

# Mysterious North-East India & Hornbill Festival | 18 Days



Northeast India is a largely unvisited region of India. The biodiversity of Northeast India is one of the most diverse in the world. This region is home to a multitude of Asia's rarest and most secretive animal and bird species. Northeast India is home to indigenous hill tribes of a very different cultural anthropology. The Naga tribes in particular, who are indigenous to both India and Burma, have largely preserved their cultural heritage and distinctive features to this day.

Only since 1994 have some areas been opened to foreigners. Since then, the still almost unknown Manas National Park has been open to tourists interested in nature & wildlife. This park borders Bhutan and is home to a fabulous fauna with a rich bird life as well as a variety of highly interesting mammals. On the one hand, this trip focuses on three great wilderness areas of India: the huge Sunderbans river delta, famous for its numerous tigers, the Kaziranga National Park—perhaps the greatest wildlife sanctuary in India, which is one of the last refuges of the One horned Rhinoceros and the magnificent water buffalo,— and the rarely visited Manas National Park, famous for some endemic species.

Besides, this trip also offers the opportunity to get to know the cultural sights of Calcutta (now Kolkata) and the million-strong metropolis of Assam-Gauhati-, as well as the local population living in these areas. Another highlight of this trip is the visit to the Hornbill Festival of the archaic headhunting tribes of Nagaland. This colourful festival is celebrated here in

December, when thousands of Nagas gather and continue their ancient traditions with dances.

## Trip Highlights

- Exploring the three great wilderness (national parks) areas of East India: Sunderban, Manas and Kaziranga
- The world's largest population of Indian One-horned Rhinoceros in Kaziranga
- Hog Deer, Swamp Deer, Hoolock Gibbon & the chance of seeing a Tiger
- Extensive bird list featuring waterbirds, raptors & Bengal Florican
- Highly endangered species of mammals such as the rare Pygmy Hog, the Hispid Hare and the Golden Langur, Fishing Cats, Wild Buffalo, Wild Dog (Dhole) in Manas National Park
- The cultural sights of Calcutta (now Kolkata) and the million-strong metropolis of Assam-Gauhati
- The visit to the Hornbill Festival of the archaic headhunting tribes "the Nagas" of Nagaland

## Detailed Itinerary

### Day 1: Arrive in Kolkata

Welcome to India! Upon arrival in Kolkata a *travel-to-nature Asia* guide/representative will be at the airport to greet and take us to our hotel. Please look out for your name-card once you exit out of arrival area.

The rest of the day is at leisure. Overnight stay in Kolkata.

**Accommodation:** The Park

### Day 2: In Kolkata

In the morning, we will start our journey by getting to know India's most culturally rich and vibrant metropolis: Kolkata, the "City of Joy", of the French bestseller and film.

(Kolkata, which was called Calcutta until 2001, is the capital of the state of West Bengal. Kolkata is an

# Mysterious North-East India & Hornbill Festival | 18 Days

industrial city, transport hub and cultural centre with museums, galleries, universities, theatres and cinemas. In addition, the city is the Catholic bishop's seat and an important Hindu place of pilgrimage).

We take a traditional tram ride, a "Sunset Cruise" on the Ganges, India's holy river, and visit sights such as the imposing Writers Building, the Victoria Memorial Hall, the Jaligat Temple, the ashram of Mother Teresa, the newly renovated City Hall, but also the house of the famous Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore.

**Accommodation:** The Park  
**Meal:** Breakfast

### Day 3: Kolkata - Sundarbans (Sunderbans Tiger Reserve)

In the morning bus journey to the Sunderbans, the largest estuarine delta in the world, created by the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna. For two days we will explore it mainly by boat in search of rare wildlife and birds. Numerous Bengal tigers live here, which still prey on people in the border area of India and Bangladesh. We may also see swamp crocodiles, sharks, snakes, birds and typical mangrove inhabitants such as mudskippers and hermit crabs.

In the afternoon, boat excursion across small rivers and canals to the Sudhanyakhali observation tower. Here we will be on the lookout not only for birds but also for axis deer, rhesus monkeys, smooth otters, Gangetic dolphins and tigers - so the viewing platforms can only be reached through lattice walkways.

