



TRAIN : The Deccan Odyssey
JOURNEY : Darjeeling Mail (WESTBOUND)
Journey Duration : Upto 15 Days

DAY 1 KOLKATA

Arrival day at Kolkata Airport, where you will be met and transferred to the iconic five-star Taj Bengal, Kolkata for a two-night stay, a landmark five-star hotel in the exclusive neighborhood of Alipore.

(All meals today are at your own arrangements)

DAY 2 KOLKATA

Kolkata is a sensory delight and cultural extravaganza that is constantly evolving. After breakfast, we spend the day exploring and absorbing the many sights that comprise this enthralling city that was once India's capital. Our tour includes a visit to the Victoria Memorial, one of the finest and most prominent buildings in Kolkata which houses a museum dedicated to the history of India.

We then visit Dalhousie Square, the bustling hub of English colonial power and trade during the two centuries of British rule. Our final stop is at South Park Cemetery, an atmospheric and still space within the clamour of modern-day Kolkata.

In the evening a drinks reception is followed by a Welcome Dinner at your hotel, where you can get to know your fellow travellers who will share this remarkable Indian rail odyssey.

DAY 3 KOLKATA TO DARJEELING

Today we embark on a spectacular journey to the hill station of Darjeeling. Choose to travel either by bus (3-4 hours) or embark on the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, itself listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which takes about 6 hours from Tindharia. Also known as the 'Toy Train', it is a 2ft (610mm) narrow-gauge railway.

Travelling through awe-inspiring scenery our locomotive zigzags and loops, gaining height to reach the cooler air of India's most famous hill station. We climb to Ghum; situated at 7,407 feet (2,258 metres), it is the highest railway station in India. The snow-covered Mount Kanchenchunga (third highest in the world) dominates the skyline, before dropping 595 feet (181 metres) into Darjeeling itself, first crossing the graceful double loop at Batasia. A packed lunch is served on board the train before our arrival into colonial Darjeeling.

We have dinner in the Hotel Mayfair where we will stay for the next three nights. Perched on a picturesque hill with beautiful views of the valley, the Mayfair is a heritage hotel that exudes old-world charm and quiet elegance.

DAY 4 DARJEELING

We awaken to the stunning scenery of Mount Kanchenchunga and this morning we can ride the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway up to Batasia Loop and Ghum, climbing 600 feet during its 7km journey. The senses reel as we experience the chaotic nature of roadside life, passing within inches of colourful shops, houses and enthralling monasteries.

Our afternoon tour of Darjeeling provides a wonderful opportunity to experience the elegant grandeur of colonial life as well as the contrasting culture of a Tibetan refugee centre. Finally, there is an absorbing visit to the Himalayan Institute where we learn about some of the famous mountaineering expeditions.

DAY 5 DARJEELING

This morning, weather permitting, we have a once in a lifetime opportunity to watch the sun rising over the snow-capped Himalayas, with Mount Everest rising majestically 200 miles away on the horizon. Your early morning trip to Tiger Hill is a quintessential experience that captures the very character of one of our planet's most overwhelming natural sights.

This afternoon we visit a local tea plantation and sample the freshest cup of tea most of us are ever likely to taste!

DAY 6 DARJEELING; BOARD THE DECCAN ODYSSEY

Mid-afternoon sees us boarding our private train, Deccan Odyssey, for the perfect way to experience the colour, character and amazing diversity of India. Settle into your beautifully appointed private en-suite cabin, enjoy the hospitable atmosphere of the stylish Bar Lounge Car and experience fine Indian or western cuisine prepared by our resident chefs.

DAY 7 VARANASI

Varanasi simply has to be experienced to be understood. Our early morning arrival at Varanasi, one of India's most sacred and spiritual places, offers us the opportunity to discover what is believed to be the oldest continually inhabited city in the world. Situated on the banks of the River Ganges, this cultural and religious centre, known as the City of Light and established between 3 – 5,000 years ago, is a focus for Hindu pilgrims who bathe in the sacred waters of the Ganges and perform funeral rites.

We are privileged to witness these time-honoured ceremonies before departing for a private river cruise. Our exploration of Varanasi is completed with a guided walk through the winding ancient streets – home to some 2,000 temples – of this remarkable city.

DAY 8 DELHI

One of the oldest cities in the world, Delhi is a bustling and vibrant city, famous for its traditional bazaars and street markets.

