

INDIA: TIGERS, TAJ and BIRDS GALORE

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*“I do not know how the close proximity of a tiger reacts on others,
but for me it is always with a breathless feeling”*

Jim Corbett in “The Maneaters of Kumaon”

There is something indefinable about India which makes Westerners who have been there yearn to return. Perhaps it is the vastness of the country and its timeless quality; perhaps it is the strange mixture of a multiplicity of peoples and cultures—so alien and yet so fascinating—which strikes a hidden chord in us; or perhaps it is the way that man and nature are so closely linked, co-existing in a way that seems intrinsically impossible. There are just some places one has to visit in a lifetime, and India is one of them. On this tour we will be treated to an indelible view of India, its people, its history and its impressive wildlife. We have an excellent chance to see tigers in the wild with additional chances for leopard, dhole, gaur and Asian elephant. We will sight an impressive variety of birds.

India, however, is so much more than a series of highlights. It is a total experience. Perhaps no other country on earth provides such rich panoplies of culture and living history intertwined with nature, literally at one’s feet. For the photographer, the traveler, the historian, the anthropologist, and most emphatically for the naturalist, India is a veritable dream. Join us on a very special journey to the Indian subcontinent, one of the most romantic and magical places on our planet.

Our journey begins in the capital, New Delhi. From here we will fly to Raipur and then be ensconced in a superb new hotel on the edge of Kanha National Park. The primary focus of this trip is to search for the increasingly endangered but nevertheless magnificent Royal Bengal tiger.

*The tiger is the quintessence of a predatory mammal and an enduring icon for everything that is wild and wonderful about India and Asia. Kanha provides an excellent chance of seeing tigers; among the best anywhere in the world. We will spend three full days here enjoying morning and afternoon safari drives in perhaps the richest region in India for wild game. This is where Rudyard Kipling wrote *The Jungle Book*. Meadows are alive with herds of deer whilst the deep grass offers shelter to the world’s charismatic great cat. We have a very good chance for tiger encounters here, via both jeep and elephant. Some of the bird specialties we may encounter include Painted Francolin, Red Spurfowl, five species of vulture, Lesser Adjutant Stork, Brown Fish-Owl, White-naped Woodpecker and Indian Scimitar-Babbler.*

We will then proceed to another of India’s great national parks—Corbett National Park, cradled in the eastern Himalayan foothills. With over 550 species on the park bird list, including an incredible 50 species of raptor, this location offers outstanding birding. Some of the special birds possible here include Collared Falconet, Great Hornbill, Great Slaty Woodpecker, Slaty-headed Parakeet, Tawny and Brown

fish-owl, Pallas's and Gray-headed fish-eagle, the critically endangered Hodgson's Bushchat, Wallcreeper, and Crested Kingfisher, to mention just a few. Herds of Asian elephants are a major feature and there is always a good chance for a special tiger encounter here. Like Kanha, the biomass of hoofed mammals here is impressive, with herds of spotted deer, sambar, hog deer and wild boar supporting the big cats.

Before going on to Bharatpur, we will visit the incredible Taj Mahal. There can be no finer way to visit this monument than by the light of a beautiful sunrise. It is a wonderful, romantic location and often with an array of great birds to enjoy.

The final leg of the tour will take us to the famed bird sanctuary at Bharatpur. Again a wonderful new hotel will allow us to explore this wetland reserve and other nearby sites in great comfort. The birding is exceptional, with a host of nearby locations like Bund Baretha providing the chance for sightings of such rarities as Sarus Crane, Black-necked Stork, Indian Skimmer, Indian Spotted Eagle or perhaps the critically endangered Sociable Plover. Local guides often have a variety of owls like Dusky Eagle-Owl and Indian Scops-Owl staked out. Our visit is timed for the maximum number of winter visitors like Bar-headed Geese, Common Crane and Bluethroats. This is a great birding location; it is quite possible to see over 100 species in a day here. This is a perfect tour of India.

