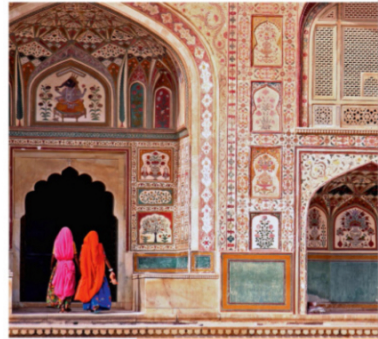




*WE GET A
FRONT-ROW
VIEW OF LIFE
IN INDIA*



PHOTOS: BOB/CLARE PROUL GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK, WING. DETAILS CORRECT AT TIME OF WRITING

floors. More importantly, as roads – especially good ones – are scarce in West Bengal, this is by far the best, and most comfortable, way to travel.

Every day, we're out exploring – not notching up world-famous sights this time but getting a front-row view of life in rural India. Like the women in colourful saris in Matari queuing at the village pump for water, and the copper beaters rhythmically bashing out a living making pots. We see centuries-old temples and mosques left behind by the passage of time, and tour a vast neoclassical palace in Murshidabad with 1,000 doors – including many that don't open to confuse intruders.

Different worlds

Back on board, we learn about Indian cooking from our chef and the vagaries of the Ganges, India's most sacred river, from our guides. During the monsoon, we discover, the river breaks its banks,

villages are engulfed and no cruises run between April and late September.

We are shaken from our river reverie by a day spent in Kolkata before we disembark. Once the capital of the British Raj, it's now a busy city where faded buildings recall the days of empire. We visit the flower market with its endless stalls of marigolds, the great Victoria Memorial and Mother Teresa's home – and I say a silent prayer as our bus driver negotiates the cars, bikes and people going every which way on the chaotic roads. It might be a very different world to the one we have just cruised through, but I love them both.

✚ 13-day Golden Triangle and the Sacred Ganges, from £6,299pp; uniworld.com