Bengal Despatch 1: The Historic Hooghly (Lower Ganges)

UPSTREAM ITINERARY | 7 NIGHTS/8 DAYS | KOLKATA TO FARAKKA

DAY 1

This morning, you will be collected from your hotel to embark your ship by midday. Sail past the old Danish colony of Serampore to Barrackpore. Land and take a walk through the cantonment – past the Semaphore Tower, Government House, the Temple of Fame and Flagstaff House – to get a better understanding of India's journey to independence. Sail up to Chandernagore, a French possession until 1950.

DAY 2

Visit the 18th century church and Dupleix's House, the erstwhile Governor-General of French India. Sail upstream past the old Dutch settlement of Chinsura before landing to visit the imposing Imambara at Hooghly. With verses from the Koran written on its walls, the Imambara is an opportunity to step back in time and relive a slice of Islamic history in Bengal. Sail into the night to a mooring near Kalna.

DAY 3

After breakfast, land at the country town of Kalna and take rickshaws to see a group of some of Bengal's most attractive terracotta temples, the unique Shiva temple with concentric rings made up of 108 shrinelets, and a muslin-weaving centre. Continue on through the countryside to Mayapur to visit the vast new ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) temple which dominates the skyline. As the headquarters of ISKCON or the Hare Krishna movement, the temple receives over a million singing and dancing devotees a year from around the world. Sail on through the night to a mooring near Matiari.

DAY 4

This morning visit the brass-working village of Matiari, a charming riverside village. Interact with the locals of Matiari and witness the whole primitive process of beating out brass water pots and other vessels. Later, cruise on and visit the battlefield of Plassey where, in 1757, Robert Clive, the Commander-in-Chief of British India, defeated Siraj-ud-Daulah, the last independent Nawab of Bengal, to change the course of Indian history. Moor close to Khushbagh for the night.

DAY 5

This morning, walk to the Khushbagh, a peaceful Mughal-style garden that encloses the tombs of Siraj-ud-Daulah – the last independent Nawab of Bengal – and his family. Continue a little way upstream to where the great Hazarduari Palace dominates the waterfront. Built by an English architect in 1837, the palace hosts an extensive collection of pictures, china, weapons and other objects. Carry on to visit the great Katra Mosque before driving out to see the Katgola Palace. Built in classical Georgian style by rich local merchants, Katgola Palace represents the other side of the coin of the 'White Mughal' period when English and Indian cultures came close to fusion. Moor overnight on the riverbank across from town at Baranagar.

DAY 6

This morning, walk through the fields of the delightfully sleepy village of Baranagar to visit its three gorgeous miniature terracotta temples. This is rural India at its most idyllic. Continue

up the lower Ganges (or the Hooghly), which transforms into a charming waterway twisting and turning between banks lined with mustard fields and mango orchards. Carry on up a long canal section to a mooring close to the Farakka Barrage.

DAY 7

Disembark and go on a full-day excursion by road to Gaur, near the town of Malda, or English Bazar. This quiet, deserted place was once one of India's great cities, first under the Hindus in 12th century, then as the Muslim capital of Eastern India from the 14th to the 16th century. There are plentiful remains of mosques, palaces and gateways and you visit a number of the most interesting before rejoining the ship in the evening.

DAY 8

For those taking only Bengal Despatch 1, transfer to Farakka station in the morning for a 4 hr (approx.) train journey to Kolkata. Our representatives will meet you on arrival and transfer you to a central Kolkata hotel.

This itinerary, including the cruise and approximate driving durations, is subject to river and weather conditions.