January 3-4, Days 1-2: Fly USA to India. Upon arriving at Delhi on January 4, you will be met and transferred to your comfortable and conveniently located hotel. We will meet in the hotel lobby for lunch at 12:00 p.m. Few large cities can equal Delhi in the number, variety and tameness of its birds. During the Palaearctic winter, many species migrate south to the Indian subcontinent and supplement Delhi's resident bird fauna. Delhi's numerous parks, ruins, and gardens function as a huge man-made oasis for birds and other wildlife in an otherwise dry, semi-arid region. Hindu reverence for life also contributes to the approachability of so many birds. It is astonishing to see the stately Indian Peacock stalking arrogantly along the ramparts of an ancient fortress, or a flock of Black Kites attending the carcass of some unfortunate animal. We will make a tour of the city (to be more exact, Delhi is a mélange of seven ancient cities), visiting some of the city's key sites, such as Humayan's tomb and Qutab Minar. Be assured, aside from seeing some of India's magnificent history, you will encounter a good number of birds, many of which are very easy to photograph.

NIGHT: Uppal's Orchid, Delhi

January 5, Day 3: Fly Delhi to Raipur; Drive to Kanha National Park. And so the great adventure begins! This morning we will fly south to Raipur, capital of the newly created state of Chattisgarh, located at the heart of the great forests of Central India. Our relatively long drive from here will take us on a wonderful journey across India with its bird-rich farmlands and villages that barely appear to acknowledge the passage of time. Depending on how much birding and photography we do along the way, we should arrive in time for dinner.

NIGHT: The Baagh Resort, Kanha

January 6-8, Days 4-6: Kanha National Park. Kanha National Park is one of the largest national parks, covering 1945 sq. km, including a "core zone" of 940 sq. km. It is also part of Project Tiger, one of India's most important conservation efforts. Here amidst the setting for Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, we will travel by jeep and elephant (for tiger viewing) through different habitats, including sal forest, bamboo thicket, dadar (plateau grasslands), meadows, and mixed forests. This beautiful area of forest and lightly wooded grassland with many rivers and streams supports an excellent variety of wildlife. Some of the species we may encounter include the endangered Hard-ground Barasingha (this being the only place where this sub species of deer persists), Barking Deer, Spotted Deer, Gaur – the largest of all bovines, Golden Jackal, Jungle Cat, Common Langur, Sloth Bear, Wild Boar, Dhole or Asian wild dog, and the elusive Chowsingha.

The park hosts many Central Indian bird species including Red-naped Ibis; Jungle Owlet; Blue-bearded Bee-eater; Crested Bunting; Red Junglefowl; Indian Peafowl; Oriental Darter; Indian Pond Heron; Woolly-necked Stork; Bronze-winged Jacana; Green Bee-eater; Indian Roller; Indian Gray Hornbill; Brown-throated Barbet; Black-rumped Flameback; Black-headed Oriole; Greater Racket-tailed Drongo; Rufous Treepie; Scarlet Minivet; White-rumped Shama; White-eyed Buzzard; Changeable Hawk-Eagle; Crested Serpent-Eagle; Pied Harrier; Red-headed Vulture; Alexandrine and Plum-headed parakeets; Yellow-legged Green-Pigeon; Sirkeer Malkoha; Greater Coucal; Indian Scops-Owl; Gray, Indian, and Savannah nightjars; Crested Treeswift; Indian Scimitar-Babbler; Tawny-bellied and Yellow-eyed babbler; Tickell's Blue and Verditer flycatchers; Asian Paradise-Flycatcher; Olive-backed Pipit; and Red Avadavat.

NIGHTS: The Baagh Resort, Kanha

January 9, Day 7: Kanha National Park and Return to Raipur; Fly to Delhi. Three full days exploring this park will give us excellent opportunities to observe all that is offered. This includes great birds like the Red-headed Vulture, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Orange-headed Thrush, Stork-billed Kingfisher and the Malabar Pied Hornbill. Or perhaps it will be a rarely seen mammal like a Honey Badger (Ratel) or the diminutive four-horned antelope. Always though, the tiger will be amongst our thoughts. This evening we will catch the flight to Delhi.

