

North India – from West to East with Christine Manfield

INDIA

"Start an enduring romance with this beguiling country and join me on this enchanting and alluring tour. Discover and experience first hand the exotic and decadent charm that is India. Explore its hidden treasures, indulge in its culinary arts and let the warmth and generosity of its people touch your soul. This is more than a journey; it is a life changing experience.

Our adventure will take you through an astonishing array of landscapes, a heady mix of the mystical and sensuous. Surrender to the definitive mystery of India as it confronts, delights, challenges, amuses, questions and ultimately overwhelms you with its myriad images and intense passion. Let your taste buds come alive with the diverse and complex flavours that permeate the regional food and discover the unrivalled imaginative use of spices. Let me share my love and knowledge of Rajasthani and Bengali food with you.

An astonishing blaze of colour awaits you in Rajasthan, where you will luxuriate in the opulent Moghul palaces of the Rajera and expand your taste memory bank with the discovery of the unique foods of this exotic region. Customs, heritage, art and architecture will unfold in an unparalleled kaleidoscope before your eyes. Our final destination, Calcutta, offers one of the most enduring Indian experiences imaginable.

Why not linger a little longer and come trekking (promise it's quite gentle!) into Sikkim for a taste of life in the Himalayas with our 4 day extension tour. With captivating scenery at every turn; Hindu temples and magnificent forests abundant with wild herbs. Observe local mountain village life and experience the sense of being at one with nature, while still being pampered all the way.

My passion for and deep connection with India seeps through every element of our exhilarating journey where we will dine in some of my favourite restaurants, sleep in majestic hotels and gain a privileged insight into the culinary secrets that sustain one of the world's most vivid and alluring cultures."

Christine Manfield



Christine Manfield is one of Australia's most celebrated chefs, a perfectionist inspired by strong flavours and a writer whose successful books have spiced up the lives of keen cooks from Melbourne to Mumbai and Manhattan.

Her gastronomic travels are extensive and provide much inspiration for her food and writing. We are privileged to have Christine design and lead our inaugural culinary journey across North India from Mumbai to Rajasthan and onto Kolkata.

Christine offers an expert's insight into the culinary secrets of each region we visit and her passion for India shines through every element of this exhilarating journey. Every food stall, restaurant, private dinner and sumptuous hotel has been handpicked by Christine ensuring a tour of unmatched quality and outstanding cultural and culinary significance.

Trip length	Start/Finish	Cost	Dates
13 days 12 nights	Mumbai/ Kolkata	\$11,950 \$3,674 single supplement	9th February 2010

ITINERARY

Key: (B) breakfast (L) lunch (D) dinner (W) wine/spirits

Tuesday 9th February – Arrive Mumbai

Arrive in Mumbai today where you will be met by our staff and taken to your hotel.

This famous hotel, The Taj Mahal Palace and Tower, combining Moorish, Oriental and Florentine styles, was built in 1903. Located in the heart of Mumbai, it offers panoramic views of the Arabian sea and the Gateway of India.

Overnight: The Taj Mahal Tower and Palace, Luxury Grand sea view room

Mumbai

Part of the charm of visiting Mumbai and hitting the streets, is sampling the plethora of tiffin snacks and watching the chai wallahs work at a furious pace, or hanging out with the locals on Chowpatty Beach at sunset and joining the queue at the Great Pani Puri Seller, one of the many food carts on beach. This frenetic city has food delights galore honouring the traditions of Muslim, Parsi and Hindu cuisines. The restaurant scene is the most vibrant of the country and its street food brilliant. Nothing beats munching on delicious bel puri – a snack of potato and peas dressed with tamarind and crispy puffed rice flakes scattered over the top. Equally addictive are pani puri – small puri puffs with spicy chick peas spooned into the hollow and dressed with tamarind yoghurt and mint – the best snack imaginable. Same with crisp bhaji – vegetable fritters fried in a besan (chickpea flour) and turmeric batter. Vegetable filled samosa pastries and the luscious sweet threads of syrupy orange jalebi complete the picture. The repertoire of seafood dishes from the the koliwada fisherman along the Konkan coast is extraordinary. Excite your taste buds as we explore the myriad flavours.

Wednesday 10th February – Mumbai

In the morning, we will be met by our guide and taken for sightseeing of Mumbai city which includes a visit to the Gateway of India, Victoria Terminus and the Prince of Wales Museum.

The Gateway of India was built during 1924-1927 to commemorate the visit to India of King George V of England in 1911. It is the most enduring symbol of the city. The Victoria Terminus, popularly known as VT, is the major railway station and is considered the most beautiful edifice in Mumbai. Dhobi Ghat or washer man's enclave, provides a very interesting insight into Mumbai's local culture. Once a "Portuguese princess" dowry and later an adornment of Neo Gothic British architecture, Mumbai today, is more than just a metropolis. It is an enigma of mud huts and skyscrapers, age old traditions and high fashions, the industrialist's haven and Indian movie makers' Hollywood. The city is constantly changing while at the same time standing still. The city's name was changed in recent times to Mumbai, derived from

Mumbadevi, the patron goddess of the Koli fishermen, the city's oldest inhabitants.

