



DURGA PUJA

KOLKATA PHOTO WORKSHOP

27 SEPTEMBER - 3 OCTOBER 2022

Robert van Koesveld &
Manjit Singh Hoonjan



Welcome

Kolkata is a city with a deep soul and so many photographers fall in love with the place and its people. Known as the City of Joy for its soulful embodiment of culture, love, mystery, respect, enthusiasm, and some amazingly sweet delicacies. Kolkata (Calcutta) is a city that holds a perfect juxtaposition between the old world and the modern one.

To visit during the enthusiastic preparation time for the Durga Puja is to see the artistry and vibrancy of its communities at their fullest as they embrace this annual Hindu festival. To experience the Puja as it is celebrated by ordinary families and diverse communities is to glimpse something very special.







Highlights

- Experience Kolkata during the creativity and excitement of the Durga Puja
- See clay, straw and bamboo transform into the Goddess Durga.
- Be amazed by pandals (temporary shrines) being constructed and completed.
- Consider cultural and religious beliefs, and insights behind India's largest festival.
- Photograph in a fascinating artisan's neighbourhood unique in the world.
- Get under the skin of one of India's largest flower markets.
- Explore with a renowned Kolkata photographer, guide and resident – Manjit.
- Enjoy individual coaching from two expert photographers - Robert and Manjit.



Kolkata (Calcutta until 2001) on the banks of the Hooghly River was the child of the British East India Company that became the second city of the British Empire, and then a leader in the Independence Movement. Over the centuries it has been a major Indian centre of commerce, culture and education. The diversity, cultural and visual richness, and unceasing energy of Kolkata makes it very exciting and memorable. It offers photographers endless special opportunities to make atmospheric images centred on people and place.

Robert van Kesteren
PHOTOGRAPHY



The Durga Puja

is an annual Hindu festival that is particularly popular and traditionally celebrated in West Bengal and particularly in Kolkata. The festival is observed in the Indian calendar month of Ashwin (September–October). While Durga Puja, is a ten-day festival, we will start before the actual festival, so we can experience the diverse festival preparations which are especially photogenic.

Pandals

are temporary shrines housed in fabricated structures or tents. Kolkata has been witnessing extreme creativity of Pandals and theme-based Pujas for quite some time during the festival. Groups of creative young people raise money to build extraordinary structures and their themes vary each year. Recent themes have included celebration of humanity, folk culture, sex work, womanhood, cinema, marginalization of queer persons and transgender persons, and pro-environment. Others have chosen metaphorical themes such as celebration of maati (literally, soil or ash) and 'finding one's own light'. Pandals have also replicated existing temples, structures, and monuments, and some have even been made of elements such as metal scraps, nails, and turmeric.



Workshop Structure

Our key focus is the intensity of preparations for the Puja and the Pandals. However, we also visit locations such as the flower market which are of course also caught up in the excitement. The clay idol makers district is full of activity, and we will see the work of the artisans as they create the goddess who will live in simple home shrines or in ornate and spectacular Pandals. The Pandals are a special experience, and we will meet a range of artists groups as they bring their unique structures to completion.

Most days we will start early in the morning. This avoids much of the heat and traffic. It also is in sync with the activity cycle of many of the craftspeople we want to visit. Late morning, we return to our hotel. There will be time for a rest if desired, a freshen up, lunch, a teaching session or individual coaching. Then we head out once again into the evening.

Day 0 Tuesday 27th September

Flights into India typically arrive during the late night. We have included a room booking for the evening of 27th September (and morning of 28th September) so you can rest on arrival without waiting for a room. Our hotel, the beautiful five-star Oberoi Grand, is very comfortable and well located.

Day 1 Wednesday 28th September (3rd day of Puja cycle)

We begin with a get-together in the hotel in the afternoon. Following introductions and an orientation briefing, we will head out for our first photography and cultural experience. Manjit will have been tracking the construction of various Pandals around the city so we will have a range of locations to visit each day

Kumortuli: We will visit this hive of activity as artisans rush to complete the clay idols which are such a part of this festival. We will return in different light another day.



Day 2 Thursday 29th September (4th day of Puja cycle)

Flower Market: Flowers form an integral part of any Hindu festival, from being used in worship and rituals to decorations. Thousands of kilograms of flowers are 'consumed' during the Durga Puja festival. And what better way to photograph this than at one of the largest flower markets of India. We will start early and see the flowers arrive fresh from the fields and see them make their way to the market and finally be bought. The frenzy of the market is extraordinary and offers a challenging environment to photograph. The Hooghly River flowing beside the flower market lends itself of more picturesque moments besides allowing us an insight into the rituals and traditions.

North Kolkata lanes: The older part of the city of Kolkata reveals old Calcutta, and anything ancient brings with it richer tradition and culture. So we will be walking to experience the fascinating lanes of North Kolkata and use it as a backdrop to document an old city living between the old and the new. The urban decay and the labyrinth of lanes offers absolutely wonderful opportunities to pause life and photograph it.



Day 4 Saturday “Maha Sashthi” 1st October (6th day of Puja cycle)

‘Pandal hopping’ begins today and tomorrow. Many people head from site to site to experience exquisite and sometimes quirky creations.

Kalighat and the Kali temple area are well worth a visit in the evening.