NIGHT: Uppal's Orchid, Delhi

January 10, Day 8: Drive Delhi to Corbett. This morning we will depart from Delhi for Corbett National Park. India's first national park lies cradled in the foothills of the Himalayas, approximately 300 km northeast of Delhi. Our journey takes us across the vast Gangetic Plain, the very core of Hindu India and the most populous part of this nation of some one billion people. Our journey, in addition to providing plenty of opportunity for seeing a good cross section of open country birds, permits a fascinating window on the life of everyday India. The sheer mass of humanity and the ensuing congestion has to be seen to be believed! Every imaginable form of transport including buses, trucks, motorized and cycle rickshaws, bullock carts, camels, even the occasional elephant, together with teeming numbers of pedestrians, cram on to roads designed for traffic of one hundred years ago. The squalor of the cities and larger towns gives way to mud-walled villages and reservoirs teeming with birds whilst women, gracefully adorned in silk saris, collect cow and buffalo droppings to be dried and used as cooking fuel. This is another world that never fails to totally overwhelm the first time visitor. Perhaps one of the most salutary impressions is that birds are everywhere; truly a tribute to the Hindu reverence for animal life.

Eventually we will reach Corbett National Park. We will spend the first night on the outskirts of the park in rather comfortable and attractive accommodations, while the last three nights will be at Dikhala Forest Rest House located deep within the heart of the reserve.

NIGHT: The Den, Corbett

January 11-13, Days 9-11: Corbett National Park. Corbett encompasses more than 200 square miles of magnificent deciduous forest and grassland at an elevation of 1,312 to 3,970 feet and occupies a series of ridges centered round the Ramganga River. The dam, which now forms Ramganga Lake at the western boundary of the park, is a haven for wildlife and attracts good numbers of large mammals including Asian elephant, spotted deer, sambar and wild boar, in addition to their attendant predators dhole (wild dogs), leopard and the magnificent tiger. This classic tract of wild India has a special beauty that is vividly described in 'The Maneaters of Kumaon' and other books by Jim Corbett. During the winter, the snows of the Himalayas force large numbers of birds down to lower elevations, where together with the resident avifauna, they form one of the richest communities of birds in northern India. Corbett also harbors a plethora of mammals. In addition to those mentioned above, other mammals include Leopard, Jungle and Fishing cats, Sloth and Himalayan black bears, the strikingly marked Yellow-throated Marten, Indian Crested Porcupine, Goral—a strange goat-antelope, and both Common Langur and Rhesus Macaque.

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The stillness is broken by the raucous bugle of an advertising peacock as the mists part to reveal another day. Eerie skeleton-like drowned trees host Lesser Fishing-Eagles and snake-birds more commonly known as Asian Darters, while nearby rivers are home to impressive Crested Kingfishers, Plumbeous and White-capped redstarts, and the quintessential Himalayan inhabitant, Brown Dipper. Our lodge at Dhikala overlooks the attractive, seasonal Ramganga Lake, where at dawn, ripples in a secluded bay may reveal a Smooth Otter fishing.

A list of 580 species of birds for the park present enough options for even the most hardened lister, and our days here will be filled with many new and exciting sights and sounds. Some of the birds we may encounter here include Black Stork; Brahminy Kite; the magnificent but increasingly rare Pallas's Fish-Eagle; Indian Spotted Eagle; Changeable, Rufous-bellied and Mountain Hawk-eagles; Black Francolin—a real snappy looking bird that is best seen at dawn when the male calls from exposed tree stumps at the edge of the grassland; Red Junglefowl; Kalij Pheasant; River Lapwing; Eurasian Thick-knee; perhaps even the elusive Great Thick-knee; Red Turtle-Dove; Emerald Dove; Lesser Coucal; Slaty-headed, Red-breasted, Plum-headed, and possibly Alexandrine parakeets; Crested Treeswift; Himalayan Swiftlet; Brown-backed Needletail; both Brown and Tawny fish-owls (sorting these two out is no mean task); Jungle Owlet; and with a bit of luck we may find the rather sparsely distributed Blue-bearded Bee-eater – quite unlike any bee-eater you have ever encountered! We may also see Oriental Pied and the simply astounding Great hornbill; Lineated, Brown-headed, Blue-throated and Coppersmith barbets; Streak-throated, Gray-headed, Fulvous-breasted and Gray-capped woodpeckers; Rufous-winged Bush-lark; Oriental Skylark; Plain Martin; Large Wood-Shrike; Large Cuckoo-shrike; Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike; Small Minivet; Common Iora; Black-crested and Ashy bulbuls; Chestnut-capped and Yellow-eyed babbler; Rufous-gorgeted and Slaty-blue flycatchers; White-throated Fantail; Gray-breasted Prinia; Tickell's Leaf and Smoky warblers; Indian Robin; Gray-winged Blackbird; Little and Black-backed fork-tails; and Chestnut-bellied and Velvet-fronted nuthatches. If we are lucky, we may come across the highly sought after Wallcreeper, Gray-backed and Long-tailed shrikes, Black-hooded Oriole, Hair-crested Drongo, Chestnut-tailed and Spot-winged starlings, Jungle Myna, Rufous-bellied and Gray treepies, Oriental White-eye, Red Avadavat, Common Rosefinch, and Chestnut-eared and Crested buntings.

