



DELHI
and overland to the
GREAT CATTLE AND ELEPHANT FAIR AT
SONEPUR

November 9th to November 24th 2010



It is our avowed intention to provide holidays that have no strict itinerary and to encourage our guests to devise the day by day programme as we go along thus hopefully fulfilling individual desires and wishes. This trip however is the exception! Indeed our entire autumn programme is based round the fact that to experience the great elephant sale in Sonapur fully one has to be there on the evening of the first full moon in November. Everything is worked back from that date and as you will see below although a degree of latitude is built in we do not have too much time with which to play.

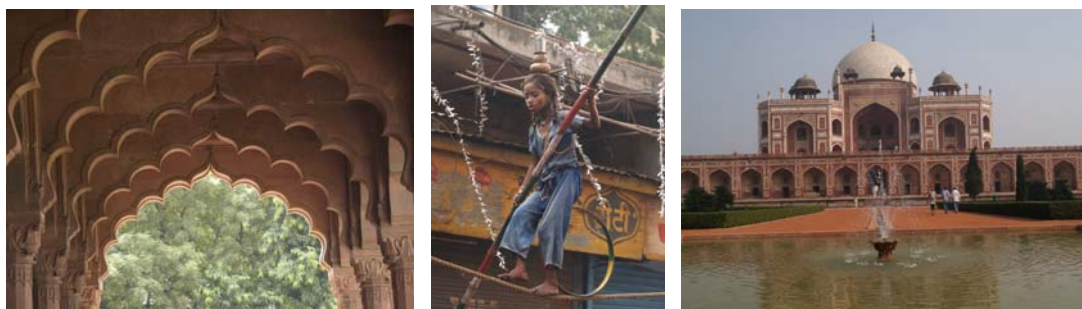
That said, we think this to be the most exciting and original trip we offer as it includes everything the visitor to India is likely to have read and heard about and then goes “off piste” taking you to one of the greatest ‘unknown’ Indian festivals

Day 01 *Pick up from Delhi airport and transfer to Hotel.*

Our Hotel, which has been our Delhi HQ for several years, is a comfortable family owned establishment that sits to the side of a bustling fruit and vegetable market on the boundary between Old and New Delhi. The rooms open off comfortable communal lounge areas that lead to balconies overlooking the market place. An ideal spot for early morning tea or to relax in the cool of the evening

Day 02 and 03 On first impressions Delhi is a disorientating mass of tower blocks, mosques, forts, temples, tightly packed streets and colonial mansions. Making sense of it to begin with is difficult and it might help to think of it as the accumulation of seven different cities. While in Delhi there are several things we think you must see and do. Close (ish!) to the hotel is Lakshmi Naryan Mandir it is a bizarre mix of holy place and play park. Not far off is the nearly completed Hanuman Temple, surely one of the most weirdly extraordinary buildings in the world!

New Delhi (British Delhi) is centred on Connaught Place a glorious circular walkway covered against the glaring heat of the early summer and the monsoon rains of the late. Exploring New Delhi is a fascinating cross-cultural experience as you constantly switch from India to an Edwardian/ Elgarian Britain! Old Delhi is undeniably Indian!



The roof of the Diwan-i-Am in the Red Fort, a street entertainer and Humayun's tomb

The Red Fort is central to contemporary India for it was from the ramparts that Indian independence was declared and from where the president gives his annual state of the nation speech on Independence Day. Behind the ramparts lies a magnificent series of palaces which sadly, but thanks mostly to the Brits in past ages.... Now requires a sustained imagination to see as they must have once been.... an anonymous visitor in the 17th century wrote

***'If there be paradise on the face of earth
Oh it be this, it be this, it be this'***

Close by is the Jama Masjid, India's largest mosque, and surrounding it are the teeming streets and markets of Old Delhi. The best 'shopping' of the trip!

There is so much to see and to do in Delhi that however hard we try we will have to miss some things out.... even after around a dozen visits, one for more than a month.... I still have things I want to see and do.

