

Our Glorious AFS Itinerary

Mar 11 – Depart USA

Fly USA to Delhi. You can arrange own air for flexibility or fly with group air. (TBA approx. 300 days out.)

Mar 12 – Timeless Delhi

Arrive at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International airport and be met by our guide just outside the customs gate for transportation to the Welcome Dwarka Hotel, a short drive from the airport. The 5-star property has round the clock dining with two restaurants as well as a pool and a fitness center.

Meet in hotel lobby around noon for a traditional India welcome of tikka garland and juice.

City Tour – Imperial Delhi and Sikh Kitchen! 2-6 PM

Discover one of the world's fastest growing city's with over 5000 years of history. As India's capital, there's a fantastic blend of old and new and we'll see some of each. Delhi has been the seat of power for numerous dynasties like the Turks, Rajputs, Afgans and Moghuls who lead until the British entered.

We begin in impressive **Old Delhi** to retrace the architectural history. See the imposing India Gate, President Palace, Parliament, Jama Masjid and more. Continue to Red Fort and Humayuns Tomb (UNESCO site), a mausoleum built in 1570. Its beautiful marble and sandstone structure with intricate gardens were a precursor to the Taj Mahal.

Enjoy a two-wheeled Rickshaw ride among the monuments. Pass vibrant bazaars, vendors cooking up street-side delicacies and children (also cows) darting in and out of traffic... a great photo op! If time allows, we visit Rajghat, cremation site of Mahtma Ghandi and Chandi Chowk in New Delhi.

Our groups loved visiting the enormous Sikh Temple. What you eat in India depends on which religion you follow, but here's a place where people of all religions and castes come together to share a common meal and it's free. Enter the huge 'Langar' or kitchen and dining hall where thousands of people are fed daily. Sikhism, 5th largest world religion, is an egalitarian society. Sikh's volunteer their time in Langars to fulfill a tenant of their faith. It's a cool cultural immersion. Ladies cover yourself with a head scarf.

7 PM - AFS Welcome Dinner to get to know your fellow travel junkies!

Overnight –Welcome Dwarka Hotel (B, D)

Mar 13 - Free Day with Optional: Agra and Ellies

This is a free day to relax and explore some sights on your bucket list of Delhi or if it's your first time to India, we recommend our full day tour to the Taj Mahal and Wildlife SOS for an unforgettable experience!

OPTIONAL: Agra, Taj and Elephant Tour

Morning transfer to New Delhi/H.Nizammuddin Railway station to board train for Agra.

Depart: New Delhi at 8:10AM by 12050 Gatiman Express

Arrive: Agra at 9:50 Hrs

Agra: Two great Mughal monarchs, Akbar and Shah Jahan, transformed the little village of **Agra** into a befitting second capital of the Mughal Empire - giving it the name **Dar-ul-Khilafat** {seat of the Emperor}. It is not surprising, that modern Agra still reflects its Mughal heritage most conspicuously. A walk down the narrow bustling streets of the city will introduce the visitor to the wafting aroma of Mughlai cuisine.

Then we visit the mesmerizing **Taj Mahal** - a UNESCO World heritage. A visit to the fabled Taj Mahal to witness the magical effects caused by the reflections of the changing colors of the Sun on this brilliant white marble building. The Taj is perhaps the most photographed monument in the world. Nothing can truly prepare you for the beauty. Exploring the manicured grounds and spectacular monument will leave you breathless.

The 17th century Taj Mahal is often called a poem in stone. If so, the mausoleum is a love poem - created by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan for his favorite wife Mumtaz Mahal. It took 22 years to be completed and was designed and planned by a Persian architect Ustad Isa. Apart from its stunning design balance and perfect symmetry, the Taj is also noted for its elegant domes, intricately carved screens and some of the best inlay work ever seen. It is the jewel of Muslim art in India and one of the universally admired masterpieces of the world's heritage.

Later in the afternoon, before our drive back to Delhi. We visit **Wildlife SOS Mathura**. This Elephant Conservation and Care Center will provide you with the opportunity of a lifetime: to meet, interact, bath and feed these rescued elephants. Each day hundreds of captive elephants in India are tortured, overworked, starved and continue to slave for owners who exploit them. This is an elephant haven created in 2009 to rehabilitate severely abused captive elephants in distress. Several months of vet care, good nutrition and rest totally rehabilitates their welfare. They get the best medicine, veggies and even pedicures here! Learn about their incredible rescue efforts by elephant ambulances and meet the vets who treat all their injuries.

