



Dakshineswar Kali Temple on the banks of the Hooghly River

A Cruise through History along the Hooghly: Travellers, Traders and Truth Seekers in India

6 – 17 January 2025

With extension 6 – 19 January 2025

“It was a privilege to be on such a trip.
I think it was perfectly suited to your
clientele and thoughtfully put together.”

Demelza Benbow, A Cruise Through History
Along the Hooghly River, March 2023

Main Tour

Level 3 
MODERATE

River Cruise Component

Level 2 
GENTLE



Jon Baines
tours



The terracotta Shiva temples at Kalna

The Hooghly River is the main artery running through the history of Bengal. Kolkata was founded on the banks of the river in 1690 as a British trading outpost of the Mughal Empire. Not only was Kolkata the centre of the Raj until 1911, when the capital moved to Delhi, but it has long been a hub of Bengali literature, music and philosophy. Bengal was the richest province in India for a time, its lush soil producing indigo, opium and rice crops, among others, and its exquisite textiles were known as 'woven wind'.

This progressive, wealthy and cultured land drew people from all over the world - the Portuguese, Dutch, Danish and French all settled on the banks of the Hooghly and Islam, Hinduism, Jainism and Christianity all flourished here. The long history of this province leaves

a legacy of magnificent temples, buildings and parks, often of astonishing size. A visit to Kolkata combined with a cruise along the mighty Hooghly offers an unparalleled vision of the rich history and culture of the great province of Bengal.

Katie Hickman's talks throughout the tour will address the theme of 'Travellers, Traders and Truth Seekers in India.'

"The ABN Raj Mahal was superb. The Oberoi Grand in Kolkata was stylish and comfortable; lovely pool. The food on the boat and in the hotel was very good."

Ralph Fildes & Jean Massey, A Cruise Through History Along the Hooghly River, March 2023

Speaker

Katie Hickman is a British historian, novelist and travel writer. Her highly acclaimed history of British women in pre-Raj India was published in 2019.

She is the author of nine other books, including two bestselling works of non-fiction; *Daughters of Britannia*, about the lives and times of British diplomatic wives, which was developed into a twenty part series for BBC Radio 4; and *Courtesans*, about English eighteenth and nineteenth century women of pleasure. Her most recent work, *Brave Hearted: The Dramatic Story of Women of the American West*, was the winner of the 2023 WILLA Award for Nonfiction.

Her other works include a trilogy of historical novels which, between them, have been translated into twenty languages.



Born into a diplomatic family, Katie Hickman had a peripatetic childhood, growing up in Spain, Ireland, Singapore and South America. She lives in London on a converted barge on the River Thames.

Tour leader

Abhishek Chordia originally hails from Udaipur. He completed a degree in hotel management, leading to a career with Radisson and Grange hotel chains in London before transferring into the tourism industry. He has worked as a tour manager and leader for the past 17 years, collaborating with high profile

travel companies for discerning travellers. He is officially recognized as a Pan India guide by the Ministry of Tourism. Abhishek was shortlisted for the Explore Worldwide Global Tour Leader's Award for four consecutive years and won the award twice, as runner-up and winner, in 2014 and 2015. Beyond his insatiable love for travel, he is passionate about sports, particularly squash and billiards.

Tour Activity Level

Level 1 Relaxed



A gentle pace, involving minimal walking and exertion. Shorter travel distances and a full but relatively relaxed itinerary.

Level 2 Gentle



Easy walking at a mostly leisurely pace. Slightly more daily activity and travel.

THIS TOUR IS CLASSIFIED AS:

Level 3 Moderate



Regular walking at destinations, extended standing and / or increased travel distances. Good fitness is required.

Level 4 Active



Longer and fuller days. Significant levels of walking, covering longer distances, requiring very good fitness and mobility.

Level 5 Challenging



May involve extended drives, hikes and multiple visits across busy days. Excellent fitness is required.

NB: The river cruise component is Activity Level 2

3 nights Kolkata – 7 nights cruising on Hooghly River – 1 night Kolkata



Day 1: Kolkata (Mon, 6 Jan) D

- Am: Arrive and transfer to the Oberoi Grand Hotel and at leisure
- Pm: Optional stroll along the Colonnade to visit the Park Street Oxford Bookstore. Later in the afternoon board a boat at Prinsep's Steps for a river trip through the city. Dinner at the hotel.

