

Red Pandas, Rhinos & Tigers

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



January 10 – 22, 2020

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Tour Highlights

- Find endemic and regional specialty birds in four very different parks and ecosystems
- At Sundarbans, navigate mangrove areas rich with water birds; keep your eyes peeled for possible Tigers that swim!
- At Kaziranga, have the chance to see Indian Elephant and Indian Rhino in the wild
- Spend time alongside the Brahmaputra, one of the great rivers of Asia
- See Red Panda as you explore Singalila National Park
- From your park lodge porch, stare off to foothills of the Himalayas

Tour Summary

13-Day / 12-Night India Wildlife Tour
w/ Carlos Sanchez
\$6390 from Kolkata
Airport is Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose (CCU)

NEW! For 2020, this is our TOP PICK for a winter tour. Discover the wonders of India—amazing birds, mammals, and landscapes as we travel to three key national park areas from Kolkata, India’s cultural capital, into the rich habitats of this colorful country. India is a top destination for mammals as well as birds and our carefully crafted itinerary highlights both. We have chosen Singalila, Kaziranga, and the Sundarbans as three totally different environments to explore; our tour is a national park sampler rich in wildlife. For those with more time, highly recommended is the Kanha National Park extension. Our owner, Peg Abbott, describes that experience as one similar

to Yellowstone for its incomparable wildlife viewing.

Explore the Hoollongpar Gibbon Sanctuary, a grand opportunity to see Western Hoolock Gibbon, Stump-tailed Macaque, Northern Pig-tailed Macaque, Rhesus Macaque, Capped Langur, and Assam Macaque. Discover Kaziranga National Park on safari, keeping your eyes peeled for Indian Elephant, Indian Rhinoceros, and possibly even Bengal Tiger. Then, by boat wind your way through extensive mangroves of the Sundarbans, where swimming Tiger may cross paths with a plethora of water birds. Finally, explore by safari vehicle through Singalila National Park, home to Red Panda, Asiatic Leopard, and Himalayan Black Bear, and super rare cats like the Clouded Leopard and Asiatic Golden Cat, as well as Red-headed Trogon, Hill Partridge, Darjeeling Woodpecker, and more.

Birding highlights include seeing Great Hornbill, Rufous-necked Hornbill, Malabar Pied and Oriental Pied Hornbill, Swamp Francolin, rare but possible Bengal Florican, Satyr Tragopan, Black-faced, Chestnut-crowned, Rufous-backed, White-crested, and Greater-necklaced Laughingthrush, Long-tailed Broadbill, Indian Roller, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Pallas’ Fish Eagle, Blue-naped Pitta, and so many more!

Our main tour is designed for two weeks plus your travel time. But since you've traveled all the way to India, we encourage you to make the most of your time at another top national park and maximize your chances to see Tigers by adding our Kanha Tiger Reserve extension—take a peek!

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Day 1 Arrival in Kolkata

Welcome to India! You are met on arrival at the airport and are transferred to our nearby hotel. As the group arrives, we assemble for dinner to get to know each other and our guides. Kolkata is the capital of India's West Bengal state, in the far eastern part of the country. Some may wish to arrive early, to rest up from travel and see cultural highlights of the city; if so we can help you with plans and ideas to explore.

Accommodations at The Pride Plaza or similar (D)

Day 2 Flight to Jorhat

After breakfast this morning, we drive to the Kolkata airport to connect to your flight to Jorhat. The flight is just over an hour and a half. We arrive mid-day and then drive about 30 minutes to the lodge. If time permits we enjoy the first visit to the sanctuary. Some may wish to take a tour of the tea estate.

Accommodations at The Purnobhethi Resort or similar (B,L,D)

Day 3 Hoolongopar Gibbon Sanctuary | Kaziranga National Park

We depart early this morning to experience the Hoolongopar Gibbon Sanctuary, where we explore the park on foot looking for primates like Western Hoolock Gibbon, Stump-tailed Macaque, Northern Pig-tailed Macaque, Rhesus Macaque, Capped Langur, and Assam Macaque. We may also find other species like the Pallas' Red Bellied Squirrel, Malayan Giant Squirrel, Indian Elephant, Wild Boar, and even the shy Jungle Cat.

