



FairMail Photography Expedition

“The Holy Rivers”

Detailed itinerary

30th of September until 11th of October

556 Euro p.p.

“The Holy Rivers” Photography Expedition is a journey connecting the holy Ganges and Narmada Rivers in central India. During this 12 day expedition we visit the holy ghats (temples) in the cities of Varanasi and Jabalpur on the central Indian plains, before travelling by train up to the lush green mountain town of Pachmarhi with its breathtaking viewpoints and refreshing waterfalls. Besides Varanasi these destinations are not visited by many tourists. This guarantees an adventurous journey far from the beaten path, filled with authentic photography moments. The journey starts in the city of Varanasi on the borders of the famous Ganges River. This is a holy city for Hindus and has almost 100 ghats along the river’s shore providing a breathtaking view of the daily activities that take place. Although possibly overwhelming, in Varanasi you will have a few days to get used to Indian life. You can relax along the shores of the Ganges, enjoy a boat trip over the river or take a long walk past the many ghats. In Varanasi you will also meet the FairMail teenagers, the FairMail office and learn more about how FairMail works. During the first photography exercise you can start to get to know each other while working together.

After three days in Varanasi, you travel by train with the entire group from the central plains to Pachmarhi hill station in the Satpura mountain range. On the way to Pachmarhi we will stop for two days in Jabalpur. This city is located next to another holy river, the Narmada River. We will take time to see the impressive cascades, the surrounding ghats and enjoy the marble rocks on a boat ride over the river.

After that we will take five days to explore the beautiful natural environment of the Pachmarhi hill station. On walking distance or a short drive away we will find many beautiful viewpoints, refreshing waterfalls, caves, temples and rock paintings. During our day hikes we will be able to practice nature photography and do photography exercises together in this inspiring surrounding. After 7 days we take the train back to Varanasi. During the last day we will have time to visit the houses of the teenager’s families to share experiences of our unforgettable journey with the parents who will be very happy to see their children back safe and sound.

About travelling with FairMail

The Fair Mail team likes to invite travellers during our photography journey. If you want to join us, you have to realize that you travel with teenagers and that you’ll have to adapt to their mode of transportation. The main goal of the whole group is to take pictures, not to view as many touristic sites as possible. Due to the limited budget of FairMail and the teenagers, we sleep in a basic accommodation, use public transport as much as possible and we eat in local restaurants. Sometimes we will walk for a few hours in a row in a mountainous area with primitive footpaths. Walking shoes and a raincoat are part of your equipment! Alternately we speak Hindi, English and Dutch in the group. There is a Dutch and English speaking tour guide, so it is not



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Character of trip

After 16 successful FairMail photography excursions in Peru this will be the fourth photography excursion FairMail organizes with the new teenagers from FairMail India. This means we are trying something new and can't really guarantee what is going to happen. It will be the only the second time we will visit these destinations with this group of teenagers. If you have a flexible character you are most welcome to share this new experience with us and enjoy the spontaneous way of travelling in a small group. Beforehand we will make train reservations, but during the trip we will discuss exactly what we will be doing each day, and where we will be eating.

About the accommodations

We mostly use small basic hostels during this journey. We use them because there is no alternative on the destinations we visit, but also because of the limited budget we have. The teenagers are not accustomed to luxury and for you it can be a new experience. For example our hotels don't guarantee hot water. By this way of travelling you get to understand what living in India is like, and it also gives the local owners a benefit from tourism in their area.

About the meals

The food is included during the part of the journey with the teenagers. Only in Varanasi you pay for your own meals. This means that you eat the same food as the rest of the group. This is the best way to experience some of the excellent local dishes! Due to the budget and the expectations of the teenagers we often eat in simple and inexpensive local restaurants and not in tourist restaurants. Of course you are free to order something else at your own costs.

About transport

We use trains, buses, rickshaws and sometimes private jeeps during this journey. Travelling by train is a unique experience and way to get to know the country. As the distances are long (sometimes more than 10 hours) we do make use of the more luxurious trains that provide meals and beds with sheets, toilets and even have air conditioning! For the routes between smaller cities only simple buses or jeeps are available. When the quality is acceptable and the distance not too long on these routes, we use public transport. For a couple of times it is also a nice to experience how the public transport is organised in a developing country like India. Sheep on the roof, chickens in the bus, loud Hindi music on the radio and there you go. And stop again, and go!



The level of comfort during this journey

The places we visit are not the general tourist hotspots in India. That's what makes our trips different. This does mean that we visit places where the tourist infrastructure is not as developed as you might be used to. The accommodations are fine, but consider that you mostly stay in primitive hostels, not always with hot water for example. The state of many roads in India is bad and the traffic is chaotic. The advantage is that you drive pretty slowly, so you can enjoy the beautiful scenery.

About Culture:

Varanasi is a traditional city, where it is appreciated if you adapt to the more traditional way of clothing: for women this means no bare shoulders and knees. Also, kissing and hugging in public is considered awkward (also just among friends).

What to take?