Day 2: Kolkata (Tues, 7 Jan) B D

- Am: Optional early morning sightseeing walk through old Kolkata, including the Writer's Building. Return to the hotel for breakfast and then visit the Victoria Memorial, the Maidan and St John's Church.
- Pm: Visit the Anglican Cathedral, Park Street Cemetery and the office of Warren Hastings.
- Eve: Welcome dinner.

Day 3: Kolkata (Wed, 8 Jan) B D

- Am: Optional early morning visit to the flower market. After breakfast visit Kutamali, the pottery village. See Bazar Rajabarim Tagore House and museum, the Marble Palace, and the double courtyarded palace on both sides of the road of Raja Nabakrishna Deb (1733-97) in Shobabazar.

- Pm: Visit The India Museum. At leisure at the hotel and pool.

- Eve: Dinner at Zaranj local restaurant.

Day 4: Kolkata / Cruising (Thur, 9 Jan) B D

- Am: Make a late morning transfer to the river and board the ABN Rajmahal to commence your cruise on the Hooghly.
- Pm: Sail past the old Danish colony of Serampore to Barrackpore and disembark. Take a walk through the cantonment past the Semaphore Tower, Government House, the Temple of Fame and Flagstaff House and its garden.

Day 5: Cruising (Fri, 10 Jan) B L D

- Am: Sail onto Chandernagore, which was a French possession until 1950, and visit the eighteenth century church and Dupleix's house and museum.
- Pm: Sail on past the old Dutch settlement of Chinsura. Disembark to visit the imposing Imambara at Hooghly. Reboard your ship and cruise upstream, leaving Kolkata's urban sprawl behind.

Day 6: Cruising (Sat, 11 Jan) B L D

- Am: Disembark at Kalna and take cycle rickshaws to see some of Bengal's most attractive terracotta temples, as well as the unique Shiva temple with concentric rings made up of 108 shrinelets.
- Pm: Continue on through the countryside to Mayapur, its skyline dominated by the vast new ISKCON temple, before sailing on through the night.

Day 7: Cruising (Sun, 12 Jan) B L D

- Am: Disembark at the brassworking village of Matiari, where you can watch the traditional process of beating out brass water pots and other vessels.
- Pm: Cruise to the battlefield of Plassey where in 1757 Clive's defeat of Siraj-ud-Daulah changed the course of Indian history. Moor for the night close to Murshidabad.

Day 8: Cruising (Mon, 13 Jan) B L D

- Am: Disembark and walk to the Khushbagh, a peaceful Moghul-style garden enclosing the tombs of Siraj-ud-Daulah and his family. Continue a little way upstream to where the great Hazarduari Palace dominates the waterfront. Inside is an extensive collection of pictures, china, weapons and other objects.
- Pm: Visit the great Katra Mosque and drive out to two classic Georgian merchant buildings of the late 18th century, the Nashipara Palace and the Katgola Palace.

Day 9: Cruising (Tues, 14 Jan) B L D

- Am: Moor at the sleepy village of Baranagar, rural India at its most idyllic. Walk through fields to visit three beautiful miniature terracotta temples.
- Pm: Return to the ship and continue up the Hooghly, here a charming waterway twisting and turning between banks lined with mustard fields and mango orchards. Carry on up a long canal section to a mooring close to the Farakka Barrage and overnight.

Day 10: Cruising (Wed, 15 Jan) B L D

- Am: Disembark and take a full day excursion by road to Gaur, near the town of Malda. This quiet, deserted place was once one of India's great cities, first under the Hindus in 12th century, then as the Muslim capital of Eastern India from the 14th to the 16th century. Visit the remains of mosques, palaces and gateways before rejoining the ship in the evening.

Day 11: Cruising / Kolkata (Thur, 16 Jan) B L D

- Am: Transfer to Farraka Station for a scenic four hour train journey back to Kolkata.
- Pm: Spend the rest of the day at leisure before a farewell dinner in the evening. Transfer to the airport the next day or extend your stay in Kolkata.
- Eve: Farewell dinner.

Day 12: Kolkata (Fri, 17 Jan) B

- Am: Transfer to the airport or extend at the Oberoi Grand Hotel.

