

MAHASHIVRATRI



MAHASHIVRATRI - THE BIG NIGHT OF LORD SHIVA

Imagine a Phalanx of Gods and Goddesses descending upon one place, in elaborately decorated *gurs* or Palanquins for a brief period every year and what you get is a town that is charged with an electrifying atmosphere. Come Shivratri hundreds of local deities invited from all over the Mandi district, start arriving in Mandi town amidst much fanfare. It's religious fervor at its best.

However during Mahashivratri, even the gods must follow certain rules in Mandi. The Main deity, also known as the Protector of Mandi, is Madho Rao (Lord Vishnu) and it is to him that every arriving deity must first pay obeisance. Next is a meeting with the Raja of Mandi, followed by a visit to the ancient Bhootnath (Lord Shiva) temple. Only then can the visiting deities proceed to their designated places.

The Fair actually begins the day after Mahashivratri and goes on for six days. The mornings are devoted to all things religious ritualistic while the evenings are dedicated to a Plethora of Cultural programme conducted at the Seri Manch.

SHIVRATRI FAIR AT MANDI

Mandi Shivaratri Fair is an annual fair that is held for 7 days starting with the Hindu festival of Shivaratri, in the Mandi town.

The Mandi Shivaratri fair is held as per Hindu calendar every year on the Krishna paksha 13th day/ 13th night (breaking fast/'vrata' on 14th after sunrise) of the waning moon in the month of Phalguna that corresponds to February/March as per Gregorian calendar. In view of the large number of Gods and Goddesses that are invited to the festival from its 81 temples, Mandi town has the title of 'Varanasi of the Hills'.

The Mandi festival or fair is particularly famous as the special fair transforms Mandi town into a venue of grand celebration when all Gods and Goddesses, said to be more than 200 deities of the Mandi district assemble here, starting with the day of Shivaratri. Mandi town located on the banks of the Beas River, popularly known as the "cathedral of temples", is one of the oldest towns of Himachal Pradesh with about 81 temples of different Gods and Goddesses in its periphery. There are several legends linked to the celebration of this event. The festival is centered around the protector deity of Mandi "Mado Rai" (Lord Vishnu) and Lord Shiva of the Bhootnath temple in Mandi.

The observance of the fair is marked on the Shivaratri day when the village Gods are carried in palanquins or rathas (chariots by people) to Mandi to pay homage to Madho Rai and the Raja. The Gods and Goddesses of various caste denominations such as Brahmin, Kshatriya carry the deity only by palanquins or on their back. However, some exceptions of carrying them in vehicles by some caste groups have been noted. Thereafter, the fair lasts for seven days. It is an accepted practice that every deity that is brought to the festival (decorated with glittering embroidered drapery) visits Madho Rai temple first to pay obeisance to Lord Vishnu and then proceed to the palace in a colourful procession called the Shoba Yatra known locally as 'Zareb', to honour the ruler (the regent of the Lord Mado Rai) (it is also said that Madho Rai comes out of his temple only once a year on the Shivaratri day and leads the procession and thereafter pay obeisance to Lord Shiva at the Bhootnath temple where the main festival of Shivaratri is held. The palanquins of the deities are swayed to the drum beats and folk music to indicate their happiness after visiting the temples of Vishnu and Shiva. There is pecking order that is maintained in the sequence of worship by the various deities invited to the fair, based on rank and status. The day after the Shivaratri, on the second day of the fair, a pageant of Gods with folk bands, dancers and devotees (all dressed in their colourful attire) and with lot of fanfare, is held in Paddal, a large open ground at the confluence of the Beas and Suketi rivers. The 200 odd deities that arrive from various shrines around the Mandi town are assigned places at the Paddal grounds as per the pecking order, where the devotees offer worship to all the deities. The pageant is held every day of the festival

One day before the concluding day of the festival at the end of fanfare, music and dance, in the evening, Jagaran (literal meaning "night vigil" - a puja or worship throughout the night) is held. On this occasion, a Guru and his disciple proclaim prophecies for the following year. On the last day of the festivities, prayers are chanted and after paying obeisance to Lord Shiva all the deities assembled in Mandi depart to their original abodes. On this occasion, chadars (a form of devotional drapery offering to the God) are offered. It is also an occasion when the head of the State, now a governor, is normally present on the last day and joins the worship and accompanies the pageant. During all these festivities, it is said that Rishi Kamru Nag (local god of rains), the presiding deity of the Maha Shivaratri, after paying his obeisance to Madho Rai moves to the Tarna mata temple at the top of the Tarna hill from where he watches the proceedings of the fair for seven days.