**Accommodation:** Sunderban Tiger Camp  
**Meal:** Breakfast, Dinner

### Day 4: Sundarbans

Full day boat trip - we might see one of the famous "swimming tigers" of the Sunderbans. Destination is the Netidhapani Observation Tower.

In the evening, villagers perform a play about the history of the Tiger Lord and the forest gods, fishermen and honey gatherers.

**Accommodation:** Sunderban Tiger Camp  
**Meal:** Breakfast, Dinner



### Day 5: Sundarbans - Kolkata

On a walking tour we will learn about the life of the villagers and learn about their farming methods and the implements they use. We will also travel in a traditional houseboat - much like the villagers on trips into the mangrove to fish and collect honey and wood.

Return to Kolkata in the afternoon.

**Accommodation:** The Park  
**Meal:** Breakfast

### Day 6: Fly Kolkata - Guwahati (1.20 hrs) | Drive to Manas Tiger Reserve

In the morning short flight to Gauhati (Guwahati), the capital of the state of Assam. Then bus ride to the Manas Tiger Reserve. The long drive is interrupted by several stops before we reach the Jungle Camp. It is run by the Bodo tribe, who have done great service to the conservation of the tiger reserve.

**Accommodation:** The Bansbari Lodge  
**Meal:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

# Mysterious North-East India & Hornbill Festival | 18 Days

## Day 7: Manas Tiger Reserve

### Head of a Nile Gau antelope

Located in the foot hills of the Himalayas on the border with the Kingdom of Bhutan, Manas National Park, also a UNESCO Natural Heritage Site, is one of the most beautiful and diverse protected areas in the world. The species-rich reserve is not only important for the conservation of tigers, elephants and rhinos. Four endemic, endangered animal species live here: the bristlenose rabbit, the golden langur, the pygmy hog and the Assam roof turtle.

We will spend the first two days with excursions in the park and extensive animal observations. We will also learn about the work of the rangers. In the evening, presentation on the conservation projects in the national park and Bagurumba cultural programme, villagers will tell the story of the Bodos and their connection with the Manas wilderness. On the third day we will learn about life in the Bodo villages and the culture of the local people and experience rides in a buffalo cart.

**Accommodation:** Jungle Resort

**Meal:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



## Day 9: Drive Manas - Guwahati (148 km | 3 hrs)

In the morning drive back to Gauhati. On the way visit "Hajo" a medieval pilgrimage centre for believers of the three religions - Hindus, Buddhists and

Muslims. Visit to Sualkuchi, a textile centre in Assam famous for Muga silk, Pat silk, Eri silk.

If there is still enough time, visit Assam's capital with some of its cultural sights. Enjoy the sunset on a "Sunset Cruise" on the Brahmaputra.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Apollo Grand

**Meal:** Breakfast

## Day 10: Drive Guwahati - Kaziranga (193 km | 4.20 hrs)

In the morning transfer to Kaziranga. Slowly leave the densely populated area and spot native birds like Bengal rockets, herons and storks.

Finally, drive along the Kaziranga National Park, where one or more One horned rhinos might already be standing in the swamp meadows.

**Accommodation:** Infinity Resort

**Meal:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## Day 11-12: Kaziranga National Park

Kaziranga, one of India's most wildlife-rich reserves and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a lush green floodplain of the Brahmaputra. Elephant grass and reed plains as well as dense gallery forests provide a habitat not only for armored rhinos, but also for elephants, wild buffalo (arnis), barasingha deer and many tigers. Gangetic dolphin, smooth otter and Hulock's gibbon are also native to the area, as well as some 500 bird species: from Bengal bustards to banded sea eagles, storks and herons to wading birds and kingfishers. Ganges gavial, swamp crocodile, reticulated python and rock python may also show up - but rarely poisonous snakes like cobras and kraits. The first two days in the park start with an elephant ride of about one hour, during which the interest is mainly on the armoured rhinos and Barasingha deer.