Our fascinating city tour in this pulsating metropolis takes in the Raj Ghat memorial to Mahatma Gandhi, the World Heritage Site of Humayun's Tomb, the first example of Mughal architecture in India, and the towering Indo-Islamic Qutab Minar, the tallest brick minaret in the world at 238ft (73m) which dates from 1368.

Tonight, we enjoy a sumptuous dinner on board our private train as we continue our journey across India.

DAY 9 FATEPHUR SIKRI & AGRA FORT

After breakfast, we visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Fatehpur Sikri. Known as a 'ghost city', this red sandstone town was abandoned only shortly after being built due to lack of water in 1585.

This afternoon our journey takes us to Agra Fort, a magnificent structure that dominates the skyline and acted as the main residence for emperors of the Mughal Dynasty until 1638. Its red sandstone walls run for 2.5 km and contain many fairy-tale palaces and two beautifully preserved mosques.

DAY 10 AGRA (FOR TAJ MAHAL)

Today is devoted to visiting the impossibly beautiful Taj Mahal, built entirely of white marble on the south bank of the Yamuna River and indisputably the most famous building in the world.

Completed in 1648 by Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan, the Taj Mahal is a mausoleum for his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal, and took 22 years and 20,000 artisan workers to complete. Nowhere else on the planet will you experience such a poignant architectural statement dedicated to the enduring nature of human love and inspirational artistry.

DAY 11 JAIPUR

With a breakfast arrival into the capital of Rajasthan, the 'Pink City' of Jaipur overwhelms the senses as we embrace its rich and colourful past. This morning we visit the Amber Fort and explore its breath-taking and ornate majesty, including the magnificent Hall of Mirrors.

After lunch in a local restaurant, we continue our exploration with a tour of the Jantar Mantar Observatory, the imposing and vast City Palace and the beautiful Hawa Mahal, or Palace of Winds. This delicately stunning yet enduring monument is constructed entirely of pink sandstone and was built in 1799 to allow royal ladies to discreetly observe everyday life. Finally, if time permits, we explore a famous fabric market before returning to the train to refresh ourselves.

This evening we dine in the elegant Rambagh Palace Hotel, originally built in 1835 and once the residence of the Maharaja of Jaipur. The palace retains its elaborate splendour, extravagantly decorated with hand-carved marble 'jalis' or latticework, sandstone balustrades, cupolas and 'chattris' or cenotaphs, and elaborate Mughal Gardens.

DAY 12 UDAIPUR

We spend a leisurely morning on board as the landscape and spirit of India unfolds before us. We then have the opportunity to listen to a talk on Indian culture before arriving at Udaipur, known as the 'City of Lakes' or 'Venice of the East'. A beguiling tapestry of breath-taking lakes and opulently majestic palaces from the Rajput era awaits your discovery.

The afternoon is spent admiring the awe-inspiring beauty of the Lake Palace. Constructed entirely of marble, it sits on its own island in the shimmering waters of Pichola Lake. We go on to visit the medieval grandeur of City Palace.

DAYS 13-14 MUMBAI

On Day 13 we arrive in Mumbai and say farewell to the Deccan Odyssey and transfer to the iconic five-star Taj Mahal Palace & Tower Hotel for a luxurious two-night stay. This flagship Taj hotel offers you splendid views of the Arabian Sea and Gateway of India, alongside refined century-old hospitality. This legendary hotel has played host to kings, dignitaries and eminent personalities from across the globe.

Deluxe Class guests will stay in the Tower Wing, Presidential Suite guests reside in the Palace Wing.

The compelling city of Mumbai is rich in culture and history. During our two-night stay we visit the 'Dhobi Ghats', an intriguing outdoor laundry. The dhobi is a traditional laundryman who collects your dirty linen, washes it and returns it neatly pressed. The Ghats are the laundries where they practice this historic tradition.

Our programme also takes in Fort Bombay and Gandhi's House, now turned into a fascinating museum depicting his inspirational life.

We take a short cruise from the Gateway of India, weather permitting, to Elephanta Island. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is a lush island densely wooded with palm, mango and tamarind trees. The atmospheric and fascinating cave complex, which dates back to the 3rd – 5th century, was designed to honour the life of Lord Shiva, one of the most auspicious Hindu gods.

In the city we take lunch at the famous seafood Trishna restaurant.

As part of the touring programme, you are also free to explore Mumbai independently or visit one of the colourful local markets.

DAY 15 MUMBAI

After breakfast you will be transferred to Mumbai Airport to begin your journey home.