



African & Indian
Explorations

CENTRAL INDIA

Highlights:

- Gwalior
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GWALIOR

Dominated by its imposing and ancient fort, Gwalior is too often dismissed as a busy nondescript town. Yet the hill-top fort is a magnificent specimen of its kind, sheltering a marvellous collection of Hindu and Muslim buildings. For lovers of classical Indian music, the Tansen Music festival in early December is one of the best and the later palaces of the Scindia Maharajas and the museum are well-worth a visit. Gwalior certainly deserves a day and is easily reached from Delhi or Agra by the fast and convenient Shatabdi Express which goes on to link Jhansi (Orchha) and Bhopal.

ORCHHA



Orchha is one of the most romantic medieval towns of central India with beautiful palaces, temples and funerary monuments situated along the banks of the lovely Betwa River which runs through a shallow wooded valley. This was once the capital of the Bundela Rajputs,



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turbulent feudatories of the Mughals. The architecture reflects this association as also its indigenous moorings. One of the loveliest experiences is to wander into the Ram Mandir (Temple) at sunset to observe the evening prayer or arti and hear about the legend regarding the empty Chaturbhuj Temple.

DATIA

Close to Orchha in the little town of Datia is the beautiful Rajmahal (Royal Palace built especially for the visit of the Emperor Jehangir and used as a set for *THE FAR PAVILLIONS*) which is perhaps the best example of Bundela architecture and remains in remarkably fine condition. En route you can also visit the Sona Gir Jain temple whose needle spires are silhouetted above the horizon and visible from the road.

KHAJURAHO



Discovered in 1838 by Captain T S Burt, Khajuraho was one of the capitals of the Chandela Rajput Kings. The temples were built between the 10th and 12th centuries. Out of the original 85 temples only 22 survive today. These Temples are amongst the finest surviving examples of the splendid architecture and exuberant and fine sculpture of the period immediately prior to the arrival of the Turko-Afghans in the North. Well connected by air and 3

hours by road from Orchha, Khajuraho is a must for anyone interested in architecture and sculpture. The whole experience being enhanced by the remoteness of this place and the beauty of the country-side. Khajuraho is only 30 minutes from the Panna Tiger Reserve which is en route to Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve 6 hours away.



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BHOPAL



Once the capital of the Nawabs of Bhopal and still a lovely city, Bhopal is presently the capital of the central Indian province of Madhya Pradesh. Time and energy permitting spend a few hours in the late afternoon and evening driving around the city visiting some of the famous monuments. This afternoon visit the mosques, museums and crafts emporia that display exquisite tribal art and handicraft.

Bhopal is dominated and divided by its two lakes; the old city with its marketplaces and fine old mosques and palaces still bears the aristocratic imprint of its former rulers, among them the succession of powerful Begums (Queens) who ruled Bhopal from 1819 to 1926. Equally



impressive is the new city with its verdant, exquisitely laid out parks and gardens, broad avenues and streamlined modern edifices. It is greener and cleaner than most cities in the country. The modern part of the city has also been embellished with some superb examples of modern architecture like the **Bharat Bhavan** designed by the renowned Indian architect Charles Correa. We would strongly recommend a visit here with its unrivalled collection of sculpture, painting and tribal art. Also visit the hilltop site of **the Museum of Man** with its superb exhibition of tribal houses, art and technology.

SANCHI

Situated about 46 kms/1 hour from Bhopal, the Buddhist remains of Sanchi, dominated by the dome of the Great Stupa, represent the oldest and finest Buddhist architecture in India. The site comprises a



group of Buddhist monuments (monolithic pillars, palaces, temples and monasteries) all in different states of conservation most of which date back to the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C. The remains however, span the entire period of Buddhist dominance in India from the 2nd Century BC to the 12th Century AD. While it was not associated with any known incident in the life of the Buddha, it was, like so many other important Buddhist sites, supported by the wealth of merchants in this case based in the nearby city of Vidisa. They in turn prospered from the trade that flowed along one of the most important arteries of commerce – the north/south highway known as Dakshinapatha.

The Great Stupa

Emperor Ashoka built this famous stupa in the 2nd century BC. The massive stupa with its intricately carved toranas (gateways) is considered to be the most complete example of the early Buddhist stupa in its extant form. The gateways are a masterpiece of both architecture and sculpture. Pali literary sources speak of Emperor Ashoka's dedication to the original stupa, and his erecting a pillar with a lion capital here. The figure of a yakshi reaching out for

a branch as shown in the corner of an architrave is one of the most captivating images of Sanchi.



