India

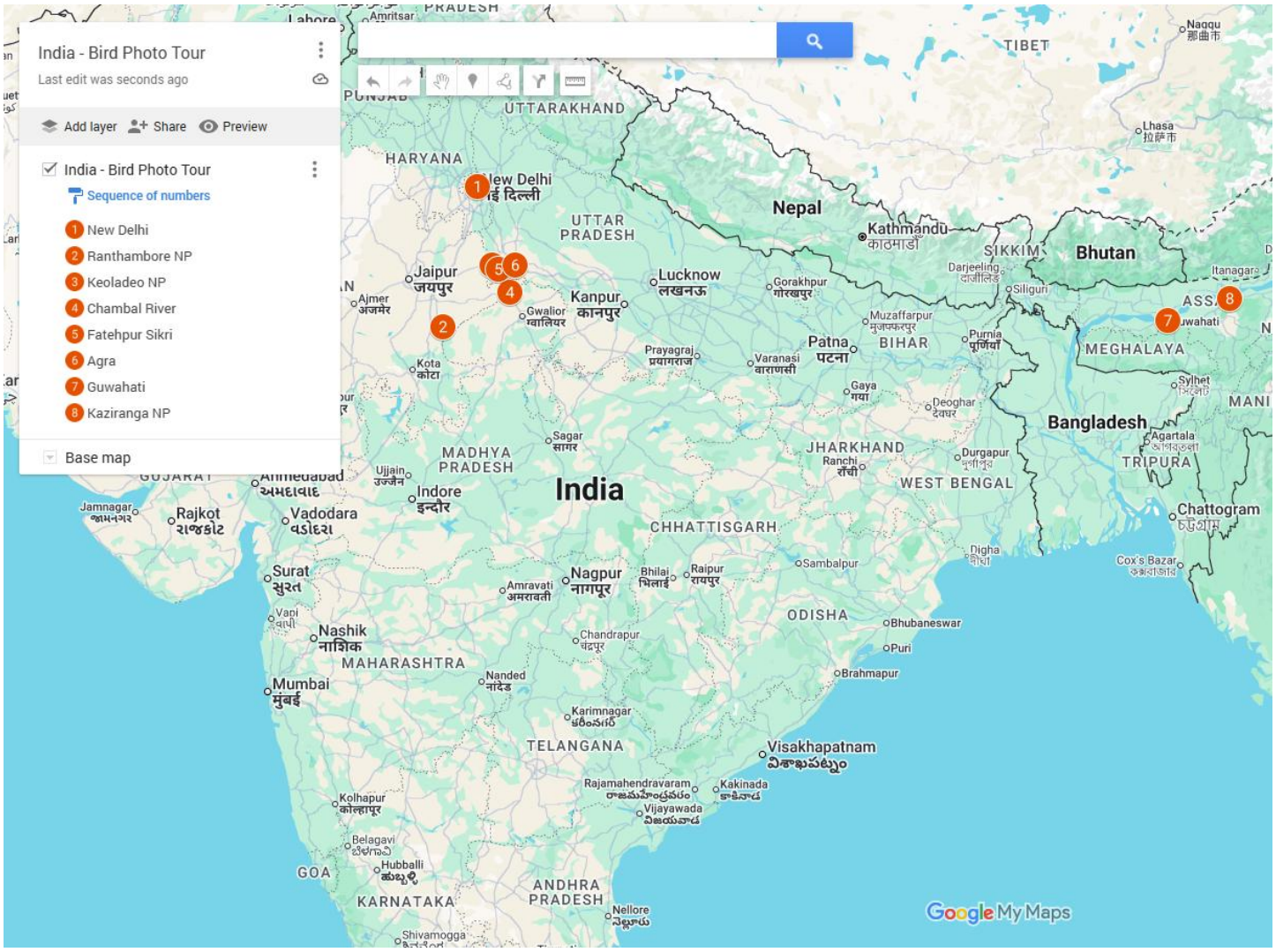
Bird Photo Tour



Bengal Tiger by Adam Riley

India is a country with no equal and boasts a staggering range of habitats from deserts and forests to tropical, palm-lined shores and snow-capped peaks. Home to over a billion people India offers arguably the world's richest cultural landscape but is also famous for its rich avifauna and iconic mammalian megafauna, foremost of which is the regal Bengal Tiger. This specially designed Photo Tour visits the core mammal, birding and cultural sites including the fabled Ranthambhore National Park, the exquisite wetlands of Keoladeo (Bharatpur) and incomparable Taj Mahal. We'll also be searching for a good number of mammals and birds in Kaziranga National Park, one of the most spectacular wildernesses in all of Asia. This area gains its fame as one of the last places on earth where the prehistoric Indian Rhinoceros can be found, but no other site in Asia can match the vast herds of big mammals to be seen. Join us for an unforgettable photo tour experiencing India's incredible birds, iconic mammals, dramatic scenery, and kaleidoscope of cultures!