Extension

Day 12: Kolkata / Rajbari Bawali (Fri, 17 Jan) B L D

- Am: Drive from the Oberoi Hotel in Kolkata to the Rajbari Bawali.
- Pm: Take a tour of the hotel and its grounds.
- Eve: Dinner.

Day 13: Rajbari Bawali (Sat, 18 Jan) B L D

- Am: At leisure.
- Eve: Dinner.

Day 14: Rajbari Bawali (Sun, 19 Jan) B

- Am: Depart Rajbari Bawali for the airport.

Please contact us for extension costs.

"All visits were really good. The local guides were superb – so knowledgeable and enthusiastic and generally helpful."

Ralph Fildes & Jean Massey, A Cruise Through History
Along the Hooghly River, March 2023

All itineraries are subject to change according to local conditions.



The Victoria Memorial, Kolkata (photo by Susi Richardson)



ABN Rajmahal on the Hooghly

The ABN Rajmahal

The ABN Rajmahal contains 22 air-conditioned cabins, all of which have French balconies and en suite bathrooms. There is a spa, a saloon with a library and a spacious sundeck at the very top. The décor is stylish and fresh with touches of colonial elegance, brought to life by traditional Indian-inspired designs on hand-blocked cotton fabrics. Food on board is a mixture of Assamese (milder than most Indian cuisine) and continental. Wines, beer and spirits are available.

“The ABN Rajmahal was outstanding – staff, facilities, food, everything.”

Helena Molyneux, A Cruise Through History
Along the Hooghly River, March 2023



The Oberoi Grand, Kolkata

Fondly known as the Grand Dame of Kolkata, the luxury Oberoi Grand is centrally located, near bustling markets and cultural landmarks. Dating back to the late 1880s, The Oberoi Grand was frequented by the country's leading figures during colonial times and even today hosts grand functions for Heads of State in the city's largest pillarless Grand Ballroom.



ABN Rajmahal on the Hooghly (top);
The ABN Rajmahal dining room; The Oberoi Grand Hotel;
The Oberoi Grand lobby (above)



Katgola Palace (top); Sacred Heart Church at Chandernagore (above)

The cost of the tour is \$5,579 per person sharing.

The cost of the tour with a room to yourself is \$6,804.

The cost includes:

- Tour leader and speaker
- Comprehensive briefing notes
- 4 nights' accommodation in twin-bedded rooms with private facilities in a first class hotel (Oberoi Grand, Kolkata)
- 7 nights' accommodation in twin or double bedded cabin on the cruise ship
- Meals as per the itinerary (half board Kolkata, full board cruising)
- Water
- All transport and transfers
- A full programme of visits and talks as per the itinerary
- Admission fees and tips

* Please note there are limited numbers of single cabins available.

The cost excludes:

- Meals not mentioned
- Alcoholic drinks and drinks from the bar on the cruise
- Items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone calls
- International flights* and airport transfers

Please contact us for extension costs.

* Please contact us for assistance in organising international flights, transfers and additional accommodation, if required.

Transporting rice straw along the Hooghly



About Us

To travel with us is to dig below the surface, revealing the deeper destination. Of course, you will visit the great historical sites; marvel at the wonders of architecture and engineering; be moved by the riches of culture and art; and experience the most spectacular landscapes in the world. What we also do is make sure that you see the country as it is today, giving you privileged access that independent travel and other tour companies rarely get close to. We give you a variety of experiences, from the sublime to the humble, in the company of intelligent, curious, like-minded people. And while we can be worthy, we also make sure that you have a lot of fun.

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www.atol.org.uk/ATOLCertificate

Jon Baines Tours (London)
Hyde Park House, 5 Manfred Road,
London, SW15 2RS
Tel: +44 (0) 207 223 9485 / 5618
Email: info@jonbainestours.co.uk
www.jonbainestours.co.uk

Jon Baines Tours (Melbourne)
PO Box 68, South Brunswick,
Victoria 3055
Tel: +61 (0) 3 9343 6367
Fax: +61 (0) 3 9012 4228
Email: info@jonbainestours.com.au
www.jonbainestours.com



A brassworker in Matuari (top); The flower market, Kolkata; Boy washing his water buffalo on the river; The Howrah Bridge on the Hooghly (above)



Jon Baines
tours

