



Itinerary

Essence of India

22 Nights – March 1-23, 2020

Goa to Kolkata, traversing five diverse Indian States



If an off-the-beaten path connection with the pulse of India calls to you . . .

An epic sensitively-conceived journey traversing the breadth of India, taking roads less travelled through rarely explored towns and cities in the heart of India. Beginning our journey in [Panjim](#) (Panaji), the Portuguese influenced capital of Goa, we travel north and east through ancient villages and world heritage sites. We explore ancient rock-cut temples of sculptural extravagance, grand Muslim mausoleums, and the commercial capital of dazzling Mumbai. Cool heels in verdant vineyards, explore Afghani fortresses and Buddhist stupas, Hindu palaces, before stepping in the crumbling British heritage of [Kolkata](#). A fascinating and exotic trip which is at once traditional, exotic, bizarre and totally unexpected. Hosted by India-insider and western-based owner of E.Y.H.O. Tours, Canada who will help you navigate and decipher the incredible cultural, historical, and architectural riches of this vast country.



Highlights

- * explore the traditional Portuguese heritage of Goa
- * wander the ruins of the once majestic Vijayanagar empire in Hampi
- * witness the spectacular rock-cut cave temples at Badami
- * live it up in glitzy and glamorous Mumbai
- * Holi, spring festival of colour and wineries and temples of Nashik
- * be left breathless by the unsurpassed Ellora and Ajanta Caves
- * uncover the history and charm of Mandu and Maheshwar
- * be amazed at the Buddhist ruins of Sanchi
- * discover otherworldly charm of royal cenotaphs at Orchha
- * witness sunrise over the Ganges in holy Varanasi
- * get enriched in cultural Kolkata

Day by Day Itinerary



Day 1 Sunday March 1 - Panjim

Arrival Day. No group activities today. In the evening there will be a welcome meeting before dinner. Relax at your beachside hotel to catch Goa's unique vibe.

Overnight: Panjim

Day 2 Mon Mar 2 - Panjim

Explore [Old Goa](#) with its vintage churches and the spice gardens of Ponda to explore a side less travelled in Goa.

Overnight: Panjim

Day 3 Tues Mar 3 - Panjim to Hospet to Hampi

In the morning, take a day train (7 hrs) over the beautiful [Western Ghats](#) to the [Deccan Plateau](#) and arrive in Hospet, gateway city to [Hampi](#). Relax overnight at Anegundi, a model social and cultural village.

Overnight: Anegundi Village

Day 4 Wed Mar 4 - Hampi

Early morning, cross the Tungabhadra River to explore the myriad sights and temples that make up the ruins of the [Vijayanagar Empire](#)'s 15th century capital of Hampi set against the stunning



backdrop of enormous boulders. Evening, we will meet and eat with local families who are also old friends.

Overnight Anegundi Village.

Day 5 Thurs Mar 5 - Hampi

Relax in the quiet magic of Anegundi's unique early morning village vibe before crossing the river again, this time to erstwhile royal city of Vijayanagar. See elephant stables, palaces, Queen's Bath.

Overnight: Anegundi village

Day 6 Fri Mar 6 - Badami

Transfer (3 hrs) to [Badami](#), once capital of the ancient [Chalukya empire](#). Explore rock-cut temples from 6th C.E. and hills surrounding a picturesque lake.

Overnight: Badami

Day 7 Sat Mar 7 - Badami to Mumbai

Morning, 2.5 hr transfer to Hubli airport for flight to Mumbai. Upon arrival, explore the fascinating, chaotic and frantic commercial capital of India, visiting the [Gateway of India](#), [Dhobi \(laundry\) washers](#) and [Chowpatty Beach](#). Evening, tea with Hema Shroff Patel, founder and designer of women's weaving co-operative.

Overnight: Mumbai

Day 8 Sun Mar 8 - Mumbai

Since Mumbai houses the world's second largest collection of Art Deco buildings, we will tour major sites, including visits inside private homes. Option: explore bustling markets of Matunga, including an early morning flower market.

Overnight: Mumbai



Day 9 Mon Mar 9 - Nasik

Transfer 3.5 hrs to [Nasik](#), one of the four sites of the [Khumb Mela](#) and the largest religious gathering on the planet. Situated on the holy Godavari river, Nasik is a colourful town with exotic temples and bathing ghats where pilgrims come to wash away their sins. Nasik is also home to the [Sula Vineyards](#) one of India's oldest and most reputed wineries. Spend an



afternoon touring the vineyard before enjoying a meal in one of the fine restaurants at the winery.

Overnight: Nashik

Day 10 Tues Mar 10 - Aurangabad

Relax the morning away in verdant vineyard surroundings and celebrate Holi (optional) at our hotel. After lunch, transfer to Aurangabad (5 hrs). Evening at leisure. Take in a typical Maharashtrian *thali* meal.

