



# Trip Notes

## Raj, Tigers & Mangroves

### GETTING STARTED

#### Welcome

Congratulations on booking with *Travel The Unknown*! We love travel and we know that you do too, so we can't wait to show these truly remarkable tours.

#### Itinerary Disclaimer

Itineraries are correct at the time of printing. Our itineraries are sometimes updated during the year to incorporate suggestions from past travellers and sometimes our own research too. Please ensure that you print and review a final copy of your **Trip Notes** and itinerary a couple of days prior to travel, in case there have been changes that may affect you. For the latest updated trip notes please visit our website:

[www.traveltheunknown.com](http://www.traveltheunknown.com).

#### Itinerary

Please download the detailed itinerary for your tour from our site. We have made it simpler to navigate and there is now one-click access to each tour via the Trip Finder in the main menu.



### **Joining Point**

You will receive an email at least 2 weeks before your departure with details of the joining point. All travellers will be greeted at Kolkata airport by a *Travel The Unknown* representative and will be escorted to their accommodation.

### **Finishing Point**

All customers will be escorted to the flight departing from Kolkata airport when flights have been booked with *Travel The Unknown*. Transport to the airport can be arranged for all other travellers or you can come to the airport at the same time as the group that booked flights with *Travel The Unknown*.

## **TOUR DETAILS**

### **Accommodation**

*Travel The Unknown* will provide you with the best accommodation available, in keeping with the natural environments of our destinations. Traditional houses and camping are also arranged where appropriate. On this trip, you will be staying in good hotel accommodation, as well as in spacious jungle huts/cottages, equipped with comfortable beds and bathrooms. Since we choose to visit places more off-the-beaten-track, you should not expect accommodation standards always to be equal to those in Western countries.

Usually we focus on small, family-run hotels and lodges. Here you will be personally catered to and your host will take care of your needs, as well as provide you with expert local advice and offer you their own insight on the local area. We've got to know many of the owners and families that run these places, and not only will you get a good night's sleep, but also bedtime stories that will stay with you forever.

All accommodation during the tour is provided as part of the package cost.



## **Meals**

Most meals are included in the tour price. All meals are included everywhere outside of Kolkata. In Kolkata only breakfast will be provided. Please see itinerary for the full meal plan.

You should budget about £10 (\$15) per day for additional meals.

## **Single Travellers**

As experienced solo travellers, there were many times when we wanted to join tour groups, as it is a great way of meeting like-minded travellers, as well as getting to see some places that were otherwise not on our itineraries.

However, we found that many tour companies discriminate against solo travellers by whacking up the price unfairly, just for the privilege of having their own room. In reality, we know that the cost to the company is a lot less than this hefty premium. That is why at *Travel The Unknown*, we try to keep our solo supplements to a reasonable cost. You will only have to pay a supplement if you want your own room. If you are open to sharing a room with another single same-sex traveller, then you pay no supplement.

## **Style of Travel**

Our trips combine culture, activity and relaxation. We try to give you the best of everything the region has to offer and you can opt in or out of any activities you please. These tours are for independent people and so we try to be flexible where we can, and give you time to explore on your own too.



### **Group Size**

To minimise the footprint our tours leave - both on the environment and the local culture - we keep our group sizes limited to 12 people.

### **Transport**

Travel in India can be tough at times and so we have opted for well-maintained vehicles and reliable drivers for all ground travel to maximise comfort, safety and practicality. The tour price also includes all internal flights as per the itinerary and international flights where applicable.

### **Activities**

All of our activities are optional, but standard activities on our tour include:

- Boat rides in Sunderbans
- Walking (Kolkata's hidden streets)

A basic level of fitness and mobility is assumed of our clients. For those who are not able to participate in any of the above activities, alternative arrangements can be made.

### **Optional Activities**

From time to time other activities may be possible to arrange. Costs for such additional activities will not be covered in the standard tour package. Contact us in advance of your trip for more information.



## **Culture Shock**

India is a country which may be very different to anything you may have experienced before. It is not always the easiest place to travel, but this is also what makes it so special. Pollution, poverty and the swirling crowds can result in initial culture shock, but take a deep breath and go for it, and you will understand what makes this land so enchanting.

Kolkata can be quite overwhelming for the first time visitor. Often unfairly better known for its poverty, it would be ignorant to overlook Kolkata's rich colonial heritage and intellectual prowess. However, you'll soon admire how its people from all strata of society live side by side and make this city tick.

The Sunderbans on the other hand is a totally different world to neighbouring Kolkata. In just a few hours you will be transported to this water world, full of lush tropical mangroves and wildlife.