Itinerary & Map



India Bird Photo Tour

Day 1	**Arrival in New Delhi**
Day 2	**New Delhi to Ranthambhore**
Days 3 to 5	**Ranthambhore National Park**
Day 6	**Ranthambhore to Keoladeo National Park (Bharatpur)**
Days 7 & 8	**Keoladeo National Park (Bharatpur)**
Day 9	**Bharatpur to Chambal River via Fatehpur Sikri**
Day 10	**Chambal to New Delhi via Agra (Taj Mahal)**
Day 11	**New Delhi fly to Guwahati and drive to Kaziranga**
Days 12 & 13	**Kaziranga National Park**
Day 14	**Kaziranga NP to Guwahati**
Day 15	**Guwahati and depart**

Highlights

- ***Incredible photographic opportunities with many species of birds and animals being easy to view and highly approachable***
- ***Explore some of Asia's most prolific national parks where big game still thrives such as Ranthambhore and Kaziranga National Parks. India's overall array of megafauna is comparable to Africa and makes for a wonderful wildlife experience***
- ***Ranthambhore holds the highest density of Tigers anywhere on the planet and our chances of seeing and photographing this incredible big cat is very good***
- ***Kaziranga is home to one-third of the world's Indian Rhinoceros population and holds significant numbers of wild Asian Elephant.***
- ***Explore Keoladeo (Bharatpur). This exceptional wetland is one of the most famous birding sites in India***
- ***Boat cruise on the Chambal River where endangered species such as Gharial, Indian Skimmer, Black-bellied Tern and Ganges River Dolphin still reside***
- ***See famous historical landmarks such as Fatehpur Sikri and the Taj Mahal***



Brown Fish Owl by Adam Riley

Sites in detail

Ranthambhore National Park. A range of habitats await us as we kick off our unique photo tour in one of India's finest natural areas - Ranthambhore National Park, with vast deciduous forests, woodlands, and lakes of the central plateau.