A number of interesting birds like the Abbott's Babbler, Rosy, Long-tailed and Grey-chinned Minivet, Banded Bay Cuckoo, Red-headed Trogon, Oriental Pied Hornbill, Chestnut-headed, Slaty-bellied and Grey-bellied Tesias, Pale-chinned Flycatcher, Snowy-browed Flycatcher, Small Niltava, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, and Red-breasted Parakeet are species we expect to find.

The park is also home to an amazing number of butterflies and we are able to see a number of them—species like Red and Yellow Helen, Batwing, Unbroken Sergeant, White Dragontail, Crimson and Common Rose, Commodore, Red Lacewing, and several others can be sighted while we are walking in the park.

The park has a number of wild Indian Elephants that are present in the park so we stick together while exploring the forests on foot.

This afternoon we enjoy a sit down hot lunch at a nearby home before we make the two and half hour drive to Kaziranga. On arrival, we check in at the lodge and get settled in our air conditioned rooms before enjoying some leisurely birding on the outskirts of the park.

Accommodations at The Infinity Lodge or similar (B,L,D)

Days 4 & 5 Kaziranga National Park

On each of our two full days here in Kaziranga we enjoy morning and afternoon safaris in the national park—these drives are in open 4-wheel drive jeeps. Early risers can opt to get out a bit earlier to bird an area behind the lodge where a number of species can be encountered. There is a forest patch bordered by tea estates and

plenty of good birds can be sighted here. We look for some endangered birds like the Rufous-fronted Babbler, Puff-throated Babbler, Lesser and Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, the brightly colored Scarlet Minivet, Black-naped and Indian Golden Oriole, Rufous-backed Laughingthrush, Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush, and a number of other species.

On our morning safaris we hope to see the One-horned Rhino, herds of Indian Elephant, a number of Wild Buffalo, and other mammals like the Smooth-coated Otter and the rare Hog Badger. On one of the days, after the morning safari and a quick picnic breakfast at the park gates, we venture out (about an hour's drive) to enjoy a boat ride on the Brahmaputra River looking for the severely endangered Gangetic Dolphin and water birds.

On our afternoon safari drives, we look for more birds and mammals. We may also be lucky to find the rare King Cobra or a basking Burmese Rock Python and other reptiles like the Water Monitor or Bengal Monitor.

Today we enjoy morning and afternoon safaris in the national park. Birding at Kaziranga National Park is some of the best in India. Almost 500 species of birds call this place home; the park is a vitally-important IBA (Important Bird Area), home to 14 near threatened species. Notable residents include Swamp Francolin, Lesser Adjutant, Pallas's Fish-Eagle, Bengal Florican, Greater Grey-headed Fish-Eagle, Black-necked Stork, and difficult but possible Bristled Grass-Warbler, Marsh Babbler, Finn's Weaver, Black-breasted Parrotbill, and more. Pale-capped Pigeon, a globally-threatened species, breeds in the park. Kaziranga is also famous for its nesting colonies of the Spot-billed Pelican.

On our safari drives, we search for mammals, including Hog Deer, Indian Elephant, Indian Rhinoceros, Wild Water Buffalo, Swamp Deer, Sambhar, Indian Muntjac, Capped Langur, Rhesus Macaque, Western Hoolock Gibbon, Asiatic Jackal, Common Palm Civet, Hoary Bellied Squirrel, Red-Bellied Pallas Squirrel, Himalayan Striped Squirrel, Black Giant Squirrel, Smooth Coated Otter, Bengal Tiger, Small Indian Mongoose, Hog Badger, and Assam Macaque.

