

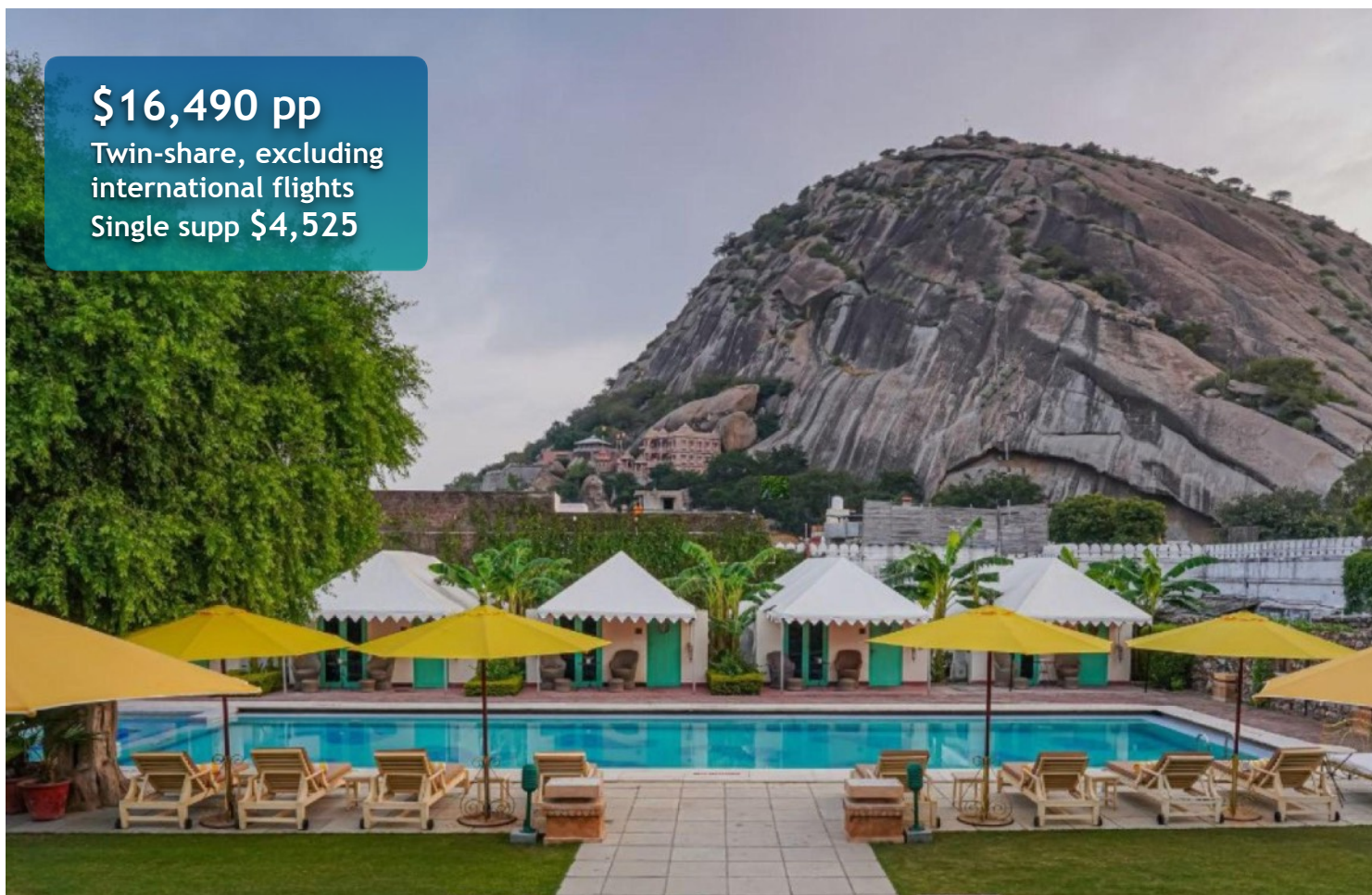
Blue Dot Travel



\$16,490 pp

Twin-share, excluding
international flights

Single supp \$4,525



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.

Join us as we peel back the various 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 late evening in to Mumbai, the group will be greeted and transferred to our hotel in the city. 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, where we stay for two nights.



