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Explore Colorful Rajasthan including Royal Palaces, Forts and Tribal Villages February 6-21, 2012

November 20-December 5, 2012 During Pushkar Camel Faire

Day 1 Arrival in Delhi. Transfer to hotel.

Day 2 Delhi (B, D)

Breakfast, orientation & introductions by tour escort. Late morning start sightseeing of Old & New Delhi including the Red Fort, India Gate, Qutab Minar & a rickshaw ride through the market in Old Delhi. Also visit Crafts Museum for an introduction to the wealth of textiles and handicrafts of India.
Dinner at a traditional restaurant.

Day 3 Agra / Trident (B, D)

Early morning Shatabdi Express Train to Agra dep 615 am, arr 830 am. After checkin, visit Agra Fort, Sikandra and Itmad-ud-Daulah Tomb. We will also stop at one of the artisan workshops to see a demonstration of the inlay marble technique used on the Taj Mahal. These are descendants of the original artists who worked on the Taj Mahal.

Day 4 Agra-Jaipur / Samode Haveli (B,D)

Sunrise visit to Taj Mahal. Return to the hotel for breakfast.

After breakfast, drive to Jaipur, enroute visit Fatephur Sikri, the deserted city. Fatephur Sikri was the capital from 1570 to 1586 of the Great Mughul Empire, and has a unique architectural concept reflecting Akbar's belief in the unity of all religions.

Continue to Jaipur. On arrival, transfer to hotel for lunch on your own.

Afternoon, a city tour including the City Palace, Hawa Mahal (Palace of Winds) and the Jantar Mantar Astronomical Observatory. Browse the shops if you wish.

At the heart of Jaipur is its City Palace which houses an extensive collection of rare manuscripts, Mughal and Rajasthani miniatures, Mughal carpets, costumes and textiles, arms and weapons, royal buggies, chariots and palanquins and a remarkable carriage -the indiraviman - that was drawn by four elephants. At the center is Chandra Mahal, the seven-tiered moon palace where the present Maharaja still resides. The City Palace complex also contains the Govind Devji Temple, dedicated to Lord Krishna.

Just outside the gateway of the City Palace is Jantar Mantar, the Yantralaya of Sawai Jai Singh II, the last great classical astronomer in India. The modernistic structures known as Yantras are the unique creations of this astronomer-king, designed by him and built by experts to observe the movements of the sun, moon, planets and stars. This is the largest of five observatories founded by him in various parts of the country.

Hawa Mahal (Palace of Winds) is Jaipur's most-photographed building, a honeycomb palace with 953 latticed windows overlooking the bazaar and busy streets of Jaipur. Built in 1799 by the poet-king Pratap Singh, this extraordinary building was used by purdah-bound women to watch the grand processions that were a regular feature of the city.

Evening, if you like you can go out browsing the bazaars.

Day 5 Jaipur / Samode Haveli (B,L, D)

Morning excursion to Amber Fort. Amber is the name of the ancient kingdom of Jaipur as well as the name of its

ancient capital, before it was shifted to Jaipur, situated 7 miles away. Its history can be traced back to the 12th century. Amber Fort is superbly located, protected by the wild Aravalli Hills on all sides. Originally built in the 11th century, it was expanded by Raja Man Singh in the late 16th century. The rugged exterior belies a beautiful and delicate interior. The ascent to the Fort will be on elephant backs.

Afterwards we visit the lovely quaint village of Samode. We will tour the ornate palace and enjoy a short walk about the village to observe local lifestyle. A visit to the palace and village of Samode is an excellent stop to admire the art styles prevailing in the region. Aesthetically beautiful, this is the former home of a wealthy landowner. The interiors are superbly decorated with murals and frescos typical of this region, mirror work, stained glass and enormous chandeliers. Enjoy lunch here on the patio of the palace.

Day 6 Pushkar / Feb: Pushkar Palace Hotel (B,D) / During Pushkar Fair: Royal Jodhpur Camp, (B,L,D)

After breakfast, we drive 2.5 hrs to Pushkar.

Feb Tour: This will be a relaxed day. Our hotel is the best in town, right on the lake and next to the main ghat. Lunch on your own at the hotel cafe facing the lake. Afterwards, a guided walking tour to visit Brahma Temple and other sites. Rest of day free to explore on your own or relax by the lake.

During Pushkar Fair: Our accommodation is located near the fairgrounds and one can wander through the nomadic camel herders' camp quarters to see their lifestyles close up and to interact with them. They are very friendly and enjoy the exchange as well. The town of Pushkar surrounds a holy lake below the fair site and one can relax by the lake, explore on foot and check out cafes and shops, as well as visit the Brahma Temple.

Day 7 Drive to Nimaj (105 km) / Nimaj Palace (B,L,D)

Pushkar Festival Tour: after breakfast go for another visit to the festival fairgrounds.