Accommodations at The Infinity Lodge or similar (B,L,D)

Day 6 Kaziranga National Park | Sundarbans National Park

We say goodbye to Kaziranga this morning after breakfast. Today is primarily a travel day; we leave Kaziranga and make the four-hour drive to Guwahati airport for flights to Kolkata. This is a short flight, just over an hour, and repositions us well to move on to our next national park: Sundarbans.

It is a three-hour drive to the jetty point where we embark on a boat into Sundarbans National Park, a large coastal mangrove forest on the border of India and Bangladesh. This second section of our tour opens up some truly splendid birding, and time here also gives us excellent opportunities to witness Royal Bengal Tiger. Other wildlife we watch for includes Estuarine Crocodile, Fishing Cat, Common Otter, Water Monitor, Gangetic Dolphin, Irrawady Dolphin, River Terrapin, sea turtles like Olive Ridley, Green Sea Turtle, and Hawksbill Turtle. The park is also home to six species of shark and ray. Other mammals we hope to see include Wild Boar, Spotted Deer, Porcupine, and Rhesus Macaque.

Once we reach our simple, but well-appointed lodge in the evening, we enjoy time to relax, eat dinner, and get to know the lodge grounds.

Accommodations at The Sunderban Jungle Camp or similar (B,L,D)

Day 7 Sundarbans National Park

We awake bright and early today to an all-day cruise through the Sundarbans. This is an amazing land that is

strewn with rivers and swamps. The habitat has resulted in a difficult compromise between man and animal (with high man-animal conflict situations).

Sundarbans is home to some rare and interesting birds and we look out for the shy Mangrove Whistler, White-browed Scimitar-babbler; Buffy Fish-owl; Grey-fronted Green Pigeon; Greater Flameback; a number of kingfishers like the Stork-billed, Brown, Little Pied, Black-capped, Common and Collared Kingfisher, Loten's Sunbird, Forest Wagtail, the black morph of the Changeable Hawk Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, White-bellied Sea Eagle, and a host of other species.

The villagers in some parts of Sundarbans live under the shadow of the Tigers of the mangroves who do swim into the villages occasionally and kill livestock. Your stay is on an island where, fortunately due to high protection, these kind of situations do not arise. From the boat your guide watches for Tiger, Jungle Cat, Spotted Deer, Rhesus Macaque, Wild Boar and the rare Small-clawed Otter. There is even a possibility of sighting the Irrawady Dolphin and the rare Fishing Cat and Leopard Cat.

Accommodations at The Sunderban Jungle Camp or similar (B,L,D)

Day 8 Sundarbans National Park | Kolkata

Though we reposition to Kolkata this evening, we spend most of the day cruising Sundarbans. We begin our cruise early and continue our explorations until about 4:00. We then cruise back to the jetty and embark on our drive back to Kolkata. After checking in to our hotel and enjoying a quick dinner, we settle into our rooms for the night.

Accommodations at the Holiday Inn (B,L,D)

Day 9 Kolkata | Bagdora | Singalila National Park

We depart our hotel early this morning for the airport to catch our flight to Bagdogra, due north of Kolkata. Once we land, we are met by our driver and embark for Manebhanjan, a drive of about three hours to the park entry. Then it's into the wilds! At the park gate we climb aboard our safari vehicle, an open Land Rover, and drive another hour to our lodge, nestled inside Singalila National Park in the foothills of the Himalayas right on the border of Nepal. We stop for birds and views! On arrival, we settle into our rooms, then enjoy dinner and sunset over our view of the national park and beyond.

Accommodations at Habre's Nest or similar (B,L,D)

Days 10 – 12 Three Full Days at India's Outstanding Singalila National Park

With the luxury of ample time, we spend the next four days exploring on foot and by safari vehicle looking for the iconic Red Panda and other mammals, as well as myriad birds. We spend most mornings out exploring until mid-day, taking a packed lunch to eat along the trail. We return to our lodge in the late afternoon or early evening to relax, freshen up, and explore the lodge grounds. Hikes are typically out and back, giving us the chance to perhaps spend long hours watching and photographing the Red Pandas. Other mammals that we may see here include Asiatic Leopard, Leopard Cat, Jungle Cat, rare but possible Malay Porcupine, Himalayan Serow, Himalayan Black Bear, Wild Boar, Assam Macaque, Hoary-bellied Squirrel, Orange-bellied Squirrel, and more.