For many, this will be the India you have always dreamed of—gentle, sunlit days in true wilderness made magical by some of earth's most charismatic creatures.

NIGHTS: Dhikala Forest Rest House

January 14, Day 12: Corbett National Park to Unchagaon Fort. This morning we will depart Corbett for Unchagaon Fort near the Ganges. We may be able to stop along the way to do some birding. This early 19th century fort was inherited in 1927 by the present Raja, Surendra Pal Singh. He took an active interest in the maintenance and preservation of his ancestral home so the décor is authentically aristocratic but with all the modern amenities. There are beautifully manicured lawns and flowerbeds and a mangrove orchard that is excellent for birding. Upon arrival at the Fort, we will get settled and time permitting, we will look for birds in the beautiful mango orchard and explore the gardens.

NIGHT: The Fort, Unchagaon

January 15, Day 13: Agra and the Taj Mahal. This morning we depart for Agra. We will visit the superb Agra Fort in the afternoon and we will arrive in good time to view the very lovely Taj Mahal, undoubtedly one of the great architectural wonders of the world, in the afternoon from our hotel. The Taj View Hotel is centrally located in Agra, which will afford a good location from which to do some sightseeing or shopping, if time permits. The birds in Agra are also excellent, including River Lapwing, Pallas's Gull, Little Pratincole and maybe the very rare Black-bellied Tern.

NIGHT: The Taj View Hotel, Agra

January 16, Day 14: Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri and Bharatpur. After a superb morning visit to the Taj Mahal when the light is at its best, we will head west to Bharatpur via the ancient abandoned city of Fatehpur Sikri. This fascinating journey will take us south and westwards into the state of Rajasthan. As we venture out

into the countryside, we cannot help but be fascinated as we pass camel carts, mud brick villages and elegantly attired women—all seemingly little changed in a thousand years. As is characteristic of India, we will make regular stops along the way for anything of interest. We will arrive at our lovely hotel for a three night stay.

You will need to ensure you have plenty of digital memory and your camera and video are in good working order. All of these sites combined will be amongst the highlights of this tour.

NIGHT: The Baagh, Bharatpur

January 17-18, Days 15-16: Bharatpur. Bharatpur is one of the last major undisturbed wetlands remaining in north-central India and is considered one of the greatest birding spots on our planet. It is of critical importance to huge numbers and a wide variety of Palaearctic waterbirds wintering in the subcontinent. In addition, it supports important nesting colonies of Painted and Asian Openbill storks. Although unlikely to be nesting at the time of our visit, these storks are resident throughout most of the year, feeding on the rich pickings provided by the reserve's protected water supply.

In addition to its wonderful wetlands, Bharatpur encompasses areas of tall woodland and low semi-arid scrub. These habitats support a fascinating assemblage of birds. This includes the elusive Spotted Creeper, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Eurasian Wryneck, Dusky Eagle-Owl, Small Minivet, scarce Marshall's Iora, Orange-headed Thrush, and the scarce Brook's Leaf-Warbler, to mention a few. It is quite possible we will record over 100 species of birds daily in the Bharatpur area.