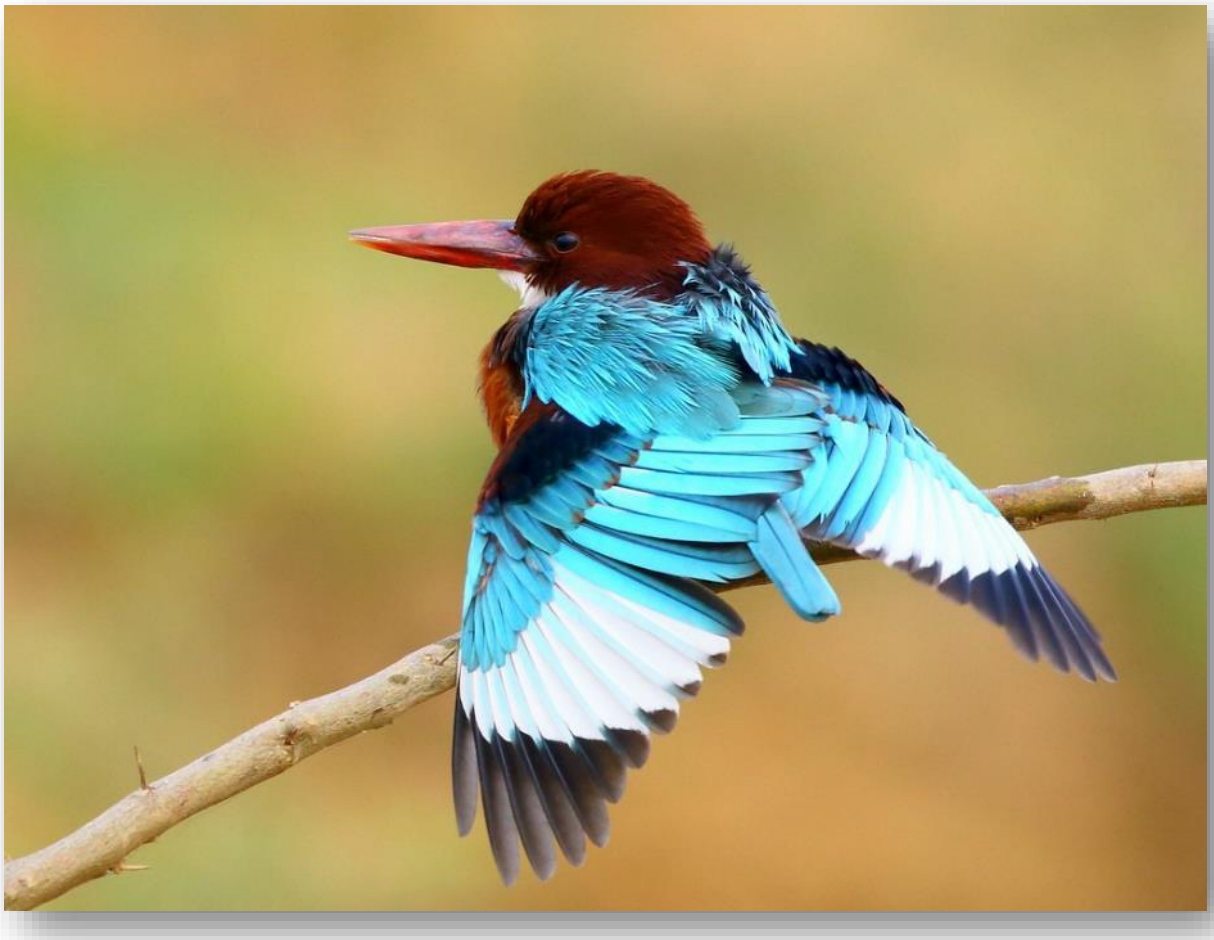
The tropical dry deciduous and thorn forest covers an area of more than 1 300km^2 (500m^2); needless to say, there is plenty of area to roam! Dominated by the 10th Century Ranthambhore Fort which sits atop a plateau 700ft above the plains, this scenic reserve contains high concentrations of herbivores 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. Locating these magnificent cats requires a combination of skill and patience – and, of course, a small dose of luck!



Painted Spurfowl by Adam Riley

We will use open-top jeeps and/or canter vans to explore the park in search of Tigers, watching for tell-tale signs such as pugmarks or scat in the road and listening for the alarm calls of Sambar, Chital, Southern Plains Grey Langurs and Indian Peafowl. 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 big cats, undoubtedly ranks as one of the world's ultimate wildlife experiences! In addition to Tigers and their favourite prey species, during our safari drives, we may also come across Ruddy Mongoose or even Jungle Cat, Leopard, and Sloth Bear. Our chances of viewing and getting photos of Tiger is very good.

Although our main reason for visiting Ranthambhore is to search for Tiger, the rich woods and meadows of this scenically stunning park also offer excellent birding and the valley floors support good numbers of Painted Spurfowl, Jungle and Rock Bush Quail, the uncommon White-naped Woodpecker, Indian Scops Owl, Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Alexandrine and Plum-headed Parakeets, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Sirkeer Malkoha, Common Iora, White-bellied Drongo, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (which can often be located by its sweet song given from dense bamboo patches), the active White-browed Fantail, Grey-breasted and Rufous-fronted Prinias and Yellow-throated Sparrow.



White-throated Kingfisher by Adam Riley

While in the area, we will also keep our eyes peeled for Indian Vulture, Pallid Harrier, Shikra, Bonelli's Eagle, and Crested Serpent Eagle.

We will also take the opportunity to do some birding and photographing around our lodge, which regularly produces the endemic Painted Sandgrouse, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Indian Roller, Indian Stone-curlew, Brahminy Starling, Common Woodshrike and Ashy-crowned sparrow-Lark, whilst a good degree of luck is required to find Marshall's Iora.

Soorwal Lake. If time permits, we may visit this lake to search for a host of water associated birds that could include Dalmatian and Great White Pelicans, Spotted Redshank, Temminck's Stint, Common Ringed Plover, Indian Courser, Indian Stone-curlew, Green Bee-eater, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark, Indian Bush Lark, Moustached Warbler, Ashy and Yellow-bellied Prinias, Rosy Starling and the ever-popular Greater Painted-snipe.

