

# The far horizons

When clients are looking for something different, it may be an opportune moment to broaden their horizons and suggest an exotic river cruise, as **Jeannine Williamson** discovers



Guests will share the Brahmaputra with local villagers. Right: monks on Majuli island make a joyful noise



*Mahabaahu* itself offers one of many photo ops on a Brahmaputra cruise



## BRAHMAPUTRA SELLING TIPS

- 1**  
Spacious colonial-style vessel designed to cope with the Brahmaputra's currents
- 2**  
Fresh, regional food that is very different from Indian restaurants in western regions
- 3**  
Shore tours in private cars – each accompanied by a crew member – rather than a minibus
- 4**  
Free daily yoga classes suitable for all levels
- 5**  
Option for an extension to take in the famous Golden Triangle and the Taj Mahal

Photos: Mayuresh Hendre

**R**iver cruising is normally associated with Europe, but once your clients have sailed on the more traditional routes, there are some exciting waterways further afield waiting to be explored. CLIA UK & Ireland's annual *River Cruise Review* revealed that in 2017 India experienced the highest percentage passenger increase in far-flung itineraries, with a 27.5 per cent growth in intrepid travellers heading for the Ganges and Brahmaputra. Similarly, other up-and-coming exotic destinations include the Amazon.

This month we take a close-up look at the Brahmaputra and Amazon so you can offer your customers the thrilling trip of a lifetime.

## BRAHMAPUTRA

The world's fastest flowing river rises in the Himalayas and courses 2,391 miles to the Bay of Bengal, running the entire length of the north-eastern Indian state of Assam on the way. Rising the height of a three-storey building during the monsoon season, the Brahmaputra is a mighty waterway that seems to shape every feature of the surrounding landscape.

### HIGHLIGHTS

With few hotel boats sailing on the Brahmaputra, India specialist Far Horizon Tours offers a pioneering itinerary that takes in remote areas, including many that would otherwise be inaccessible, on its sturdy and comfortable vessel, the 46-passenger *Mahabaahu*. Knowledgeable guides are assigned to stay with passengers for the duration, accompanying them on diverse trips to temples, tea plantations and isolated villages

where visitors are a rarity and attract curious yet always polite attention.

Standout excursions include a trip to Majuli, the world's largest river island, to see joyful monks worship through song and dance. There are exhilarating waterborne safari trips on the *Mahabaahu*'s skiffs, and an unforgettable expedition to Kaziranga National Park, home to India's 'big five'; the one-horned rhinoceros, Asian elephant, wild water buffalo, Indian bison and the magnificent Royal Bengal tiger, which lucky visitors may stand a chance of spotting.

### ASK THE EXPERT

"It is the only river cruise apart from the Zambezi that offers three safaris by boats, jeeps and elephants inside Kaziranga, which is known as the Serengeti of India," says Sanjay Basu, managing director of Far Horizon Tours. "The naturalist makes each day like being in a bird and wildlife paradise – visits to silk-weaving villages and learning about the birth of English breakfast tea are all part of being in Assam. Temple visits provide great cultural and spiritual experiences, and barbecues and drinks on the silver sands of deserted islands are very special. The on-board facilities, including a heated swimming pool, make it a very comfortable ship and, with 55 per cent of deck space devoted to public areas, it never feels crowded."

### WHO WOULD IT SUIT?

This is for open-minded customers looking for an authentic and insightful experience that will take them into the heart of rural life. Although *Mahabaahu* has a lift, passengers need to be comfortable walking reasonable distances, sometimes on uneven ground.

## SELL IT

### FRED RIVER CRUISES

offers the nine-night Kolkata & the Mighty Brahmaputra River itinerary departing 28 March 2019 from £2,799pp, including a two-night pre-cruise B&B stay in Kolkata, a full-board seven-night cruise and return flights from London. 0800 021 3189 [fredrivercruises.co.uk/far-horizons](http://fredrivercruises.co.uk/far-horizons)

## DID YOU KNOW

The *Mahabaahu* has an on-board tailor who makes tops, dresses and other clothing from lengths of silk and fabric bought in villages or from the ship's own stock. Prices are very reasonable and garments are often ready the next day.



## River cruising: Exotic waterways

Skiff excursions take passengers even deeper into the rain forest



### AMAZON SELLING TIPS

- 1**  
A truly off-the-beaten-track experience
- 2**  
Small-ship cruising that gives something back to the local communities
- 3**  
Passengers enjoy Amazonian dishes made from local produce
- 4**  
Swimming in the river with wild dolphins is a not-to-be-missed holiday experience
- 5**  
Add an extended pre or post-cruise stay in the culture-rich and foodie Peruvian capital, Lima

## AMAZON

Rising in Peru, South America's largest river, and the second-longest in the world, flows for 4,345 miles: more than 60 per cent of Peruvian territory is covered by the Amazon rainforest, greater than any other country. Iquitos, less than a two-hour flight from Lima, is the gateway for cruises on the Amazon.

### HIGHLIGHTS

Waking up to the sound of the dense rainforest coming to life and sailing deep into creeks with sharp-eyed naturalists are key experiences that make an Amazon river cruise aboard the *Amatista* totally unique. Early morning and evening skiff excursions make the most of rich bird and wildlife spotting opportunities, and passengers might see chattering monkeys, beautiful pink river dolphins, sloths, bats, caiman, iguanas and more in the heart of the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve.

Back on dry land, meetings with indigenous villagers, who depend on the river for fish and the rainforest for food, provide a real insight into the people who make their homes on the river banks. Most notable is a visit to a shaman, or spiritual healer, who uses plants to cure all manner of ailments and carry out rituals.

### ASK THE EXPERT

"The Amazon continues to be incredibly popular among wildlife lovers and those looking to get off-grid to immerse themselves in the heart of

*Amatista* offers a unique off-grid experience



## SELL IT

### G ADVENTURES

offers a six-night Amazon Riverboat Adventure itinerary departing 8 April 2019 from £1,279pp, including two nights' B&B in Lima, a four-night full-board cruise, internal flights and transfers. 0344 272 2040

## DID YOU KNOW

G Adventures' solo travellers don't pay a supplement if they share a twin-bed cabin with a same-sex roommate. For singles who want their own space, the My Own Room option enables them to book a private cabin for an additional fee.

the jungle," says Sarah Schlederer, marine sales specialist at G Adventures. "Aboard the 30-passenger *Amatista*, travellers can get up close to exotic species such as toucans, sloths and pink dolphins, which are seen on daily skiff excursions led by experienced guides."

She continues: "Skiffs enable us to take guests deeper into the jungle down small tributaries where wildlife is much more diverse. Each journey includes visits to villages where travellers learn about local life from food to handicrafts, and can enjoy a meal on the floor, jungle-style, with an indigenous family."

### WHO WOULD IT SUIT?

This is for well-travelled, adventurous clients of all ages who support responsible tourism and don't mind rain (ponchos and waterproof boots are provided). A reasonable degree of fitness is needed for getting on and off the boat on to muddy banks and for boarding skiffs. ⚓