Continue overland to Delhi covering distance of in approx. of 3 ½ hours.

Overnight: Welcome Dwarka Hotel (B)

Mar 14 – Delhi - Amritsar

This morning transfer to Delhi airport for your flight to **Amritsar**.

Depart: New Delhi at 1240 Hrs by 9W-2791 Jet Airways

Arrive: Amritsar at 1350 Hrs

Amritsar - is the second largest town in the state of Punjab. It is known to be a cultural and spiritual center for Sikh religion and was founded in year 1574 by **Guru Ram Das** – the fourth guru of the Sikhs. The name Amritsar, meaning '**Pool of Nectar**,' is named after the sacred pool around which the **Golden Temple** is built. People from all over the World come to pay their reverence to Guru Granth Sahib and take a dip in the holy water for spiritual purification. (Read my blog below about this special city)

Arrive at Amritsar airport and transfer to The Hyatt Regency where you receive a traditional Punjabi welcome. This beautiful 5-star property is located very near the Golden Temple and includes a full spa, a pool, as well as a fitness center.

Enjoy a free afternoon to relax and enjoy the property or explore Amritsar.

Overnight: Hyatt Regency Hotel (B)

Mar 15 - Amritsar - The Golden Temple

Begin with a visit to the appropriately named **Golden Temple**. Located in the heart of the city, it is of the holiest religious shrine of Sikh Religion. Also known as Sri Harmandir Sahibm, it has entrance doors in all four directions. This beautifully gilded structure is covered with almost a ton of gold. The Golden Temple welcomes everyone regardless of the religion or faith one follows. The stunning sanctum stands out against the shimmering waters of the holy tank, flanked by spotlessly clean marble walkways and pavements makes it breathtakingly beautiful. It's so big, you could spend a day exploring. We will also visit the Temple's **Community Kitchen** the largest on earth - where food is served free of cost all day and night for thousands of people!! Enjoy a volunteer experience in the community kitchen. Prepare and serve a meal for people from all walks of life.

Continue to Jaliawalah Bagh, which is located near the Golden Temple. A historical monument of national importance; it was immortalized after the 13th April 1919 massacre in which British soldiers fired on peaceful protesters. Visit the Martyr's Gallery to pay homage to those who lost their lives in one of the worst carnages of its times.

Later, we can test out bargaining skills when we proceed to The Old City Bazaar. Amritsar is an excellent place to shop for traditional Indian wear, bangles, the famous Punjabi jootis and other trinkets. Just wandering through the narrow lanes of the Old Bazaar lined with old havelis and other structures is an enchanting experience in itself.

Early evening, we depart for the village of Attari for the famous **Wagah Border Ceremony** between India and Pakistan. Witness a spectacle like no other - the ceremonial changing of guard. This daily theatrical ceremony includes marching, followed by the singing of the national anthems and other patriotic songs. This is a much sought after experience, and people come from far and wide to watch it.

Overnight: Hyatt (B)

Mar 16 - Amritsar - Dharamshala

This morning we drive thorough sweeping landscapes into the foothills of the Himalayas for Dharamshala approx. 5 hours with a few nice stops along the way.

This beautiful hillside city located in the Indian state of **Himachal Pradesh** offers incredible vistas. Surrounded by cedar forests, the hillside city is home to **His Holiness the Dalai Lama** and the Tibetan government-in-exile. The Thekchen Chöling Temple Complex is a spiritual center for Tibetan Buddhism, while the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives houses thousands of precious manuscripts.

On arrival at the Fortune Moksha Hotel & Spa, also known for its incredible views. We are greeted with a traditional Himachali welcome which generally involves the wearing of a colorful regional cap. You will have the rest of the day free to relax or explore.

Overnight: Fortune Moksha Hotel & Spa (B, D)

Mar 17 – Bir Billing in Naggar Valley

This morning, we drive to Bir Billing for some adventure!

Bir Billing is India's most famous **Paragliding** destination, located in the heart of Himalayas Himacahal Pradesh region. Bir Billing hosted the Paragliding World cup in 2015. Other activities here are trekking and

Mountain biking. We'll get a headcount on who wants to paraglide later. Only \$75. Others may explore the villages or try the new sport of River Crossing by Rope over the rapids.

Lunch at nearby hotel. Return to Dharamshala.