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 the University of Mumbai. 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. 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 the Hanging Gardens. Your welcome dinner is at the hotel. Overnight at Trident Nariman Point. *B/D*

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

Today, we'll transfer to Mumbai airport to board the flight to Diu (9I623, 12:10/13:10). We'll be picked up and transferred to Sasan Gir (approx. 3 hrs). 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. Check in to The Woods at Sasan for three nights – 8 acres of lush mango orchard on the fringe of the 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 characterised by dry and deciduous vegetation, which provides the ideal 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 Chowringha – the world's only four-horned antelope. The Jackal, striped Hyena, and Indian fox are some of the smaller carnivores in the Gir Forest. *B/L/D*



Day 5, Friday 27th February SASAN GIR

Irrigated by seven perennial streams and four 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 provides shelter to 40 species of mammals and over 425 species of birds. The sanctuary has been designated as an Important Bird Area by the Indian Bird Conservation Network. Gir is also the habitat of raptors, including the critically endangered White-backed and Long-billed vultures, 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 that can usually be spotted while driving around Gir are the Asian Paradise Flycatcher, the Red-breasted Flycatcher, and the Fantail.

B/L/D



Day 6, Saturday 28th February SASAN GIR – GONDAL - RAJKOT

This morning, after breakfast, we'll drive to Rajkot via Gondal (approximately 4 hours), where we visit the Naulakha Palace, followed by the 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. Then we will drive to Rajkot and check into the Hotel Sayaji for one night. **B/L/D**

Day 7, Sunday 1st March RAJKOT – DASADA

Today, we'll embark on a morning drive to the Little Rann of Kutch, a salt marsh near the Great Rann of Kutch (approximately 5 hours). It is famous as the world's last refuge of the Indian wild ass (Khur), for which it has been declared the Indian Wild Ass Sanctuary.



Check in at the Rann Riders resort. The rest of the afternoon will be at your leisure. Your accommodation is an enchanting, eco-friendly boutique resort that thoughtfully combines traditional ethnic architecture with modern amenities. 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 for exploring the Little Rann, home to a rich and unique community of birds and animals, including the highly endangered Asiatic Wild Ass, as well as a wealth of cultural offerings. Our stay at The Rann Riders is for two nights. Dinner at the resort. **B/L/D**

Day 8, Monday 2nd March DASADA

Today we will explore the unique habitat of the 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 traverse the unique, salt-laden landscape of grasslands, Prosopis scrub, and bird-rich wetlands with experienced trackers. Keep a look out for herds 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 flocks of Common and Demoiselle Cranes. Overnight at Rann Riders. **B/L/D**



Day 9, Tuesday 3rd March DASADA – MOUNT ABU

Today, we will drive north towards Mt. Abu for our transit to Rajasthan (approximately 6 hours). 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. 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. The Palace Hotel was built 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. Stay for one night. **B/L/D**



Day 10, Wednesday 4th March MOUNT ABU – NARLAI

Today we'll drive to the land of leopards and shepherds (approximately 4.5 hrs). Check in to the gorgeous Rawla Narlai for three nights. Then, late in the afternoon, we'll take a drive to spot birdlife and experience a sensational high tea overlooking the lake and hills. (As a result, dinner will be light and later than usual). **B/L/D**

Day 11, Thursday 5th March NARLAI

Today comprises morning and afternoon jeep safaris in an effort to spot leopards. The safari drives will last approximately 3 hours each, allowing time to enjoy the hotel's beautiful grounds, including the swimming pool, during the day. **B/L/D**



Day 12, Friday 6th March NARLAI

For those up for an early morning trek, there's an optional climb (750 steps, about 30 minutes) up to Elephant Rock. Then, after breakfast, we'll take a walk around the village of Narlai to interact and see how the locals live. On this walk, we'll visit the temple, which offers stunning views over the countryside. Or, consider another leopard spotting safari if trekking uphill isn't your thing. Tonight, a special dinner is planned at an ancient stepwell, not far from the hotel. **B/L/D**

Day 13, Saturday 7th March NARLAI – SHAHPURA

Today, we'll commence our early morning drive to Shahpura (approximately 5 hrs). On arrival, we'll check into our hotel. Enjoy a sundowner at their 400-year-old private fort (12 km away) with 360-degree countryside views in the evening. It is a scenic drive, stopping en route to visit a famous temple and a tribal village. We'll overnight at Shahpura Bagh, a luxury homestay on 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. Check in to Shahpura Bagh for one night. **B/D**