DELHI + NALAGARH + MANDI + TARAGARH + DHARMSHALA + AMRITSAR**16 Feb, 12: ARRIVE DELHI**

On arrival in Delhi, you will be Greeted and Escorted by Indo Asia Tour Executive to your Hotel (Rooms will be available 1200 Noon)

In its 3000 years of existence; seven cities have risen where the present capital of India stands. Here you'll encounter a fascinating blend of the ancient and the contemporary. Where government buildings, medieval palaces and bazaars exist beside a modern metropolis. Delhi is a city waiting to be explored.

Overnight in the Hotel

17 Feb, 12 DELHI

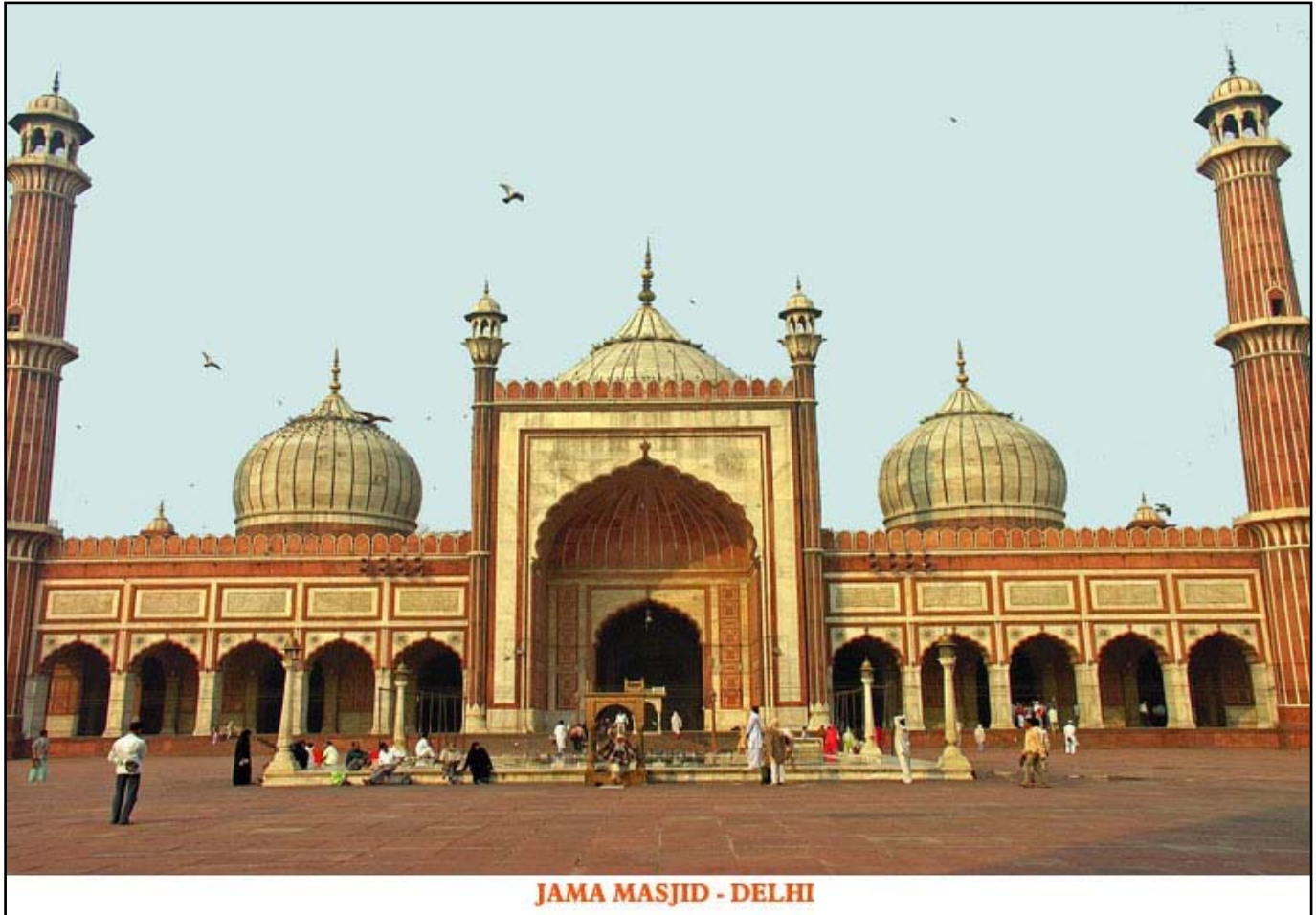
After breakfast, enjoy the sightseeing of Delhi.

