

# Bengal- Kantha, Tigers and more

## 8-22 February 2020

### Lead by

**Fiona Wright  
Praveen Nayak.**

A new Indian adventure, sub-tropical West Bengal; heartland of ancient kingdoms, long time centre of the British Raj in India and now home to centres of excellence in the crafts and especially textiles.

A land of poets and culture, with so many stories to share.

Kantha— from simple cotton cloths made in the home to wrap the family through various life events to groups elevating them to a silken art form, helping unwrap brighter futures. We will meet a number of groups working in this beautiful artform.

Weaving— the finest muslins and saris, silk and khadi cotton production and a wealth of crafts, pottery, sculpture, sea shell carving...

A new love is the Gamcha— colourful handloom bath-towels and very desirable for many uses.

Tagore— poet—Nobel Prize Laureate— beautiful words and ideals.

History— Hindu Maharajas, Muslin Nawabs and British Raj, stories and wonderful architecture.

Tigers....we know they are in there in the largest Mangrove swamp on the planet....whether we see them or not it will be peaceful and beautiful looking for them from our cruise boat.

Food— delicious, fresh, subtle spicing and an abundance of seafood.

**Creative Arts Safaris are  
— art and culture based with a hands-on,  
get out and about type attitude.**

• all inclusive utilising good quality mid-range up to flash accommodation and excellent dining experiences — *we look for atmospheric places to stay [off the beaten tourists trails where possible] always good, clean bathrooms, friendly service and comfortable rooms.*

• groups of 8-14 participants

*These trips are not traditional package tours, rather it is hoped we can travel as a group of friends; Creative Arts Safaris have done the research, our tutor handles the artistic side and a host makes sure it runs smoothly; we all share our observations and knowledge along the way. [any info you pick up in preparation is easy to share with the group via the internet and helps you 'meet' the others too]*

The Traveller has to knock at every alien door to come to his own— Tajore *Gitanjali*

**Cost – US \$3990 - twin share**

Single US\$ 1180

Deposit US\$ 1950 to book today

Booking Deadline 8 Nov, 2019

Full payment due 8 Nov, 2019

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**Day 1-Sat 8 Feb, 2020**

**Home/Kolkata**

Arrivals—you will be met at Kolkata International Airport.

**Day 2-Sun 9 Feb, 2020**

**Kolkata**

We will start the day with Sunday at the Maidan [Green] and a spot of people watching as we visit the Victoria Monument. This memorial was opened in 1921 funded by voluntary donations from both within India and Britain. Enjoy checking out the saris of the visitors outside and the informative display inside detailing the history Kolkata, from its beginnings in 1630 until the departure of the British to Delhi in 1911 and on to the Independence Movement.

A quick lunch at the iconic Indian Coffee house and onto the Marble Palace.

Later in the afternoon to head down to Malik Ghat- the flower market. No way to describe this other than WOW, so come along for the experience under the edge of the famous Howrah Bridge.

[breakfast, lunch, dinner]

**Day 3 -Mon 10 Feb, 2020**

**Kolkata/ Phulia/  
Krishna Nagar**

Leaving town this morning we will head out to rural Phulia, an area famous for its superb weaving. We'll spend the day wandering around the village, seeing all aspects of fine cotton and silk weaving, check out the village market for gamcha- Bengali bath towels and other things destined for the local market.

[breakfast, lunch, dinner]

**Day 4— Tues 11 Feb, 2020**

**Krishna Nagar/  
Plassey/Murshidabad**

We will start out early to wander around the ruins of its old Rajbari [Ruler's mansion] and then visit the nearby sculpture village and an amazing garden.

Half way to Murshidabad we will turn off the highway to the peaceful fields around Plassey for a picnic lunch.

Once a grisly scene of battle where Clive [of India as he was later known] orchestrated the defeat of the Nawab of Bengal through bribery and deception and annexed the rich state of Bengal for the British East India company.

[breakfast, lunch, dinner]

**Day 5— Wed 12 Feb, 2020 Murshidabad**

Murshidabad is a wonderful town that time seems to have forgotten, once the principle seat of a very rich kingdom is it now home to a thousand wonderful photographs of crumbling mansions, palaces, mosques and temples, beautiful gardens and fields. We will spend the day exploring — a mansion housing a car that cost 80 Rupees, superb garden of Rajasthani merchants, a Palace of 1000 Doors. Yes we love the place [inc-breakfast, lunch]

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**Day 6—Thurs 13 Feb, 2020 Murshidabad**

A short drive out to a weaver's village, experience the medieval feeling of the steamy silk processing rooms where they reel off the silk, the women working on spinning cotton threads for weaving and the river bank for washing, a hive of activity.

