Bengal Despatch 4: The Holy Ganges

DOWNSTREAM ITINERARY | 6 NIGHTS/7 DAYS | PATNA TO FARAKKA

DAY 1

Arrive at Patna by road, rail or air; transfer from airport or railway station to ship is included in the cruise cost. Embark on your ship from 4pm onwards, and enjoy dinner on board.

DAY 2

This morning, we take a tour of Patna, visiting the 18th century Gola Ghar granary, the great Sikh gurdwara and the rich collections of the State Museum. Return to our ship and pass near the old East India Company opium warehouses to cruise downstream, mooring for the evening at Barh.

DAY 3

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. We return in the evening to our ship which will have sailed down to the great bridge at Mokameh, where earlier the naturalist Jim Corbett spent his working life overseeing the ferry crossing.

DAY 4

Today we sail down to Monghyr. Monghyr possesses a fine Mughal fort, as well as an East India Company Cemetery, now with villagers living amongst the tombs. We shall also visit the Pirpahar Hill, crowned by a fine old mansion as well as the Sitakund hot springs, before continuing our cruise downstream to anchor near 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.

DAY 5

We sail this morning, along a stretch of the river where Gangetic Dolphin may be seen, to Bhagalpur, a centre of silk production. Here, we shall visit the elegant 18th century mansion built by Augustus Cleveland as well as a silk-weaving village. We sail on passing close to the island shrine at Colganj, with both Buddhist and Hindu cave temples, and once a centre of the murderous Thug sect. Close to here we visit idyllic Bateshwar with 6th century Hindu carvings and the nearby ruins of an 8th century Buddhist stupa and monastery at Vikramshila. We anchor for the night near the confluence with the Kosi, coming down from Nepal.

DAY 6

We sail downstream this morning to Rajmahal, beneath the Rajmahal Hills. Rajmahal is one of those places, so common in India, which feature in no guidebook and yet offer both interest and atmosphere; once known as Akbarnagar, the town was founded by the 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 before continuing on down to the Farakka Barrage.

DAY 7

For those taking only Bengal Despatch 4, 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.