



Tiger tracking, Kanha National Park



Nagarhole National Park



Bengal tiger, Bandhavgarh National Park

WILD INDIA

Rupert Cue and Harsha Ogale reveal the best ways of immersing yourself in the prime wildlife spots of India.

Not as well known as the bountiful plains of Africa or the teeming steamy jungles of the Amazon, the national parks, reserves and sanctuaries of India support a fascinating array of wildlife. The encroachment of man has reduced vast former animal populations to a fraction of their previous numbers and many species now hover on the edge of extinction. For many years nature battled alone but in recent decades man's awareness of the economic and social importance of the native flora and fauna has resulted in a network of national parks and protected areas throughout India. With limited visitor numbers and defined boundaries these relatively small enclaves have provided a sanctuary for wildlife to recoup, or in some cases like the tiger, elude extinction.

The northeast of India is a wild region of indigenous tribes, colonial hills stations, the snowy peaks of the eastern Himalaya and vast grasslands bordering the mighty Brahmaputra River. Cascading off the Tibetan plateau, the waters of the Brahmaputra bring life to the grasslands that

in turn provide a home to the rare one-horned rhino. Protected within Kaziranga, one of the most remote national parks in India, the one-horned rhino is smaller than its African cousins and shares its environment with an array of deer and antelope, including the basiranga or swamp deer. The watery pools scattered throughout the park and the adjacent Brahmaputra support plentiful fishing birds including Pallas' fishing eagle. Not adverse to robbing kites and other birds of their catch this eagle is a fearsome angler whose talons are capable of catching fish weighing up to six kilogrammes.

In 1900 there were an estimated 40,000 tigers in India but just over a century later this iconic beast is clinging on by its claws with a conservative figure of 3,500 remaining in a few last bastions. It is a sad fact that there are more tigers in captivity in the USA than roaming free in India but this wild population now enjoys greater protection than ever before and the parks of north and central India allow the fortunate some incredible sightings of the world's largest cat. Around 75 kilometres from Jaipur, Ranthambhore National

Park is the most easily accessed tiger park and has been at the forefront of India's Project Tiger since the 1970s, but its proximity comes at a price. Visitor numbers are high and the rapidly increasing surrounding population puts extra pressures on the park.

However, with a multitude of bird life, numerous cheeky monkeys and wary prey species this remains a good place to see tigers. For those with a little more time the parks of Bandhavgarh, Kanha and Pench provide a wild alternative. With an estimated 927 tigers, these three parks account for around a quarter of India's remaining population, while the lower visitor numbers and the opportunity to view tiger from elephant-back fulfil most travellers' idea of a unique wildlife experience.

The tropical south is a haven for colourful bird life but the parks at Periyar and Nagarhole in the western ghats also provide a home for India's largest animal, the Indian elephant. Smaller and more at home in the forest than the larger plains elephant of Africa, they are no less impressive



One-horned rhinos, Kaziranga National Park

and family groups regularly congregate in playful harmony along the water's edge. Game viewing by coracle provides a quiet approach and is ideal for those seeking to watch or photograph the herd with the minimum of disruption.

We have been fortunate enough to visit many of these incredible areas and witness the fascinating wildlife of India first-hand and would be delighted to advise you on how best to view the wildlife, both great and small, throughout this intoxicating country.

Rupert Cue & Harsha Ogale
India Wildlife Specialists

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www.audleytravel.com/indianwildlife
Park and reserve profiles and suggested itineraries

WILDLIFE GROUP TOUR

Search for tigers, ride elephants and marvel at the myriad of bird species in the company of an expert guide and photographer on our annual small group tour, Wildlife of India, which departs in October 2007. For further information please call Rupert on 01993 838 309.