During two full days, we hope to see Indian and Little cormorant, Sarus and Common crane, four species of egret, Purple Heron, Black Bittern, Painted and Black-necked stork, Black-headed and Red-naped ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Graylag and Bar-headed goose, Red-crested and Common pochard, Ferruginous and Comb duck, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Falcated Teal, Shikra, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, and Pallas's Fish-Eagle. Wintering raptors are a major feature of Bharatpur. It is possible to see Steppe, Tawny, Imperial, Greater Spotted and the rare endemic Indian Spotted Eagle in a day. Other likely raptors include Short-toed Snake-Eagle, Long-billed Vulture, Red-headed Vulture and Pallid Harrier. More secretive or elusive waterbirds we hope to locate include Painted Snipe, Brown Crake and White-tailed Lapwing. In the dry country, we will look for Indian Courser, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and Isabelline Shrike. We can hope for sightings of such global rarities as Indian Skimmer and Sociable Lapwing.

NIGHTS: The Baagh, Bharatpur

January 19, Day 17: Return to Delhi; Evening Flights Home. Today we will have to return to Delhi. Dinner will be provided along with the use of day rooms until 10:00 p.m.

DAY: Uppal's Orchid, Delhi

TOUR LIMIT: This tour is limited to 10 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Dion Hobcroft

Dion Hobcroft has been working for VENT since 2001. He has led tours to Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand, Bhutan, India, Southwest Pacific, Cambodia, Thailand, China, Japan, Russia, Alaska, and the Antarctic. In 2007 alone Dion showed more than 2,000 species of birds to VENT clients. His informative, relaxed, and educational nature, combined with sharp eyes and ears, has established Dion as a favorite of many tour participants. His fieldwork for over 30 years on birds and other terrestrial vertebrates has allowed him to amass an extraordinary knowledge of the biodiversity in the Asia-Pacific region. Born in Tasmania and based in Sydney, Dion has traveled widely throughout Australia listing over 760 species, placing him in the top echelons of Australian birders. He is very tuned-in to the songs of bird species in the Asia-Pacific region, and specializes in rare and elusive species. He is delighted to show these skulking rarities to his travel companions. Dion has

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published several papers on field ornithology, served on national and state rare bird committees, managed *Birdline NSW*, run introduction to ornithology courses for Sydney University, and, before he traveled so continuously, was a popular speaker with various natural history societies. Dion has worked for many research and government agencies ranging from the Antarctic Division, Department of Environment NSW, Agriculture Protection WA, Taronga Zoo, Australian Museum, and the Queensland Department of Primary Industry. Dion lives in Sydney with his wife Lise, and two young children, Grace (age 9), and Daniel (age 5).

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$8,155** per person in double occupancy and includes all meals beginning with lunch on Day 2 to dinner on Day 17, accommodations as stated, ground transportation during the tour, internal India flights, and guide services provided by the tour leader. The tour fee does not include roundtrip airfare from your home to Delhi, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, telephone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small party supplement may be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$1,195**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and one cannot be provided for you.

PLEASE NOTE: This tour is priced based on estimated 2010 rates. If our ground operators increase their prices, we may need to surcharge for whatever those additional costs may be.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider.** Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact Travel Insured International prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

IMPORTANT NOTE: *Please read your itinerary carefully to see whether or not your tour/cruise requires MANDATORY Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the trip.* This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by Travel Insured International. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through Travel Insured International, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: www.insuremytrip.com.

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AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. We will be happy to make whatever air reservations you desire, including stopovers, business or first class reservations, etc. **AIRFARES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE UNTIL THE TIME OF TICKETING AND ARE BASED ON ADVANCE PURCHASE ARRANGEMENTS WITH CANCELLATION PENALTIES.**

MEALS & ACCOMMODATIONS: We will, at all times, stay in the best accommodations available. In many cases, we will be staying at some superb locations and very comfortable hotels such as in Delhi, Kanha, Raipur, Corbett National Park, Bharatpur and Agra. Accommodations at Dhikala Forest Rest House in Corbett are Spartan, but everyone has their own private bathroom facilities. Dhikala is located in the heart of the reserve and the opportunity to be serenaded by jackals or trumpeting elephants is surely well worth any slight inconvenience.

Much to the surprise of many, the food in India is outstanding and not just a plate of hot spices. In fact, on many of our tours, participants have felt that India’s cuisine was one of the highlights of the tour. Furthermore, providing one takes common sense measures such as not eating uncooked vegetables or unpeeled fruit or drinking unbottled water, participants on VENT trips rarely encounter any serious stomach disorders. Good bottled water is widely available.