We start the tour with the majestic **Red Fort (Closed on Monday)** - the 17th century imposing fortress built in red sandstone is surrounded by a huge 33m high boundary wall. Inside are exquisite palaces and beautiful gardens.



RED FORT - DELHI

Opposite the Red Fort lies **Jama Masjid** (Friday Mosque) made of red sandstone and white marble, completed in 1656 at a cost of one million Rupees has perfect proportions. India's largest mosque where more than 20,000 people can kneel in prayer. The interior of the prayer hall is divided into aisles by arches. The walls and floors are of marble inlay panels.



JAMA MASJID - DELHI

Also visit the **Raj Ghat** on the banks of the river Yamuna is Mahatma Gandhi's Memorial, where he was cremated following his assassination in January 1948. The memorial lies in the midst of landscaped gardens and made of a simple square platform of black marble inscribed with his last words "Hey Ram". An eternal flame burns 24 hours.

Drive through **Lutyens Delhi** and see **India Gate** - Built of Bharatpur-stone, commemorates the 70,000 Indian soldiers who died in the 1st world war. 13516 names of British and Indian soldiers killed in the Afghan War of 1919 are engraved on the arch and foundations. **Photo stop** at **Rashtrapati Bhawan** once the Viceroy's residence is now the official residence of the President of India.

Later in the afternoon explore **New Delhi**. Visit the **Humayun's Tomb**, built by his wife Haji Begum in the 16th. Century. An early example of Mughal architecture considered the predecessor of the Taj Mahal. The elements in its design - a squat building, lighted by high arched entrances, topped by bulbous dome and surrounded by the char bagh (garden divided into quadrants), water channels and fountains.

Later visit the **Qutub Minar** - the landmark of Delhi, a huge tower of victory started in 1199 and completed in 1368. The Minar is 72.5m high with a diameter at the base 14.4m and 2.7m at the top. The tower has 379 steps to the top.

Overnight in the Hotel

18 Feb, 12 DELHI / CHANDIGARH (BY TRAIN) - NALAGARH

After early breakfast transfer to the railway station and connect train Kalka Shatabadi - 0740 / 1105 Hrs to Chandigarh.

On arrival check in at the hotel

Arrive railway station and further drive to Nalagarh (50 Kms)

Nalagarh is a gateway to Himachal Pradesh in North India. The Fort which was built in 1421 during the reign of Raja Bikram Chand is located on a hillock at the foothills of the mighty Himalayas affording a panoramic view of the Shivalik hills beyond the Sirsa river. Nalagarh was ruled by the Chandela Rajputs who originated from Chanderi in the Bundelkhand region of central India.

Arrive and check in at the Hotel.

Overnight in the Hotel.

19 Feb, 12 NALAGARH / MANDI (150 Kms - 5 Hrs drive)

After breakfast drive to Mandi, arrive there and transfer to the Hotel.



BEAS RIVER - MANALI

Built along the Beas River is the historic town of Mandi, the gateway to the Kullu valley . Mandi is renowned for its 81 old stone temples and their enormous range of fine carving, it is often called the 'Varanasi of the Hills'.

Evening at leisure.

Overnight in the Hotel.

20 Feb, 12 MANDI

Full day to visit Maha Shivratri celebrations in Mandi town.

Evening visit Shiva temple (Bhutnath/ Trilokinath) to see the Maha shivratri celebrations.



Bhutnath Temple: The temple, located in the heart of the town was built by Raja Ajber Sen in 1527 AD. The temple is devoted to Lord Shiva and was built at the time when State Capital was shifted from Bhiuli to present place. There is tradition of Raj Madhav Rao, the deity who ruled the Mandi state, visiting the temple and offer prayers before starting the procession of Shivratri Fair along with all the visiting hill deities.

TrilokNath Temple: The temple of Triloknath was built by Sultan Devi, queen of Raja Ajber Sen in 1520 AD. Temple houses the three-faced image of Lord Shiva and is located in Purani Mandi across Victoria Bridge on Mandi Pathankot National Highway. Trilokinath temple is one of the oldest temples in the town with typical architecture and sculptural artistry. Idols of Narda and Sharda and many Hindu gods are also worshipped along with the main deity Trilokinath.

