this trip.**

A VALID PASSPORT is essential to all international travel; please check the expiry date of your passport, and ensure you have a sufficient number of blank pages for Visas, entry/exit stamps etc. for the entire intended duration of travel with Rockjumper Wildlife.

### **Additional notes:**

- The train rides are always something to consider when travelling in India. Although we use the highest class, air-conditioned sleeper cabins, these journeys can be taxing especially if you are a light sleeper. Each cabin is enclosed by a curtain only and has 4 or 6 bunk beds with clean bedding. Although noisy at first, things settle down and people generally get a reasonable sleep. These trains are by far the best way to reach many of the sites we visit, as the distances they cover would take infinitely longer if done by vehicle on the congested roads. In addition, we choose to journey at night as this allows us to fit in more wildlife watching hours by day.
- Taj Mahal remains closed on Fridays
- Bandhavgarh reserve is currently closed on Wednesday afternoons
- Currently, there is no camera fee in the parks we visit however this is subject to change

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