

PLAN AN ADVENTURE IN KIPLING'S INDIA

This trip takes in three very different Indian experiences: the 'megacity' of Mumbai, safari drives in search of tigers in the central states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, and finally a scenic train journey north to Shimla, in the foothills of the Himalayas.

ESSENTIALS Documents

All UK passport holders will need an e-Tourist visa, which is valid for 30 days and can be purchased online ahead of your trip (£40; indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa).

Health advice

You may need inoculations, and a malaria prophylaxis for travel to central India. Check travelhealthpro.org.uk and fitfortravel.nhs.uk, and book an appointment with a health professional at least six weeks ahead of your visit.

When to go

As India's national parks generally close from April to September, it is best to plan to visit between October and March.

Further reading

A copy of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (£6.99, Penguin Classics) will whet your appetite for the trip. Lonely Planet's *India* (£20.99) is particularly detailed on Mumbai and Shimla.

TOUR OPERATOR

As this trip involves fairly complex travel arrangements to multiple locations (including the relatively off-the-beaten-track national parks of central India), we recommend booking with a tour operator. India specialist **Wild Frontiers** offers both group tours and tailor-made holidays including a 12-day Kipling's India itinerary, which takes in all the places mentioned in our article, plus a stop in Delhi. As well as seamless organisation, guests benefit from private drivers and English-speaking local guides, plus accommodation in some excellent jungle lodges and heritage hotels. Prices for this tour start at £2,495, excluding international flights (wildfrontierstravel.com).

1 If you prefer to travel under your own steam, start by booking your international flight – this itinerary works best if you **fly into Mumbai** and out of Delhi. Several airlines offer a direct route on both legs of the journey, including Air India, BA, Jet Airways and Virgin Atlantic (from around £500 with airindia.in). Cheaper flights are available, but usually involve a stopover in the Middle East.

2 Once in Mumbai, check in to **Le Sutra**, a small boutique hotel decorated with Indian art (£70; lesutra.in). Spend a day people-watching at the city's Raj-era highlights, from a cricket game at the **Oval Maidan** to commuters at **Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus**. Break for lunch at **Britannia & Co Restaurant**. Its owners are Parsis – Iranian Zoroastrian immigrants – who serve signature dishes such as chicken berry pulao (£5; open 12.30–4pm, closed Sun; SS Ram Gulam Marg). Next, seek shade at **Kipling's house**, situated on the grounds of the Sir JJ Institute of Applied Art (jjiaa.org). End with a sundowner at the **Sea Lounge bar at the Taj Hotel**, which overlooks the **Gateway of India** (tajhotels.com).

3 It's off to **Tadoba National Park**, your best bet for tiger sightings. The flight from Mumbai to Nagpur takes 1.5 hours and costs around £30 (with domestic airlines Air India or Jet Airways). The staff at **Svasara Jungle Lodge** can arrange a pick-up from here (£155pp, including all meals and game drives; svasararesorts.com). The lodge is minutes from the park's entrance, and offers two daily game drives and

nightly screenings of wildlife documentaries shot locally. At the time of going to press, the sale of alcohol in the park was banned, so keep back some duty free for a post-safari G&T.

4 Next, it's a long (eight-hour) drive to **Satpura National Park** (book the transfer through your hotel), where you'll find a tumble-down temple and lots of sloth bears. **Reni Pani Jungle Lodge** has spacious suites beautifully designed to be integrated with the forest, and a



lovely pool (£285 per day full board, including one game drive and one other activity, such as a walking or canoeing safari; renipanijunglelodge.com). The lodge also offers a 'night under canvas', an atmospheric recreation of a turn-of-the-century safari camp, complete with fabric tents and hurricane lamps, pitched on the banks of the Denwa River (pictured left; £80 supplement). Reni Pani can arrange guided walks of **local villages** such as Nayapura, and your car transfer to Bhopal's Raja Bhoj Airport.

5 En route, be sure to stop at the **Bhimbetka rock shelters**, which contain some of the world's oldest prehistoric paintings. The **flight from Bhopal to Delhi** takes 1h 15mins and costs around £30 (with Air India or Jet Airways).

6 If you decide to break the journey before heading on to Shimla, stay at **The Claridges** in New Delhi, colonial Deco in style and surrounded by magnificent green lawns (from £75; claridges.com). Explore the culinary culture of India's most food-focused city with a **cooking course** hosted by the charming Neha Gupta in her family home (cooking class and meal, £75 for two; saffronpalate.com).

7 Next, catch the train from Delhi to Kalka, purchasing your tickets in advance from the International Tourist Bureau at New Delhi Train Station or through a website such as irtct.co.in (prices vary). There's a sleeper service which connects with the Shivalik Deluxe Express, the '**toy train**' from Kalka to Shimla. This magically scenic narrow-gauge ride is also a Unesco World Heritage site.

8 Base yourself at Shimla's **Oberoi Cecil**, where the luxury hotel chain's founder got his first job. A grand colonial-era property, it combines old-world charm with the group's trademark outstanding service – rose-petal baths, cakes and monogrammed towels occasionally appear in your room, unbidden – and knock-out views (from £110; oberoihotels.com). Check out nearby **Viceregal Lodge** before strolling the Mall Road, stopping in at the **Gaiety Theatre** for a tour (gaiety.in). Finally, it's a three-hour transfer to Chandigarh Airport for a short flight to Delhi (£30 with domestic airlines), and your international connection back to the UK.

The forests of Tadoba National Park, which provide ample camouflage for its Bengal tiger population

A room at Reni Pani Jungle Lodge, near Satpura National Park. BELOW Diners at Britannia & Co Restaurant in Mumbai

Reni Pani's 'night under canvas' recreates a vintage camp

The grand interior of Shimla's Raj-era Oberoi Cecil Hotel



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