Overnight in the Hotel.

21 Feb, 12 MANDI

Full day to explore the **Rewalsar town**. Rewalsar which is holy place for Tibetans who call it as Tso Pema. Rawalsar is sacred to adherents of three major religions - Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism.

Visit the famous Hindu temple and a Gurdwara, This Gurudwara was built in 1930 by Raja Joginder Sen of Mandi.

Overnight in the Hotel

22 Feb, 12 MANDI / TARAGARH (120 Kms - 3 to 04 Hrs drive)

After breakfast drive to Taragarh enroute visiting Bir monastery & Vaidyanath Shiva temple at Baijnath.



On arrival check in at hotel

Situated at an altitude of **1000 m above sea level**, Taragarh lies on a 15 acre are of tea plantations at the foothills of Dhauladhar Mountains and offers picturesque views of the snow capped peaks.

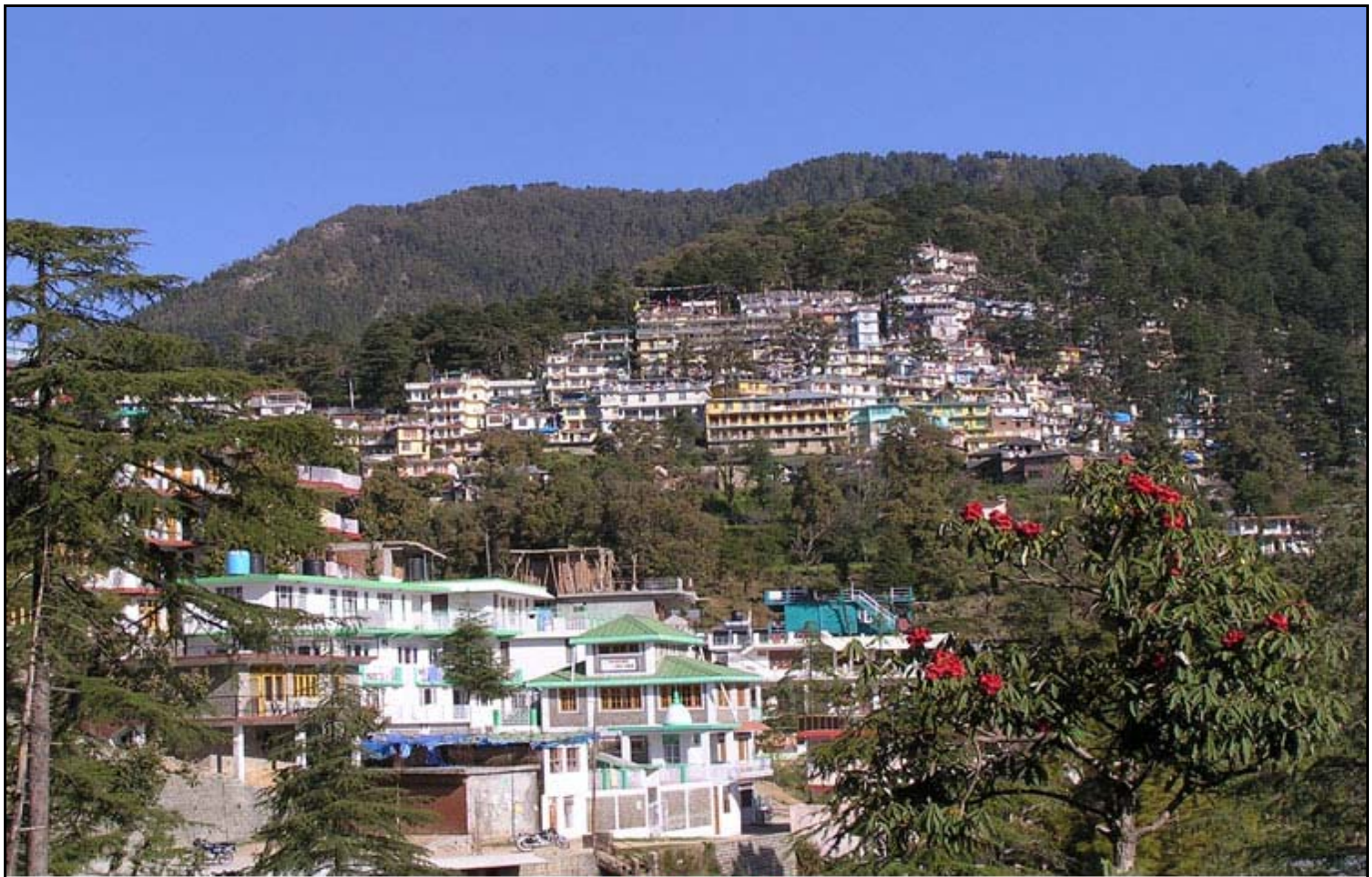
Overnight in the Hotel

23 Feb, 12 TARAGARH / DHARMSHALA (51 Kms - 2 Hrs drive)

After breakfast visit to Tashijong Monastery.