PHOTOGRAPHY: India is one of the most photogenic countries in the world. You could spend a day literally standing in one spot, and shooting in all directions. Furthermore, the wildlife is exceptionally tame. Add good lighting and a preponderance of open habitats, and you have a photographer’s paradise. However, beware of dust, and bring spares of all those little batteries you may need, in addition to lots of film or digital memory.

CLIMATE: At the time of our visit (January-February) and because of the wide geographical range that our tour covers, we will encounter a broad spectrum of temperatures from cold and damp to warm, occasionally hot conditions with very bright sunshine. In the mornings at all locations it can be surprisingly cold. Fog is also a feature of the mornings.

CLOTHING: Casual is the order of the day. Participants may like to have one set of slightly smarter clothes to wear at some of the nicer hotels. Hard wearing, easy-to-wash-and-dry field clothes are ideal. Robust hiking boots with a solid lug sole are **essential** — sneakers or sports-type shoes **are not appropriate** as the sole form of footwear, as the ground may be wet and possibly slippery some of the time.

Participants are recommended to bring several layers rather than one or two large items. Robust rain-proof jackets and pants are strongly recommended. In addition, we also recommend bringing at least one warm sweater and jacket or down vest. **It can be very cold in the early mornings on jeep safaris.** Other items that are recommended include a warm head covering such as a knit or fleece hat or balaclava, in addition to a regular birding hat; gloves and scarf or neck-gaiter. Sunglasses are very useful (occasionally essential). Thick socks that absorb perspiration and cushion one's feet from hard surfaces are important.

Bring lightweight, long-sleeved shirts and pants in natural fabric, such as cotton, or cotton and man-made fiber mixes. These offer protection against the sun and insects (very few) while remaining comfortable, cool and easy to launder. Laundry service will be available at many of the places we will be staying.

SPECIAL NOTE: Please absolutely NO bright colors. Although the birds and other wildlife are relatively approachable, we will be trying to see a number of very elusive species so that muted colors are essential to enhance our chances. Please do not wear brightly colored clothes, hats, gloves, bags or other paraphernalia. Furthermore, if you can avoid crackling nylon/plastic jackets and pants, this will greatly enhance everyone's enjoyment of the trip and enable the leader to hear those critical but so easily overlooked subtle call-notes of the birds you want to see!

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure is required for United States citizens to enter India. **Visas ARE required for entry into India and should be obtained prior to departure.** For further information, you may wish to contact the India consulate nearest you or Pinnacle Travel Document Systems (www.traveldocs.com on the web or 888-838-4867 by phone), a company which handles visa procurement. Non-United States citizens should check with their local Indian consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: Everyone should have a good pair of binoculars that are not in need of repair (**please check before departure!**). Many people carry a second pair, just in case of emergencies. Your tour leader will be carrying a spotting scope; however, you are welcome and **encouraged** to bring your own spotting scope if you so wish. You should bring **all** the camera equipment, spares, batteries and film-cards (most participants find that they require a great deal more film-card space than they think they will before leaving home). India is exceptionally photogenic with lots of good lighting and many opportunities for both cultural, scenic and wildlife photography. Thus you should bring all the film-cards you will need as your preferred film-card will likely be **almost impossible** to obtain once we arrive in Delhi. UV and polarizing filters are recommended. A supply of robust plastic bags is very useful to protect equipment from rain and especially dust.

A small day pack (either waterproofed or with a robust plastic bag inside) is essential for carrying excess clothing, camera equipment, toiletries, food and water. However, in many of the birding areas, we will have regular access to our transport, which will be attended by a driver and his mate. **Water bottles are important** if you like to carry a regular supply of water.

Other useful items include:

1. Flashlight or headlamp - we will be out at night on a few occasions when a small light is **essential**.
2. Handy wipes and paper tissues - these are especially useful and all participants should carry sufficient for their personal needs for the entire tour.
3. Spare glasses or contact lenses.

4. Sunscreen - Sunscreen lotion is strongly recommended, especially for higher elevations where the UV is much greater. A lip balm is also essential.

5. Umbrella - The collapsible type is easy to carry and useful both against rain and sun.

HEALTH: Participants are advised **NOT** to drink the tap water or unboiled water placed at the table except as advised by your tour leader. Bottled drinks (including uncarbonated bottled mineral water) will be available at **all times** throughout the tour. Participants should not eat uncooked foods such as meat or vegetables or food that has cooled and/or been sitting in the open. Unpeeled fruit is fine; provided you wash the exterior first in clean water.