Overnight: Aurangabad

Day 11 Wed Mar 11 - Aurangabad to Ellora Temples

Explore the spectacular [Ellora Caves](#), carved monasteries, chapels and temples dating back to 600AD. A UNESCO World Heritage site, the masterpiece is the breathtaking [Kailasa Temple](#), carved out of a cliff-face which is larger and higher than the Parthenon in Athens.

Overnight: Aurangabad

Day 12 Thur Mar 12 - Aurangabad/Ajanta Caves to Jalgaon

Drive 1.5 hrs to Ajanta before driving on (3.5hrs) stopping the night in Jalgaon. The [Ajanta Caves](#) date from around 200BC and comprise of around 30 rock-cut Buddhist caves. With intricate carvings and stunning original frescoes, the Ajanta caves have also been proclaimed a World Heritage site.

Overnight: Jalgaon

Days 13 Fri Mar 13 - Maheshwar

Transfer 4.5 hrs to [Maheshwar](#). We base ourselves for two nights at the stunning Ahilya Fort taking a day trip—if you care to rouse yourself from the fort's delights – to visit the ruins of [Mandu](#), a 10km long hilltop fort covered with erstwhile palaces, temples and tombs dating from the early 15th century.

Overnight: Ahilya Fort

Day 14 Sat Mar 14 - Maheshwar

During our stay at Ahilya Fort, you can choose to do as much as little as you wish. Take in weaving of handlooms in the town, watch a lac bangle maker at work, or relax poolside on the fort ramparts. Sumptuous meals made fresh from fort's own organic gardens and all alcoholic beverages are included.

Overnight: Ahilya Fort

Day 15 Sun Mar 15 - Bhopal

We drive to [Bhopal](#) (6 hrs) In the late afternoon visit the fascinating [Museum of Mankind](#).

Overnight: Bhopal



Day 16 Mon Mar 16 – Sanchi to Orchha

After breakfast, transfer 1.5 hrs to nearby [Sanchi](#), with stunning Buddhist ruins. Founded by [Emperor Ashoka](#) in the 3rd century BC, many stupas and other religious structures were built here over the following centuries. An afternoon train (3 hrs) takes us to Jhansi, from where we transfer the short distance (30 min) to Orchha.

Overnight: Orchha

Day 17 Tues Mar 17 - Orchha

[Orchha](#) is a town lost in time with grand deserted palaces, royal cenotaphs, and a countryside strewn with temples. A friendly place with a fascinating history, get a glimpse of rural Indian life. Tonight we take an overnight train to Varanasi (dep 10.25pm arrive 10.50am next day)

Overnight: Train

Day 18 Wed Mar 18 - Varanasi

We arrive early morning into [Varanasi](#). The holiest city in India for Hindus, Varanasi—also known as Benares and Kashi (city of light)—is a city full of sadhus, or holy men, holy cows and Hindu temples. Take the morning to catch up on your rest at our riverside hotel, or wander down to witness the eternal tableaux of life along the banks. In the afternoon, we take a walk along the [Ghats](#) (steps along the river) on the bank of the [Ganges](#) and explore the old city. Whilst in Varanasi, witness an evening [ceremonial "aarti"](#) on the riverbanks, followed by a private classical music and dance concert by one of the most venerable *gharana* or houses of culture.

Overnight: Varanasi

Day 19 Thurs Mar 19 - Varanasi

Take in the peace of the morning arti and a dawn boat ride on the Ganges. Visit ancient Kashi Vishwanath Temple, one of Hinduism's holiest sites. Later visit [Sarnath](#), the site of Buddha's first sermon. Return to Varanasi, stopping enroute at a weaving co-operative from where famous Banarasi saris originate. Evening arti if desired.

Overnight: Varanasi



Day 20 Fri Mar 20 - Varanasi

Visit Benaras Hindu University to catch another side to Varanasi: its youthful exuberance. Afternoon at leisure, or visit to a widows ashram. Widows choose Varanasi in their advanced years in order to attain immediate salvation (mukti) from rebirth upon death. Evening: Pranayama breathwork session with expert.
Overnight: Varanasi

Day 21 Sat Mar 21 - Varanasi to Kolkata

Afternoon flight to [Kolkata](#). Kolkata, once the capital of British India is the crowded, decaying and fascinating cultural capital of India. With a morbid, yet passionate history, modern day Kolkata is a city with soul. Ancient rituals and colourful traditions blend in a city that is like nowhere else on earth.
Overnight: Kolkata

Day 22 Sun Mar 22 - Kolkata

Early morning exploration of the colourful, bustling world of an Indian flower market where acres of fresh flowers are bought and sold for weddings and temple rituals. Visit to Victoria Memorial Museum which captures the might of British Raj in its collections. Afternoon visit with the renowned founder of Artisana, Ruby Palchoudhari, who has singlehandedly revived textile and arts/crafts of rural West Bengal.
Overnight: Kolkata

Day 23 Mon Mar 23 – Kolkata/Departure

There are no organised activities today. You are free to depart at any time.