Keoladeo National Park. We will base ourselves a few minutes from the entrance to the incredible Keoladeo National Park. Usually known simply as 'Bharatpur', the extensive series of shallow ponds were artificially

created as a duck-shooting preserve by a former Maharaja of Bharatpur but is now a wetland sanctuary attracting thousands of wintering waterfowl, waders, cranes, and raptors. Keoladeo offers wonderful photography and a real opportunity to fill our boots with many special images.



Painted Stork by Keith Valentine

We'll explore the riches of this amazing reserve on foot and by bicycle rickshaw, following the network of raised dykes that criss-cross the labyrinth of ponds. Scanning through the waterbirds is usually our priority and we will likely be overwhelmed by the staggering numbers of species.

Possibilities include the beautiful Bar-headed Goose, whose migration sees them travelling from northern China over the high Himalayan Mountain ranges to winter here on the plains. Other species may include Garganey, Northern Pintail, Lesser Whistling, Indian Spot-billed and Ferruginous Ducks, Red-crested Pochard, Cotton Pygmy Goose, Common and Pied Kingfishers, Little and Indian Cormorants, Oriental Darter, Grey and Purple Herons, Great, Yellow-billed and Little Egrets, Black-crowned Night Heron, Painted, Woolly-necked and Black-necked Storks, Asian Openbill, Black-headed Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged Jacanas, White-breasted Waterhen, Grey-headed Swamphen, Black Bittern and Black-winged Stilt. Regal and elegant Sarus Cranes are often heard calling before they are seen striding over the flooded grasslands.

The marshy edges attract a variety of migrant passerines, including the secretive Bluethroat, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Rosy Pipit, Western Yellow, Citrine and White-browed Wagtails, whilst Wire-tailed Swallows hawk insects overhead. Raptors are especially well represented at Bharatpur, with concentrations of large migrant eagles such as Eastern Imperial, Greater Spotted, Steppe and Indian Spotted being of special interest. Other raptors we may find include Western Marsh Harrier and Laggar Falcon.

Extensive areas of arid Acacia dominated woodland and dry grasslands surround the ponds and we will be sure to explore this habitat for Black-rumped Flameback, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Indian Grey Hornbill, Greater Coucal, Brahminy Starling, the very uncommon and localised Marshall's Iora, White-eared Bulbul, Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher, Zitting Cisticola, Purple Sunbird, Baya Weaver, and small flocks of Indian Silverbill.



Gharial by Adam Riley

These Indian residents share their habitat during the winter months with a wide range of migrants from northern Asia, notably Red-breasted Flycatcher, the scarce Brooks's Leaf Warbler, skulking Siberian Rubythroat, Olive-backed Pipit, and Isabelline Wheatear.

We will also search for the nocturnal residents at their day roosts, including Dusky Eagle-Owl, Spotted Owlet and Large-tailed Nightjar, while a visit to the plant nursery may produce a wintering Orange-headed, Scaly, or even Tickell's Thrush. Mammals we should see include groups of the huge Nilgai (Blue Bull), largest of all, Asian antelope, as well as Golden Jackal, Sambar, and the attractive Five Striped Palm Squirrel.

Reptiles such as the huge Flap-shelled Turtle are often seen sunbathing on dry land, Water Monitors patrol for prey items and Checkered Keelbacks are often seen sunbathing just above the water. If we are very lucky, we may even come across an Indian Rock Python sunning itself.

Fatehpur Sikri. The ancient city of Fatehpur Sikri is an amazingly well-preserved historical city constructed by Mughal emperor Akbar in 1570, which 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. Today numerous notable imperial buildings and a fabulous mosque still stand, and a visit to Fatehpur Sikri is a truly memorable experience.

Chambal River. We head towards the town of Dholpur on the Chambal River where we will take lunch before proceeding on a boat trip. Despite the presence of this majestic river, the area is surprisingly dry. We will focus our attentions on the river itself, searching for several river specialists. The endangered Indian Skimmer, one of our main reasons for visiting this reliable site, can often be found on islands in the river together with Black-bellied and River Terns.



Great Stone-curlew by Daniel Danckwerts

During our boat trip, which provides for an excellent base to take pictures, we will do a lot of shoreline scanning and this could turn up other exciting species in the form of Ruddy Shelduck, Black Stork, Red-naped Ibis, Small Pratincole, Long-legged Buzzard, Laggar Falcon, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, River Lapwing, Pallas's Gull, Great Stone-curlew, Desert Wheatear, and possibly even Indian Eagle-Owl roosting on the small cliff faces.