Cholera and yellow fever inoculations are required only if you arrive within five days of departing from an infected area. Malaria is highly unlikely, but a slight possibility. Participants may wish to protect themselves with prophylactics. These should be taken as prescribed by your doctor. A number of forms of hepatitis may be present and participants are recommended to contact their doctor for advice prior to departure.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely as it will be very difficult to obtain anywhere during the tour. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (877) FYI-TRIP. You can check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

LUGGAGE: When traveling within India, **officially** one piece of checked luggage weighing no more than 44 pounds is allowed free of charge. In addition, you are allowed one piece of carry-on luggage and whatever you carry over your arm or in your hands (i.e. coat, book, purse, umbrella etc.). In reality we generally find that airlines in India are fairly flexible; however, you should be prepared for some excess baggage charges if you exceed the baggage limits by more than 5-6 pounds. We feel it is better to incur this charge than to cut back your baggage so that you do not have enough clothing, etc for the trip. In practice, on our previous tours, we had no problem with the number of pieces we checked in or the weight of our total baggage. Nevertheless, imposition of such rules and regulations is idiosyncratic and in the event that excess baggage fees are charged, participants will be expected to pay for their fair share.

CURRENCY: Rupee (Rs); Currency can only be changed at banks or authorized money changers. Credit cards are accepted by most of the major hotels on this tour. Participants are advised to carry sufficient funds in low denomination American Express US dollar traveler's checks, and/or US dollar cash. The latter can be very useful in an emergency. India has some very fine handicrafts, including spectacular rugs and carpets from Kashmir that have to be seen to be believed. And, at prices to match every pocket!

MISC: Departure Tax: Typically included in the price of your airline ticket.

Electricity: India 230 - 240 volts, 50 cycles, AC systems

Language: The national language of India is Hindi

Time: 10½ hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as

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www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books. We also recommend Andrew Isles bookstore for the Asia-Pacific region at <http://www.andrewisles.com/AndrewIsles/>. Andrew can also often obtain difficult to find and out of print books.

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and T. Inskipp. 1998. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Christopher Helm Identification Guide Series. This will cover all of the birds we are likely to encounter on the following tours: Assam (Kaziranga Nat. Pk.); Northern India; Tigers, Taj and Bharatpur; Western Himalayas and Deserts of India; South India; Sri Lanka and Bhutan. *All participants are recommended to obtain a copy of this guide or Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) see below as they greatly supersede all previous guides we have advocated for tours to the Indian Subcontinent.*

Daniel, J.C. *The Book of Indian Reptiles*. Bombay Natural History Society, 1983.

Gurung, K.K. and Singh, Raj. *Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent and Where to Watch Them*. Oxford: Bishop's Printers Ltd., 1996.

Insight Guides. *Indian Wildlife*. Apa Productions, 1987.

Kazmierczak, Krysz and Singh, Raj. *A Birdwatchers' Guide to India*. Bedfordshire, United Kingdom: Prion Ltd., 1998. This book describes a cross-section of birding sites covering all of India's regions and main habitats- a wonderful and very informative book co-authored by Raj Singh, owner of the company that handles our ground operations in India, Assam and Bhutan. He also co-authored *Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent and Where to Watch Them*.

McNeely, J.A. & Wachtel, P.S. *Soul of the Tiger*. New York: Doubleday, 1988. One of the most intriguing and beautifully written books on the complex relationships between man, his myriad beliefs and nature, and the implications for conservation.

Prater, S.H. *The Book of Indian Animals*. Bombay Natural History Society, 1971. An excellent mammal book with colour plates and black and white photographs.

Rasmussen, P.C. & Anderton, J.C. *Birds of South Asia: The Ripley Guide*. Vols. 1 & 2 Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions, Washington, D.C. and Barcelona, 2005. The new standard field guide to birds of India and neighbouring countries with a complete taxonomic reappraisal of the birds in this region. Highly recommended although the Vol. 2 is not necessary to be carried in the field.

TIPPING: As noted in our itineraries, tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary,

notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on April 8, 2010 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.