Accommodations

All accommodations are best available; 3-5* level, clean, with private western-style bathrooms. Each is carefully selected for ambiance, cultural relevance, personal service, location, and appointments. Here is a sample.

<p>Panjim, Goa – 2 nights Coconut Creek Beach Resort Located on Bogmallo Beach with access to colonial core of Panjim, and exemplary dining and award-winning service. Spa, pool, beach to help you relax after your long journey.</p>	
<p>Hampi, Anegundi Village – 3 nights Uramma Heritage Cottages 7 delightful local farm house style cottages with thatched roofs, spread across landscaped gardens and farm. Offers cultural and artistic residencies in laid back riverside village with a self-help social footprint.</p>	
<p>Badami – 1 night Heritage Resort Cottages with thoughtful appointments, set in landscaped gardens with an open-air restaurant. Accommodation of choice in Badami</p>	
<p>Mumbai – 2 nights Abode Luxury Boutique Hotel Bombay’s first luxury boutique hotel in an elegant colonial building whose period features have been lovingly restored and infused with the best of modern design. Ideally located in Colaba, central South Mumbai</p>	
<p>Nashik – 1 night Source at Sula India’s first heritage winery resort, with a Tuscan twist, unbeatable vistas. Pool, tennis, cycling, vineyard tours, delicious organic food with wine pairings from their gardens</p>	
<p>Maheshwar – 2 nights Ahilya Fort 18th C royal fort-hotel. Small, intimate, award-winning set in 3 acres of courtyards, fountains, and gardens. Find a secluded spot to read, sip tea, or just watch the butterflies flutter by. Perched above the Maheshwar ghats.</p>	
<p>Varanasi – 3 nights Hotel Ganges View Once a royal property, now an art-filled boutique guesthouse with delicious vegetarian cuisine, memorable service, and views over the Ganges from ideal location on Asi Ghat</p>	
<p>Kolkata – 2 nights Elgin Fairlawn Housed in a 1783 building with a colonial-era vibe, a memorabilia-filled iconic hotel, shaped by the hands and minds of generations of families whose memories and influences have contributed to Kolkata’s unique heritage.</p>	



Cost

8-9 pax: USD 5475 pp in double occupancy

10 pax: USD 5375 pp double occupancy

Add USD 1950 for own room throughout. Or enquire about three people sharing one single supplement.

Group size: minimum 8; maximum 12

Tour inclusions

Conceptualised and hosted by Shila Desai, owner of E.Y.H.O. Tours

Expert English-speaking local guides

Arrival and departure transfers

All accommodation as specified

All private a/c transportation between overnight stops and to and from included sightseeing

Entrance fees for all sites listed as part of the itinerary

Art Deco tour of Mumbai

Tea with Hema Shroff in Mumbai

Boat rides in Varanasi

All breakfasts, one lunch or dinner daily

Full board with all meals and alcoholic beverages at Ahilya Fort

Tips and gratuities for hotel staff, porters

Train: Goa/Hospet, Bhopal/Jhansi, Jhansi/Varanasi

Internal air: Hubli/Mumbai, Varanasi/Kolkata

Meals with local families as specified

Tour exclusions

Visa costs

Meals other than those listed

Drinks, meal tips, laundry and other items of a personal nature

Gratuities to drivers and guides

International flights

Terms

Secure your spot with a USD 800 deposit. Balance payable 75 days before departure. Cancellation and refunds as follows:

More than 120 days before departure: full refund less \$100 admin fee

Less than 120 days before departure: deposit is non-refundable

80 – 60 days before departure: tour cost is 40% non-refundable

59 – 45 days before departure: tour cost is 60% non-refundable

44 – 29 days before departure: tour cost is 90% non-refundable

Less than 30 days : 100% non-refundable

Refunds cannot be made for domestic flights. We reserve the right to retain an administration fee of USD 100.

Additional terms and conditions, click [here](#).



Trip Notes - Essence of India, March 2020 tour

Are you physically capable of taking this tour?

You may need to carry your bag/pack up and down railway station and hotel stairs. There will be plenty of walking around towns or sites, which due to the warm to hot weather in India at this time of year will make general sightseeing a little more strenuous.

Culture Shock

Conditions in India are not always as comfortable as in other countries. You may need to occasionally deal with a squat toilet, cold showers or power failure.