We will also be keeping a sharp eye out for one of the rarer inhabitants of this river, the unique Ganges River Dolphin that is confined largely to the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers and their tributaries. Another rare species we should encounter is the bizarre, long-snouted Gharial – one of the most localised and critically endangered crocodilians on the planet, together with Mugger Crocodile and Flap-shelled Turtle.

We may have some time to search the woodlands around our lodge grounds, which often hold wintering migrants such as Verditer Flycatcher and Booted and Sykes's Warblers, as well as Indian Flying Fox. At night we may take a short walk to look for Brown Hawk-Owl and even Common Palm Civet, which is sometimes found in the trees around the lodge grounds.

Agra & Taj Mahal. We head to Agra for the cultural highlight of the trip, the simply magnificent Taj Mahal, literally meaning "Crown of Palaces". It is also a World Heritage Site and is famous for the elegance of its design, its extraordinary translucent white marble dome, its mathematical symmetry, and the immense numbers of intricately carved and inlaid semi-precious stones that adorn its walls. Begun in 1632, tens of thousands of architects and labourers, and over a thousand elephants, toiled for more than 20 years to complete this breath-



Taj Mahal by David Hoddinott

taking edifice, which was commissioned by the grief-stricken Shah Jahan after his third wife died during the birth of their 14th child. This is without a doubt one of India's most iconic and impressive sites and should not be missed!

In Agra, we will also visit the fabled Agra Red Fort, located in the centre of the city and serving as a monumental reminder of the fascinating history of the region. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is more accurately a 94-acre walled city and was constructed in the 16th century. Exploring this architecturally spectacular complex is fascinating and from here we will also enjoy further views of the shimmering marble Taj Mahal. In fact, Shah Jahan spent his final years here at the Agra Fort as a captive of his son Aurangzeb who deposed him. Shah Jahan apparently died here whilst imprisoned in a tower with a view of the Taj Mahal.

Whilst marvelling at these impressive historical sites, we will no doubt also keep an eye out for birds, and species that we may encounter include Brown Rock Chat and Dusky Crag Martin which call these buildings home, families of Spotted Owlets in the gardens, raptors (Egyptian Vultures are frequently seen around the Taj Mahal), and waterbirds on the holy Yamuna River, including the elegant River Lapwing.

Guwahati. We will make a stop at the local refuse dump that attracts hundreds of regal Greater Adjutants, a rare and extremely localised bird throughout most of its limited range. Guwahati remains the best place on earth to see this stately, yet also very ugly stork, with smaller numbers of the more widespread Lesser Adjutant, Asian Openbill and Black-headed Ibis also being attracted to this site. Citrine and White Wagtails are usually around in good numbers, while Striated Grassbird and Plain and Yellow-bellied Prinias will be looked for in areas of rank grass.

Kaziranga National Park. This exciting wilderness of marshes, open grassland, woodlands and forest, which is situated on the floodplain of the Brahmaputra River, will be the focus of our attention. A total of one-third of the entire world population of Indian Rhinoceros is located in Kaziranga and we will likely enjoy incredible sightings of these highly threatened beasts. The area is also home to many eye-catching and very special birds including the rare Bengal Florican, which will be searched for in the long grass that covers huge areas of the



Greater Yellownape by Stu Elsom

reserve, though we will have to be lucky to see this extremely rare species!

This habitat also offers us the best shots at other high priority species such as the near-endemic Swamp Francolin, Baya, Streaked, Black-breasted and the extremely rare Finn's Weavers, as well as Chestnut-capped and Striated Babblers, Bengal Bush Lark, Rosy Pipit and Siberian and Himalayan Rubythroats. The critically endangered Greater Adjutant occurs alongside the Lesser Adjutant in wet areas, and we will keep our eyes peeled skywards for Pallas's and Grey-headed Fish Eagles. Western Marsh and Pied Harriers can be found quartering over the grassland areas, and the stately Black-necked Stork is still fairly numerous throughout the region.