Later, as well as in the afternoon, we will visit the four major areas of the park in small off-road vehicles and usually get to see four of the "big five" of the national

# Mysterious North-East India & Hornbill Festival | 18 Days

park - with a bit of luck, maybe also number 5, the tiger.

On the third day you will visit a tea plantation and the forest area of Banbari, get to know a traditional Assamese village and also see coffee and rubber plantations. A boat trip on the Brahmaputra awaits you at sunset. In the monsoon season it floods large parts of the national park, which is then closed to visitors.

**Accommodation:** Infinity Resort  
**Meal:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### Day 13: Drive Kaziranga - ToupHEMA (250 km | 7 hrs)

After breakfast departure to ToupHEMA (approx. 7 hours drive).

After arrival move into typical Angami Naga style huts. Angami are the original inhabitants of this area. In the evening demonstration of traditional dances and dinner around the campfire.

**Accommodation:** ToupHEMA Village Resort  
**Meal:** Breakfast

### Day 14: ToupHEMA - Kohima (48 km | 1 hr)

Today we leave the park and drive to Kohima, the capital of Nagaland. The inhabitants of Nagaland were once feared head-hunters. The various Naga tribes represent an Indo-Mongolian ethnic group. In the afternoon, visit a traditional market and admire the variety of local handicrafts.

Kohima is the hilly capital of the state of Nagaland with an altitude of 1,495 m and a population of about 80,000. The population of the city, which lies on the top of a mountain ridge, is made up of all 16 tribes of Nagaland. The development of the town runs serpentine along this ridge, which is typical of populated areas in Nagaland. Kohima owes its name to the plant "Kew Hi", which grows in the mountains of Nagaland. "Kew Hi Ma" means the man from the land where the flower "Kew Hi" grows. During the

Second World War, the advance of the Japanese and the Indian National Army was stopped in the battles of Kohima and Imphal. This 1944 event is still commemorated by the Second World War Cemetery. The war cemetery is located on Garrison Hill, which was the scene of fierce fighting. "When you go home / tell them of us and say / for your tomorrow / we gave our today", which adorn the 2nd British Division memorial, have become world famous under the name Kohima Poem).

**Accommodation:** Hotel Eastgate  
**Meal:** Breakfast, Dinner



### Day 15-16: In Kohima | Hornbill Festival

In the morning drive to Khonoma village. On the way we will see magnificent mountain scenery, waterfalls and stunning flora of orchids and ferns. Khonoma is famous for the former battles of the British during their advance into the Naga Mountains. During the Hornbill Festival, drive to Kisama Heritage village to take part in the festivities. The festival is dedicated to the hornbill and the Nagas gather in their traditional attire to celebrate and dance - a unique and very colourful experience! In December, the colourful Hornbill Festival is celebrated here, where thousands of Nagas gather and continue their ancient traditions with dances.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Eastgate  
**Meal:** Breakfast, Dinner

### Day 17: Drive Kohima - Jorhat (202 km | 5.30 hrs)

# Mysterious North-East India & Hornbill Festival | 18 Days

In the morning transfer to Jorhat. In the afternoon visit Majuli Island. This river island is located about 20km from Jorhat in the Brahmaputra River. The island has a rich natural and cultural history. Its birdlife is particularly diverse. The population of the island lives in 23 villages and consists mainly of tribal people. Combined with a unique Hindu monastery, these special characteristics of Majuli Island have resulted.

Jorhat is a town in Assam, India. Jorhat was introduced by the decaying and declining Tunkhungia Ahom dynasty, as the new capital city of Assam in the last years of the 18th century. Jorhat, the city name means that the trading centres (=ind. "hat") were fairly connected. The two parallel trading centres, Chowkihut and Macharhut, located on the eastern and western banks of the river Bhogdoi, were united. Jorhat today is an upstart cosmopolitan city. It is the best laid out town in upper Assam with extensive perpendicular intersecting roads. The people of Jorhat are very rich in art and culture.

