

Big Cats of Western India

Departs 23rd February 2026

Blue Dot Travel

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Itinerary correct as at 23 Sep 2024, but subject to change. ALL flights to be confirmed. www.bluedottravel.com.au



BIG CATS OF WESTERN INDIA

For wildlife-lovers, nothing is as alluring as the big cats of India. This journey takes us deep inside India's western wilderness. The region is highly diverse, with unique landscapes that are primarily dry and arid, dominated by the Thar Desert. Along with the desert are enchanting dry deciduous forests, shrubland, vast savanna grasslands and endless salt pans.

A huge variety of wildlife live here, including three of the four Big Cats in the country – the Asiatic Lion, Bengal Tiger and Indian Leopard. Interestingly we also have the opportunity to see four kinds of canids on this trip – Indian Wolf, Striped Hyena, Bengal Fox and Jackal. Along with these predators are other mammals such as the Asiatic Wildass, blackbuck, spotted deer, sambhar deer and many more.

Western India is also an essential destination on the Central Asian flyway and thousands of migratory birds congregate in the waterbodies, making it an absolute goldmine for birders. The arid salt pans are dotted with lakes that are breeding grounds for flamingos, cranes and pelicans. A number of raptors are found here, including harriers, vultures, falcons and eagles. On a lucky day, we may chance upon the highly endangered Great Indian Bustard, a bird endemic to our country.

Come with us, as we peel back the different layers of India for you. Wherever you are from, you will find something that touches your heart in India.



Day 1, Monday 23rd February
ARRIVE MUMBAI

Upon arrival in Mumbai, the group will be greeted and transferred to our hotel in the city, the Trident Nariman Point. Your evening is at leisure. Trident Nariman Point offers a spectacular view of Mumbai. Part of the famous Mumbai skyline, the hotel overlooks Marine Drive, a 3-km-long promenade that rings a beautiful natural bay. Overnight at Trident Nariman Point. *Meals in flight*



Day 2, Tuesday
24th February
MUMBAI

This morning, we'll explore Mumbai with a city tour. We'll see the Indo-Saracenic buildings at Victoria

Station and Mumbai University. We'll stroll the waterfront to see the famous Gateway to India monument constructed by the British. We'll also visit the dhobi ghat, a giant open-air laundry where hundreds of dhobi wallahs vigorously thump and scrub the city's washing. An unusual highlight is a visit to watch Mumbai's dhobi wallahs at work. See the sorting of the tiffin boxes (tin lunch boxes) by the dhobi wallahs, who deliver lunch boxes from private homes to the workplace. Their 100-year-old management system of collecting, sorting and delivering over a million tiffin boxes is flawlessly

executed daily. Later we'll drive through Marine Drive, Malabar Hills and Hanging Gardens. Welcome dinner is at the hotel. Overnight at Trident Nariman Point. *D*

Day 3, Wednesday 25th February
MUMBAI – DIU – SASAN GIR

Today we'll transfer to Mumbai airport to board the flight to Diu. We'll be picked up and transferred to Sasan Gir (approx 2 hrs) upon arrival. The Gir Forest National Park is a forest and wildlife sanctuary in Gujarat, India. Established in 1965, with a total area of 1412 km, it is the only refuge of the Asiatic lion. It is considered one of Asia's most important protected areas due to the number of species it supports. Gir wildlife reserve is a tapestry of deciduous forests, evergreen flora, scrublands, grasslands and water bodies. Late lunch at the hotel. The rest of the day is at your leisure. The Gateway Hotel Gir Forest is located just opposite the Hiran River at the fringe of the dense Gir Forest. The surrounding Gir Forest lends an atmosphere of calm and serenity to your days here. The spacious rooms are equipped with modern amenities, and a dedicated staff on standby ensures your stay is truly comfortable. Overnight at Gateway Hotel Gir Forest. *B/D*

Day 4, Thursday 26th February
SASAN GIR

Today, we'll enjoy morning and afternoon safaris. Gir National Park is the only place outside Africa where lions can be seen in their natural habitat. The entire

forest area of the Gir National Park is dry and deciduous, which provides the best habitat for the Asiatic Lion. Approx. 523 Lions and over 300 Leopards inhabit the park. The lions of Gir are majestic animals, averaging 2.75 metres in length, with a larger tail tassel, bushier elbow tufts and more prominent belly folds than his African cousin, which has a larger mane. Apart from these two animals, the park is home to two different species of deer. The Gir forest is known for the Chowsingha – the world's only four-horned antelope. The Jackal, striped Hyena and India Fox are some of the smaller carnivores found in Gir Forest. Overnight at Taj Gir Serai. **B/L/D**