Overnight: The Taj Mahal Tower and Palace, Luxury Grand sea view room. (BD)

Thursday 11th February – Mumbai

This morning we will depart from the hotel after an early breakfast for a guided walk through some of Mumbai's markets and gain a better understanding of the 'foodie' side of the city.

After lunch at a local vegetarian restaurant, we will be taken for an excursion to the Elephant Caves – reached by a one hour boat ride from the Gateway of India.

This early 8th-century religious sanctuary is a shrine dedicated to Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction and regeneration. The Portuguese named the island because of large stone elephant sculptures they discovered on the island, and which were moved to Mumbai's Jijamata Udyan (Victoria Gardens).

This evening we will be treated to special last evening in Mumbai.

Overnight: The Taj Mahal Tower and Palace, Luxury Grand sea view room. (BD)

Friday 12th February – Mumbai-Udaipur

This morning we will be transferred to the airport for our departure to Udaipur.

Upon arrival in Udaipur we will be met and transferred to the jetty for the transfer to our hotel.

The famous Lake Palace, built 250 years ago, is colloquially known as the 'floating palace', due to its unique location in the middle of Lake Pichola. The Palace was originally the 'summer' residence of the Royal Family of Udaipur and is a beautiful combination of white marble and mosaic.

Later in the afternoon we enjoy boat ride on Lake Pichola and in the evening we will have drinks and dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight: Lake Palace, Palace Room. (BD)

Rajasthan

Rajsthani cuisine is perhaps the most sensitive among Indian cuisines. Its cooking has its own unique flavour where the simplest and the most basic of ingredients go into the preparation of dishes. Due to its scarcity, cooking is done with minimal use of water. Instead milk, buttermilk and clarified butter are used to give moisture to food. Non-availability of vegetables like tomatoes has led to the usage of dried mango powder while asafoetida is used instead of onion and garlic. Gram flour is a major ingredient and is used to make some of the delicacies like khatta, gatte ki sabzi, pakodi; powdered lentils are used for mangodi, papad; bajra and corn is used all over the state for preparations of rabdi, khichdi and rotis. Various chutneys are made from locally available spices like turmeric, coriander, mint and garlic.

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Exotic yoghurt and cream based main-courses are common, like Safed Maas, Maas ki Kadhi, Khad, Besan ke Gatte. One of Rajasthan's favoured non-vegetarian dishes is Laal Maas, an extremely hot dish prepared with lamb.

Saturday 13th February – Udaipur

Today you will be taken on a sightseeing tour of Udaipur city.

Udaipur, the enchanting City of Dawn, looms up like a vision in white. The City Palace was built in 1725, and has various palaces inside such as Dilkush Mahal, Sheesh Mahal, Moti Mahal, the Palace of Krishna, all of which are ornately decorated. Saheliyon Ki Bari, the 'Garden of Maids of Honour', is a small ornamental pleasure garden, containing an elegant lotus pool, gushing fountains, beautiful black marble kiosks on the corners of the pool and stunning bougainvilleas covering the wall of the enclosures. We will also visit the beautiful Jagdish Temple, which is still in use and very much a live temple.

Later in the day you will have time at leisure or an optional walk through the back streets of Udaipur.

Overnight: Lake Palace, Palace Room. (BD)

Sunday 14th February – Udaipur to Narlai

After a leisurely breakfast we will be driven to Narlai (approximately 160 kilometres or 5 hours drive). En-route we visit the Ranakpur Jain Temple and Kumbhalgarh Fort.

Ranakpur is situated about 98 Kilometres from Udaipur in the Aravalli hills. This 15th century temple is the centre of the Jain community. The central temple is called the Chaumukha which is supported by 1444 pillars. Kumbhalgarh Fort was built by Rana Kumbha. The fort is approached by a narrow pass in the surrounding hills and is entered through five gigantic gates called Pols.

After our visit to the Temples we will continue to the sleepy village of Narlai, where we will be staying at Rawla Narlai. The rest of the afternoon is at your leisure.

This lovely little hotel lies, hidden away in a small village, deep in the heart of the Aravalli Hills. Surrounded by forested hills and rocky outcrops, it is reminiscent of a Rajasthan that few see today and is located in one of the most beautiful parts of the state. Rawla Narlai is a delightful 17th century property which was once a favourite hunting lodge of the Jodhpur Royal Family. It is still owned by members of the Jodhpur family who play an active part in the running of the hotel to ensure it remains a real 'gem' of an experience.

This evening we will enjoy a specially designed dinner on the roof terrace under the stars.

Overnight: Rawla Narlai, Luxury room. (BLD)

Monday 15th February – Narlai

This morning we will be taken for a walk up to the top of the Rock Mountain for sunrise.

The remainder of the day will be at your leisure - to relax at the hotel or further explore the area. Members of staff

from the hotel will be at hand to accompany you on a walk through their small village if you so desire.