**Accommodation:** The Manor Hotel

**Meal:** Breakfast, Dinner

## Day 18: Drive Jorhat - Kolkata | Depart Kolkata

We leave Jorhat behind and drive to the airport for your return flight to Kolkata and after a few hours stay in the city, connect your homeward-bound flight in the evening.

**Meal:** Breakfast

### Includes

- Airport (pick up/drop off) transfers by private A/C vehicle
- Twin-Sharing room accommodation at all hotel/resort as mentioned
- Daily breakfast throughout the trip and other meals as mentioned in the itinerary
- Guided Sightseeing, all activities and day excursions as per itinerary
- All sightseeing and long distance transportation in private air-condition vehicle

- Services of a local guide for sightseeing tours
- Country Boat for full day in Sunderbans for wildlife viewing/Bird watching
- Sunset Cruise on river Brahmaputra River on seat sharing basis
- 3 Jeep Safaris each in Kaziranga & Manas National park (5-6 persons sharing a Jeep)
- Entrance fees (national parks/conservation areas/monuments etc.)
- Domestic flights as per the itinerary
- All applicable government taxes

### Excludes

- International flight tickets
- Visa fee
- Travel insurance
- Meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Personal clothing and equipment
- Tips for trip leader/guide, driver, hotel staff and porters
- Items of personal nature such as alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, laundry, and other unforeseen expenses
- Items/services not listed in "included"
- Extra expenses/payment for 'Optional' activities/programs if participated

### Accommodation

#### The Park, Kolkata

Located in the capital of West Bengal, Kolkata, The Park Kolkata is a 5-star property offering urban luxury at the best downtown location. The hotel offers an outdoor swimming pool, Jacuzzi, well-equipped fitness centre and luxurious spa, which come with additional charge. It features seven luxurious multi-functional banquets which can be divided into seven halls for meetings and conferences.

#### Sunderban Tiger Camp, Sundarbans

Sunderban Tiger Camp is an escapade in the lap of nature. Located at Dayapur Island, it is a blissful world that shields you from your television,

# Mysterious North-East India & Hornbill Festival | 18 Days

newspapers, Internet and (sometimes) telephone. Established in 2004, it is the flagship property of Waxpol Hotels and Resorts and is situated across the Sundarbans National Park, the largest estuarine mangrove forest in the world.



### The Bansbari Lodge, Manas

One of the oldest lodge in Manas National park, Bansbari Lodge is located in a very scenic location close to the main gate. It is situated overlooking the forest hills of the park on one side and lush green tea garden on the other side. It offers clean and airy room with a small balcony attached in each room.

### Hotel Apollo Grand, Guwahati

Apollo Grand is located in the central business district of Guwahati, G.S Road, and close to transit options like Christian Basti Bus Stop (170 m), Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport (23.3 km), and Guwahati Railway Station (3.8 km). Apollo Grand provides a variety of amenities to guests such as free WiFi, complimentary breakfast, and a fully stocked pantry etc



### Infinity Resort, Kaziranga

Our guests are drawn to the magic of nature, to the slow pace of life, closeness to the natural world and to the relief from the pressures of modern living. The ethos of Infinity Resort is founded on super luxury, afforded by an exceptionally great location which is harmoniously blended with its natural environment. A completely a zen experience for our guests!

### The Manor Hotel, Jorhat

The Manor Hotel is nestled in a beautiful town Jorhat in the state of Assam. Hotel offers front desk, parking, housekeeping, doctor on call, laundry, room service and Wi-Fi. All the rooms in hotel are elegantly decorated with comfy beds, clean linen, table, chairs, wardrobe, mini-bar, television, in-room-safe and attached bathrooms with hot/cold water and essential toiletries.

### Group/Individual

On this trip you will be traveling privately with your family & friends. Our representative/tour partner will look after your transfers to and from the airport and will be around to answer other questions you may have about your trip.

### Accommodation – Hotel, Resort

Your accommodation has been selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a fine heritage hotel in another or a family-run guesthouse or lodges in a smaller town. Accommodation in remote areas tend to be basic and may not have western amenities.

### Single Accommodation

Single (room) supplement is provided on request (single supplement charge applies) and are subject to availability.

