

Spirituality and Service in India

Week 1: Arrival and Program Orientation in Delhi, India

After our long journey to the Indian subcontinent, the group will have a day to settle in to the bustling capital city of New Delhi. This modern city reflects India's profound history, from a capital of ancient empires to British colonization to the present day city of over 25 million inhabitants. The group will explore this diverse city while engaging in 3-4 days of Orientation, team building activities, establishing a group culture, and setting the foundation for the upcoming journey.

Week 2: Art and Culture in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India

Taking an overnight train, we travel to Varanasi, the holiest of the 7 sacred cities according to Hindu and Jain traditions. Situated on the banks of the Ganga River, Varanasi has been a center of religion, industry, and art, and has been inhabited for over 3000 years. Students will have individual artistic internships here, ranging from stone carving, to sitar, to fire dancing. In accordance with our ethos of being respectful travelers, the group will also dive into an introductory Hindi language class. Our free time will be spent exploring the multitude of Ghats along the Ganga river; visiting local temples and religious sites (including Sarnath, where Buddha reportedly gave his first sermon); and learning about the principles of various religions that were born here.

Week 3-4: Kolkata, Mother Theresa Home, Bengali Culture, West Bengal, India

Going overland once again by train, we travel to the eastern cultural hub of Kolkata, capital city of West Bengal. Kolkata is a center for political, cultural, and creative movements. It is home to a diverse population, and is considered a "melting pot" that plays host to multiple ethnic communities. With a population of nearly 15 million, nearly one third of the population lives in slum conditions. While here, the group will work with the Mother Theresa Home in an effort to understand the issues of poverty, dignity, and human rights. Individual students will choose which Mother Theresa "house" most reflects their interests, and serve there alongside an international community of volunteers. This can look very different depending on placement: you may work with children, wash laundry, serve food, or simply hold someones hand while

strolling in the garden. Afternoons/evenings will be spent exploring the unique cultural landmarks of Kolkata, engaging with a local troop of actors, or finding some live music to enjoy.

Week 5: Taj Mahal and Red Fort, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India

Flying back to Delhi, and then transferring to a train, the group will explore the city of Agra. Perhaps most famous for being the home of the Taj Mahal, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and an ingenious feat of human engineering. Agra has a unique history, as it was the capital city of the Mughal Dynasty and home to many architectural wonders including the Taj and the Red Fort. The group will also work with a local contact, Arif ji, discovering the many aspects of Agra that most travelers never get to see or experience. We'll spend 3 days learning the history of the region, economic realities, and finding ways to have a little nature time even in the midst of this city that receives millions of visitors every year.

Week 6: Yoga and Reflection on the Ganga River, Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, India

Having spent the first half of the semester in densely populated, urban areas, it is now time to take a breath and reflect on all of the myriad experiences that we have enjoyed. Situated on the banks of the Ganga River, in the foot hills of the Himalaya, Rishikesh is known as a hub of yoga and meditation. Here the group will explore the peaceful town, enjoying a couple days of respite from the urban crowds. We will then go to Phool Chatti yoga ashram, a stones throw from the Ganga River, and engage in an introductory week of yoga, meditation, kirtan, and Ayurveda. This time is meant for personal reflection, and much of the experience will be in silence. Students report this as being a rejuvenating interlude in the journey: enjoy!

Week 7-8: Art and Culture in Rajasthan; Jaipur and Jhadol, Rajasthan, India

Revitalized from our yoga and meditation retreat, we once again hop on the train, this time moving west into the state of Rajasthan. Like many states in India, Rajasthan has a unique character unto itself. A mostly arid region, dominated by the Thar Desert, Rajasthan is India's largest state by land area. We will get a sense of urban life in the capital city of Jaipur, staying with local families and engaging in artistic studies with local artisans. Our guide, Rishi ji, will infuse the experience with outings to historic and cultural sites, and offer us insight into the unique culture of the region. You'll spend evenings with your families, most of whom are fluent in English, and establish a deeper understanding of social and family systems of India.

After our urban homestay, we move on to Udaipur, transferring to Jhadol. A small village two hours outside of Udaipur, Jhadol is a community that is facing the reality of climate change, few economic prospects, and the inevitable tides of change. Many youth are seeing very few prospects in working the land, and are moving to cities in an attempt to find greater economic opportunities. Traditions are breaking down, the land is growing more arid, and a way of life is

being threatened. Rishi ji will lead us in open, honest discussions with local community leaders to discuss these issues. Additionally, the group will have an opportunity to conduct educational activities at a local school for girls, a progressive initiative in this country where many young girls are not given an opportunity to receive an education.

Week 9: Golden Temple, Amritsar, Punjab, India

Continuing our time in the desert, we'll take the train to Punjab state, and onward to Amritsar, the site of the Golden Temple. This is the most holy pilgrimage site for follower of the Sikh faith, yet another fascinating religion born here in India. As inclusivity and tolerance are core aspects of Sikhism, travelers receive a warm welcome into the Golden Temple. In being true to their belief of offering kindness and generosity to all people, the Sikh's feed upward of 50,000 people EVERY day at the temple! The group will eat alongside everyone else, and spend time volunteering by helping to wash the endless amount of dishes generated in this process. Describing the experience of being in the Golden Temple, listening to the constant stream of live Shabad Kirtan (holy music), and witnessing the reverence of the Sikh people is nearly impossible. You must experience it for yourself. The group will also take one evening to visit the Pakistan border and witness the Wagah Border ceremony. We'll discuss the history of the partition, the wounds that still exist today, and the social and cultural implications of political boundaries that oftentimes result in isolation and estrangement between people that have historically interacted peacefully for centuries.

Week 10-11: Compassionate Living with Dharmalaya, Bir, Himachal Pradesh, India

Leaving the heat of the arid regions, we finally move into the mountain terrain of Himachal Pradesh. The group will engage in 9-10 days of life at Dharmalaya Institute for Compassionate Living. Here we'll explore a progressive movement that works to create sustainable local economies, reinvigorate traditional adobe brick architecture, and support traditional ways of living among local populations. The setting is one of incredible beauty, as the peaks of the Dhauladhar (one chain of the Himalaya) are visible, and the forest leading up to the peaks is densely populated with rhododendron, oak, and a local variety of cedar. After each hard days work, the group will enjoy amazing sunsets and have discussions about sustainability and the importance of maintaining traditional ways of life.

Week 12: Himalaya Trekking, Himachal Pradesh, India

Having witnessed the beauty of the surrounding mountains, it is now time to explore them! The group will engage in a 4 day Himalaya trek, fully guided by a professional outfitter. We'll visit small villages, climb to incredible mountain passes and vistas, and enjoy camp fires under perhaps the most star filled skies you've ever seen. This is a time of enjoying our community

bonds, sharing stories of our time in India, and letting our experiences sink in through engagement with the natural world.

After our trek, we'll settle into McLeod Ganj, a Tibetan refugee colony and home to the Tibetan government in exile and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We'll discuss the plight of the Tibetan people, and the benefits and hinderances of being granted a refugee status in India. In the evenings, your Overseas Educators will lead a few activities designed to explore ways of preparing for the upcoming reintegration to life at home. We'll talk about strategies for maintaining our sense of adventure and inquiry in the context of our daily lives, and how to keep the momentum of an amazing semester alive.

We then transfer back to the place we started, Delhi. Here, the group will enjoy a final meal filled with stories and shared gratitude, and depart for our respective homes.

****Carpe Diem reserves the right to make changes to the program at any time, and indeed has the responsibility to do so in some instances; changes may be required to provide the best possible experience, protect the safety of participants, or respond to changes in weather or political conditions.***