

Grand India: Tigers & Glorious Birds with Naturalist Journeys



March 10 – 23, 2023

w/ Red Panda Extension

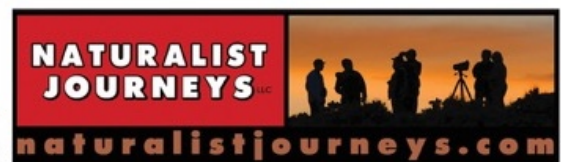
866.900.1146

520.558.1146

travel@naturalistjourneys.com

www.naturalistjourneys.com

or find us on Facebook & Instagram at
Naturalist Journeys, LLC



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 Kaziranga, Sundarbans, and Kanha as three totally different environments to explore; our tour is a national park sampler rich in wildlife.

Explore by safari vehicle through Kaziranga National Park, keeping your eyes peeled for Indian Elephant, Indian Rhinoceros, and possibly even Bengal Tiger. Then cruise through extensive mangroves of the Sundarbans, where swimming tiger may cross paths with a plethora of water birds. You may also see the rare and diminutive Fishing Cat or Leopard Cat and even Jungle Cat. Then, we’re off to the Saal forests of Central India to enjoy safaris in the open forests of Kanha—a park that our owner, Peg Abbott, compares to Yellowstone for its incredible wildlife diversity. Keep an eye out for Bengal Tiger, Common Leopard, Sloth Bear, Jungle Cat, elegant Sambhar and rare Hardground Barasingha. Kanha is home to Wild Dogs too, a unique species that we may be lucky to spot here. Explorations are in open 4x4 jeeps with a knowledgeable local naturalist.

Birding highlights include Great Hornbill, Malabar Pied and Oriental Pied Hornbills, Swamp Francolin, rare but possible Bengal Florican, Greater-necklaced Laughingthrush, Long-tailed Broadbill, Indian Roller, Indochinese 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 beautiful natural habitat and try to see the iconic Red Panda by adding our Singalila National Park Extension. It’s the only place in the world where one can hope to see one of the cutest mammals on Earth, the Red Panda, along with plentiful Himalayan birds. By timing the extension for the end of the trip we have a chance to see the Rhododendron bloom in the park, which is exquisitely beautiful. Our lodge has great views of the Kanchenjunga Mountains, the highest peak in India.

Tour Highlights

- Find endemic and regional specialty birds in totally different parks and ecosystems
- Spend time alongside the Brahmaputra, one of the great rivers of Asia
- Look for Indian Elephant and Indian Rhino in the wild at Kaziranga
- Cruise mangrove areas rich with water birds at Sunderbans; keep yours eyed peeled for swimming tigers
- Opt to extend your stay and see Red Panda as you explore Singalila National Park

Tour Summary

14-Day / 13-Night India Wildlife Tour

\$6790 DBL / \$7690 SGL, from Kolkata

Airport is Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose (CCU)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Fri., Mar. 10 Arrivals 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 Taj New town or similar (D)

Sat., Mar. 11 Kolkata | Guwahati | Kaziranga

Early this morning, we fly to Guwahati and then we drive for four hours in our comfortable air conditioned van to reach the magnificent Kaziranga National Park in the far northeast part of the country. Kaziranga is one of the great wildlife-rich parks of India, and it hosts grasslands, savanna woodlands, tropical moist deciduous forests, and tropical semi-evergreen forests. The Brahmaputra River passes by to the north of the park and we should be lucky enough to spot Elephants and Rhinos here—a solid mark to the health of this wildland ecosystem.