BHIMBETKA

Situated about an hour out of Bhopal in the middle of teak and mixed forest is one of the greatest collections of rock and cave art in South Asia. This is Bhimbetka. The oldest paintings could possibly date back to the Mesolithic period 10 – 12000 years

ago. Several periods are covered – the oldest depicting scenes of animals and hunting, the latest of war, horses, chariots and armies. Of the 700 or so caves only about 15 are open to the public. Now a World Heritage Site, Bhimbetka is an extraordinary place.

MAHESHWAR & AHILYA FORT HOTEL



This is indeed one of the hidden treasures of India. Situated on the banks of the sacred river Narmada, it has been described as one of the most beautiful temple-palace complexes in India and is a treasure-house of sculpture. It is also famous for its fine cotton saris – a tradition that was re-introduced by Ahilya Bai Holkar over 200 years ago in order for the plain geometric weave patterns that she preferred, to be woven to her specifications.



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Ahilya Fort



One of the country's lesser known gems, Ahilya Fort has a location unique in all India. It almost has to be seen to be believed as it sits high on the ramparts above the Narmada River. A walk down from the fort, past the women's weaving centre, through spotless, empty temple areas and down onto the ghats, is an experience in itself. A walk down the ghats or down the riverbank, past dozens more temples unhassled by anyone, is even more of a treat. Cap this will a sail downriver at sunset, followed by dinner on board, under the stars on a full moon night, and you won't want to leave.

The food is some of the finest in India and constantly changes as the owner is a great 'foodie' and insists on the very best. Wonderful pasta salads for lunch, followed by delicious and unusual Indian cuisine at night, after drinks by the pool, will keep the most demanding gourmand happy!

MANDU



The magnificent medieval city of Mandu is located in the heart of the Malwa plateau southwest of Indore and 2 hours from Maheshwar. Perched atop a spur of the Vindhya ranges at an altitude of 2,000 feet, Mandu with its superb architecture and isolated location provide a suitably romantic setting for one of the great romances of Indian history – the story of the Sultan Baz Bahadur and his Hindu



Queen Rupmati.



Each of Mandu's structures is an architectural gem; some are outstanding like the massive Jami Masjid and Hoshang Shah's tomb, which provided inspiration to the master builders of the Taj Mahal centuries later.

Mandu is a celebration in stone, of life and joy, of the love of the poet-prince Baz Bahadur for his beautiful consort, Rani Roopmati. It is a place that people fall in love with – as much for the location as for the simple

elegance of it's architecture. One of the finest site in India.

TRIBAL INDIA



In the southern part of the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhatisgarh are the dense jungles that still support unique tribal cultures. This is the stronghold of the tribes labelled as Gonds by the anthropologists but calling themselves by their own names. Through much of the world these aboriginal cultures are crumbling, degrading and disappearing under the press of modernity and bigoted incomers determined to change what they don't understand. Our tours here are for the true travellers seeking unique cultures, colour and a fascinating people living in a land of great beauty. The vast weekly markets are a swirl of colour; the handicrafts of amazing beauty and the friendliness and hospitality of the people infectious. We use a mix of small converted palaces of the old feudal rulers and a 'modern' house built by a well-known



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Gond. All accommodations are simple – but for all who travel here this is one of the highlights of India.

WILD INDIA – TIGER RESERVES



Central India supports perhaps the highest population of tigers in India and boasts several superb tiger reserves where tiger viewing is relatively easy due to the presence of specially trained riding elephants whose mahouts are skilled trackers allowing visitors to see tigers even when they are deep in the jungle:

Bandhavgarh: This scenically beautiful park dominated by the enormous hill-top fort that gives the park its name, boasts a very high density of tigers apart from leopards, sloth bears, wild dogs, wolves, several species of deer, antelope and small mammals. Has over 250 species of birds. Main entrance is very crowded but a further gate has only one small lodge.

Kanha: Amongst the oldest protected areas in India this park in the Maikal hills with it's mosaic of extensive grasslands surrounded by densely forested hills also supports the last population of the central Indian race of the Swamp deer apart from a significant population of the giant wild ox – the gaur.

Pench: Only 2 hours from Nagpur airport, this is the most accessible of the tiger reserves and has only recently come onto the tourism network. With its drier vegetation the park provides tremendous visibility and very high densities of both prey and predator species. Excellent for birds as well with just over 300 species being recorded here.



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Satpura: Amongst the latest of the tiger reserves and almost certainly the most beautiful, this is the least known. Located only 3 hours from Bhopal, this park supports a tremendous range of habitats and relic populations of flora and fauna that are not found anywhere else in the region. Population densities of other mega-fauna are also very high.

Panna: Another very scenic park drained by the very beautiful Ken River, this park is located only 30 minutes from Khjuraho. In recent years the tiger population has been hard hit by poaching but hopefully added protection will aid in recovery. The park is superb for birds and the Ken supports large populations of crocodiles and the very specialised fish-eating gavial or gharial as well.