

REBECCA RECOMMENDS

Inspirational destinations & properties of excellence



This is India? The traditional Tibetan Buddhist Thiksey Monastery in Ladakh has views of the Himalayas. Photo by Anastasia Regas.

Ventours Travels Off The Beaten Path in India

I have been fortunate enough to visit India many times but, like most luxury travelers, my trips have been focused on the northern states. The beautiful hotels that were once palaces not only transport travelers to another time, they make us feel like royalty.

But India is the world's seventh largest country, stretching from the towering Himalayas in the north to the lush tropical greenery of Kerala in the south. With 2,000 ethnic groups, [29 states](#) and a land-mass one-third the size of the United States, India has an enormous variety of cultures, landscapes, monuments and cuisines to explore, and more regions are working to attract high-end travelers.

[Ventours](#), the premier luxury management company for India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Tibet and the Maldives, is always in the forefront, searching out new and exclusive properties and creating out-of-the-ordinary experiences that excite luxury travelers.

On two familiarization trips recently led by Ventours, we learned about some of these gems. Rebecca Recommends' director of sales and business development, Carla Malachowski, traveled with one group to Ladakh, which has the flavor of old Tibet but is just a 90-minute flight from Delhi. Their next stop was JAWAI Leopard Camp in the heart of an untrammelled wilderness, where the group was thrilled to observe a leopard and her two cubs roaming wild and free.

I traveled with a group that took a day trip from Delhi to the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest site for Sikhs. This was a rich and authentic cultural experience, and so easy to reach from Delhi. We then flew south to the coastal state of Kerala, where we traveled by boat on canals and lakes, and absolutely fell in love with the food.

What struck all of us is the great number of amazing destinations that can be reached by an easy plane ride of 90 minutes or less. I hope you enjoy a little taste of what we experienced in the highlights below.

Please contact me or any of the Rebecca Recommends

love to hear from you.

Very best wishes,

Rebecca

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Tibetan Buddhism in Ladakh and Wild Leopards in Jawai



Chamba Camp is a luxury camp open from mid-May through mid-October. Photo by Anastasia Regas.

Carla's group took in Delhi's iconic sights before heading off to Ladakh the next morning. The air was crisp and cool when they arrived at [Chamba Camp](#), located on 26 acres leased from Thiksey monastery. Chamba Camp's esthetic is inspired by explorers of the British Raj, but the luxury factor has been taken way up, with en-suite bathrooms, private decks and personalized butler service. The views were absolutely outstanding.

*"Ventours is very professional from beginning to end,
and they truly know their destination inside and out."*

Yafa Neer
Vista Travel
Cambridge, Mass.

offered butter tea along with the monks, but politely declined, having been forewarned that the salty tea is an acquired taste.



The Indus River originates at Tibet's Mount Kailash and Manasarovar Lake. Photo by Anastasia Regas.

Though the land is infused with spirituality, it can be a terrific destination for adventuresome types. Ladakh's pleasures include bicycling, birding, hiking, even rafting on the beautiful Indus River. A gentle current takes you past breathtaking views of canyons, mountains, and the monasteries along the riverbanks.

Their next stop was Udaipur, where the group visited ancient temples and palaces, took a cooking class and indulged in some retail therapy before heading back off the beaten path to [JAWAI Leopard Camp](#), a Relais & Chateaux property in the little-visited wilderness of Rajasthan.

A thriving population of leopards has always ranged across this region, and they coexist with Rabari herdsmen. The group tracked leopards in customised 4x4 safari jeeps and were rewarded with the thrilling sight of a mother and her cubs.





Jawai in Rajasthan combined remarkable leopard sightings and herdsmen going about their daily lives. Photos by Anastasia Regas.

The camp lies minutes upstream of Jawai Bandh, one of western Rajasthan's largest reservoirs and a major spot for migratory birds, including flamingos, geese and cranes. Visitors can bike where even the 4x4s cannot go, take a leisurely stroll, undertake a challenging trek, or visit a local village. There is a rich calendar of local festivals, and it is great fun to go when those are being celebrated.

Sundowners and private dining at a host of inspiring spots and relaxing wellness experiences are among the pleasures available in Jawai. The travel advisors all agreed: going off the beaten path with Ventours delivered plenty of "wow" experiences.