Birds include the striking Satyr Tragopan, the brilliant Red-headed Trogon, and numerous specialties including Hill Partridge, Darjeeling Woodpecker, Spotted Nutcracker, Streak-throated Barwing, Gold-naped Finch, Scarlet Finch, Dark-breasted and Dark-rumped Rosefinch, Sikkim Treecreeper, a number of different warblers, yuhinas, tits, and overhead, we keep alert for views of raptors.

The lodges in this area are basic, but offer awesome views, a clean bed and bathroom, and simple, home cooked food for our dining.

Accommodations at Habre's Nest or similar (B,L,D)

Day 13 Singalila National Park to Kolkata

After a relaxed morning that includes some additional explorations in Singalila, we drive back to Bagdora for our flights to Kolkata. Upon arrival, we are transferred to our airport hotel. You can make international flights out this evening if you'd like (after 8 PM), or you can depart at your leisure tomorrow morning.

Accommodations at the Holiday Inn (B,L,D)

Kanha Tiger Reserve Extension

Day 1 Kolkata | Raipur | Kanha Tiger Reserve

We depart our airport hotel early this morning to connect to our short, hour-and-a-half flight south-west to Raipur, the capital city of Chhattisgarh State in central India. Raipur is home to the ancient Dudhadhari Math temple, a sacred monument dedicated to Lord Rama. On arrival at Raipur Airport we drive nearly four and a half hours to Kanha where we check in the atmospheric lodge located on the fringe of the park. We enjoy lunch and then take our first safari drive out into to the park.

Although our camp is tented, the tents are large and luxurious, with private bath and all the bells and whistles. Our days (and nights) here are spent comfortably, immersed in the reserve and all its wonder.

Accommodations at The Shergarh Tented Camp (B,L,D)

Day 2 Kanha Tiger Reserve

Today we enjoy early morning and afternoon safaris in open 4X4 jeeps. The park is about 1000 sq kms (apart from the buffer area which is another 1000 sq kms) and it is divided in four zones that are open to tourists.

The park is home to Tigers, Leopards, the rare and severely endangered Indian Wild Dog, Asiatic Jackal, Jungle Cat, Sloth Bear, the endemic hard-ground Swamp Deer, Sambhar, the largest wild bovid—Indian Gaur, Bengal Fox, herds of Spotted Deer, Wild Boar, and other mammals. Kanha is a beautiful park with plentiful saal trees and is home to over 300 species of birds like the Crested Hawk Eagle, Crested Serpant Eagle, Brown Wood Owl, Mottled Wood Owl, Scarlet Minivet, Brown-cheeked Fulvetta, Paradise Flycatcher, Red Spurfowl, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, the endemic Indian Scimitar Babbler and the Red Spurfowl, and others.

Our intimate and lovely Africa-style tented camp is located near to the park in a natural forest with a number of birds on the grounds. The tents are spacious and fan-cooled and have adobe-like porches for sitting and watching the wildlife. In the evening hot water bottles and extra blankets and duvets are provided to keep us warm, as needed. The camp is run by the local community with active participation from the owners and a team of naturalists. Shergarh has running hot water, laundry facilities, and for those who need to get in touch with their family and friends there is an area that is equipped with wifi. Shergarh serves a mix of Indian and continental cuisine (and can manage special dietary needs for those who need it). We gather for meals in a lovely dining area adorned with local art and furnishings. A fireplace is lit up in the evenings and everyone gathers around to share conversation and learn from each other over tea and drinks. Shergarh also supports a couple of artists from the local Gond community whose art (Gond Art) is well known in some parts of the world. For those who are interested, Shergarh can call the artists and people can meet the artists, as well as buy an art-piece directly from the artist.

