Bengal Despatch 5: The Historic Hooghly (Lower Ganges)

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

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

Today, enjoy 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 historical sites before rejoining the ship in the evening near Jangipur.

Set sail down the Lower Ganges, a charming waterway twisting and turning between banks lined with mustard fields and mango orchards. Moor at Baranagar for the night.

DAY 3

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

Continue on down past Azimganj, boasting some fine riverside mansions, to Murshidabad where the Nawab's 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.

DAY 4

Sail downstream a short distance then walk to the Khushbagh, a peaceful Mughul-style garden enclosing the tombs of Siraj-ud-Daulah – the last independent Nawab of Bengal – and his family. Return to the ship and continue downstream past the old British cantonment of Berhampur to a rural mooring close to the battlefield of Plassey where, in 1757, Robert Clive, the Commander-in-Chief of British India, defeated Siraj-ud-Daulah, to change the course of Indian history. You can walk through the fields to the commemorative obelisk. Cruise on to a mooring near Katwa, a market town with narrow bustling bazaars.

DAY 5

Visit the brassworking village of Matiari where you can see the whole primitive process of beating out brass water pots and other vessels. 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.

DAY 6

Continue on down to the country town of Kalna. Take cycle rickshaws to see a group of some of Bengal's most attractive terracotta temples, as well as the unique Shiva temple with concentric rings made up of 108 shrinelets. Sail on, leaving fields behind and arrive at the outskirts of Kolkata. Land at Hooghly to visit the imposing Imambara. 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 downstream past fine waterfront buildings and the old Dutch settlement at Chinsura to moor at Chandernagore.

DAY 7

At Chandernagore, a French possession until 1950, visit the 18th century church and Dupleix's House, the erstwhile Governor-General of French India, before continuing down 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. Subject to river tide, cruise under the Howrah Bridge to reach central Kolkata.

DAY 8

Disembark and transfer to central Kolkata or airport.

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