Bengal Despatch 9: City of Light - A Varanasi Summer

UPSTREAM ITINERARY | 7 NIGHTS/8 DAYS | PATNA TO VARANASI

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 cruise ship from afternoon onwards, and enjoy dinner on board while sailing upstream.

DAY 2

This morning you'll cruise upstream during breakfast before landing to visit a spectacular small Mughal tomb at Maner. Reboard and continue past the confluence with the River Sone to the busy river port of Doriganj, mooring at an overnight stop near the confluence with the River Goghra.

DAY 3

Today brings another opportunity to watch life unfold on the riverbanks as you cruise upstream. The languid pace of life on-board the boat offers a rare opportunity to sit and watch the world slip by, chat with fellow guests, or catch up on your reading. You'll have time to stretch your legs with a walk through a river side village before cruising past Ballia & Buxar, famous for the battle fought here in 1764 which, together with Plassey, laid the foundations of the British Raj.

DAY 4

Sail upstream today past Chausa to Ghazipur, still a centre for (official) opium production. Visit the imposing tomb of Lord Cornwallis, the General responsible for the British defeat at Yorktown and, if time permits, take a stroll through the busy Ghazipur bazaar, a quintessential Indian experience.

DAY 5

This morning, sail on to Varanasi, formerly Benaras. Also known as the 'City of Light', it is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, dating back 3,000 years. Mark Twain once wrote that "Benaras is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together". An accurate description, Varanasi is arresting to your every sense yet beautifully spiritual for those willing to let go and just be. It's the most important religious site for Hindus and visited by people from all walks of life who come here in the hope of attaining moksha or salvation.

After lunch, visit the Buddhist site at Sarnath and the Deer Park where the Buddha preached his first sermon, as well as the nearby archaeological museum.

DAY 6

This morning, sail past the ghats of Varanasi to visit Chunar, the great Mughal Fort, the old British cemetery and the Mughal tombs nearby and Carpet weaving offer a taste of the traditional industries that still thrive in the region. Later cruise down to visit Ramnagar to see the Ramnager Maharaja's Palace and museum.

DAY 7

An early start this morning as you take rowing boats at dawn to soak in the lively and colourful bathing ghats of Varanasi. After a reviving breakfast onboard, disembark again to take a walk through the busy alleys of Varanasi to experience the beating heart of the city. In the evening, take rowing boats once again to join the evening Ganga Aarti ceremony, where young priests perform their daily rituals with brass lamps and spiritual mantras in front of large crowds from all over India and the world. A truly mesmerising sight, this aarti is the essence of Varanasi. Return to the ship anchored at Rajghat.

DAY 8

After breakfast, disembark and transfer to Varanasi airport or railway station.

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