

INo09 Sunderbans Smiles 11 Days

Your “Taste of Volunteering” Project:

Village Based Projects, Environmental Projects

Your Volunteer Project will be within the Sunderbans Jungle Camp on Bali Island in the Sunderbans region of north eastern India. The Camp itself is already a successful project for a sustainable source of income for the ‘poachers-turned-conservationists’, along with sustainable development of the local community and conservation of the wildlife and flora of this unique eco system.

You will have the opportunity to assist in various areas of the camp such as maintaining and repairing the clay embankments (the longest man-made dyke in the world!), mangrove planting to help minimise flood damage, construction of a proposed 10-bed hospital, and assisting in general village upkeep.

Trip Highlights:

- Volunteering with the wonderful people of Bali Island in the Sunderbans
- Calcutta city tour
- Game cruises and birding tours within the unique Sunderbans eco-system; potential viewing of tigers in the water
- Visiting land based tiger viewing watchtowers
- Staying in a community-owned eco-lodge at ‘Sunderbans Jungle Camp’
- Evening entertainment at the rural theatre (view ‘Bonobibi Yatra’, a folk story, performed by the villagers)

Day by Day Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Calcutta – Heritage Walk (D)

Day 2: North Calcutta Walking Tour (B,D)

Day 3: Transfer to Bali Island and Sunderbans Camp. Bird and animal spotting cruise (B,L,D)

Day 4: Full day bird and animal spotting cruise (B,L,D)

Day 5: Village walk and adventure cruise (B,L,D)

Day 6-9: Volunteering (B,L,D)

Day 10: Bird and animal-spotting cruise; transfer by boat to Calcutta (B,L,D)

Day 11: Trip ends, transfer to airport (B)

B = Breakfast, L= Lunch, D = Dinner

Trip Summary:

This 11 day trip showcases the best of Calcutta and the remarkable Sunderbans wetlands area, where former tiger poachers are now committed tiger conservationists.

You will spend four days volunteering in various areas of the camp such as maintaining and repairing the clay embankments (the longest man-made dyke in the world!), mangrove planting, construction of a proposed 10-bed hospital, and assisting in general village upkeep.

In addition, you will interact meaningfully with the local people in their daily life, and get to go on numerous bird and game adventure cruises through these remarkable wetlands. The Sunderbans is mysterious, unpredictable, vast, untameable and perhaps, the last true wild frontier in the Indian sub-continent. We take you to the world's largest estuarine forest, a landscape dominated by great tidal creeks and waterways and home to some of the most sought after birds and animals, including the famous 'swimming tigers' (albeit rarely seen).

Your first two days will be spent exploring the vibrant city of Calcutta with an informative local guide. You will visit many museums and monuments and immerse yourself in this city's vibrant history. You can soak up the ambience of Calcutta on the popular Heritage Walk and tram tour.

Commencing from Calcutta you will be driven through the beautiful countryside before boarding your boat for a cruise to Bali Island, home of the Sunderbans Jungle Camp.

Sunderbans are a part of the world's largest delta formed by the rivers Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna, here you will experience game cruises and birding tours through this amazing piece of the world. Your cruises will be aboard motorised boats, taking you into the home of the man eating tigers, estuarine



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crocodiles, sharks and snakes. The dark and foreboding attractiveness of the mangroves offer the chance to encounter myriad birds - and of course the unforgettable sight of the most secretive great cat in the world. We will also stop on land at various watchtowers for a closer look. Safety is always paramount and the watchtowers are housed within wire cages, so no strolling in tiger-land!

Your experience in Sunderbans does not end with the wildlife: you will have the opportunity to visit the village and interact with the local community. Enjoy a taste of their lifestyle, local crafts, cuisine and even be entertained in their local rural theatre. The people of Bali village are your hosts. They are the transformed conservationists and are actively involved in the camp. They will take you around the forest or on a cruise through the creeks telling you the story of tigers, birds and flora. They are the people who intimately know each and every turn of the river and every creek.

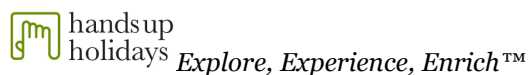
Your visit contributes to a great extent in supporting the sustainable development of the local community and the conservation of the forest and the tigers.