Later drive to Dharamsala enroute visiting Tea gardens in Palampur & Chamunda Devi temple.

On arrival check in at hotel



DHARAMSALA

Dharamshala has monasteries representing all the three important sects of Buddhism. The right place indeed to get introduced to one of the most popular religions of the world.

Evening at leisure

Overnight in the Hotel

24 Feb, 12 DHARMSHALA

Morning visit the monasteries and later visit the Tibetan Norbulingka Institute where Tibetans learn to paint the Thangkas, stitch garments and craft articles of wood. The museum close by is equally interesting. Thereafter visit to the Tibetan astro institute, with its college, the library and the unique museum. The Tibetan government in exile is spread all over here.



NORBULINGKA MONASTERY - DHARAMSALA

Afternoon visit HH The Dalai Lama temple and make a Kora walk around His Holiness residence.

Evening free to explore McLeodganj town on own.

Overnight in the Hotel.

25 Feb, 12 DHARMSHALA / AMRITSAR (200 Kms - 6 Hrs drive)

After breakfast drive to Amritsar.

On arrival check in at hotel.

Evening visit Wagah border for Flag ceremony.

You can also have the optional to visit Golden temple at night to view Palaki Sahib ceremony.

Wagah Border:

Located at a distance of 28 kilometers from Amritsar, Wagah, an army outpost on Indo-Pak border - between Amritsar and Lahore, is an elaborate complex of buildings, roads and barriers on both sides. At the entrance of this outpost, there is a sightseeing gate with an inscription "Swarna Jayanti". From this place, a panoramic view of the landscape is seen. There are electrified fences with 66,000 volts of electric current.

This place is famous for its "Beating the Retreat" ceremony performed by the soldiers in evening. Soldiers from India and Pakistan perform a flag march. The flags of both the countries are brought down. Then the gates between India and Pakistan are opened. Soldiers perform some drills and then the complex is illuminated.



The whole ceremony takes about half an hour. En route Wagah, the tourists chance upon seeing some of the most fertile lands of Amritsar.

Overnight in the Hotel

26 Feb, 12 AMRITSAR - DELHI (Train)

After breakfast visit the following:

Golden Temple

Sri Harmandir Sahib, also known as Sri Darbar Sahib or Golden Temple, is named after Hari (God) i.e. the temple of God. The **Harmandir Sahib** is the holiest shrine in Sikhism and is a major pilgrimage destination for Sikhs from all over the world. Construction of the Golden Temple began in **1574** on land donated by the Mughal emperor Akbar and was completed in 1601, but restoration and embellishment continued over the years.