Afternoon, a 2 hr drive to Nimaj, a fascinating little village that sees very few tourists. It offers wonderfully warm hospitality, insight into rural India, and a chance to get to know an Indian family. Nimaj was a Jagidari or a principality under the Kingdom of Marwar, the rulers of Jodhpur. The location is stunning.

Chattra Sagar, the district where Nimaj is located, is the home of the Seervi Tribe, a tribe very similar to the better-known Bishnois. They have the same beliefs in the preservation of living things. You spend the afternoon sitting on a charpoy - a rope bed - in a Seervi village, drinking chai and chatting with a family through your interpreter. Later you walk through the village - completely unspoiled since tourists are a rarity here. You can stop at a jeweler, a potter and an oil extractor. The latter takes the locally grown sesame seed and extracts oil for the local people using something that resembles a giant mortar and pestle made of wood. The pestle is attached to a buffalo that is blindfolded so it does not get dizzy while walking in endless circles grinding the seed. Similarly the jeweler uses the most amazing tools and skills to make the silver jewelry favored by the women of the local tribes. Everything he makes is for locals, so is not the usual touristy items you get in the towns and cities.

Day 8 Drive to Jodhpur (110 km) / Ajit Bhawan (B,D)

Morning drive to Jodhpur, approx 2.5 hrs. Afternoon tour of the 15th century Mehrangarh Fort perched majestically on a high hill. You enter through gates which bear the evocative handprints of the Sati queens, women of the royal harem who took their own lives when their men were defeated in battle. The fort has a series of spectacular palaces, each decorated with exquisite engravings, lattice and mirror work. Of particular note is the museum that exhibits a magnificent collection of royal memorabilia. Afterwards a quick stop to admire the graceful cenotaph at Jaswant Thada.

Browse the bazaars of the old city. Jodhpur is well known for its glass bangles, puppets and other folk art. Ornate mirror-embedded and lacquer-finished glass bangles can be found here. The area around the bazaars is a wonderful example of 19th century town planning, blending Rajasthani concepts with more contemporary styles.

You can stop and browse the antique shops between the Umad Bhawan Palace and our hotel.

Day 9 Drive to Jaisalmer (300 km, 6 hrs) / Gorbandh Palace or Fort Rajwada Hotel (B,D)

Jaisalmer is straight out of an Arabian Nights fable. The name Jaisalmer induces a dramatic picture of magic and the brilliance of the desert for many people. The hostile terrain notwithstanding, the warmth and color of the people is simply overwhelming.

One of the main draws is the daunting 12th century Jaisalmer Fort. The beautiful havelis which were built by wealthy merchants of Jaisalmer are yet another fascinating aspect of the desert city. The desert citadel is truly a golden fantasy in the Thar Desert. Bhatti Rajput ruler Rawal Jaisal, after whom the city is named, founded Jaisalmer in 1156. On advice of a local hermit, Eesaal, he chose the Tricut Hills as his new abode, abandoning his vulnerable old fort at Luderwa just 16 kilometers northwest. In Medieval times, its prosperity was due to its location on the main trade route linking India to Egypt, Arabia, Persia, Africa and the West. The Bhatti Rajput rulers lined their coffers with gains from traditional taxes on passing caravans and sometimes through illicit gains by rustling cattle.

On arrival check into hotel. Late afternoon we visit Khuri village, in the desert 40km (25 miles) southwest of Jaisalmer. It is a peaceful place with houses of mud and straw, decorated like the patterns on Persian carpets. Camel ride in the sand dunes just before sunset.

Day 10 Jaisalmer / Gorbandh Palace or Fort Rajwada Hotel (B,D)

Morning visit to the Hilltop fort and the ancient Jain Temples. The fort is the most lively that you'll visit anywhere in India, with homes and shops tucked in hidden lanes. Stalls are swaddled in colorful Rajasthani embroidered and mirrored cloths. Built in 1156 by the Rajput ruler Jaisala, the fort crowns the 80 meter (262 foot) high Trikuta Hill. About a quarter of the Old City's population resides within the fort walls. Within the fort walls are a beautiful set of Jain temples built between the 12th and 15th centuries.

Known as Sonar Quila or the Golden Fort, this mega structure rises from the sands and merges with the golden hues of the desert ambience and the setting sun in its most colorful shades, giving it a fairytale look. The Fort envelops the whole township, which consists of the palace complex, the havelis of rich merchants, several temples and the residential complexes of the armies and traders placed strategically on the trade route from where the ancient caravans passed. These merchants acquired a great deal of power and noble status in the royal courts of the Bhatti Rajputs who founded the state in the 12th century. The rich merchants, inspired by the classic style of the royals, constructed the huge havelis adjacent to each other in the nature of medieval culture and profusely decorated the walls and ceilings with intricately carved motifs. The craftsmen were usually Muslims who were induced on their journey to exhibit their skills. The results were architectural purity that cannot be seen elsewhere.