Settle into air-conditioned accommodations and enjoy a bit of evening birding around the outskirts of the park.
Accommodations at The Infinity Lodge or similar (B,L,D)

Sun., Mar. 12 Kaziranga

Today we enjoy morning and afternoon safaris in the national park. Birding at Kaziranga 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, and more. Pale-capped Pigeon, a globally-threatened species, breeds in the park. Kaziranga is also famous for its nesting colonies of 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)

Mon., Mar. 13 Kaziranga

Today 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. This is a forest patch bordered by tea estates and plenty of good birds can be sighted here. We look for some endangered birds like Rufous-fronted and Puff-throated Babbler, Lesser and Greater Racket-tailed Drongos, brightly colored Scarlet Minivet, Black-naped and Indian Golden Orioles, Rufous-backed and Greater Necklaced Laughingthrushes, and a number of other species.

On our morning safari we hope to see One-horned Rhino, herds of Indian Elephant, a number of Wild Buffalo, and other mammals like Smooth-coated Otter and rare Hog Badger. After the morning safari, we return to the lodge for lunch and a short rest before our afternoon safari drive, looking for more birds and mammals. We may also be lucky to find rare King Cobra or a basking Burmese Rock Python and other reptiles like Water or Bengal Monitor.

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

Tues., Mar 14 Kaziranga National Park

Once again, we have morning and afternoon safaris in the park. Kaziranga has some lesser known areas around the park that can be very interesting for birders and today we explore a zone that is very rewarding from a birding perspective. Rare gems like the Blue-naped Pitta, Crow-billed Drongo, Pied-Falconet, and several other interesting species may show up.

After the morning safari, we return to the lodge for lunch and a short rest before our afternoon safari drive, looking for more birds and mammals. We explore a zone that is slightly further away this afternoon, often one of the best areas to find a tiger.

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

Wed., Mar. 15 Kaziranga | Kolkata | Sunderbans National Park

We depart early this morning to catch a mid-day flight back to Kolkata, then continue on to Sunderbans National Park. It's a three-hour drive to the jetty point where we board our boat into the park, a large coastal mangrove forest on the border of India and Bangladesh. This third 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, Small-clawed Otter, Water Monitor, Irrawaddy Dolphin, River Terrapin. Other mammals we hope to see include Wild Boar, Spotted Deer, 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)

Thurs., Mar. 16 Sunderbans

We awake bright and early today to an all-day cruise through the Sunderbans. 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).

Sunderbans 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 Sunderbans live under the shadow of tigers who do swim into the villages occasionally and kill livestock. Your stay is on an island where, due to high protection, these kind of situations do not arise.

Sunderbans also offers a rare chance to enjoy some fresh crab, prawns, and fish. These are delicious treats over lunch and dinner.

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

Fri., Mar. 17 Sunderbans | Kolkata

We plan to cruise most of the day again, exploring different areas of the park and covering territories of tigers in an attempt to find them. All of us have to keep our eyes peeled to look for the tiger pugmarks on the mudbanks. Once we find fresh ones we start hot-footing it in the boat. We circumnavigate the islands to see if there are fresh pugmarks on the other side or not. If we see that the tiger is yet to leave the island, we then make a plan to wait at the likeliest area from where the tiger is going to come out to cross the estuarine channels.

We also look out for rare and shy Mangrove Pitta and Mangrove Whistler. Other mammals like the smaller cats are always wonderful to see and photograph.

After lunch we start our cruise towards the jetty, disembarking and then drive back to Kolkata. On reaching Kolkata we overnight at and airport hotel.

Accommodations at Taj New Town Kolkata or similar (B,L,D)

Sat., Mar. 18 Kolkata | Kanha Tiger Reserve

After breakfast we leave for the Kolkata airport for a short, hour-and-a-half flight south-west to Raipur, the capital city of Chhattisgarh State in central India. On arrival at Raipur Airport we drive nearly four and a half hours to Kanha National Park, a park that we compare to Yellowstone in the USA for its incredible richness of mammals. Upon reaching Kanha, we check in to the lodge and enjoy the birds and the natural forest that are present on the lodge grounds.

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.

This afternoon, we head out for our first jeep safari to the Kanha Tiger Reserve.