Day 04 Delhi to Jaipur We will leave very early in the morning aiming to avoid the traffic congestion which builds up (like most big cities) from a surprisingly early hour, and drive south to Jaipur. We will stop for breakfast at one of the many roadside café's en route. If you are used to the corporate motorway fare provided in the UK then this will come as a pleasant surprise. Small, clean and providing omlettes with varied fillings and freshly made chapattis served with incomparable tea. Our driver will know the best one to stop at.

Dusky pink Jaipur is a wildly seductive city, which in the early evening light glows magically.

Day 05 Jaipur There is an enormous amount to see and do in Jaipur however we recommend that a trip 11k north to the fort/palace of Amber (pronounced Amer) be made. This awesome delicate pink example of Rajput architecture was the ancient capital of the Jaipur state and is reached from the road either a stiff walk or by riding up on an elephant! A kilometre further on is Jaigarh, another fort that has survived intact. The views over the plains from its watchtowers are startling.

Day 06 Jaipur to Agra. Agra and the Taj Mahal need no introduction and we will be there in the late afternoon when the light makes the Taj constantly change colour. If Jaipur is the 'Pink City' then in my mind Agra is the blue city. As evening draws in the pale purple blue buildings take on a hue, which exactly matches the sky, it provides a strange ethereal vision where entire blocks of buildings shimmer and then appear to vanish!

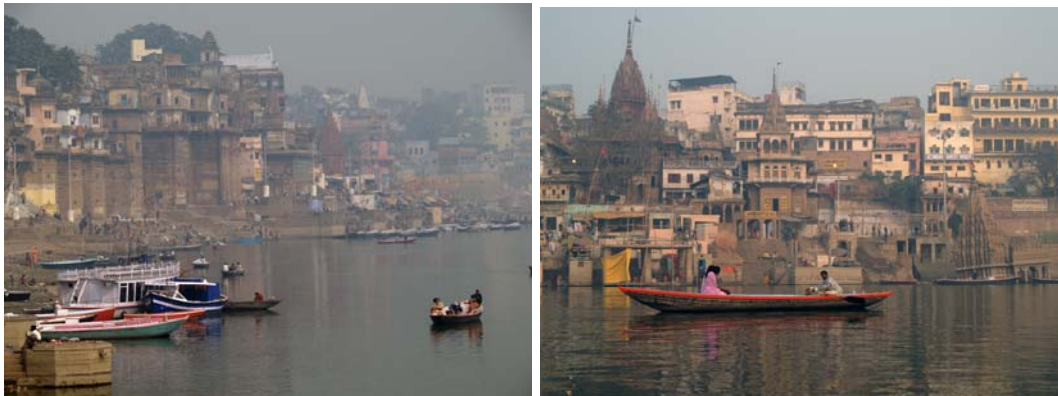


Day 07 *Agra to Khajuraho.*

Day 08 *Khajuraho* Khajuraho has been described as being “a long way from anywhere” and yet the temples found here rival the Taj Mahal as an attraction and contain some of the most extraordinary and wonderful temple art in the world.

Day 09 *Khajuraho to Varanasi.* We will arrive in Varanasi in the early evening and getting to our hotel will involve leaving our vehicles and following a guide through a maze of narrow roads and paths. Our hotel overlooks the Ganges and once there sitting on the rooftop and watching life fold, unfold and reform below you I suspect your first impression will be of a magical light and quiet well being.

Day 10 The sacred city of Varanasi (also known as Kāshī ... the city of light ... or Banāras) is one of the oldest living cities in the world – as old as Jerusalem, Athens and Peking. Mark Twain famously described it as “...older than history, older than tradition, older than legend and looks as twice as old as all of them put together.” It is the place where Shiva, the Lord of All is said to have made his permanent home since the dawn of creation. It is a magical city where the most intimate rituals of life and death take place in public on the cities famous ghats.