Accommodations at The Shergarh Tented Camp (B,L,D)

Day 3 Kanha Tiger Reserve Safari Drives

We enjoy another morning and afternoon safari into the park. We visit different zones of the park today so we can explore the diverse micro-habitats and make the most of the diversity of the forest. However our drives are a little bit biased towards finding a Tiger. The Tiger has been voted as the “most charismatic mammal” across several web-based research organisations for the last 20 years and when we see one in the wild we realize the reasons for that. Kanha is home to over a 100 Tigers and within the areas that we cover there are a number of well-known males and females whose whereabouts are fairly known by our guides. We plan the drives in a way that maximises our chances to find one in the wild. We, of course, stop several times for birds and other mammals and birds. With luck we may be able to find a few interesting reptiles like the *Calotes versicolor* (Garden Lizard) and other species like Indian Rock Python or even an Indian Cobra. Kanha is home to a large variety of butterflies and we are sure to stop and enjoy some of them, too.

Accommodations at The Shergarh Tented Camp (B,L,D)

Day 4 Kanha Tiger Reserve Safari Drive | Visit to a Local Village

Today we are driven out to the Phen Sanctuary, which is about an hour from the lodge. The sanctuary is located in the buffer of the park and it offers an opportunity for a quieter experience with the chance of sighting animals like the Malabar Giant Squirrel, Indian Four-horned Antelope, Bluebull, and even the Indian Grey Wolf.

This afternoon we have a change of pace and take a drive through the local village to experience rural life and its charm—we meet locals and enjoy a meal at a small house with new friends from the nearby community.

Accommodations at The Shergarh Tented Camp (B,L,D)

Day 5 Kanha | Raipur | Departures

We say goodbye to our gracious hosts today after breakfast. We then settle in for our drive to the Swami Vivekandanda (Raipur) airport where the tour ends. Our operator has booked our group flights from Raipur to New Delhi; you will make your flights home from New Delhi. Naturalist Journeys offers you the service of our travel agent, Pam Davis of Willamette Travel, to help you book flights. If you wish to extend your time in India, our partner agency is happy to make suggestions. (B,L)

Know Before You Go

Main Tour Pace: The tour demands a fair amount of walking, occasionally uphill or downhill, particularly in Singalila National Park. Normally we are out walking for several hours, though at a birders pace so not covering significant distances, typically 1 – 2 kilometers. After time at Singalila, the tour is pretty relaxed but the safaris require early morning starts.

Extension Pace: The extension demands a fair amount of time in the open jeeps through the forests, which can be bumpy and dusty but allow for prime wildlife viewing. Due to predators being present, there is minimal walking so other than jeep-driving type of conditions, it is a fairly easy trip. In case someone has any physical complications we will need to know that in advance and accommodate in the best way possible. The pace of the tour is pretty relaxed but the safaris require early morning starts and normally the evening meals are done by 8:00 PM so you can get enough sleep each night.

Journey Cost & Details

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose (CCU) in Kolkata in time for a welcome dinner on January 10. Please book departure flights for the main tour after 8:00 PM January 22 or for the extension from Indira Gandhi International (DEL) in New Delhi in the evening on January 27. Please check all flight times with us before booking.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is **\$6390 DBL / \$7280 SGL** per person, based on double occupancy, from Kolkata. Cost includes all accommodations; all meals as stated in the itinerary; group airport transfers; ground transportation; professional guide services; park, preserve, and other activity fees; miscellaneous program expenses; and internal airfare.

Tour price does not include: roundtrip airfare to and from Kolkata (or New Dehli for those on the extension), or items of a personal nature such as laundry, portorage, telephone charges, or alcoholic beverages.

Cost of the Kanha Tiger Reserve extension is **\$1995 DBL / \$2395 SGL**.

Photo Credits

Red Panda, Avijit Sarkhel (AS); Oriental Pied Hornbill, Carlos Sanchez (CS); Hoopoe, Bud Ferguson (BF); Tiger Family, AS; Asian Elephant, CS; Rhino, AS; Primate, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush, CS.

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