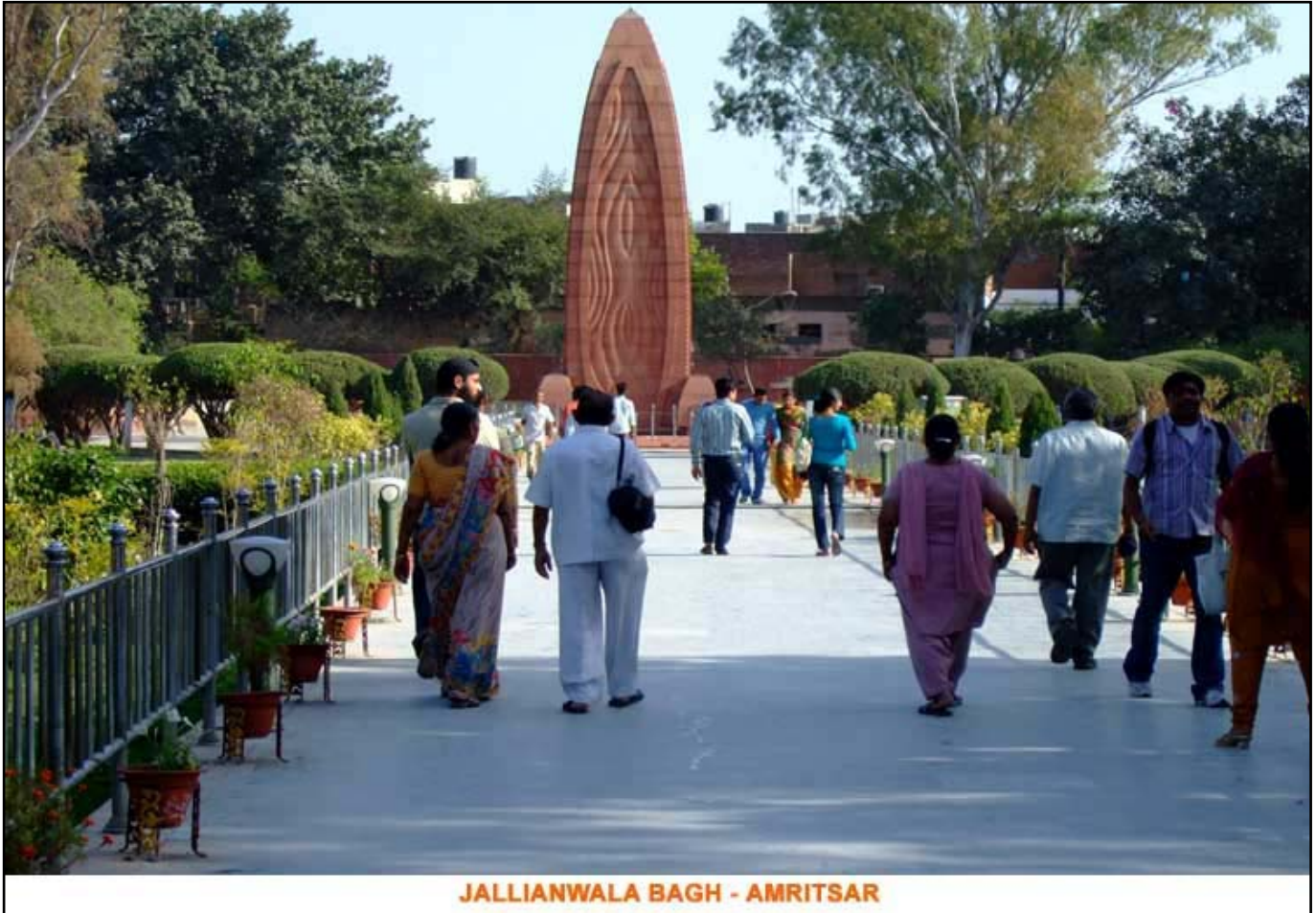
The most famous and sacred part of the Golden Temple complex is the **Hari Mandir (Divine Temple)** or Darbar Sahib (Court of the Lord), which is the beautiful golden structure at the



center of a large body of water. The water that surrounds the Hari Mandir is a sacred pool known as the Amrit Sarovar, "Pool of Nectar." Another major highlight of the Golden Temple complex is the Guru-ka-Langar, a **dining hall** where around 35,000 people a day are fed for free by temple volunteers.

Jallianwala Bagh (Garden):

This place is noted for its most notorious massacre under British rule. The incident took place on April 13, 1919, when thousands of people had gathered in Jallianwala Bagh to voice their feelings against the repressive policies of the British Government. This ground surrounded by high walls on all sides has only a narrow alley for access.



JALLIANWALA BAGH - AMRITSAR

General Dyer (Lieutenant Governor of the province at that time) personally led the troops to the sight and ordered his men to open fire without any warning. It resulted in the death of 379 and injured more than 1200. Till date, the bullet holes can be seen on the walls and adjoining buildings. A section of wall with bullet marks still visible is preserved along with the memorial well, in which some people jumped to escape.

Today this ground has been changed to a park and it has a pleasant garden. At the east end of the garden there is a large memorial, which commemorates the sacrifices of hundreds of men, women and children who were victims of ruthless firing of the British forces.

Later evening transfer to the railway station to board the train to Delhi.

(Swarna Shatabdi - Dept time - 1700 Hrs - Arr time - 2305 Hrs)

Arrive Delhi and transfer to the Hotel.

Overnight in the Hotel



INDO ASIA TOURS

27 Feb, 12 DELHI DEPARTURE

In time transfer to the airport to board the flight back home.
(Check out time is 1200 Hrs)

= End of the Services =