Guided walk about the city seeing several havelis. These impressive mansions, built by wealthy merchants, are fine sandstone buildings with elaborate wall murals and mirror work. They are still occupied by families, descendants of the original owners in most cases.

Enjoy lunch on the terrace overlooking the courtyard of the old city with view of the fort at Jaisel Treat, a multi-cuisine restaurant with simple good food. Afterwards, independent time to explore the winding narrow passages of the walled old city where shops are tucked into every nook and cranny and locals go about daily life.

Day 11 Drive to Rohet (340 km/6 hrs) / Hotel Rohet House (B,D)

On arrival check in to hotel. After lunch, go for a walk through the village. Evening enjoy folk music & dance performances by traditional artists .

Day12 Rohet / Hotel Rohet House (B,D)

Full day to explore the villages. Visit the Bishnoi settlements in the villages surrounding Rohet. The Bishnoi are a gentle people who follow the 29 (bish-noi) principles of a non violent Vishnaa sect. Founded in the 15th century, their religion dictates protection of all animate beings. Their careful environmental management has resulted in wildlife, including the rare black buck, taking sanctuary near their villages. They are a community of potters, weavers, leather embroiderers and camel herders.

Day 13 Drive to Narlai Village (130 km) / Overnight Rawla Narlai (B,L,D)

Narlai is an enchanting village located amidst dramatic boulders and ancient temples. The Rawla lies at a foothill of a stupendous 350 - foot single rock granite hill. Maharaj and Rani Swaroop Singh and their sons oversaw the careful restoration of this 15th century home of Marwar nobility. The ambience is a special blend of aesthetics and comfort that envelop the senses.

Afternoon explore the nearby villages including bustling bazaars and temples where a miraculous flame has burnt for centuries producing saffron instead of soot! Wishes made here are said, come true.

Day 14 Drive to Udaipur, visit Ranakpur Temples enroute (3 hrs) /Laxmi Vilas Hotel (B,L, D)

Surrounded by tangled forests with monkeys abounding in the courtyards, the magnificent Ranakpur Jain Temples were built in 1439, dedicated to Adinath, the first Jain Tirthankar. Ranakpur is one of five important pilgrim centers for the Jain community. Of the three temples, the Adinatha is the most outstanding and is known for its grandiose scale and elaborate ornamentation. The entire temple is fascinating and houses an extraordinary array of 1144 sculptured pillars, each distinct in design with different scenes from Jain mythology and cosmology, carved ceilings and arches decorated with friezes depicting scenes from the lives of the Jain saints. Lunch at Maharani Bagh (Mango Orchard of the Maharaja of Jodhpur) near the temples.

On arrival, transfer to hotel. Sunset boat ride on lake Pichola.

Day 15 Udaipur / Laxmi Vilas Hotel (B,D)

Often called the Venice of India, this is a city of lakes, palaces and gardens. There is no place in India which appeals more to the imagination of poets and painters, travelers and writers, than Udaipur, the lovely lakeside capital of Mewar. The city's inherent romance and beauty, along with its remarkable past, bristling with episodes of heroism and splendor, continue to enthrall visitors. Udaipur, sometimes called the City of Dawn, looms up like a vision in white. Surrounded by hills and mountains, and set on the edge of three lakes which give way to a fertile plain, it is bewitching in all its details - narrow streets lined by vivid colored stalls, gardens, temples and palaces - every feature mirrored in the placid blue waters of Lake Pichhola.

Udaipur retains the essence of a quaint town with cobble stone streets, plentiful local bazaars, marble palaces, lakeside gardens, temples and havelis. It is a traditionally planned fortified city surrounded by walls and massive gates. The rulers, beginning with Maharana Singh in the mid 16th century, prided themselves on being independent from other more powerful regional neighbors, particularly the Moghuls.

In the morning visit the City Palace, the largest Palace complex in the area, and the Museum of Rajasthan. The City Palace is a blend of stern Rajput military architecture on the outside and lavish Mughal-inspired decorative art on the inside. Set on a hill overlooking Lake Pichhola, it is quite large and made up of at least four separate inter-connecting palaces, built over a period of nearly 3 centuries. The palace museum contains a wonderful collection of old Rajput weaponry. Also visit the Crystal Gallery.

We suggest lunch at the excellent Fateh Prakash restaurant, adjacent to the City Palace. In the afternoon, visit artists' studios of the miniature paintings.

Afterwards, you will have some independent time to stroll the quaint city and take a walk through the colorful Bapu Bazaar. It is easy to walk about independently just outside the city palace gates for a real experience of the local culture beyond the tourist shops.

Day 16 Fly to Delhi-Home (B)

Morning independent. Afternoon transfer to airport for flight to Delhi. Transfer to hotel near airport for wash/change. Late night transfer to airport for flight home.