## **Fellow Travellers**

While travelling in a group is very rewarding and is a great way to meet new people, the fact is that groups often contain quite a bit of variety within themselves. You may get large variations in age and nationality. This is most often a good thing and a way to learn about other parts of the world (and maybe even make some contacts there!) but these differences can also cause some teething problems, so we ask you to be patient with your fellow passengers and realise that everyone likes to travel a little differently. Please consider your fellow passengers too, and try to respect meeting times. Nobody likes to be kept waiting around. Remember, a little effort can go a long way.



## **Physical Demands**

This trip is reasonably comfortable. Transport in Kolkata is by local air-conditioned cars and we use reputable and well-equipped boats for your cruises in the Sunderbans. Nevertheless, a basic level of fitness and decent health is assumed, as well as an ability to put up with sometimes more basic accommodation and transport than that which is common in the West. For those who can bear this, the rewards are great!

## **RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

### **Responsible Travel**

As regular travellers, one thing that never ceases to amaze and inspire us while travelling is the kindness and generosity of people, who often have very little to their name. We firmly believe that the people who make these places special should also benefit from them. Therefore as first preference we use local guides and locally-owned lodges, shops and eateries. We do our best to ensure that the benefits of our tours reach as widely as possible into the communities where they operate and also invest a significant amount of our profits in development projects within those communities.

### **Environment**

The biggest environmental impact of your holiday with *Travel The Unknown* is the CO<sub>2</sub> generated by your flights and land travel. As a responsible tour operator, we have included in our tour prices the costs of offsetting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from all international and domestic flights as well as land travel forming part of the tour.

We have partnered with *Climate Care* for this purpose. If you are making independent flight arrangements, we urge you to take responsibility for your CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by offsetting through *Climate Care*, or another reputable offsetting scheme.



We also ask you to be vigilant about disposing of your waste. Dispose of all rubbish correctly and do not leave litter or cigarette butts in natural environments.

Our brochures and stationery are printed on FSC-accredited or recycled paper. To minimise waste, all of our brochures and trip notes are available for download online.

Visit [www.traveltheunknown.com](http://www.traveltheunknown.com) for more details on our environmental policies.

## **PRACTICALITIES**

### **Travel Insurance**

Travel insurance is compulsory for all our trips. As a minimum we require that your insurance covers you for medical expenses including emergency repatriation. We also strongly recommend you are covered for personal liability and loss of luggage and personal effects. You will be required to give details of your insurance prior to departure. Please go to [www.traveltheunknown.com/partners](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/partners) for links to excellent deals on travel insurance.

### **Visas**

It is your responsibility to arrange visas before you travel. *Travel The Unknown* also provides a visa service for an additional fee. Below are the visa requirements at the time of printing.

**All foreign nationals, including children, require a visa to enter India. They are not available at port of entry AND must be obtained in advance.**

### **Health**



All *Travel The Unknown* travellers need to be in good physical health in order to participate fully in the group travel experience. If, in the opinion of our group leader, any traveller is unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to themselves and/or the rest of the group, *Travel The Unknown* reserves the right to exclude them from all or part of a trip without refund. Please read the itinerary for this tour thoroughly and then realistically self-assess your physical ability to complete the trip as described. Please consult with your doctor if you have any doubts or give us a call with any queries you may have.

We recommend that you consult your doctor for up-to-date medical travel information before departure. You should also carry a first aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements. Please be aware that we are in remote areas and away from medical facilities for some time during this trip, and for legal reasons our leaders are prohibited from administering any type of drug including headache tablets, antibiotics, etc.

**NOTE:** Do not leave it to the last minute to see your doctor as you may have to get immunised or start taking malaria tablets some time prior to departure. You should see your doctor or visit a travel clinic at least 45 days before your departure.

When organising your own meals, be selective where you eat. Choose places that seem quite clean and where many locals eat. A high turnover usually means food is not left lying around and has been made fresh. We recommend that you stick to drinking bottled water, even when brushing your teeth.

At the time of writing the following vaccinations were recommended for travel to India but it is advisable to contact a doctor to get the latest available advice.

- Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Rabies, Tetanus, Typhoid. In addition Malaria tablets are recommended.



Travellers should vigilantly protect themselves against mosquito bites by wearing long-sleeved tops, long trousers and using a mosquito repellent with a high quantity of DEET. A mosquito net is also advisable for night time.

### **Communication**

While there are many internet cafes and call shops en route, the reliability of the services can be poor and internet access is frequently interrupted. International calls, while theoretically possible in most call shops, are frequently not possible. Most foreign mobile phones should be able to get a good connection in Kolkata, although this will not be the case in the Sunderbans. In Kolkata, Wifi broadband internet is usually available, but connection can sometimes be sporadic.