# Mysterious North-East India & Hornbill Festival | 18 Days

## Food & Transport

All breakfast and 12 dinners are included.

Generally, you can eat out very cheaply in India. Where food is not included, you should allow at least 1,800 rupees (approximately Euro 20 & US\$22) per day for lunch and dinner. However, if you choose to dine in fine/expensive restaurants please allocate more than our suggested amount.

Please note, service in restaurants can be quite slow.

For airport, sightseeing transfers, and for long drives we use a private air-con car, jeep, van depending upon group size. Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines.

## Weather

Lying very close to the tropics, North-East India displays, to a large extent, the character of tropical climate, especially in the valleys. The region has a monsoon climate with heavy to very heavy rains, confined within four summer months from June to September. The southwest monsoon is the main source of rain, and June is the rainiest month. There are three seasons in the area, winter, summer and rainy season, though rainy season, as in the rest of India, coincides with summer months. There is a climatic contrast between the valleys and the mountainous region. While the mean January temperature in the valley region of Assam is around 16 °C, the temperatures in the mountainous region of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland hover around a maximum of 14 °C and a sub-zero minimum temperature. The summer temperatures in the plains vary between 30 and 33 °C, while the hills have a mean summer temperature of around 20 °C with a mean minimum of 15 °C.

## Baggage Allowance

At time of writing the standard weight limit is one checked baggage on Qatar Airways is 25kg (55lb) and hand baggage 7kg (15lbs). We recommend packing only one piece of checked baggage. Luggage allowances for both hand and checked luggage are subject to change, we suggest you check the airline's

website for the latest information prior to your departure.

## ESSENTIAL/PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Passport & Visas

All nationalities require a full passport that must be valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information below is primarily for EU passport holders, and other nationalities should check with the relevant embassies. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

Visas are required if you are German and for most other nationalities. Visa information changes regularly for India; for the latest information on applying for a visa please follow these links for more information.

<https://indianembassyberlin.gov.in/pages?id=Mg,,&su bid=MTQ>,

**Please note:** Visa regulations can change without notice, therefore please check the current regulations or contact us.

### Vaccination & Health

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad.

There are no mandatory vaccination requirements for this trip. Recommended vaccinations for this trip are: Polio, Tetanus, Diphtheria, Typhoid, Hepatitis A. The risk of malaria on this trip is slight, but you may wish to consult your GP/Family Doctor or travel health clinic for further advice. Dengue fever and/or Chikungunya are known risks in places visited on this trip. Both are tropical viral diseases spread by daytime biting

# Mysterious North-East India & Hornbill Festival | 18 Days

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mosquitoes. There is currently no vaccine or prophylaxis available for either, and therefore the best form of prevention is to avoid being bitten. We recommend you take the usual precautions to avoid mosquito bites. The above information can change at short notice; as we are not qualified to answer all your questions about travel health we strongly recommend you contact your Medical Professional or a Travel Health Clinic prior to departure for up-to date information.

### Local Time

GMT + 5 hours and 30 minutes

### Electricity

230/240 volts AC, 50 Hz. There are recharging facilities at most of the hotels, the electricity supply is not 100% reliable but it is usually only off for short periods of time.

### Money

The national currency of India is the Indian Rupee (INR), with an exchange rate at the time of publication of approximately 89 to the Euro and 82 to the US\$. It is illegal to import or export rupees. Do not accept torn or (very) dirty Indian banknotes from banks or in change as they will almost certainly not be accepted as legal tender in India. Please ask for low denomination notes of 100, 200 or 500 Rupees as 2000 Rupee notes can sometimes be difficult to use out of Delhi. You can change money back from Rupees into Euro or Dollars at Delhi airport (before going through security), but you must produce an exchange receipt showing that you changed money in India. You are advised to bring most of your money in cash as you may have difficulty changing travellers cheques outside Delhi. It makes no difference whether you bring Euro or US Dollars. You should change your money on arrival at Delhi either at the hotel or airport (please note that the hotel often gives a better rate than the airport). It is possible to change cash in Ladakh. You will need approximately €200-€250 for extra meals and tipping for the whole trip.

