

Volunteer and Village Journey: Feb 1st-15th 2016

Have you wanted to travel to India but didn't know where to start?

Do you like the idea of travel mixed with true purpose?

Do you want to make a difference to the lives, health and wellbeing of others in need?

Are you a grassroots sort of traveller, or would like to give it a try?

If you answered yes to any of these questions then you are a perfect candidate to join our Volunteer/Village Journey to Incredible India in February 2016. We will take you on a tour like no other, where you will be living, working and playing alongside children and adults, being an intricate and valuable part of their days, sharing your gifts and talents with them and receiving the Indian open hearted ease and generosity in return!

You will be immersed in an authentic discovery of the real India; her depth, colour, magic and mystery, ease and flow. She will charm you and awaken sleeping parts of your heart and mind. You will be interacting with India's most vulnerable people. Children who were once orphaned or homeless, neglected and living on the streets, begging on railway platforms, or sifting through rubbish at garbage sites, who are now being loved and cared for in a children's shelter. And farmers, who are the heart and soul of rural India and make up 25% of Indian life.

By sharing your time and energy and connecting at a grassroots level with these village folk, you can make a heart-felt difference in the way they experience their lives. Speaking English, sharing your gifts and talents, your knowledge, energy and enthusiasm, has an impact that ripples outwardly, long after you have gone. In return the paradox that is India will work her magic ways on your heart and you may find deeper strands of compassion and discover surprising facets to yourself and perhaps even new perspectives on your own life. It is a true exchange – one that I guarantee, you will feel you have received more than you have given!

***"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others!"
Mahatma Ghandi***



Feb 1st Mumbai.

We start our journey by meeting at the airport in Mumbai, the gateway to India and home to 21 million people!



Here and throughout the state of Maharashtra, the local language is Marathi with people also speaking the national language of Hindi. Religion in Maharashtra is primarily Hinduism and you will find that religion is layered throughout the

whole of Indian culture, evidenced through the many temples and places of worship found across India. We will drive through the Western Ghats to the small village of Devale, near Lonavala (approx 2-3 hour drive), where we arrive at Shikshangram, shelter for street children

Feb 2nd- Feb 5th Shikshangram, Lonavala.

Shikshangram will be our home for the next 4 days. Here we will eat, sleep, play and work alongside the 110 children in whatever capacity you are drawn. Whether it be teaching English, sports, games, music, drama, tending their cuts and wounds, teaching them various life skills – you are welcome to share whatever your particular gifts and talents are, or just simply “hang-out” with them. We may also do some gardening or painting or repair work around the shelter, continue the health and hygiene program, visit the schools they attend and go for nature walks in the area. We will visit the iconic Bhaja caves and Karla caves nearby and also the Saddharma Pradeep Retreat Center – a short walk through the forest from the shelter. You will fall in love with the children and they with you. The children love practising English and testing guests on remembering their names! 120 names, that’s no mean feat!



Feb 6th Pune.

After saying (an often tearful), farewell to the children, we catch the local train to the first stop on our Village journey, which is, Pune. Here we visit, what myself and others, consider to be a world-class museum with three floors filled to overflowing with very old artefacts, paintings, sculptures and wall hangings etc. We will shop and eat at fabulous markets and restaurants and stay overnight in a 4 star hotel.



Pune hosts many tourists and is home to the Osho International Meditation Resort.

Feb 7th Aurangabad.

Leaving Pune we head East toward Aurangabad where we visit the Dr Hedgewar Hospital and the Bibi-ka-maqbara mausoleum. The hospital is unique in that it combines excellent state of the art medical facilities with low costs, making healthcare accessible to the poor and needy. Its various social outreach programs have many services for women and children, schools and in education.



It is leading India in health services both in terms of social responsibility and cutting edge facilities. The mausoleum is architecturally styled along the lines of the Taj Mahal and is a beautiful substitute when you can't get to the real thing!

Feb 8th Ajanta Caves



The next day, we drive through a National Park, a beautiful scenic forested park, where leopards and tigers habitate, to the famous Ajanta Caves, a UNESCO world heritage site. The caves are a series of 30 rock-cut monuments carved into a horseshoe shaped rock-face, which, served as Buddhist prayer

halls and monasteries to Monks in the 1st and 2nd centuries.



Elaborate paintings, murals and carvings of Buddha portrayed in his former princely life, adorn the vaulted ceilings and walls, alongside carved statues of Buddha, the Bodhisattva. These paintings and sculptures are some of the finest surviving examples of ancient Indian/Moghul art.