### **Group Leader**

All *Travel The Unknown* group trips in India are accompanied by one of our local Indian group leaders. The aim of the group leader is to take the hassle out of your travels and to help you have the best trip possible. Your leader will be knowledgeable about the places you are visiting, will be able to offer suggestions for things to do and see, and recommend great local eating venues, etc. Our group leaders are experienced, qualified guides and have a broad general knowledge of the areas visited on the trip, including historical, cultural, religious and social aspects. There will be a separate group leader for the Sunderbans to ensure a consistent quality of local knowledge of the leader. Local guides will be used in addition to the group leader in certain places.



## Safety

Many national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues involved with international travel. We recommend that you check your government's advice for their latest travel information before departure. For the UK check out [www.fco.gov.uk/](http://www.fco.gov.uk/). See *Dangers* section below.

We strongly recommend that you use a neck wallet or money belt while travelling to ensure the safety of your documents and other valuables. It is not advisable to bring valuable jewellery when travelling. A lock is recommended for securing your luggage.

Your leader will accompany you on all included activities; however during your trip you will have some free time to pursue your own interests, relax and take it easy or explore at your leisure. Any optional activities you undertake are not part of your *Travel The Unknown* itinerary, and *Travel The Unknown* makes no guarantees about the safety of the activity or the standard of the operators running them. Please use your own good judgment. *Travel The Unknown* cannot be held responsible for any injuries or losses that may occur for any such optional activity. Please also note that your group leader has the authority to amend or cancel any part of the trip itinerary if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns.

## Dangers

India is generally a very safe place to travel. However, you are still subject to the same problems that you find the world over – e.g. pickpockets can operate in busy places. Travelling with an experienced group leader will make your trip more protected from such external dangers but do not let your guard down completely. You are still responsible for your own belongings.

Fortunately Kolkata has not experienced blasts that have occurred in other Indian cities. Also the chances of being directly affected by such activities are still very small. We closely monitor the safety situation on a continuous basis, using both government sources and our own network of contacts on the ground. Please check [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)



for the latest government advice on travel to the region. Please contact us at [info@traveltheunknown.com](mailto:info@traveltheunknown.com) if you have any further questions or concerns about safety issues.

In addition we recommended that you read the Health section for how to mitigate dangers to your health.

### **Electricity**

Electricity in India is 240 volts, alternating at 50 cycles per second. You will require a voltage converter if you are carrying a device that does not accept 240 volts at 50 hertz. To adjust your device according to the power and voltage in India, the following three types of voltage converters may be used:

#### Resistor-network converters

This type of converter usually supports approximately 50 -1600 Watts. They are lightweight. You can easily use this converter for high-wattage electrical appliances like hair dryers and irons. But, you can use them for short periods only and they are not ideal for digital devices.

#### Transformers

Transformers support low watt rating, around 50–100 watts. Generally, you can use them continuously. Also, they provide better electricity for low wattage appliances like battery chargers, radios, laptop computers, cameras, mp3 players and camcorders. Their drawback is the low wattage and heavy weight.

#### Combination converters

Combination converters are a combination of a resistor network and a transformer in the same package. You can easily switch between the two modes. If you need both types of converters, then it is better to buy this combination converter.



Outlets in India generally accept the following types of plug:

- Two round pins (continental European plugs and adapters will suffice)
- Three round pins arranged in a triangle

If your appliance(s) plug has any other shape, you will need a plug adapter. If you plan to travel a lot in the future, it is better to get a combination voltage converter and a plug adapter.

Check out [www.traveltheunknown.com/estore](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/estore) for some adapters that will be suitable for India.

## **Laundry**

Laundry facilities are offered by some of our hotels for a charge. In addition, laundry services can be found outside our hotel in all major cities and many smaller ones. However, we advise you not to leave laundry to the last minute as sometimes drying times may be required and laundry will not be available at all stops.

## **EXPENSES**

### **Spending Money**

Every traveller is different and therefore spending money requirements will vary. Some people spend a lot of money on drinks, whereas others may spend more on souvenir or present shopping. Please consider your own spending habits when it comes to allowing for drinks, shopping, participating in optional activities and tipping.

Any tip that you wish to give your local guides or leader in recognition of excellent service is always appreciated. See Tipping section below.



## **Departure Tax**

Unless otherwise specified departure tax will be included in the cost of your package when you booked your international flight with *Travel The Unknown*. Where you are arranging your own international flights please check with your travel agent or airline.