Day 5, Friday 27th February **SASAN GIR**

Irrigated by 7 perennial streams and 4 reservoirs, the Gir National Park was once a hunting ground for royalty. The ecosystem hosts mammals, birds, reptiles and insects – all resilient species that face the annual adversity of drought. The exotic flora of Gir National Park gives shelter to 40 species of mammals and more than 425 species of birds. The sanctuary has been declared an important bird area by the Indian Bird Conservation Network. Gir is also the habitat of raptors like the critically endangered white-backed and long-billed vulture, the Egyptian Vulture, the vulnerable Greater Spotted Eagle and the endangered Palla's Fish Eagle. The crested Serpent Eagle, the Changeable Hawk Eagle and other prey birds breed in the Gir forests. Birds usually can be spotted while driving around Gir are the Asian Paradise Flycatcher, the Red-breasted Flycatcher, and the Fantail. Overnight at Taj Gir Serai. **B/L/D**



Day 6, Saturday 28th February **SASAN GIR – GONDAL**

This morning after breakfast, we'll drive to Gondal (approx. 4 hrs) and check into the hotel on arrival. In the afternoon, we'll visit the Naulakha Palace followed by Swaminarayan Temple. Naulakha Palace is one of the oldest and most beautiful palaces from the 17th century, with pretty jharokha windows and carved stone pillars. It houses the impressive Darbar Hall and a museum of paintings, furniture, brass and silver. Shri Swaminarayan Mandir. The temple includes idols of Dhami, Guru Parampara, Dham, Mukta, Ghanshyam Maharaj and Sukh Shayya. Diwali, Sharad Poornima and Yogi Jayanti are important festivals at this temple. Visit the Private Vintage Classic Car collection at Orchard palace. Overnight – Riverside Palace. Built in the 1880s as the residence of the Crown Prince of Gondal, the Riverside Palace is a colonial-style building set in gardens beside the town's river. It has been converted into a heritage hotel with 11 large, high-ceilinged rooms appointed with four-poster beds, old dressers, and other colonial-period furniture from the family's heirloom collection. **B/L/D**



Day 7, Sunday 1st March **GONDAL – DASADA**

Today we'll embark on a morning drive to Little Rann of Kutch, a salt marsh near the Great Rann of Kutch (approx 5 hrs) . It is famous as the world's last refuge of the Indian wild ass (Khur) for the conservation of which it has been declared as the Indian Wild Ass Sanctuary. Upon arrival, check-in at the resort and a late lunch. The rest of the afternoon will be at your leisure. Our accommodation is at Rann Riders by Kaafila, an enchanting, eco-friendly boutique resort that imaginatively combines ethnic architecture with modern facilities. Set in a serene rural landscape near Dasada Village, the resort is a lush oasis at the edge of the Little Rann of Kutch. With its primary focus on nature and wildlife, Rann Riders is an ideal base to explore the Little Rann with its rich and unique community of birds and animals - including the highly endangered Asiatic Wild Ass - and a wealth of cultural offerings. Dinner at the resort. **B/L/D**

Day 8, Monday 2nd March **DASADA**

Today we will explore the unique habitat of Little Rann of Kutch's salt desert on morning and evening jeep safaris. Driving across the Rann is a safari experience like no other. We'll cross the unique salt-laden landscape of grasslands, Prosopis scrub and bird-rich wetlands with experienced trackers. They can spot a herd of wild ass or nilgai among the rippled air of a heat shimmer. For birders, the winter months are fantastic for getting close to various species, including huge Common and Demoiselle Cranes flocks. Overnight at Rann Riders. **B/L/D**



Day 9, Tuesday **3rd March** **DASDA - MOUNT ABU**

Today we will drive north towards Mt. Abu for transiting to Rajasthan (approx 6 hrs). En route, we will visit the Sun Temple of Modhera, with its intricate designs carved and precise architecture allowing the sun rays to course through its chambers to strike the centre of the inner sanctum at high noon. About an hour from here lies Patan, the erstwhile capital of Gujarat in medieval times. Learn about Patan's silk ancestry from the Salvi family, who are the custodians of the Patola silk weaving technique and numerous other stories of trade with south-east Asia and other markets. We'll then continue your drive to Mount Abu. Check into your hotel on arrival. Later visit Delwara Jain Temples, built between the 11th and 16th centuries, one of the first Jain temples with such expansive and elaborate architectural nuances. Overnight at the Palace Hotel. The building was erected in 1893 under the management of the Council of Regency. The blueprint of this splendid structure



was chalked out by Sir Swinton Jacob, an eminent architect of his time. In 1962, Maharaja Karni Singhji converted this majestic residence into a hotel. **B/L/D**