### ATM | Credit Cards

There are ATMs in Delhi and other major cities. We recommend you change most of the money you need for the trip before leaving Delhi. Please do not rely wholly on ATM machines as often they are broken or run out of cash. Credit cards are accepted in larger shops in Delhi and other major cities.

### Extra Expenses & Spending Money

You will need to bring some extra money to cover drinks, laundry, souvenirs and any other personal expense, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Though it totally depends on individual but generally an approximate amount of US\$250 per person, per week should be sufficient (more if you enjoy a few beers); however, for those that can't resist a bargain or may wish to participate in all of the optional excursions, consider allocating a higher amount. Or if you are the one frugal with money probably allocating less would also suffice.

India has very good opportunities for shopping, especially for locally made goods, and in Delhi local guides may well offer to take you to emporiums as well as workshops where these goods are made. Many people find this a great opportunity to buy local handicrafts, silk, jewelry, carpets etc. Guides will often assume that visitors will want to go shopping, it is very much part of the culture, however if you do not wish to go, please make this clear to your local guide at the time.

Optional Tours may be offered in some city you visit during your tour. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits and if seats are available. Please ensure you have additional funds available if you feel you may wish to participate in any extra activities. Each optional tour/activity will be arranged locally by our local partner/guide, participation and tipping for optional excursions is completely at your discretion.

### Tipping

Tipping is of course entirely at your discretion, but it is customary in India. Tipping can be an awkward affair especially when you are not familiar with the country. Your leader will help with tipping and will provide a list



# Mysterious North-East India & Hornbill Festival | 18 Days

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of suggested tips. This will include tips for drivers, hotel porters and other hotel staff, local sightseeing guides, and if trekking will include camp staff such as guide, assistants, cooks and pony men. Sometimes your leader will collect a kitty during the trip and sometimes they will collect the tips towards the end of the trip (occasionally for very small groups the leader may need to collect a little more than the suggested amount). We suggest you allow Rs 6,000 (approx. €60 -70 / \$65-75) for this trip. Please try to tip in local currency.

Tipping of the local leader is not included in the above and is at your discretion. However, we suggest around Rs1000-2000 (approx.€11-25 /US \$12-25) per person for the leader depend upon the group size.

### Itinerary Change

In case of some unusual events/incidents the order of programs (sightseeing, excursions etc.) might have to change in order to accommodate the local situations. In these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements while maintaining the overall integrity of your trip.

The domestic airlines may change their schedule frequently and, in such cases, our local partner/guide will inform you about the changes.

### Travel Insurance

We highly recommend to get a travel insurance that covers all aspects your travel (a comprehensive plan). And please make sure to keep/carry a hard-copy of your travel insurance documents on your person while on tour. It's prudent to check thoroughly the inclusions and procedure to file claims prior to purchasing insurance coverage. travel-to-nature Asia will not be responsible for any costs incurred by you due to your failure to purchase appropriate travel insurance from the date of booking.

### Public Holidays

During major Indian public holidays such as India's Republic Day 26<sup>th</sup> Jan, the Holi (Colors) Festival (generally falls around March), Diwali (sometime in Oct-Nov) etc. some business will be closed and air

and ground transportation may be affected. Tourist attractions sites may get overly crowded. But it's a good trade off as you will get to experience India more intimately.

### Dress Code

Though modern-day Indian have become more liberal to dresses they wear, however, as a tourist we advise you to follow dress codes specially while visiting temples or mosques. Just dressing modestly and wearing non-revealing cloths should be fine. Women might also consider carrying a shawl in their daypack (this could be a sarong or light scarf) which you can wear over your shoulders and heads as a courtesy or just show respects. Religious sites and homes throughout India – for Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Muslims or Buddhists to name a few – require all visitors to remove their shoes to enter.

### Important Information

On all guided trips although our leaders/guides are well trained to deal with different capabilities, if they have any concerns about someone's ability to safely partake in an activity, or their impact on other people's enjoyment, we authorize them to take necessary action which, in some circumstances, may involve asking someone to miss that activity.