- Cash, during some days there won't be any ATM's.
- Raincoat / extra dry clothes (it is not rainy season, but in the mountains it can always rain)
- Warm clothes (during the night-time and some cool days)
- Hiking shoes
- Light clothes (during hot days)
- Cap or sun protection for your head
- Photo or video camera
- Valid passport and Visa for India
- Copies of travel documents
- Daypack
- Towel
- Sunscreen
- Sunglasses
- Flashlight
- Pocket knife
- mosquito net
- mosquito repellent
- all vaccinations needed for India (malaria cases are also reported around Varanasi)
- medical and travel insurance
- oral rehydrating solution powders (for diarrhea situations)
- cotton sheets (or a thin cotton sleeping bag)

What makes this journey sustainable?

Why is this journey sustainable? The good thing about FairMail photography journeys is that you not only treat yourself to a unique holiday but also one of the teenagers from FairMail. With your contribution to the journey, we can cover the costs for one of the FairMail teenagers to go with us on tour. It's obviously not just about money. You can also share your western view on beauty with the teenagers, so they learn what customers of FairMail cards like to see on their postcards. This helps them to sell more cards and earn more money for their education. In a fun and relaxed way you support talented, but underprivileged teenagers, to improve their future! You also have the option to "make your seat green" during your flight to India by using Atmosfair. This organisation plants trees to reduce your greenhouse gas emissions, for a small additional amount. Atmosfair is one of the few CO2 compensation options that have the 'Gold Standard' by the World Wildlife Fund. For more information you can check their website www.atmosfair.com. By booking this journey you also support economic development of the communities we visit. We mainly use services from people who live in the area like accommodation, transport and guides. Other travel agencies mainly use large tour operators who visit the area, but don't leave any positive things for the residents.

Minimum amount of days

Minimum of 13 days and the possibility to extend your journey with extra days in Varanasi to relax, learn Hindi or yoga or travel by yourself. If you can stay longer you can also volunteer for FairMail as photography trainer or discover more parts of India on your own.

Prices

Everybody has different wishes and a different budget. That's why we offer the Basic Program of 13 days for a fixed low price. The Basic Program is a total journey without hidden costs. We expect that our customers support the FairMail teenagers, so € 165,00 contribution to the project is included in the price of the Basic Program. For this amount of money we can take one of the teenagers on this journey!

Basic Program - 13 days: € 556,00

Included:

- Dutch speaking guide (founder of FairMail)
- Hindi translator (national manager FairMail India)
- All overnight stays in a shared room in hostals.
- All meals, except the breakfast and dinner during the first and last days in Varanasi
- Transport during basic program
- Entrance fees during basic program
- Train station or Airport pickup in Varanasi
- Lunch meeting with the FairMail teenagers before departure
- Preparation Package
- Project contribution (€ 165,00)

Excluded:

- Flight to India
- Transport by train or airplane Delhi to Varanasi
- Airport pick-up Delhi
- Overnight stay in Delhi
- Any (taxi) transport besides the basic program
- Food en drinks besides the 3 daily meals.
- Photography equipment
- Tips
- Optional tours around Varanasi
- your accommodation before and after the 10 day trip

Travel itinerary

Day 1 – 30th of September: Varanasi

Morning: Arrival in Varanasi, pick-up from airport or train station, to hotel on the shore of the Ganges river

Afternoon: Free to explore Varanasi

Day 2 – 1st of Octobre: Varanasi

Morning: Free to explore Varanasi

Afternoon: Introduction to FairMail, meeting with the teenager in the office, joint photography exercise.

Day 3 - 2nd of Octobre: Varanasi - Jabalpur

Morning: Boat excursion Ganges River to main ghat and Ganges beach

Afternoon: Free to explore Varanasi

Evening: Train to Jabalpur (12 hours)

Day 4 – 3rd of October: Jabalpur - Marble Rocks

Morning: Arrival Jabalpur

Afternoon: Photography exercise Marble Rocks

Day 5 – 4th of October: Marble Rocks

Morning: Boat Trip Narmada river and cascades

Afternoon: Presentation “Perfect photo’s” by teenagers

Day 6 – 5th of October: Marble Rocks - Pachmarhi

Morning: Train to Pachmarhi (3 hours)

Afternoon: Photography Exercise (treasure hunt)

Day 7 , 8, 9 and 10 - 6th till 9th of October: Pachmarhi

Morning: Visits to waterfalls, caves, temples and rock paintings.

Afternoons: Photography exercises

Day 11 - 10th of October: Pachmarhi to Varanasi

Morning: Arrival Varanasi

Afternoon: Free to explore Varanasi

Day 12 - 11th of October: Varanasi

Morning: Free to explore Varanasi

Afternoon: Visit houses and parents of the teenagers

Day to day program

We cannot guarantee the day to day program below. It should be used as a rough idea of what we could be doing. But if we run into a great other opportunity along the way we might change plans in consultation with the rest of the group members.

Day 1. Varanasi

You will get a warm welcome from your Dutch and English speaking tour guide upon arrival in Varanasi by train or airplane. Together you will go to your basic, but cosy hostel on the border of the Ganges river overlooking the temples that lay on the same shore. In the afternoon you are free to acclimatize or explore Varanasi by yourself. Or ask one of the FairMail teenagers to join you and show you around if you wish!

