



The great Sufi mystics have said that there is no value in prayers if your soul is not clean, no value of bathing in the Ganga, if your thoughts are impure. God is to be achieved through love. Love is the ultimate reality.



NUSRAT FATEH ALI KHAN,
Legendary Sufi singer

For eons, the Ganga has been part of the seeker's quest for transcendence, the living metaphor of plenitude, scarcity, eternity and change. Perhaps it is the paradox of water's fluidity and as well as its constancy that has allowed the Ganga to be a space that encompasses the diversity of human existence, and perhaps what drew our founder and director to seek out new possibilities of shared experiences.

How is it that a person born 1,000 miles away in arid Rajasthan in western India pioneered river cruising on the Ganges in the state of West Bengal in the eastern India part of the country? Perhaps it is the eternal power of this most sacred of Indian rivers, so integral to every Indic sacred geography and yet the ultimate thule for the intrepid travelers of the world since history began to be written. Like countless others, Raj Singh, a renowned authority on Indian wildlife and a travel industry pioneer, came to the banks of the river seeking adventure, fortune and perhaps not a little fame.

In his youth, as a native of Bharatpur Rajasthan, Raj Singh regularly went boating on Band Baretta, a nearby reservoir, as well as what is now known as Keoladeo National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. After having played a key role in the successful introduction of luxury train tourism to India, opening up Bhutan to the US market, Raj Singh had a dream to share the intimate love of his country with the same novelty and euphoric joy he had experienced from the romance of cruising the waters of a lake as a child. Little did he imagine it would take five years to develop the concept before inaugurating the first cruise in 2009. When he launched the cruise, the **R. V. Bengal Ganga** was the first ship to sail from Kolkata to Varanasi since the advent of the railways, the first luxury, long distance cruise in India and the first ship in the **Aqua Indica™** cruising fleet. The experience of learning the river, bringing others to it and importing and then building Indian ships that could sail on a constantly evolving, shifting, winding waterbody has been transformative for Singh in ways even he perhaps did not imagine.

Now, Raj Singh and his team are dedicated to bringing others to sail on the Ganga in peace and splendour. For each person, the cruise experience offers fresh encounters with an ancient landscape at the beginning of the 21st century. Each of the **Aqua Indica™** ships is of late Mughal, British colonial or Art Deco design, have a sense of retrospective luxuriousness with contemporary technological and environmental consciousness. Each of the vessels have sumptuous Indian textiles, a spa, a boutique stocked with Indian craft and textiles, expert and hospitable staff and fresh, delicious European and Indian cuisine.

No longer the commercial waterway of the Mughals and various European powers, the only other vessels encountered now are local fishing boats and the occasional barge and trawler. Though still completely untamed, the vistas along its long, high banks were once witnessed by Gautama Siddhartha when he became the Buddha, the future Mughal emperor Shah Jahan playing in his childhood idyll, the British defeating the French to take control of colonial India, landless peasants setting sail to seek a better life in the distant shores of the Caribbean, yoga arising in its modern form as did contemporary literary sensibilities, or the Hare Krishna movement establishing a world headquarters as expansive as the Vatican.

There is so much to see on this river and its shores! The palace forts of Rajasthan are renowned, but the merchant princes of Bengal built at the water's edge stately colonial mansions and centers of worship, surprising us today by their wealth and ingenious use of local and foreign status symbols. Our vessels glide on the stories of a river of liquid gold, as it transported indigo, tea, opium and Bengal's famous silk and muslin to the coast. Birds, the Gangetic dolphin and otters join the rhythm of human life along the Ganga.

The **Aqua Indica™** fleet includes the **R. V. Bengal Ganga** and the **M. V. Ganges Voyager** and **Ganges Voyager II** as well as a new vessel to be launched in 2019. As an independent firm, we draw on our sister companies' 30 years of expertise in special interest travel to tailor our unique cruising experiences with customized land programs focused on archaeology, craft and textiles, art, bird watching, as well as the remote Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan.

We are keen to be responsible in our operations and have so far managed to retain the culture of pristine environments that contrasts significantly with so many of the well-trodden paths in the world, especially where we access areas well off the beaten track. The cruising on the Ganga has supported the foundation of the **Green Village Zero Rubbish Project**, as well as annual participation in **WTM Responsible Tourism Activities**. More importantly, we are involved in education and waste management projects through **Calcutta Rescue** and **Tiljala Shed**, two NGOs which work with vulnerable children and their families.



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