Bengal Despatch 2: The Holy Ganges

UPSTREAM ITINERARY | 8 NIGHTS/9 DAYS | FARAKKA TO PATNA

DAY 1

Take a 4 hr (approx.) train journey from Kolkata to Farakka in the afternoon, and then a short road transfer to the ship. Guests joining independently at Farakka can board the ship from midday onwards.

DAY 2

This morning, we leave Farakka and sail out into the Ganges proper, almost sea-like here just above the great Farakka Barrage. We sail upstream for much of the morning before anchoring at Rajmahal, one of those places that feature in no guidebook and yet offer both interest and atmosphere. Once known as Akbarnagar, the town was founded by the great Mughal Emperor Akbar as his eastern capital; Shah Jehan, builder of the Taj Mahal, spent much of his youth here. There are remains of palaces, forts and mosques submerged in vegetation which we shall explore. We sail on as far as Manihari Ghat.

DAY 3

This morning, continue cruising upstream, passing the confluence with the Kosi river which flows down from Nepal. We arrive at idyllic Bateshwar, with its 6th century Hindu carvings, and the nearby ruins of an 8th century Buddhist stupa and monastery at Vikramshila. Later, onwards to Kehilgaon or Colganj, where our ship awaits us. We sail on, passing close to the island shrine with both Buddhist and Hindu cave temples, and once a centre of the murderous Thug sect.

DAY 4

We sail this morning along a stretch of the river where the endangered Gangetic Dolphin may be seen. Land at Bhagalpur, a centre of silk production, to visit the silk-weaving village and an elegant 18th century mansion built by Augustus Clevland, the collector and magistrate of the town back in the day. Continue on to Jahangira Island at Sultanganj, a place of pilgrimage with early Hindu carvings in the rock. On shore, another picturesque rock is topped with a mosque, while there will be a chance to stroll around the local market.

DAY 5

We sail on to Monghyr. Monghyr possesses a large Mughal fort, as well as an East India Company cemetery, now with villagers living among the grandiose tombs. We shall also visit the Pirpahar Hill, crowned by a fine old mansion, as well as the Sita Kund hot springs, before continuing our cruise upstream.

DAY 6

This morning, we pass under the great bridge at Mokameh, where the naturalist Jim Corbett spent his working life in charge of the ferry which operated here earlier. Land to visit a bankside village and stretch our legs. We arrive by evening at Barh.

DAY 7

Today, there is an excursion to Nalanda, recently included as a UNESCO World Heritage site where visits would include the excavated great Buddhist monastery and stupa along with the adjoining museum; Nalanda is also the world's oldest seat of learning, once welcoming over 10,000 students at its height. Later, visit the marbled Pawapuri Jain temple in the middle of a lake. Return in the evening to Barh to reboard our ship.

DAY 8

Today is a day spent cruising upstream. At some stage, we shall pause at a bankside village and stretch our legs. We arrive in the evening at Patna, the state capital of Bihar, and moor close to the old East India Company opium warehouses.

DAY 9

This morning, we take a tour of Patna and visit the 18th century Gola Ghar granary, the great Sikh gurdwara and the rich collections of the State Museum. Disembark late in the morning and transfer to the airport or station (transfer included).

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