Trains

Train travel in India is essential considering it is such an efficient and extensive network and is also such a part of India's culture and heritage. For our overnight journeys, we travel in air-conditioned sleeper carriages with two levels of berths. They are arranged in door-less sections each of four berths. They also have a row of two-tier (upper and lower) berths along one side. A conductor ensures that nobody without a reservation gets into the carriage. Each carriage usually has one 'squat' style and one western style toilet at either end. Bedding is supplied and is clean, but for peace of mind you may wish to bring a sleeping sheet. Meals are not included during our overnight train journey, but food is usually available. Train journeys by day give us an opportunity to experience Indian life by rubbing shoulders with the locals. Travelling locally is always exciting and fascinating you never know who you will meet.

We will be taking private vehicles or flights for all other journeys.

Meals

We ensure that you experience a vast array of the gustatory treats available in India. Generally, we include either one lunch or dinner daily. More often than not we eat together as a group. For excluded meals, your leader will offer suggestions for favourite restaurants throughout the trip.

Money Matters

There are many ATM machines (which accept both Cirrus/Maestro debit cards and Visa and MasterCard) throughout India. This is a safe and convenient way to access money in India, however we suggest that you bring a small amount of money in cash (suggested \$300) in case there are times that ATMs are not available. The major currencies, including USD and CAD are no problem in general to exchange. Visa & MasterCard credit cards are accepted in major shops and restaurants in the bigger cities.

Spending money

Although entrance fees to specified sites are included in the tour price, there are additional sights that you may like to visit. Many sites levy camera fees. Spending money requirements will differ from one person to the next. You will need to take into consideration your spending



habits when allowing for drinks, shopping, and optional activities. We recommend you allow enough money for the following:

- Meals USD500 (or equivalent)
- Optional Activities USD100 (or equivalent)
- Money for drinks, shopping and incidentals
- Tipping for driver and guides (we will run a USD 150 pp tipping kitty)

Travel insurance

Travel Insurance is highly recommended whilst travelling to India.

Visas

All foreign nationals require a visa to enter India. The official Government of India e-Visa website is <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html>

Health

We recommend that you consult your doctor for current medical travel information about before departure. Your leader will be carrying a basic first aid kit, but we suggest you bring along your own as well as any personal medical requirements. For more information, visit:

USA <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/>

UK <http://www.travelhealth.co.uk/>

Canada <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/vaccines>

Communications / Keeping in touch

Most of our hotels have Wifi, as do many restaurants and cafes. You can also purchase a local prepaid sim card (for unlocked cell phones) and data sticks (for mobile internet on your laptop) easily and inexpensively in India. Recommended are Vodafone, Airtel and Reliance. You will need extra passport photos for this as well as photocopies of your photo and visa page from your passport.

Responsible travel

We believe strongly in responsible travel. This includes being respectful to the local culture (i.e. dressing appropriately, and learning a few basic cultural do's and don'ts), being mindful of the environment, and leaving a positive image behind. Remember we are ambassadors for our country. Bringing a few photos of your family and home with you is a great way to interact with the locals by giving them a glimpse of your world whilst you visit theirs. India is very conservative, and we ask that you dress accordingly. As a guideline, shoulders and knees should always be covered. The wearing of shorts is looked upon by locals as akin to wearing your underwear and will limit entry into mosques, temples and other places of worship. Loose, lightweight, long clothing is both respectful and cool. Singlets, tank tops and short shorts are not suitable attire for India.

International Flights



Arrival is to GOA and departure from KOL. Best international connections may be from BOM or DEL. We are happy to assist with internal flight bookings. We can also help book your international flight if you're flying business or first. Please contact us.

Arrivals

Your airport transfer pickup will await you holding a sign with your name when you exit the baggage claim area of the arrivals hall. There may be large crowds here so please look carefully for your transfer.

Arriving early

Early arrival information

If you are arriving earlier than noon on Day 1, extra accommodation in Panjim is available at USD tba Single/Double (or equivalent) per night per room. Please notify us as early as possible if you require extra accommodation as Coconut Creek Hotel is popular and can be heavily booked up well in advance.

Departure

If you are staying on in Kolkata after the tour, extra accommodation is available at The Fairlawn Elgin for USD tba per night per room. Please inform us as soon as possible.

What to take

Try to pack as lightly as possible. A detailed packing list will be supplied. The smaller your bag in India the better, as the various modes of transport we use tend to have limited storage space. In addition, you will find that your bag probably needs space to expand for all that shopping! Note that most Indian domestic airlines have reduced their check-in baggage allowance to 15kg. If you have heavier luggage, you may need to pay the excess at the airport for your internal flights. Excess luggage charges are around Rs400 (USD 6) per kilo.

Laundry

Inexpensive laundry facilities are offered by most hotels we use and are generally available wherever we have a two night stop.

Weather

The weather during our journey should be great. Daytime temperatures will be warm to hot, in the range 25-35C. Night time temperatures will be comfortable. Rain is not very likely at this time of year, but sun is, so sunblock and a hat are essentials. Blankets are provided on the overnight train journey.

Questions? We're here to help!

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