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Pandaw Links South and East India with New 18-Night River Expedition

Long-haul travelers know the trade-off: the farther you go, the more time you lose to transfers and transportation. Pandaw eliminates complicated logistics and long layovers with a new 18-night expedition that trades transit for time-in-place combining two of its India sailings, the Kerala backwaters and the Hooghly River, into one seamless journey. No other river cruise line offers this connection, making Pandaw the first and only river cruise line to link over 2,000 kilometers of India in a single itinerary.

“Long-haul travelers don't just want to check off destinations; they want to understand them,” said Pandaw Founder & CEO, Paul Strachan. “This itinerary lets guests experience two very different Indias side by side, with time in each region to connect with local communities and learn from their cultures. With local guides, we take guests into Kerala's backwater villages and along Bengal's colonial trade routes, where craft traditions are still very much alive. That kind of contrast, and that kind of access, is impossible to find anywhere else.”

From Kerala's Backwaters to Historic Trade Routes

The journey begins in Kochi, where guests cruise through a labyrinthine system of more than 900 kilometres of lakes and rivers. Shaped by centuries of maritime exchange, the region reflects influences from Arab, Chinese, and European traders, still visible today in the city's architecture. As the ship moves through palm-lined waterways, guests get a sense of the region by visiting historic religious sites such as the Mannarasala Sree Nagaraja Temple known for its female chief priestess and by enjoying traditional performances onboard such as Kathakali and Mohiniattam, art forms that remain central to Kerala's cultural identity.

After exploring Southern India, the itinerary includes a two-night stay in Mumbai, offering a natural break between cruises while adding a key gateway city to the overall journey. Visits to sites such as the Gateway of India provide additional context on the country's colonial history and its role in global trade.

Exploring the Hooghly River and Bengal's Colonial Legacy

The second half of the expedition follows the Hooghly River in West Bengal, historically one of India's most important trade arteries. For centuries, this river served as the primary entry point for European merchants, with the Portuguese, Dutch, Danish, and French all establishing settlements along its banks. The journey leads toward Kolkata, which remained the capital of the British Raj until 1911, with layers of colonial and local history still visible throughout the region.

Excursions along this stretch focus on craftsmanship and showcasing local life in Eastern India. Guests ride rickshaws through the terracotta temple complex at Kalna, visit brass workers in the riverside village of Matiari, and explore Murshidabad, a former seat of power known for its palaces, mosques, and gardens. These experiences provide insight into a region that played a central role in shaping India's political and commercial history, while still maintaining its strong handcrafted traditions.

Designed for Longer-Stay, Higher-Value Bookings

The new itinerary brings together two of Pandaw's river cruises into a single, multi-region journey, offering trade partners a higher-value product that increases length of stay while simplifying itinerary planning. With ships carrying fewer than 18 cabins, the expedition is built for access and authenticity. Navigating narrow waterways that larger vessels cannot reach, guests enjoy an intimate connection to the communities along the river.

The Kerala Backwaters & Hooghly River combo expedition is now open for booking, with departures starting in September 2026. For more information, visit:

www.pandaw.com/expeditions/kerala-backwaters-the-hooghly-river

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About Pandaw Cruises:

Founded in 1995, Pandaw Cruises is renowned for its unique, innovative and immersive river cruise experiences across Asia. With a fleet of 13 beautifully crafted ships, designed with a distinctive colonial charm, Pandaw Cruises provides travellers with intimate access to the heart of Asian culture, heritage and natural beauty.