Trip Description:

Days 1 and 2: Calcutta

Your trip begins with a two day city tour exploring Calcutta, this culturally rich city. On a 'Heritage Walk' of this exciting city we discover the distinct architectural heritage of Calcutta. The walk highlights the evolution of this city from where it all began, Dalhousie Square. The first walk takes us on a two hour journey around some 15 buildings in the area, including the imposing Writers Building, the newly renovated Town Hall, the St John's Churchyard and the historic Metcalfe Hall. Our second walk, the North Calcutta Walking Tour takes us through the meandering north Calcutta lanes and hidden courtyards of merchants and noble's houses steeped in the history of this 300 year old city. We also visit the House of Rabindranath Tagore and the Marble Palace. Our tour includes visits to a number of the city's museums and monuments along with a taste of an era gone by with a city tram ride.

(B,D)



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Day 3: To Bali Island and Sunderbans Camp

In the morning you are picked up from your hotel in Calcutta and transferred by vehicle to Sonakhali jetty through beautiful countryside and rural bazaars, with stopovers at a local tea shop and fishermen's villages. You arrive at Sonakhali mid morning and are greeted with morning tea and a briefing by a local guide. You then board your motorised boat for a two hour cruise through rivers Hogol, Gomor, Durgaduani and Gumdi. An optional stopover is available at Gosaba - one of the earliest human settlements in the Sunderbans - to visit the house of Sir Danniell Hamilton - a Scottish banker who initiated India's first co-operative movement here.

After arriving at Bali Island and checking-in to Sunderbans Jungle Camp a hot lunch follows. Your afternoon is filled with a three hour Birding and Game cruise to Sudhanyakhal watch tower through creeks and canals, searching for the elusive tiger, as well as monkeys, dolphins, otters and further array of fauna.

You return to camp by evening and are greeted with tea and snacks and 'infotainment' by one of the camps poacher-turned-guide. A hearty meal of local cooking from the village's organic farm ends your day at Sunderbans Jungle Camp.

(B,L,D)

Day 4: Bali Island - Bird and game cruise

After a filling breakfast you commence your full day of Game Cruising and Bird Touring to Netidhopani watchtower (weather permitting) including crab catching and fishing expeditions from the simple country boats. Lunch is served on board your boat.

Back to camp in the evening, where you are invited for an evening experience at the local rural theatre ('Bonobibi Yatra') performed by the villagers. The

performance tells the interesting story of the Tiger Lord, Forest God and Goddesses, fishermen and honey collectors with lots of local songs and dances. You will love it!

Dinner and overnight at Sunderbans Jungle Camp.

(B,L,D)

Day 5: Bali Island - Village walk and adventure cruise

After breakfast you enjoy a guided village walk where you have the opportunity to interact further with the local villagers. You can experience wonderful encounters learning about their lifestyle, local crafts, cuisines and even the indigenous farming and household equipment used by the villagers. You finish your tour with a guided adventure cruise in a rowboat.

(B,L,D)

Day 6 to Day 9: Bali Island – Volunteering

Volunteering in the Sunderbans Jungle Camp, this may include assisting with projects such as: maintaining and repairing the clay embankments which provide the wall of protection between life and death for the villagers of Sunderbans (the longest man-made dyke in the world!); mangrove planting on the mud flats to protect the embankment and reduce erosion; construction of a proposed 10-bed hospital; or general village construction and upkeep.

(B,L,D)

Day 10: Bali Island – Bird and animal-spotting cruise; To Calcutta

In the morning you have a final cruise in search of tigers and other wildlife, including a short canopy walk. After lunch, you transfer back to Sonakhali in your motorboat en route to Calcutta, arriving back in the late afternoon.

(B,L,D)

Day 11: Calcutta

Your trip ends with a transfer to the airport. (B)

Please note: Tiger sightings are not guaranteed in such vast, remote terrain where you have little opportunity to walk on the forested lands or mud flats. **This tour is not suitable for those that consider tiger sightings ‘essential’.** Even bird and other animal sightings are not continual, so patience is required during our time spent on the boat searching for birds and game. Our project and tour is extremely environmentally-sensitive and has a strong conservation and benefit sharing pledge.

B= Breakfast, L= lunch, D= Dinner

Comfort Level: 2/5
(3 nights in a 3* hotel in Calcutta, 7 nights in simple lodging in a guesthouse in the Sunderbans)

Activity Level: 2/5

Min. Travellers per Group: 2
Max. Travellers per Group: 12

Police Check Required? No