The historian Diana Eck writes “The heart of urban Varanasi has few streets wide enough for a two seat bicycle rickshaw and even fewer suitable for cars. It is a confusing maze of narrow lanes that on the surface have hardly changed over the centuries. Of course there is electricity and running water where once there was oil lamps and wells. There are high fashion saris and stainless steel utensils for sale in the same celebrated shops that for centuries have carried only silk and brass. There are bicycles, taxis and more recently motorcycle rickshaws, which vie with the horse drawn tongas, the camels, and the pedestrians in the traffic of the main streets. And through the arched doorways of two and three storied houses in the narrow lanes there are kitchens equipped with refrigerators and blenders. But the dense structure of the old city has not changed.....”.

Day 11 *Varanasi to Patna*

Day 12 Patna is extraordinary. A city the size of Glasgow that is so singularly ill equipped for the western tourist that even buying a postcard is virtually impossible. However as a thriving commercial centre it has fine hotels and restaurants (including one in which I ate one of the most supreme meals in my life!)



There is much to see and do. To explore the riverside is to take a step back in time barges, which have not changed design in centuries, unload sand, animals, hay and spices. Townsfolk constantly come and go with water buffaloes, clothes for washing and purely for entertainment. Patna is a fine centre for brass work and produces the most beautiful buckets in the world! It also has a fine museum.

Day 13, 14 and 15 Across the river is Sonapur. We will probably drive across by an extraordinary long bridge built to allow for the Ganges in monsoon flood. (Though taking a boat is a possibility!) Then we will have to park our vehicle and walk to the fair site. Those of you who have been to Wembley, Murrayfield, or the Millennium Stadium will know what the crowds leaving any big sporting occasion are like. Walking down to Sonapur is to slowly be drawn into such a crowd. Many are heading for the confluence of the Gandak and Ganges but most are heading for the fair. We will try and do both for to stand amongst the pilgrims from all over India bathing along with elephants being given a ritual wash as the sun rises is something that will stay with you for ever. The festival lasts for a month but without doubt the most auspicious days are those that fall either side of the full moon. During this time it brings good fortune to give food and succour to those in need and the roadside will be lined with lepers receiving gifts of food and money. This feeling of good will extends to all. My wife and I stopped for a drink at one of the many stalls and immediately attracted huge attention for western visitors are uncommon. We talked to several folk for a few minutes and then when I went to pay was told by the stall holder “no no no....he pay!” indicating a back disappearing into the crowd, “it is good ... you are a visitor to our country.”



I think it is impossible to describe Sonepur fully. It is unlikely you will ever have experienced being amongst so many people, over a million is common, and it is unlikely that anyone will have tried to sell you an elephant and I am certain that no one will have ever tried to sell you a racing elephant! (If you are interested in making such a purchase I can teach you how to seal the deal!) At the end of the day we have the option of staying on site or returning to our hotel in Patna. Though this decision needs to be made before we leave the UK. Either way we will spend two days taking in this spectacularly different event, the largest animal fair in Asia.



Day 16 Flight to UK.

PRICE £1595 (excluding flights)

Rob Fairley has been a professional artist ever since leaving Edinburgh College of Art and has exhibited all over the world. He has written two books on the history of watercolour painting and also the critically well received "Drawing Hands and Feet" an idiosyncratic look at anatomical drawing. Since 1987 he has been leading expeditions to India and Nepal, which have varied, from mountaineering trips on 8000m peaks to expeditions in Delhi, Mumbai and Kathmandu for primary school children. He is credited with being the founder of Room 13, though he would probably argue otherwise! His own work varies from detailed studies in egg tempera to large oil paintings and watercolours. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and has an abiding fascination with Indian History and tradition. This holiday is probably most suitable for intermediate students and experienced artists who feel they will benefit from a supportive small group environment and from working alongside Rob. Individual guidance will be provided when appropriate. You may choose to work (or not!) on your own or with the group and in any medium.