Day 2: Varanasi

In the morning you are free to explore more of Varanasi in the mystic early morning light. In the afternoon you will be picked up in your hotel to walk together to the FairMail office. Today you meet your travel companions in Varanasi, the FairMail teenagers and the other participants. You'll get the chance to meet everyone and to see how FairMail works. We might even share a first photography exercise. In the evening we will have dinner together with all the participants, teenagers and FairMail volunteers. A lot of new impressions will pass through your head when you reach your bed in your hostel.

Day 3. Varanasi - Jabalpur

In the early morning we will meet for a scenic boat trip with the whole group along the Ganges River. A beautiful way to view the ghats from the water and take pictures. The morning mist and sunrise provide a beautiful light for this. We might also go to the beach on the other side of the river and enjoy how local families play, fish and worship. The rest of the morning and afternoon are free for yourself to explore and prepare for the train trip to Jabalpur in the evening. The train leaves

from Varanasi at the end of the day. The scheduled travel time of the train is 12 hours. Luckily we will have beds reserved in the more comfortable train classes with dinner service, sheets and pillows, toilets and air conditioning. 12 hours is a long time, but playing cards with the kids, watching the scenery from your bed and making new friends in the train the time will fly by!

Day 4. Jabalpur - Marble Rocks

Jabalpur is the capital of Madhya Pradesh, and famous for its marble rocks in the canyon of the holy Narmada river. Jabalpur itself is a big city, so we will be staying in a smaller village next to the river where we can do a photography exercise in the afternoon.

Day 5. Marble Rocks

Today we will be making a boat ride on the Narmada river to get close to the "marble rocks" and the impressive cascades.

In the afternoon the teenagers will present their ideas for the "perfect picture" they hope to take during this trip that will surely end up being a new FairMail postcard. Envisioning their goal is a strong tool to make them focus. With your feedback and additional ideas to their concept it is bound to become a success. After the presentations you start working on the pictures together in pairs.

Day 6. Marble Rocks - Pachmarhi

Today we leave Marble rocks to travel on by train to the main destination of this trip: Pachmarhi Hillstation. It takes 3 hours to get to Pipariya and then 2 more hours by jeep upto the hill station where we will be staying 5 days to discover.

In the afternoon we will have our first photography exercise dedicated at exploring town: a photography treasure hunt!

Day 7, 8, 9 and 10: Pachmarhi

Pachmarhi hill station lies at an altitude of 1.000 meters above sea level. This location is known for several rare plants including some rare orchids in its unique topography containing thick forests and rocky ravines, Tiger, Panther, Wild boar, peacock, monkeys and Langurs are found in the forests. It is a part of Satpura National Park and two wildlife sanctuaries (Bori, Pachmarhi) lay within it. The coming four days we will have the time to discover all that Pachmarhi, its surroundings and inhabitants have to offer. The small mountain village is surrounded by waterfalls, caves, temples and rock paintings. All within walking distance or a short car ride away. So we won't be bored. Amongst the places we visit will be:

*Jamuna Prapat (Bee Fall). A spectacular fall in the stream which provides drinking water to Pachmarhi. The bathing pools above the fall are great for a refreshing swim.

*Handi Khoh. Pachmarhi's most impressive ravine has a 300 feet high precipice and dramatically steep sides.

*Mahadeo. Regarded as holy for countless of generations, Mahadeo hill has a shrine with an idol of Lord Shiva and an impressive Shivlinga. On the East side of the hill is an excellent cave shelter with beautiful cave paintings.

*Dhoopgarh. The highest point in the Satpura range, with a magnificent view of the surrounding ranges. A very popular spot for viewing sunsets.

*Vanshree Vihar (Pansy Pool). A beautiful spot on the Denwa stream, cool and shady among trees, ferns and semi-tropical vegetation.

Apart from free photography during the day hikes we will also be practicing table top photography near the sites. At the end of day 10 we take the jeep back to Pipariya and the train to Varanasi. In

the train we can look at a selection of the best pictures made during the trip! How many new post-cards will have been produced over the last few days? It will only be a matter of months before you will find them on a postcard for sale in your hometown!

Day 11. Varanasi

We arrive early in the morning in Varanasi. The teenagers go back to their parents and you can freshen up in your hostel. In the afternoon you are free to do as you choose. Varanasi has many sites to offer like Sarnath, one of the 4 most holy places to Buddhist as Buddah choose this site to teach to his students. Also Fort Ramnagar is impressive to visit.

Day 12. Varanasi

On the last day of the photography trip you have the morning for yourself. In the afternoon you will probably be invited to visit the houses of the teenagers. After travelling together for 12 days and building a special relationship with these teenagers it is very interesting to see where they come from, see their houses and meet their families. Usually the last day is one of the most intense experiences of the photography trip, sharing great experiences and experiencing where the FairMail teenagers come from. Intense not in the least because of the moment of good bye that is rapidly approaching.