

# Trip Report – Alwar

## Complete Itinerary:

| Date   | Start Time | End Time | Activities   |
|--------|------------|----------|--|
| 9-Oct  | 8.00 am    | 8.30 am  | Breakfast at Cafeteria                             |
|        | 8.30 am    | 9:00 AM  | Board the Bus                                      |
|        | 9:15am     | 2.00 pm  | Delhi to Alwar                                     |
|        | 2.00 pm    | 3:00 PM  | With lunch break on the way                        |
|        | 3.30 pm    | 6.30 pm  | Visit to Alwar fort                                |
|        | 7.30 pm    | 9.30 pm  | Veg/Non-Veg Buffet Dinner                          |
| 10-Oct | 7:30 AM    | 8:30 AM  | Breakfast at Hotel                                 |
|        | 8.30 am    | 12:00 PM | Alwar to Sariska via Siliserh Lake                 |
|        | 12.30 pm   | 2:00 PM  | One session with CCF Sariska                       |
|        | 2.15 pm    | 3.00 pm  | Lunch at Sariska Hotel                             |
|        | 3.15 pm    | 7:00 PM  | Sariska Tiger Safari                               |
|        | 8:30 PM    | 9.30 pm  | Bonfire at hotel                                   |
| 11-Oct | 9:30 PM    | 10:30 PM | Dinner at hotel                                    |
|        | 7:45 AM    | 8.30 am  | Breakfast at Hotel                                 |
|        | 9.00 am    | 11.30 am | Sariska to Bhangarh                                |
|        | 11.30 am   | 1.00 pm  | Visit to Bhangarh Fort                             |
|        | 1:00 PM    | 8:30 PM  | Drive to Agra via FatehpurSikri (Lunch on the way) |
| 12-Oct | 9:00 PM    | 11:00 PM | Dinner at nearby restaurant                        |
|        | 8:00 AM    | 9:00 AM  | Breakfast at hotel                                 |
|        | 9.15 am    | 12:00 PM | Agra toBharatpur                                   |
|        | 12:30 PM   | 3:00 PM  | Visit to Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary                  |
|        | 3:00 PM    | 8:30 PM  | Bharatpur to Delhi (lunch on the way)              |

### Contacts:

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### Report:

Our study trip of 3 nights started off on high spirits. If one ever wonders how to get 31 almost strangers to interact, serve them not so great sandwiches and watch them bond over their common dislike! As the bus rolled down the highway towards our first destination Alwar, the 31 sandwich haters kicked off with the evergreen game of antakshari. A cacophony of Anu Maliks and Dhinchak Pujas made sure the non-participants were robbed of their Monday morning siesta

till we hit *Jannat-the pure veg dhaba* (oxymoron much?) for a short break. The team reached the rickety little city of Alwar as the sun blazed at the top of our heads through layers of dust. While indulging over a much-needed lunch spread we were informed that our lecture for the afternoon had been cancelled, courtesy a meeting by the ruling party at the center. It was slightly upsetting till we realized that little knowledge sacrifices by the privileged students of a sustainable future is sometimes necessary for the greater good of vote bank politics. The realization led to a change of plans and we decided to visit *Bala Quila*, the 15th century pride of the then kingdom of Alwar. Despite planning, we were past the entry timings of the fort but were greeted by a majestic Sambhar antelope at the fort doors. Not defeated by the mistiming, the team took a short hike along the east wall of the fort and was treated to a beautiful thousand feet view of the city. As we whiled away against the setting sun, the city lit up below to create a beautiful maze of yellow and white punctuated with darkness. Once back at the Hive a few of us ventured out to explore the city, but a short walk later, we realized socializing at the hotel seemed like a much better idea, and we weren't wrong. Once back at the hotel, it was quite an experience mingling and interacting with students from different milieu till late into the night.