Day 10, Wednesday 4th March
MOUNT ABU - BERA

Today we drive to the land of leopards and shepherds (approx 3 hrs). The village of Bera, Jawai is an untrammelled wilderness. Check into your safari lodge on arrival. Bijapur Lodge Leopard Safari Resort is a newly constructed wildlife boutique property spread over 5 acres amid the natural environment. It is considered one of the best places to stay in Jawai, The afternoon at leisure. **B/L/D**

Day 11, Thursday 5th March
BERA

Today morning, you will experience a Jeep Safari in the habitat around Jawai. Look for Leopards and other desert flora and fauna in the habitat around Jawai. Wildlife sightings are distant using a scope or binoculars, subject to the movement or location of animals. Later in the afternoon, we'll visit a village of the Rabari Shepherd community and learn about the traditions, culture and way of life. Despite the complications of raising sheep in leopard territory, the tribe has a balanced view towards the leopards - and is stoic when some of their livestock is lost yearly. Explore the wilderness with a Rabari shepherd, and learn of the eternal link between local tribes, their land and its biodiversity. Overnight at Bijapur Lodge. **B/L/D**

Day 12, Friday 6th March
BERA

Today morning and afternoon, experience a Jeep Safari in the habitat around Jawai. We'll look for leopards and other desert flora and fauna in the habitat around Jawai. Wildlife sightings are distant using a scope or binoculars, subject to the movement or location of animals. Overnight at Bijapur Lodge **B/L/D**



Day 13, Saturday 7th March
BERA - SHAHPURA BAGH

Today commence your early morning drive to Shahpura (approx 6 hrs). Upon arrival, check in to our hotel. Evening, enjoy

a sundowner at their 400 years old private fort (12 mm away) with 360-degree views of the countryside. It is a scenic drive, stopping en route to visit a famous Temple and tribal village. Overnight at Shahpura Bagh, a luxury homestay set upon 45 acres of thickly wooded land surrounded by a lake. Run by a warm and welcoming family, Shahpura Bagh offers an unhurried glimpse into the lives and rhythms of Rajasthan. Antique paintings and photographs

belonging to the family for generations line the property walls. A temperature-controlled pool with views over the scrub valleys brings together the best of the past and the present. **B/D**

Day 14, Sunday 8th March
SHAHPURA - RANTHAMBORE

Today morning commence your drive to Ranthambore (approx. 4 hrs). Upon arrival, we'll check in to our hotel, the Nahargarh Fort. This charming royal retreat is just a few yards away from Ranthambore National Park Gate. Nahargarh, dressed in ivory white fortification and set amidst thousands of trees, offers a tranquil experience of royalty and wilderness. Lunch at the hotel, with the afternoon at leisure. **B/L/D**

Day 15, Monday 9th March
RANTHAMBORE NATIONAL PARK

This former hunting ground of Maharajas, Ranthambore, with crumbling fort ramparts

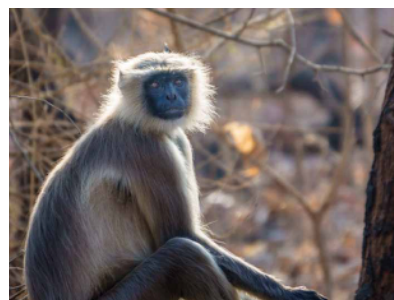


interspersed by villages with numerous watering holes, is today the regal empire of a clan of tigers, made famous by National Geographic's coverage. Conserving the tiger has also helped provide a refuge for a variety of other mammals like foxes, jackals, nilgai (blue bulls), spotted deer, and other avifauna and offers an unmissable safari experience. Today you can enjoy two jeep safaris into the national park, one early morning and the other afternoon post lunch. Ranthambore's sweeping hunting grounds of watering holes and ruins is best explored by jeep, a perfect vantage point to see wildlife in its natural environs. Apart from the famed royal Bengal tiger, Ranthambore is also home to the common leopard, nilgai or blue bull antelope, wild boar, sambar, hyena, sloth bear, grey langur, rhesus macaque and chital, among others. The numerous watering holes also support a rich birdlife and reptiles. Keep an eye out for one of the largest banyan trees in the country! Overnight and dinner at Nahargarh Fort. **B/L/D**

Day 16, Tuesday 10th March
RANTHAMBORE NATIONAL PARK

Start the day early with a jeep safari accompanied by the naturalist.