Feb 9th – Feb 11th Tirzada

The following day we drive through many small villages and farming lots, toward our destination which is the tiny village of Tirzada which will be home for us for a couple of days. At Tirzada we will visit the new check dam that “Water Harvest Foundation” has recently built, learn about water conservation techniques in India and be involved in a tree planting project to further protect and enhance the dam. We will also be involved in another community project, which could be erecting a volleyball court in the village square or building a community garden or orchard. (Details are still being finalised). There is a strong need for strengthening community bonds in rural India, village life is tough, money is scarce and tensions and competition do exist. To this end the “Strong Village Project” has been established by Satish and Yogita Moon, founders of Shikshangram, and our community projects in Tirzada will be under the umbrella of this initiative.



We will stay nearby in a local guesthouse and relax into a gentle, rolling rhythm of village life. We will sample local village fare including wood-fired Roti's (cooked on open fires) and buffalo curd, the creamiest, richest yoghurt you've ever had! Waking to the crow of the cock, communing with locals; the women as they walk to the water well and the men as they go about their morning wash rituals, sharing the street with yoked oxen, cows, goats, chooks and kids – you'll love the rich smells, colours, and textures of village life. (Great photo opportunities for photographers)



Feb 12th Palasgaon/Wardha/Nagpur



Leaving Tirzada, we travel to another neighbouring village called Palasgaon to visit friends and to eat a traditional lunch including our host, Alka's, famous Brinjal (eggplant) pickle. Yum! Driving to Wardha, we visit "Sevagram", Mahatma Gandhi's village which he built and lived in, in the later years of his life. We also visit Deekshabhoomi, a sacred monument of Buddhism, a pilgrimage site, built in the mid 1950's to inaugurate the



return to Buddhism by the architect of the Indian Constitution, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. Ambedkar and Gandhi are the two most influential political/religious leaders in more recent Indian history and learning a little about their life's work, especially as it relates to rural India, is a fitting way to end the village part of our journey. We drive and stay overnight in Nagpur.





Feb 13th and Feb 14th Mumbai.

This morning, we catch a local flight from Nagpur to Mumbai where we will shop, eat and visit sites in this densely populated metropolis for the next 2 days. We will visit the **Dharavi Slum**, one of the biggest slums in the world, home to more than 1 million people and sitting in the midst of prime real estate in the heart of the financial capital. Dharavi was also made popular by the movie "Slumdog Millionaire" and the book, "Shantaram". Dharavi challenges the notion of a slum as it has transformed from a dirty outpost into a thriving entrepreneurial community of thousands of micro-industries. Potters, tailors, garment manufacturers, leather workers, welders and recyclers reside and work here and collectively turn over millions of dollars annually for their bosses. Walking through the narrow laneways teeming with life, you will jostle with; curious residents squatting in their doorways, men washing and shaving from buckets, kids dodging you on bicycles, yapping dogs chasing each other, school girls emerging from their huts immaculate in their uniforms and perfectly plaited hair. In fact, it could be a microcosm of ordinary suburban life anywhere in the world.....only, it is all happening within tiny narrow alleyways about a metre wide, that link hundreds of thousands of matchstick homes together in the largest labyrinth you can dream of. It is a fascinating tour and one that you will remember long after you are back sipping cocktails by the pool in Australia 😊





Another iconic Indian tour we will do, is the **Dhobi Ghat**. The Dhobi Ghat is the world's largest open air laundromat where tens of thousands of articles of clothing belonging to wealthy people, plus linen from hotels, are washed daily either by hand or in huge washing machines. There are hundreds of concrete water pits where colour coded clothes are scrubbed, pummelled and beaten squeaky clean by Dhobi's (washerwomen and men)

We will end the day by watching the sunset over **Chowpatty Bay** on Marine Drive from the rooftop of the Intercontinental Hotel. Cocktail anyone?



Mumbai is the centre of India's booming **Bollywood** film industry – we are lucky enough to get taken on a tour to "film City" by a friend in the business ;) Let's hope there is some live filming that day!

The **Chor Bazaar** or "Thieves market" is famous for antiques and vintage items. You will invariably pick up some gorgeous old wares but you need to be prepared to bargain – hard!

Feb 15th Volunteer and Village Journey Ends



Cost for Volunteer and Village Journey: \$2,695 AUD

(\$695 non-refundable deposit payable by 31st October 2015,
Balance by December 1st 2015)

Includes twin share accommodation, food, internal travel, tolls and levies.

Excludes international flights to and from India, tourist site fees and evening meals in Mumbai.

Early Bird: \$2,495 (non-refundable deposit of \$495 payable by 1st September)

Travel Insurance recommended

Bookings/Enquiries - robinindiajackson@gmail.com. www.shikshangram.com



Please note: a high proportion of your tour cost will go directly to Shikshangram, split between assisting in the continual cost of food and cooking fuel for 120 hungry children and toward the building fund to finish the girls dorm.



Thankyou

You are awesome!

We love you!

We need you!