Day 14, Sunday 8th March SHAHPURA – RANTHAMBORE

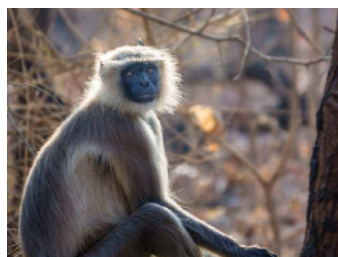
This morning, we will commence our drive to Ranthambore (approximately 4 hours). Upon arrival, we'll check into our accommodation, Khem Villas, which is set amidst thousands of trees. This charming retreat is a 20 minute drive from the Ranthambore National Park Gate. A beautiful property, offering a tranquil experience of the wilderness. Lunch will be at the hotel, with the afternoon at leisure. Stay for three nights. **B/L/D**



Day 15, Monday 9th March RANTHAMBORE NATIONAL PARK

This former hunting ground of the Maharajas, Ranthambore, with its crumbling fort ramparts interspersed by villages and numerous watering holes, is today the regal domain of a clan of tigers, made famous by National Geographic's coverage. Conserving the tiger has also helped provide a refuge for other mammals, such as foxes, jackals, nilgai (also known as blue bulls), spotted deer, and various avifauna, offering an

unforgettable safari experience. Today, we'll enjoy two jeep safaris into the national park, one in the early morning and the other in the afternoon, after lunch. Ranthambore's expansive hunting grounds, featuring watering holes and ruins, are best explored by jeep, offering a perfect vantage point to see wildlife in its natural habitat.



Apart from the famed Royal Bengal tiger, Ranthambore is also home to the common leopard, nilgai (also known as the 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 a variety of reptiles. Keep an eye out for one of the largest banyan trees in the country! Overnight and dinner at Khem Villas. **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 that makes handicrafts in and around Ranthambore National Park 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 worldwide to come together and interact with these groups, exchanging ideas and sharing craft skills. Overnight at Khem Villas. **B/L/D**

Day 17, Wednesday 11th March RANTHAMBORE – JAIPUR

After breakfast, we'll leave Khem Villas and drive from Ranthambore to Jaipur (approximately 4 hrs). 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 feudal times, and nowhere is this more evident than in Rajasthan. Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan state, is

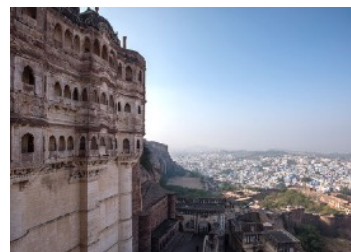
fondly known as the 'Pink City' because most buildings are constructed from rose coloured sandstone. Established by Sawai Jai Singh II, the ruler of Amber, thus named to signify a 'city of victory', Jaipur's bustling bazaars and labyrinthine by-lanes whisper the history of 4 eras. Upon arrival, check in at your hotel and spend the afternoon at leisure. This evening we will have a cooking experience at the hotel, followed by dinner. Spend two nights at the Shahpura House. **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 aims to create new economic opportunities for women and young people from low-income households. 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 for commissioning the construction of the outer wall of the city's complex. 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 who 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 awaits! The labyrinthine streets have long been the bustling economic arteries of the city, trading in everything from local handicrafts, such as clay pottery and silver jewellery, to exotic, imported goods, which are 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. 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 farewell dinner in exclusive venues in the wilderness of Dera Amer. Overnight at Shahpura House. **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**

RAJASTHAN EXTENSION

Tour cost: \$2,400 pp

Sing Supp: \$1,190

Day 1, Friday 13th March JAIPUR

Day at leisure to relax and recharge at the hotel. Overnight at Shapura House. **B**

Day 2, Saturday 14th March JAIPUR — JODHPUR

Today, depart early for the drive to Jodhpur (approx 6.5 hours). Upon arrival, check in at the hotel. The evening is at leisure. Overnight at Ajit Bhawan Palace (or similar). **B**