More off-the-beaten path destinations, like JAWAI Leopard Camp, are offering the sort of amenities luxury travelers prefer. Photo by Anastasia Regas.

Golden Temple of Amritsar,
Traveling By Boat in Kerala and Fabulous Hyderabad



The Golden Temple in Amritsar stands in the center of a pool of sacred water circled by marble steps.

My group flew into Delhi and the next morning discovered what an easy day trip it is to Amritsar, home of the famous Golden Temple. It is just an hour's flight from Delhi to this ancient and most holy city to the Sikhs. Construction of The Golden Temple began in 1574, and in the 19th century, the upper floors were covered with gold. It's a stunning temple, and always full of pilgrims from all over India.

An essential part of the temple is the Langar or public kitchen where free food is prepared and served to at least fifty thousand worshippers every day. It is an expression of the Sikh belief that "nothing is more important than Seva," the realization of brotherhood.



Free food is served at the Golden Temple every day, an expression of brotherhood.

Ventours took us next to Udaipur, where we visited temples and enjoyed a cooking class before heading on to Kerala on the tropical Malabar Coast of southwestern India. Kerala has so much to offer, including beaches, backwaters you can travel by boat, hill stations and wildlife sanctuaries,

Kerala is one of the wealthiest states in India and has a strong Portuguese and English influence because of the riches of the Spice Route. There are mansions in the capital of Kochi, and with one of the lowest poverty rates in India, Kerala offers a clean and welcoming environment. Kerala also has the most varied religious composition in India, with roughly 30% Muslims, 20% Christians and 50% Hindus -- and everyone gets along.



Kerala's lakes and canals, which you can travel by boat, are a major attraction on the coast, as is the wonderful food.

Along the coast, Kerala is a cluster of islands and peninsulas where picturesque lagoons and canals take the place of main roads. I absolutely loved traveling the backwaters of Kerala in a private boat, which took us onto lakes, down palm-fringed canals, and past tiny settlements of thatched houses.

We got a taste of the harvest festival of Onam, which is celebrated through the entire state of Kerala. It welcomes the spirit of the great King Mahabali, and assures him that his people are happy and wish him well. Breathtaking snake boat races between the villages along the backwaters are an extraordinary sight, as the huge canoes can hold more than a hundred competitors. In the evenings, Kathakali dancers reenact the legends and folk stories of Kerala.



The appearance of King Mahabali is an important part of the harvest festival of Onam, which is celebrated throughout Kerala.

Our South Indian sojourn ended with a trip to Hyderabad. It is known as a tech city, but it is also one of the largest centers for pearls in India (hence its nickname as "The City of Pearls") and has outstanding textiles and incredible food. Debates rage across the city as to who makes the best biryani, and we enjoyed a whole dinner prepared with lamb.

It's worth going to Hyderabad just for a stay at the exquisite Falaknuma Palace, the royal guest-house of Nizam Mehboob Ali Khan. Passed on for generations like a precious jewel, Falaknuma Palace ("Mirror of the Sky") is made entirely of Italian marble and is home to priceless art and artifacts.



For luxury travelers, Falaknuma Palace is a worthy destination in Hyderabad, which offers fabulous food and shopping.

My takeaway from these trips is that there is so much more of India to explore for your clients. There's the rugged Himalayas and the leopards of Rajasthan in the north. And in the south you can combine the beach action of Goa with the backwaters, wonderful food and Ayurvedic centers of Kerala.

We barely scratched the surface in the south, where the great wildlife sanctuaries of Thekkady and the fabulous ruined temple complexes of Hampi (considered the Angkor Wat of India) are major destinations. No doubt we'll be back.

After the trips, we were pleased by the positive feedback Ventours received from our discerning groups of travel advisors. "It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience," said Yafa Neer with Vista Travel in Cambridge, Massachusetts, who was on the trip to Amritsar, Kerala and Hyderabad.

"Ventours chose a wonderful itinerary, with the best accommodation you can offer to your luxury clients," Neer continued.

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to end, hands on, and they truly know their destination inside and out. I highly recommend them if you want to have peace of mind, knowing your clients are being taken care of."

As always, our team is delighted to help you share these worthy, off-the-beaten-path destinations with your luxury clients.



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