Kaziranga's network of extensive wetlands is home to huge numbers of resident and migrant waterbirds, most notably the handsome Bar-headed Goose, Indian Spot-billed Duck, Cotton Pygmy Goose, Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged Jacanas and the splendid Stork-billed Kingfisher, among many other species. Woodland areas are the best place to search for a number of specials, including the huge Blue-bearded, Blue-tailed and stunning Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters, Green Imperial Pigeon, Black-winged Cuckooshrike, Large Woodshrike, Lineated, Blue-throated and Coppersmith Barbets, extravagant Green-billed Malkoha, four species of gorgeous parakeets (Rose-ringed, Alexandrine, Red-breasted and the scarce Blossom-headed) and a host of woodpeckers, which includes Streak-throated, Fulvous-breasted and Grey-capped Pygmy, as well as Greater and Black-rumped Flamebacks. We will also explore small patches of evergreen forest in the area where we hope to find numerous interesting species. These include the striking Asian Fairy Bluebird, Black-crested Bulbul and Great and Oriental Pied Hornbills. More secretive species include Puff-throated and Abbott's Babblers and White-rumped Shama. Other notable birds that we hope to see here are Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Common Emerald Dove, Greater and Lesser Yellownapes, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Streaked Spiderhunter and Crimson and Ruby-cheeked Sunbirds.

Game viewing and photography in the reserve is excellent and besides the Indian Rhinoceros, there are also plenty of wild Water Buffalo and Asian Elephant. Furthermore, Kaziranga is one of the reserves where Bengal Tiger still occurs in reasonable numbers; here they tend to favour areas where the grass is long and dense,



Indian Rhinoceros by Andre Bernon

which aids them in ambushing their main prey, the increasingly rare Barasingha (Swamp Deer) and Hog Deer. We will, however, be lucky to encounter one of these regal beasts. While in the forests we will also keep our eyes and ears open for Hoolock Gibbon, Capped Langur, Assam Macaque and Rhesus Monkey. Other mammal species we may find include Sambar and Wild Boar, all of which frequent the grassy, watery meadows in the reserve.

Tour Grading & Key

Photography		Generally excellent. From vehicle, lodge gardens and on foot while in Keoladeo.
Overall Ease		Undemanding. Suitable for all birding / wildlife interest levels. India is an assault on the senses first time around, requiring a little tolerance to begin with.
Accommodation		Comfortable to very comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Mostly on gently undulating roads/lodge gardens. Bicycle rickshaws at Keoladeo NP.
Vehicles / Roads		Busses, train, 4x4 & open safari vehicles. Variable to poor road conditions. Vehicles are manufactured to local requirements, so tend to be a on the small size for Westerners.
Birding Ease		Undemanding. Most species provide good visuals in open conditions. Mostly savanna, wetland & woodland birding.
Annoyances		Slow traffic, poor road conditions. Spicy food, strong smells of various types. Can be cold on early morning safaris.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 15;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour (including train transport);
- Boat excursion on the Chambal River;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services;
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights 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.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Roads outside of Indian cities are poorly maintained, causing vehicles to travel very slowly. To make best use of our time, we use train journeys to cut travel times and increase both comfort and safety. Our local agents, tour leaders and porters ensure that all your luggage is stowed aboard at embarkation, as well as taken off and transferred to our vehicles at disembarkation. The train rides are generally smooth, and relatively quiet, allowing you to process photos, update social media or simply to rest.
- Rest rooms on trains vary in cleanliness. Facilities are of the squat toilet type, typically little more than a cubicle with a hole in the carriage floor.
- **We no longer make use of any OVERNIGHT trains on our northern India tours.**
- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20 kg (44 lb) for check in luggage and 8 kg (+-18 lb) for hand luggage.
- This tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health as some of the birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time.
- It is not permissible to leave the open safari vehicles within Ranthambhore and Kaziranga National Parks, except at designated sites.
- If you have any physical or medical limitations or conditions, please notify us in advance of departure.
- For much of this tour we will be far away from modern medical facilities.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is of a good standard, and the hotels and resorts that we make use of range from comfortable to rather luxurious. There is no camping on this trip.
- Overnight temperatures can be cool and it is advisable to bring layered clothing for warmth and convenience.
- The open jeep tours can be very cold (especially in the mornings), please bring sufficient warm clothing, including gloves, scarf/buff and a beanie (woolly hat).

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour begins in New Delhi on day 1 with a welcome dinner, and as this is scheduled as an arrival day; you are free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude after breakfast in Guwahati on day 15.

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.

Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi (IATA: DEL) is the main port of entry for international flights into India. For departure Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, Guwahati (IATA: GAU), is easily connected by domestic flights to New Delhi.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.