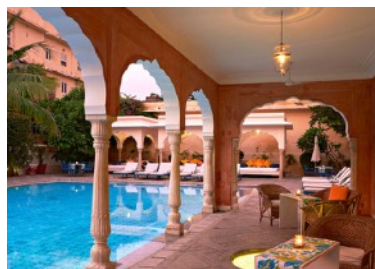
Day 3, Sunday 15th March JODHPUR

Epitomising Rajasthan's romance and feudal splendour with the majestic Mehrangarh Fort towering over it, Jodhpur was once a flourishing trade centre for opium, silk and copper. Jodhpur is the last bastion of fort ramparts, colourful bazaars, and animated people with their storytelling traditions before the



desert sands and dunes stretch away towards the horizon. Visit Mehrangarh Fort, one of the most majestic of Rajasthan's forts, described by the author Rudyard Kipling as "the creation of angels, fairies and giants". Its forbidding ramparts are in sharp contrast to the

flamboyantly decorated palaces within. After check-in to your hotel, the rest of the afternoon will be at your leisure. Later today, enjoy a walk in the Blue City, the historic district surrounding Mehrangarh Fort's foot. It has a mysterious quality to its quiet lanes, exquisite havelis, and pale indigo walls. Many believe that the indigo was mixed in the lime to provide a cooling effect against the harshness of the desert sun. Your guide will take you through the by-lanes, and we will learn more about the proud heritage of the city's inhabitants. Overnight at Ajit Bhawan Palace. **B**



Day 4, Monday 16th March JODHPUR — RANAKPUR — UDAIPUR

This morning, after breakfast, we'll drive to Udaipur en route, stopping to visit Ranakpur. The 15th-century Ranakpur Temple's grand scale,

architectural complexity and sculptural ornamentation rank it among the finest examples of temple architecture. The main temple is dedicated to the founder of Jainism, and Ranakpur is one of five holy places for the Jain followers. Continue your drive to Udaipur, and check into your hotel on arrival. Overnight at Taj Fateh Prakash Palace (or similar). **B**



Day 5, Tuesday 17th March UDAIPUR

An oasis nestled in the lap of the Aravalli Mountain range, Udaipur has a tranquil serenity that belies its tumultuous past. Originally a thriving caravanserai, Udaipur later became the capital of local royal clans. Udaipur's serene lakes, beautiful gardens and magnificent palaces lend it a nostalgia that has often earned it the acclaim of being one of the most romantic places in the world. Apart from its place in history, Udaipur has been immortalised in contemporary culture through iconic films, including The Jewel in the Crown and James Bond's Octopussy, as well as Gandhi. This morning, explore the City Palace, with its blend of stern Rajput military architecture and lavish Mughal-inspired decorative art. This is the largest palace in Rajasthan, spanning five acres and built between the 16th and 20th centuries.



Thereafter, walk through the old city to discover the various facets of markets, artists and artisans at work. Udaipur is renowned for its traditional miniature paintings, which are mural-like in style, depicting incidents from Rajput or Mughal history, as well as legends and stories from Hindu mythology. Udaipur is best known for its distinctive painting styles, including the Pichwai and Phad, as well as its Mughal miniatures. The Pichwai and Phad are created on cloth, while the miniature is crafted on specially treated paper using vegetable dyes. Phad is a scroll painting created on long cloth panels that narrates folk and historical stories. The Mughal miniatures depict a range of motifs, including mythology, court scenes, hunting scenes, and nature, and evolved into distinct styles across the various desert kingdoms of Rajasthan. End the walk at the Jagdish Temple, a three-storied architectural wonder comprising an intricately sculpted spire, beautifully carved pillars, decorated ceilings, and painted walls dedicated to Lord Vishnu, the sustainer in Hindu mythology. Enjoy your Octopussy moment with a Tuk-Tuk ride through the old city. Enjoy a tranquil ride on Lake Pichola this evening, listening to the lapping of the water alongside your boat, one of the most beautiful ways to take in the city of Udaipur. Overnight at Taj Fateh Prakash Palace. **B**

Day 6, Wednesday 18th March UDAIPUR — MUMBAI

Today, transfer to Udaipur airport to board your flight to Mumbai. Connect your international flight. The memories of the trip will keep you company on the flight back home. **B**



Icon indicates a day where there is **moderate physical exertion**. A basic level of fitness is required: eg. A trek over 'mostly flat' terrain or climbing several flights of steps without the support of handrails or elevators.



Icon indicates a day where there is a **particularly active section**. A good level of fitness is required: eg. A longer trek over non-groomed, uneven terrain, or ascending to reach a panorama. May also include exposure to higher altitude. **An alternate activity may be offered if you choose to sit out an active section.** Please call - we are happy to discuss each tour in more detail.