Overnight: Fortune Moksha Hotel & Spa (B, L)

Mar 18 – Dharamshala

The delightful children of the **Tibetan Children's Village** will help you start your day. From its humble beginning 54 years ago, The Tibetan Children's Village has today become a thriving, integrated educational community for destitute Tibetan children in exile, as well as for hundreds of those escaping from Tibet every year. You walk in and instantly feel the love and happiness of these children. TCV has established branches in India extending from **Ladakh** in the North to **Bylakuppe** in South, with over 16,726 children under its care. Bring some candies or pens to share with the kindergarteners.

Drive to visit **Norbulingka Institute**, a learning center of Tibetan Art and Culture. Thangka or mandala painting is a major attraction of the visit. There's also gallery workshops for wood-craft, embroidery, metal-craft and a doll museum that depicts the lifestyle of nomads in Tibet and a good gift shop.

Continue to the **Dalai Lama Temple Complex** a beautiful and peaceful place decorated with the colorful prayer flags and perfect for serene walks or meditation with chanting monks. Upper Dharamshala is known as the home to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The main temple is where His Holiness the Dalai Lama gives teachings several times a year.

His Holiness' residence is located near the main temple and this is the headquarters of the Tibetan Government in Exile. The Tibetans settled in Dharamshala in 1960 when His Holiness the Dalai Lama had to flee Tibet in 1959 and the Prime Minister of India allowed Him and some of His followers to settle here. The temple also houses one of the largest collections of sacred Tibetan texts. I loved watching the Tibetan nuns and monks debate outside at the Tantric College. Feel free to engage them in a debate yourself.

HHDL

Thirteen months ago we submitted a special request for a private audience with His Holiness Dalai Lama on this day. (March is the month he normally does public teachings in Dhar.) Secretary Tenzin of the Office of His Holiness said, "We cannot know the feasibility of this until late January. If we get to meet with HHDL." If we can meet with HHDL as hoped, he suggests a group donation be collected for charity. While there is no guarantee due to requests for His time because of his advanced age (now 82) and failing health. If he passes, the next in line to fill his place is the Karmapa. We pray that karma will be on our side! If not possible, we may be able to see him in a general audience. If all else fails, we will have an audience with a high enlightened monk who works for HHDL.

Overnight: Fortune Moksha Hotel & Spa (B)

Mar 19 – Dharamshala - Delhi

This morning transfer to Dharamshala airport for your flight to New Delhi.

Depart : Dharamshala at 1235 Hrs by AI-9814 Air India

Arrive : New Delhi at 1420 Hrs

Or

Depart : Dharamshala at 1210 Hrs by Spice Jet Flight SG 2469

Arrive : New Delhi at 1335 Hrs

Arrive at New Delhi's airport and transfer to your hotel.

Arrive at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi Domestic airport and transfer to hotel Le Meridian! There's plenty to do this afternoon. I suggest considering these options.

- **Visit to Salam Balak Trust:** The Salaam Baalak Trust City Walk is an English guided tour of almost 2 hours conducted by kids who used to live in the streets of Delhi before joining our Trust. Our guides are adolescents who have been fully trained as local guide and who want to improve their communication and speaking skills. City Walk gets the children's stories heard, gives people a view of their world through their eyes. Those who take the City Walk tour through the streets of inner city of Paharganj and the area around New Delhi railway station, led by a child who was once living and working on the streets will experience special tour far from the tourist main attractions. City Walk is an example of how a volunteer's creativity can translate into a unique and enduring program, which is both popular and economically viable. Over the last seven years, thousands have taken the Walk and empowered a number of children helping them to join mainstream life. \$39
- **Night Tour of Akshardham Temple:** Akshardham Temple is the largest Hindu temple of India and is a major tourist destiny of India. The temple devoted to Swaminarayan has around 2000o statues, floral monuments, ponds, a large dining hall, numerous shopping complex and beautiful gardens. Situated on the bank of the Yamuna Akshardham temple has an IMAX theater, beautiful musical fountains. The temple is a major tourist destiny and is a must watch for the visitors who come to Delhi. \$35

Overnight: LeMeridian (B)

Mar 20 – Depart for USA

Transfer to Delhi airport for departures home. (Note - You need to show air ticket or e-receipt to enter airport.). Depending when your flight leaves, you may reach USA on Mar 21.

Fitness Level Two - I have no trouble walking and if necessary, can walk for 3+ miles. Uneven surfaces are not a problem. I do not need a cane or walking device.