Lunch will be as the very lucky guests of a local family, a truly delicious treat. [Inc- breakfast, lunch]

**Day 7– Fri 14 Feb, 2020 Murshidabad/ Shantiniketan**

Travelling across a landscape of rice fields, bananas, and mango trees, we are heading to a small village income generation project of Muslim design Kantha-geometrical motifs, bright colours, beautiful work. We are guests of the village, will share lunch and spend time with a group of local women who will be our teachers starting us off on a cushion cover for you to finish along our travels. If we are lucky, we will see or even have the opportunity to purchase some older kanthas as well. [Inc- breakfast, lunch]

**Day 8– Sat 15 Feb, 2020 Shantiniketan**

Shantiniketan is the location of a University set up by Rabindranath Tagore, a Renaissance man and one of India's most famous artists he became the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. Tagore was and is a major influence on the arts

**Notes**

**Weather** – At this time of year is warm in the daytime but perhaps evenings and mornings can be cool; a cardigan and socks appreciated

**Clothing** – light weight layers of clothing is good. To respect local customs it is best for skirts or trousers to be mid-calf length at least, tops not too revealing. Light, loose layers work well with the climate. Generally I find 3 or 4 outfits sufficient, there is always the opportunity to pick up things along the way. Pack a pair of socks and cardigan for the cool of the morning.

**Shoes** – sensible walking shoes such as sneakers or strapped on sandals are the best options. Surfaces are often rough and you really want your footing stable so you can focus on all the wonderful things everywhere to look at! Pair of rubber thongs or flip-flops are good – often bathrooms are marble and can be slippery when wet.

**Money** – ATMs are everywhere so you can use a travel card, visa debit or credit advance easily. If you plan to use a card overseas DO warn your bank to expect overseas activity – some will freeze the card wondering what is happening.

Money changes can be found to change travellers cheques or currency.

**Power** – 240 volts, European adaptor plugs are the most useful.

**Begging?** – is generally not to be encouraged. Giving gifts of pens and lollies to children is encouraging them to learn a begging mentality [if you like to give a gift to children we can hand it onto a school]. There is no pension in India – a few rupees to a very old person or a handicapped person is very kind.

**Tipping?** – it is the local custom so have a pocket full of small change to be ready If you receive a personal service – e.g. bags into or out of hotel, cup of tea through room service, laundry delivery, it is customary to give a tip [20-50 rp]. If you enjoy the commentary of a guide, a performance, take a photo of some one posing in the street etc it is customary to give them a 20-50 Rp tip. Set something aside for our driver – he will take us safely and comfortably through the adventure of many Indian roads.

**Step lightly** on our environment, be frugal in water use, turn off power switches, take rubbish with you where possible.

**Say NO to Plastic! Please bring a cloth carry bag.**

especially in Bengal and more widely in India. The University of Shanti Niketan's degree awards are handed out by the Prime Minister of India each year.

We will start the day visiting our friend Mrs Khatun and through her tutelage start a fine silk kantha piece to work on as we travel and then in the afternoon tour the galleries and grounds of the University [Inc-breakfast, lunch, dinner]

**Day 9– Sun 16 Feb, 2020****Shantiniketan/ Bishnupur/ Kolkata**

Once capital to the Malla kingdom, Bishnupur is a lovely spot to wander around and visit its 400-year-old terracotta temples. Superb. We got lead astray on our last visit looking for the shell cravers, so this time we think we know which village to wander into and hope to find them, or else just enjoy a stroll through a nice village. Fingers crossed.

[inc-breakfast, lunch]

**Day 10–Mon 17 Feb, 2020 Kolkata**

A slow start this morning and an appointment for morning tea. we'll visit a group who has taken the kantha tradition and given it a high society twist, originally concentrating on intricate stitched designs on silk saris they now also

**Creative Arts Safaris tours include:**

- pickups from the airport for arrivals
  - departures last day of tour
  - accommodation from the evening of Day 1 up to and including the night of our Farewell Dinner
- Our accommodation is generally mid-range. We use heritage hotels where we can. All places are clean, friendly and have western bathrooms! It is ambiance and friendliness we are looking for. This is the range where we may meet locals as well – top end is far removed from this and just full of foreigners!*

- all transportation, road taxes and fuel costs for the tour
  - all breakfasts and many other meals
- Food is a reflection of the culture and we are pleased to say we will sample a range of good dining experiences.*
- sightseeing entrance fees [which covers the use of a still camera]

• all tuition fees

**You need to cover:**

- some meals
- all drinks
- laundry
- the one expense that we can't guestimate' for you is shopping! [this is not a shopping expedition but you will see some amazing things and you will probably want to indulge!]
- **airfares**
- **travel insurance**
- **visa** [necessary]

We support Fair Trade and Self-Help organisations where we can and so the only 'shops' listed on our itinerary come under this category [more info in the notes to follow] Don't worry there are also lots of other markets and bazaars we can visit too!