After a relaxed morning and a leisurely lunch, we'll set off for Dhonk Craft Centre. Dhonk Craft is an initiative by an organisation making handicrafts in and around Ranthambore NP with local villagers. By providing craft training to the community



living around Ranthambore, Dhonk craft is creating important employment opportunities for locals, and a viable alternative to wildlife poaching. Dhonk also encourages artisans across the globe to come and interact with these groups and exchange ideas and craft skills. Overnight at Nahargarh Fort. **B/L/D**



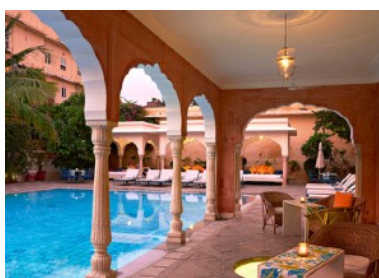
Day 17, Wednesday 11th March
RANTHAMBORE – JAIPUR

After breakfast, drive from Ranthambore to Jaipur (approx. 4 hrs drive). If there is an aspect of India that neither the Mughal empires nor the British Era could wipe out, it is the regal lifestyles of the chieftains and princes from the feudal times, and nowhere is it more in evidence than in Rajasthan. Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan state, is known fondly as the 'pink city' as most buildings are made of rosy sandstone. Established by Sawai Jai Singh II, the ruler of Amber, thus named to signify a 'city of victory', Jaipur's bustling bazaars and labyrinthine by-lanes whisper the history of 4 eras. Upon arrival, check in at your hotel and spend the afternoon at leisure. This evening you will have a cooking experience at the hotel, followed by dinner. Overnight at our authentic luxurious homestay on the outskirts of Jaipur. Khas Bagh is a heritage-style haveli with a magnificent sandstone pool, sprawling lawns and verandahs overlooking the hills. Every room has spacious jharokhas or an enclosed overhanging balcony borrowed from old palace architecture. **B/D**



Day 18, Thursday 12th March
JAIPUR

Today explore Jaipur's landmarks, starting with a visit to the Amer Fort - the citadel of the Kachhawaha clan, who later became rulers of Jaipur. With sprawling apartments, pleasure gardens, and temples, Amer is one of India's most intricate and beautiful Rajput fortresses. Later experience a Pink City Rickshaw



Ride (duration 1 hour). The Pink Rickshaw Company's initiative seeks to create new economic opportunities for women youth from low-income households. Social capital will be built by enrolling these women

and making them equity holders in a social enterprise they will own and manage. It will also impact the environment through the e-rickshaws that are proposed to be deployed under the program. Continue for a sense of history and art, stepping into the City Palace complex, which exhibits royal collections of miniature paintings, armour, royal garments, textiles, and artefacts. Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II is known to have commissioned work for building the outer wall of the city's complex. He shifted from Amer to Jaipur due to water problems

and increased population in 1727. Thereafter continue to the ornate Hawa Mahal or the Palace of the Winds, Jaipur's most distinctive landmark. Towering over the city, the Hawa Mahal was built to resemble Krishna's crown, and its purpose was to allow ladies of the court to remain unseen as they watched the goings-on in the streets below. Its forbidding exterior belies an inner paradise where a beautiful fusion of Mughal and Hindu styles finds its ultimate expression. Follow this with a visit to the Jantar Mantar observatory built in the early 1700s by Sawai Jai Singh II, Jaipur's ruler and a keen astronomer that bears witness to Central Asia's rich legacy of astronomy. Enjoy lunch in the city at a restaurant of your choice. (own cost). Later we'll explore the old city markets where a smorgasbord of delights and crafts await! The labyrinthine streets have long been the bustling economic arteries of the city, trading in



everything from local handicrafts like the clue pottery and silver jewellery to exotic, imported goods more valued today. Late afternoon visit to Dera Amer, situated on the outskirts of Jaipur. This private retreat was once a scrubland when the Singh family acquired an expanse of 180 acres. Dera Amer today is full of wilderness and natural beauty. Operating with an eco-sensitive mindset, with organic farming practices, implementing solar-panelled water pumps, and drip irrigation, engaging and empowering the local communities, and adopting elephants and camels rescued from a life of hard labour. Meet the man striving to positively affect the environment and provide the animals with a natural habitat and a healing touch. Interact with Laxmi, Rangmala or Anarkali, the three resident elephants; You can feed them, bathe them, or stroll around the retreat with one walking alongside you. Savour a special organic farm-fresh meal in exclusive venues in the wilderness of Dera Amer. Return to Khas Bagh for dinner. **B/D**

Day 19, Friday 13th March
JAIPUR – DEPARTURE

Depart for home. Today we will be transferred to Jaipur airport to board a flight to Delhi. Connect your international flight. **B/meals in flight**