In the evening enjoy sundowners at the lake side, and then we will be collected by bullock cart and driven to a secret location for a spectacular dinner.

Overnight: Rawla Narlai, Luxury room. (BD)

Tuesday 16th February – Narlai to Nimaj

This morning we drive from Narlai to Chhatrasagar in Nimaj (approximately 120 kilometres or 3 hours).

Situated just 2 hours from Jodhpur, this idyllic haven comprises 11 tents pitched on a dam, overlooking a lake teeming with birds. The Nimaj family is personally involved in looking after guests. The tents are elegantly furnished and each is pitched to ensure privacy and a direct view of the lake. The food served here is some of the finest Rajasthani home cooking and the charming family will look after our every need. Due to its location, surrounded by farmland and small villages, a stay here allows us to experience rural Rajasthan in a way that few other properties can allow.

On arrival we will be shown to our tents, followed by lunch overlooking the dam. The rest of the day will be at leisure, and in the early evening we will be treated to a cooking demonstration by the women of the family.

Drinks will be served around the fire before dinner.

Overnight: Chhatrasagar, Luxury Tent. (BLD)

Wednesday 17th February – Nimaj

This morning we will visit the local village, accompanied by the members of the family from Chhatrasagar. These small village settlements provide an insight into the traditional, rural Rajasthani lifestyle, where the priority is on harmony, conservation and the full utilization of natural resources.

The rest of the day will be at leisure – to relax, eat, drink and perhaps take an excursion around the lake to view its abundant birdlife and natural beauty.

Overnight: Chhatrasagar, Luxury Tent. (BLD)

Thursday 18th February – Nimaj to Jodhpur to Calcutta

After early breakfast we will be driven to Jodhpur. Upon arrival we will be taken for a sightseeing tour of Mehrangarh Fort which dominates the city and sits atop a sheer rocky ridge right in the centre of the town.

Later we transfer to the airport for our departure to Delhi. On arrival in Delhi we will connect to our onward flight to Kolkata arriving there at 8pm. Upon arrival you will be met by our local staff and transferred to our hotel.

The Oberoi Grand carries with it a heritage that few other hotels in India can boast. It is a bastion of the Days of the Raj, when Calcutta was the commercial capital of India. It is a supremely comfortable hotel with all the usual amenities of a luxury hotel.

Overnight: The Oberoi Grand, Deluxe room. (B)

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Calcutta

To the casual palate, Bengali food is synonymous with rice and fish, both available in abundance in this large monsoon drenched eastern state. What Bengal has in common with her west coast cousins is the use of coconut and coconut milk, but unlike in other coastal kitchens the preferred cooking medium is mustard oil, not coconut oil. The food is delicately flavoured, spiced and inventive, rounded off with the famous Bengali Mithai (sweets). Some well known dishes include Kosher Mangsho (delicately spiced, slow cooked lamb curry accompanied by luchi – a most delicious fluffy bread), Prawn Malai curry (creamy spiced prawn curry), smoked boneless river fish (hilsa) and bekti (a larger river fish) mustard curry and the wonderful mishti dahi (a creamy sweet caramel yoghurt prepared in individual clay pots). The hidden secrets that can be found in Calcutta are the highlights of a visit to this city - particularly in the company of those who 'know'!

Friday 19th February – Calcutta

Today we will take a sightseeing tour of Calcutta, which will include the charity of Mother Teresa, the Botanical Garden, Victoria Memorial, Indian Museum and the Kali Temple.

Calcutta is a city of glaring contrasts - a curious blend of the old and the new, partly feudal, partly born out of growing urbanisation and partly indefinable. It is a medley of the east and the west, a graft of a European city imposed on the Asian landscape and it is this that gives Calcutta its charm, confusion and excitement. It is a city that shocks on first impression but invariably the visitor falls in love with it.

In the evening you will have a sumptuous Bengali dinner.

Overnight: The Oberoi Grand, Deluxe room. (BLD)

Saturday 20th February – Calcutta

Today is a day of surprises as we discover the 'foodie' side of Calcutta with Christine who has an enduring connection to this amazing cultural city!

Overnight: The Oberoi Grand, Deluxe room. (BLD)

Sunday 21st February – Calcutta

Today you will be driven to the airport for your departure back home or if you are joining our Shakti Sikkim Walk extension tour onward flights to Bagdogra.

WHAT'S INCLUDED:

- Christine Manfield – tour leader
- Jennifer Wilkinson (Epicurious Travel) tour support
- Accommodation on twin-share basis
- Meals as mentioned in the itinerary.
- Transport in air-conditioned Mini coach
- Portage at the airports
- Local English speaking guides for the tour
- All entrance fees to monuments during sightseeing
- Tips

Prices DO NOT Include:

- International air-fare, visa fees, airport tax or any kind of insurance cover
- Items of personal nature like drinks, laundry, telephone calls, etc
- Any pre dinner drinks or drinks during the meal
- Any other meals than those mentioned in the itinerary