

# WONDERS OF CENTRAL INDIA

(6 of India's best & least visited UNESCO World Heritage Sites and so much more!)



## ITINERARY:

This 12 days / 11 nights trip starts & ends in Delhi



### Day 1

Land in Delhi. Transfer to the world-renowned Imperial Hotel for 1 night. Light afternoon sightseeing.

### Day 2

Mid afternoon flight to Aurangabad and check-in at Taj Vivanta Hotel where we stay 3 nights in their Premium Pool-Facing Rooms. The city was named after the 6th Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb, who launched his conquest of the Deccan from here.

### Day 3

We visit Daulatabad, one of the great fortresses of the Deccan, scene of many a battle, on the way to Ellora (40 minutes drive), a UNESCO WHS. The 34 caves, hewn from a 2km long escarpment, are India's greatest examples of rock-cut architecture. The cave temples and monastic halls are Buddhist, Hindu and Jain, and span 500 years of development from the C7th. The ornate Kailasanatha Temple, Ellora's 'highlight', is the largest monolithic sculpture in the world! Approximately 3 million cubic ft of rock, beginning from the top of the cliff and working downwards, were removed to carve the representation of Lord Shiva's mythical abode on Mt Kailash.

Late afternoon visit of Bibi ka Maqbara, locally known as 'The Mini Taj Mahal'.

### Day 4

Today we visit and lunch at the UNESCO WHS of Ajanta. 30 rock cut caves lie within a horseshoe-shaped escarpment over the Waghora River gorge. The intricately carved and painted caves date from 2 distinct Buddhist periods, spanning from the C2nd BC to C6th AD, and are India's earliest and finest examples of Buddhist art. The caves were only occupied for a short period and over time were lost to jungle, only to be 'rediscovered' accidentally in 1819 by British Army Captain John Smith. He was on a tiger hunting expedition and while searching for tigers in the dense jungle, he noticed a man-made opening in a cliff face.

### Day 5

We drive (6h) through very rural Maharashtra to the State of Madhya Pradesh and the picturesque pilgrimage town of Maheshwar. Here we spend 3 nights at the unique Ahilya Fort, according to Harpers Bazaar and Traveller magazines "Central India's best Heritage Property". Their food is also rightly renowned. The fort's high ramparts overlook the bathing 'Ghats' on the mighty and sacred Narmada River, providing stunning views at any time of day. Late afternoon stroll exploring Maheshwar's temples and lanes.



### **Days 6 & 7**

Maheshwar's lovely rural surroundings offer an endless choice of great excursion. Over 2 full days we shall: take a morning trip to the colourful nearby holy town of Mandleshwar and drift back along the river; explore the spectacular hill top citadel of Mandu (UNESCO WHS; once Central India's capital), with 9 sq miles of abandoned palaces, mosques, lakes and pleasure pavilions; do a late afternoon cruise followed by tea on the Narmada as the sun sets; visit the renowned Rehwa Weavers' Handloom Society; one can even join Hindu pilgrims in going for a dip in the river's unusually clean waters. We shall keep you busy with the help of our hosts and of course there is always the option to luxuriate doing sweet nothing in comfortable surroundings.

### **Day 8**

**AM** This morning we drive (4h) to Bhopal, the lovely lake-side capital of Madhya Pradesh. Infamously associated with the 1984 Union Carbide disaster, the city is actually beautifully sited among mountains and lakes, is very clean, full of monuments, bustling colourful bazaars, and some of India's best museums. We check-in at the excellent Jehan Numa Palace, a C19th residence built blending British Colonial, Italian Renaissance and Classical Greek architecture, for 3 nights.

**PM** Afternoon stroll in Bhopal's unusually clean and colourful bazaars.

### **Day 9**

**AM** Today we drive (1h) to the tranquil hill site of Sanchi, India's oldest, best preserved and most extensive Buddhist stupa site (UNESCO WHS). Founded by the great Emperor Ashoka, from the C3rd BC to the C7th AD it was a thriving monastic complex. Abandoned in the C14th, it was forgotten until 'rediscovery' by General Taylor of the Bengal Cavalry in 1818.

**PM** Afternoon visit of Bhopal's superb Tribal Arts Museum.

### **Day 10**

We head for Bhimbetka, India's largest and best prehistoric rock art site (UNESCO WHS). In 1957 the archeologist VS Wakander discovered over 500 rock shelters, in a sandstone ridge hidden by thick forest, covered in paintings done in bold, fluent lines. Most paintings are from the Mesolithic period (8,000 - 5,000 BC) and depict vignettes of daily life, hunting scenes and a range of animals (Including a giraffe?!)

### **Day 11**

Morning flight from Bhopal to Delhi. Check-in at The Imperial Hotel in time for lunch (1 night).

**PM** Free afternoon to shop, sightsee or just relax.

### **Day 12**

Transfer to Delhi International Airport, for flights home.



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