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

Sun., Mar. 19 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 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 sal trees and is home to over 300 species of birds like the Crested Hawk Eagle, Crested Serpent 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. We gather for meals in a lovely dining area adorned with local art and furnishings. A fireplace is lit in the evenings and everyone gathers around to share conversation and learn from each other over tea and drinks. Shergarh also supports 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)

Mon., Mar. 20 & Tues., Mar. 21 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 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 well-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 Garden Lizard and other species like Indian Rock Python or even 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)

Wed., Mar. 22 Kanha | Raipur | Kolkata

We say goodbye to our gracious hosts today after breakfast. We then settle in for our drive to the Swami Vivekananda (Raipur) airport for flights back to Kolkata. We enjoy a celebratory final dinner.

Accommodations at The Taj Newtown or similar (B,L,D)

Thurs., Mar. 23 Departures | Optional Red Panda Extension

If you are not continuing on to the Red Panda extension, please plan departures today at leisure. (B)

Red Panda Extension

Thurs., Mar. 23 Kolkata | Bagdogra | Darjeeling Hills

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 our four-hour drive to Ghoom in the Darjeeling Hills. On our way up, we make several stops to enjoy our first hill birds. As we slowly gain altitude, we see birds like Blue Whistling Thrush, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, some of the gregarious laughing-thrushes and with luck a mixed flock comprising of minivets, minlas, orioles, and other nice and interesting species. On arrival we enjoy a couple of hours of birding in the near and surrounds and then have a quick dinner before a good night's sleep.

Accommodation at Sterling Resorts (heated rooms) or similar (B,L,D)

Fri., Mar. 24 – Sun., Mar. 26 Ghoom | Singalila | Ghoom

We are up really early each morning to drive the 45 minutes to an hour in covered heated vehicles to the gate of the Singalila National Park (manebhanjan). Our permits are checked here. Once that is done, we drive up inside the park. A beautiful oak and rhododendron forest uncovers itself from the folds of the mists that keep it as a secret forest unknown to the world. We start making stops and walk in to the wilderness enjoying the birding, starting from below and then moving up into the forests. We break for an al fresco breakfast and then resume birding for a while.

Our support crew meanwhile breaks themselves into two teams and starts looking for Red Pandas. Once they find one, they guide us to the location and we can enjoy scope views and possibly reasonably up close views of the panda. 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 Rosefinches, Sikkim Treecreeper, a number of different warblers, yuhinas, tits, and overhead, we keep alert for views of raptors.

Lunch is at a local lodge, then we resume birding through the afternoon. After that we drive down out of the park and return to our hotel in Ghoom.

Accommodation at Sterling Resorts (heated rooms) or similar (B,L,D)

Mon., Mar. 27 Singalila | Bagdogra | New Delhi

We leave early this morning and gradually drive down to Bagdogra airport to connect to our flight to New Delhi. Please plan evening departures out of New Delhi. (B,L)

Know Before You Go

Main Tour Pace: The main tour 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 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.

Extension Tour Pace: The extension 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. Jeep rides into and out of the park are quite bumpy.

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

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

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is **\$6790 DBL / \$7690 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 Delhi for those on the extension), or items of a personal nature such as laundry, portage, telephone charges, or alcoholic beverages.

Cost of the Singalila Red Panda extension is **\$2265 DBL / \$2550 SGL**. Internal flights are not included in this cost and estimated at \$240 per person for the two flights.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose (CCU) in Kolkata by 2:00 PM on March 10 so you can settle in and enjoy a welcome dinner.

Please book departure flights for the main tour at leisure on March 23 from CCU.

For the extension, please book flights out at around midnight on March 27 into March 28 from Indira Gandhi International (DEL) in New Delhi. Operationally, you will need to be at the airport three hours ahead of your flight so you will be transferred to the airport around 9:00 PM (give or take based on your flight time) on March 27.

Please check all flight times with us before booking.

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 Indian operator is happy to make suggestions.

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).

Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.