Price February: \$4640 per person based on min 6 people. Single Room Supplement: \$825

Price Pushkar Faire: \$4685 per person based on min 6people. Single Room Supplement: \$920

Plus Airfare: (estimate) Delhi-Udaipur \$130

Includes: Accommodations, escort throughout the tour, meals as indicated, mineral water during drives, transfers and sight seeing in ac Toyota Tempo Traveller, entrance fees to the monuments, camera fees, professional local guides for sight seeing, elephant ride at Amber, camel ride in the desert, porter tips at hotels and domestic airports, India Gov service Tax 2.58%.

Meals: Daily breakfast and dinners, Lunches: Samode palace patio restaurant, Maharani Bagh in Rankpur, Jaisel Treat Restaurant in Jaisalmer old city. All meals at Narlai. All meals at Pushkar camp, (during Pushkar Faire).

Accommodation with meals as indicated below:

2 Nights Delhi at Radisson Marina (B, 1 D)

1 Night Agra at Trident (B, D)

2 Nights Jaipur at Samode Haveli (B, 1 L in Samode Village, D)

1 Night Pushkar at Pushkar Palace Hotel (Feb)/Royal Jodphur Camp (Nov) (B, L,D)

1 Night Nimaj at Nimaj Palace (B,D)

2 Nights Jodhpur at Ajit Bhawan (B)

2 Nights Jaisalmer at Gorbandh Palace or Fort Rajwada (B, 1 L, D)

2 nightas Rohet at Rohet House (B,D)

1 Night Narlai at Rawala Narlai (B,L, D)

2 Nights Udaipur at Grand Laxmi Vilas Palace (B, 1 L enroute)

Room for Wash and Change at Mapple Resort Hotel

Does not include: International air, Visa Fee, Travel Insurance, Tips, expenses of personal nature such as telephone calls, laundry, drinks.

Heritage Hotels

Rawala Narlai, now a heritage hotel, is located in the heart of a typical Rajasthan village bustling with activity and bursting with color. The Rawla (fortress) however is an oasis of serenity and offers a splendid view of a gigantic [350 ft high] single rock of granite dotted with caves and temples, crowned by a statue of a white elephant - proud guardian to the open desert on one side and the crumbling Aravali hills on the other. The 17th century villa features 26 exquisite rooms renovated over the last decade.

Nimaj Palace: one of the oldest heritage properties of the country running as a hotel, guests relive the medieval era in its 22 suites. Over the centuries the Thakurs of Nimaj refurbished the palace as per their likes which even today evokes a feeling of awe and reverence and the imposing gates remind you of the chivalrous days. The palace facade carved in red sand stone makes it a distinctive landmark in the architectural history of India. Many typical Indian Motifs and designs used here give the palace a unique flavor.

Pushkar/Welcome Heriage Royal Camp: Luxury tents each with verandah, bedrooms and private bathrooms are custom made using the finest of Marwar traditional skills and weaving in the best of modern comforts. The tents are air cooled and have running hot and cold water. Facilities at the camp include internet, laundry, massage, doctor on call, safety lockers. The camp is 3 km from the fair and walking distance to the town of Pushkar. www.welcomheritagehotels.com/Royal-Camp-Pushkar-Ajmer/Royal-Camp-Pushkar-Ajmer.htm

Jodphur/ Ajit Bhawan, Jodhpur, built exclusively for Maharaj Sir Ajit Singhji the younger brother of Maharaja Umaid Singhji, Ajit Bhawan is vibrantly alive with the personalized hospitality provided by the late Maharaja's family who still live here.

Jaisalmer/Fort Rajwada is an exquisite piece of glowing sand stone which faces the famous Golden "Sonar" fort. The fine traditional Jaisalmer stone work glorifies the dying art of stone carving which is imbedded in Marwad history. Fort Rajwada thus gleams as a composition of old & new architectural genius, exposing the luxury residing in memory lanes.

Jaisalmer/ Gorbandh Palace-The architecture of this Royal Retreat has been inspired by traditional Indian homes. There is a central courtyard with a swimming pool which is surrounded by luxuriously appointed rooms. The hotel is a veritable oasis that makes the discovery of the desert a pleasure by day and by night. Highlights include

superb traditional cuisine and Rajasthan's celebrated folk music and dance around a campfire on starlit evenings at the sand dunes.

Samode Haveli, 200 years old, was built by Rawal Sheo Singhji, a prime minister in the Jaipur court who belonged to the Samode family--a lineage dating back more than four centuries to the Prithviraj Singhji of Amber, 17th Prince of the house of Kacchawaha Rajputs. The current Rawal Saheb maintains the splendor of the original architecture. Samode Haveli stands in the heart of Jaipur; an easy walking distance to historic monuments and market places.