## **Emergency Funds**

Please also make sure you have access to an additional £200 (\$400), to be used when unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control (eg. a natural disaster, or political strife) necessitate a change to our intended itinerary. This is not a common occurrence but it's better to be prepared for it.

## **Tipping**

Tipping is totally voluntary and often not expected. It is however almost always appreciated. You should need no more than £30-40 (\$60-80) for tipping local staff in restaurants, hotels etc. It is also customary to tip guides and drivers if you have been happy with their services.

## **Money Exchange**

Currency exchange rates often fluctuate. For the most up to date rates please refer to the following website: [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).

There are many ATM machines (which accept both Visa and Mastercard) throughout India, though they are usually limited to major cities. Although this is now a safe and convenient way to access money during your trip, we do recommend that you carry some money in the form of cash/travellers cheques for when these ATMs cannot be accessed. For travellers cheques, the easiest to change are Thomas Cook or American Express in USD currency. Cash should be in US dollars. Black markets no longer exist in



India. Major credit cards are accepted in the larger shops and restaurants but only in the bigger cities. ATMS are widely available in Kolkata, but not in the Sunderbans.

## **LOCAL CULTURE**

### **Dress**

When packing be aware that dress standards are conservative throughout India. Loose, lightweight, long clothing is both respectful and cool in the predominantly hot Indian climate. Singlets, tank tops and shorts are not suitable for much of India, although in Kolkata and the Sunderbans, t-shirts and knee-length shorts are commonly worn and quite acceptable. If you have any questions please feel free to contact us. Full contact details can be found on our website: [www.traveltheunknown.com/contact](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/contact).

### **Recommended Reading**

Here are some recommended books from or about Kolkata and Sunderbans:

- The Home and the World by Rabindranath Tagore
- The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh
- Sea of Poppies by Amitav Ghosh
- The Lion and the Tiger: The Rise and Fall of the British Raj by Austin Cline
- India in Slow Motion by Mark Tully

These books and more can be found in our e-store:

[www.traveltheunknown.com/estore](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/estore). You will also find a decent selection of guide books and other travel related goodies.



## Hindi Cheat Sheet

shukria  
namastay  
bahut swad hey  
bina mirch  
tora mirch  
cheeni  
tel  
makan  
gosht  
kitnay baje hey  
dhyan say  
dhiray dhiray  
haa  
nahi  
mujhey...chyeey  
mujhey gosht chy eeay  
cheeni aleg say (dayna)  
mirch aleg say (dayna)  
mera naam David hey  
may vidhyarti hoo  
may bank me kaam karta hu

thank you  
Hello  
it's very tasty  
without chilli  
little chilli  
sugar  
oil  
butter  
meat  
what time is it  
carefully  
slowly  
yes  
no  
I would like...  
I would like some meat  
(please give) sugar on the side  
(please give) chilli on the side  
My name is David  
I am a student  
I work in a bank



**FINALLY ...**

### **What To Bring**

The weather will generally be warm and humid so you should bring clothing accordingly. The nights in the Sunderbans may get slightly chilly. We will send you a detailed list of all the things you need to bring at the time of booking. Many of the items required are also available in our e-store: [www.traveltheunknown.com/estore](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/estore).

- Malaria tablets and any other required medicines.
- Basic first aid kit, insect repellent and sunscreen (min. Factor 15).
- Clothing for hot conditions. Practical clothing is strongly advised especially long sleeved tops, long trousers and a sunhat. Bring a light fleece for the nights in the Sunderbans.
- Sandals and walking shoes.
- A 3-season sleeping bag and a washable liner.
- Binoculars, torch, sunglasses, small towel, and electricity adapter.
- Waterproof bag for documents and electronics.
- Watch (strict time-keeping is required at times).
- Camera, charger, batteries and memory cards (if digital camera)
- Money for meals, souvenirs, contingencies.

Most importantly, come with an open mind!

### **Checklist**

A full checklist will be sent to you at the time of booking.



### **Tour Photos**

We only use photos taken on our tours on our website so we actively encourage you to send us your photos. If you send us pictures we will also enter you in a draw to win some special prizes. Happy snapping!

### **Our Newsletter**

If you would like to find out about new tours and all that is happening with *Travel The Unknown* then sign up to our newsletter on our website.

### **Feedback**

We have spent much time and effort to make your trip a memorable experience for all the right reasons. However, we are constantly looking to improve our tours and any feedback you can give us or suggestions you may have would be very much appreciated. Please leave us some feedback by way of email ([info@traveltheunknown.com](mailto:info@traveltheunknown.com)) or through our website at: [www.traveltheunknown.com/contact](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/contact).