The next morning, post breakfast we were en-route the most exciting destination- Sariska Tiger Reserve. After that, we made our way towards Siliserh Lake. Spread across 7 sqkms, the lake is surrounded by the Aravali hills. It was created by Maharaja Vinay Singh in 1845 for the people of Alwar so that the water may be channeled from the reservoir to the city. Most students enjoyed boating in the lake while some remained on the shore to admire its vast expanse. The Lake Palace Hotel, while maintaining its heritage charm, provides an excellent view of the lake and its surroundings. The area attracts a variety of migratory birds as well as some bulbuls and kingfishers. At Sariska, after reading up about their resident mammals, birds and their much-loved tigers at the wildlife museum and a tour of the curio shop we had the opportunity to interact with Dr. GobindSagar Bhardwaj, a senior official with the IFS, scientist, author, and wildlife photographer. Dr. Bhardwaj took us on a two hours journey through the various periods of the earth's existence, right from Siderian to Quaternary and posed the much important question of whether the 6t mass extinction is in progress. The lecture expanded upon the influence of human beings in the current condition of our ecosystem both through accidental involvement like in the case of Panamanian Golden Frog and also through over exploitation of resources as in the case of Golden Toad *BufoPeriglenes*. Dr. Bhardwaj covered the topics of

climate change and ocean acidification, the effects of CO<sub>2</sub> and the measures taken by various communities across the globe to counter its ill effects, many of which may not be fruitful with explosive development in progress. He also spoke about Sariska's journey from being a zero-tiger reserve to hosting 14 tigers as of today and their current challenges to re locate some of the villages from the core area. After an educative session we headed for lunch at our residence for the night, The Tigers Den. That evening we went for the much-awaited jungle safari and were greeted by sunbathing crocodiles, herds of spotted deer and Sambhars as well as a pride of peacocks hanging around with their kids on a late weekday afternoon. The langurs and baboons too were having a good time socializing on tree tops and chattering about the world's most dangerous animals driving through their territory. While Puran-ji our safari guide bombarded us with facts and figures about the various carnivores of Sariska, our ill luck did not allow us even a glimpse of them. After a much dusty evening speeding across the dry terrain of the jungle and gaining not less a kilo of dust weight we were back at the Tiger's Den for the evening. Unlike the mornings, the evenings at Sariska tend to get quite nippy, but our Professor made sure we were warmed by the bonhomie around the bonfire. A tasty dinner did try to make up for the missed tigers but the icing was provided by few members of the team who indulged in scaring the wits out of the others with their scary stories and almost scary late-night activities.

The previous night's scare factor primed up the weaklings for a trip next morning to *Bhangarh*, India's scariest place. Currently in ruins, the fort is said to be cursed by a black magician from back in the day whose love was rejected by Princess Ratnavati. Like many other ASI monuments across the country, this place too had multiple love stories graphitized across its century old stones and was a favorite haunt for the bats. Scattered with a few mausoleums, the dark alcoves and lonely hallways of this 17<sup>th</sup> century fort were quite eerie even in broad daylight. Unfortunately, we did not witness any paranormal activities but a bunch of 200 loud school kids made sure we did not hang around for much long. The view from *Bhangarh* was quite sublime and it would have been a lovely place to visit with the sun at the horizon. From *Bhangarh* we pushed towards Agra and stopped at *Siliser Lake* for a little boat ride and crocodile watching. As the day progressed and dusk set in we found ourselves at the mausoleum of *Sufi* saint *SalimChisti, FatepurSikri*. Although getting dark, the magnanimity of the *Mughal* structure defined by the *BulandDarwaza*, the highest gateway in the world was impressive under the starlit

twilight. After spending a surreal hour in this 16th century monument we proceeded towards the city of the Taj.

Agra seemed like a dive into modern civilization after two nights at nondescript Rajasthani towns. The evening was well spent meandering on the streets of the city of love delving into some gorgeous food. We spent the last night relaxing at the luxurious Man Singh Palace and woke up to a gala buffet spread, the best of the trip! After devouring the buffet our team moved ahead for a tour at the Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary. Cycling through the vast expanse of the sanctuary we were lucky to experience the feeding session of turtles and a plethora of birds, some migratory and mostly local. After tanning for over three hours, the team although disgruntled was ready to leave for Delhi. Six hours, a sumptuous lunch and many naps in a bumpy ride later we were finally back home with memories of a lifetime.

A well organized and nicely executed trip, it would have been nicer with lesser travel time during the day and more interactive sessions with experts. But there's always a next time.