In India we look after our drivers and support staff and only use hotels where our drivers also receive good quality accommodation [some hotels look after their guests and treat their driver miserably]. We have decided to use heritage hotels where we can. They are wonderful, atmospheric places and we believe it helps to keep them maintained rather than leave them deteriorating...

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encourage their members to work on 'masterpieces'- intricate figurative designs, reminiscent of the masterpiece you would have noticed in the Victoria Museum. Stories of this group will be shared over a delightful morning tea.

Afternoon is free. There is a big local market behind our hotel that is plenty of fun to explore.

[inc-breakfast]

**Day 11- Tues 18 Feb, 2020** **Kolkata**

We have a workshop visit planned today- indigo and a picnic. [ breakfast, lunch]

**Day 12-Wed 19 Feb, 2020** **Kolkata/ Sundarbans**

Heading out of town to one of the world's biggest mangrove swamps and home to the largest population of Bengal Tigers- The Sundarbans National Park and Tiger Reserve. We'll spend the days cruising, hoping to catch a glimpse of tigers as well as the many other creatures of the swamps- crocodile, birds, birds, birds, smaller cats, antelopes and reptiles. Night time we will retire to cosy cabins on shore. During our visit to the area we will visit a local village, an interpretation centre and the shrine where the local honey collectors pray before entering the Sundarbans, a dangerous occupation.

[breakfast, lunch, dinner]

**Day 13-Thurs 20 Feb, 2020**

**Sundarbans**

Time on the boat will allow time to work on our stitching as well as enjoying the view [breakfast, lunch, dinner]

**Day 14- Fri 21 Feb, 2020** **Sundarbans/ Kolkata**

After lunch we will return to Kolkata [ breakfast, lunch]

**Day 15- Sat 22 Feb, 2020**

**Kolkata**

The legacy of poverty, whilst being addressed in India is still has work in progress. On arriving back in Kolkata we will visit The Mother's House, home and headquarters of The Sisters of Charity. Mother Teresa and her group have done so much in building awareness about poverty and its effects.

Along the way you will see much Gamcha- the bright checked handwoven bath towels of Bengal, like us you might even be a little addicted to them by this stage.

Today we will visit a designer who turns bright bold gamcha into fabulous fun clothes and accessories.

Afternoon visit to the India Museum. 200 years old, a little dusty in corners but full of great stuff. Very interesting and then get your good gear on we are going out for a farewell dinner!

[ breakfast, lunch, dinner]

**Day 16- Sun 23 Feb, 2020** **Kolkata/home**

Departures [ inc-breakfast]

**A little preparation will really add to your experience, here are a few suggestions- see what your local library has to offer....**

Movies-Have a look at a Bollywood movie or two - lots of hype and glam but you will also get some idea of the intricacy of family relationships

- Gandhi- his presence is still very much an influence to life here
- The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel...charming, almost India certainly quite true in the way things happen

A good read

**Michael Woods- A History of India. Excellent book or DVD very approachable and concise history of India- Great introduction to this ancient and continuous culture.**

Rabindarnath Tagore- *Gitanjali*

William Dalrymple- a British writer who lives in India, anything he writes is worth a read.

Amitav Ghosh- Ibis Trilogy visits the area and weaves around the methods of the British when they were establishing their hold on the area

Amitav Ghosh- *Hungry Tide* set in the Sundarbans... stalked by a tiger

And much more to discover....

For novels set in the British Raj times- Look at EM Forster *A Passage to India*

John Masters

Rumer Godden

#### **Fair Trade**

We support Fair Trade and Self-Help organizations where we can and so the only 'shops' listed on our itinerary come under this category.

By Fair Trade we mean those places where the products are produced with the workers being paid a 'liveable' wage. Some of these projects also support healthcare and education for the families of their workers.

The Indian Government actively supports the founding of Craft Peoples' Co-operatives, with education and marketing support, tax breaks and help with visa card access. The combined bargaining power of a Co-operatives means better prices for the workers, a combined buying power for better priced materials and being able to collectively meet the demands of the marketplace.

A Co-operative takes the power of determination into the people's own hands rather than terms being dictated to them if they work at piece work. When working at piece-work materials are delivered to them, work must be completed by a certain date and the payment is determined by the middleman.

Co-operatives lead to people empowerment and a better standard of living for the craftspeople whilst continuing ancient traditional skills.

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Be the change you want to see in the world  
Gandhi

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Do and in doing...

Become.

Sartre

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