Day 5 Sunday “Maha Saptami”. 2nd October (7th day of Puja cycle)

Early morning rituals of the puja are starting at the river so we will be there to experience this activity. Later we will visit at a private residence to observe the puja of an old Kolkata family.

South Kolkata: Late afternoon/evening we explore the southern part of the city that is more modern in comparison to the north and hence offers a very different canvas. Many southern neighbourhoods offer gorgeous Art Deco architecture and very different renditions of the ‘paara-r adda’ (an informal gathering of people from the neighbourhood). Kolkata is known for its adda and we will experience them amidst the backdrop of the festival and architecture. Some of the most famous Pandals of Kolkata are from the south of the city

Day 6 Monday “Maha Ashtami” 3rd October (8th day of Puja cycle)

Ashtami marks the beginning of the end of the Durga Puja and is when the religious and ritual fervour is at its maximum. A simple example of how grand the festivities are –108 lotuses are offered to the Goddess and a 108 butter lamps are lit for the worship (arati). Today we attend a typical Durga Arati.

We will wind up as a group this evening over our final dinner. Many guests will leave late in the evening or morning.

Day 7 Monday 3rd October

You have your room until checkout time if you wish. If you would like to extend your stay please let us know.



Manjit Singh Hoonjan
PHOTOGRAPHY

Teaching and Coaching

Developing as a photographer is not just a product of time. Experience needs reflection to be genuinely useful developmentally. Technical skills are valuable at times, but simply acquiring a bunch of techniques, or a bunch of cameras, won't really take you forward.

While we can talk about technical matters if appropriate for you, we are most interested in helping deepen your conceptual process so that you come away with images that matter to you. If you are open to sharing your images and visual process, we can support your development. The focus on the Puja for this workshop means you should be able to build a narrative image series or body of work.

Robert will offer some group teaching tailored to the actual participants, and with a small group we will be able to converse and coach individually along the way.

Still, we won't be intruding, and if you just want to work on your own, we will leave you to it.

Photography Matters:

The trip is designed for photographers, who will get good use of all photography gear from iPhone to DSLR and beyond. Non-photographers may enjoy the trip as well, especially if they have a plan for activities while others are photographing, eg meeting locals, writing, sketching or really looking.

We can advise you more about options after you join the tour. We will offer individual photography coaching and some structured talks during the tour.

Please bring some examples of your images and examples of other images you are interested in, so we can be clear about your goals. If you bring a laptop we can work on post-processing your images together, when time permits.

Physical requirements:

This is not a trek, but we shall be walking in each location, often on uneven paving. We will often get to the locations by private bus, van or taxi, but then there will be walking and sometimes steps. So, you'll need firm walking shoes, rather than full-on trekking boots. There will be lots of early starts and late finishes as well, though often some down time in the middle of the day. It won't hurt if you get fitter before you come. Expect to be outside in this wonderful environment a good deal and to be adaptable to the unexpected and to great opportunities.





Who Should Come

India is always intense and heading back after covid shutdowns will mean adapting to local protocols and extra flexibility. We imagine reasonably experienced travellers who are keen to get back on the road will welcome this opportunity. We aim to together reduce our covid risk on this shorter trip by maintaining best practices.

Those with any level of experience as a photographer will enjoy this trip, as will artists and nonphotographers who can, of course, enjoy making written or sketched images. We do spend lots of time in most locations, so you need to be open to that.

In terms of gear, there are no special requirements, other than your ability to carry it; we recommend travelling reasonably light. Anything from a good phone camera through to a mirrorless, dslr or medium format camera is fine. If you are not a photographer something like a sketch book or writing journal will be good too.

We provide a detailed predeparture document to help with gear and most other questions.

One Great City : One Great Hotel

We base ourselves in the historic and beautiful Oberoi Grand. It is perfectly located and has world-class facilities including multi-cultural cuisine, courtyard pool, gym, spa. The hotel is an island of calm (and cool) amid the energy and busyness of this vibrant city. Many famous sites are within walking distance eg the Victoria Memorial, the Indian Museum, the Maidan and the Hooghly River.

Weather

Late September it is still a little hot in Kolkata but that's when the festival is! Temperatures range from an average high of 32 c to an evening low of 26 c. It rains some days and humidity can be high at times. So, we design our days around the weather and start early each morning before returning to the comfort of our hotel through the heat of the day. That's when we will focus on image review and teaching. Then as it cools again, we head back out. Luckily the pattern also means we are in key locations at the very best time.



Manjit Singh Hoonyan
PHOTOGRAPHY

Just Six

3-6 participants and two photography coaches, we (Robert and Manjit) can offer support and guidance to take your image-making further and deeper. It also means we can travel in one van and be flexible to respond to interesting options that present themselves. We are excited at the notion of offering others creative opportunities during this wonderful period in Kolkata

Food

Many of our meals will be based in our high standard five-star hotel. Other meals will be in specially selected restaurants. Western visitors to India are best to avoid local water, cut fruit or raw vegetables. Bottled water will always be available. Covid means the usual hotel buffet is not available so we have only priced in first and last dinners plus all breakfasts. This means guests can choose their meals and even eat in their rooms occasionally.

Managing Our Health Together

Travel is just starting to re-open and we are all learning how to manage the possibility of infection. Our hotel has very strong covid focused protocols in place. All workshop guests will need to be fully vaccinated and optimally boosted. A recent negative test result is requested (this is also a requirement of the hotel). We will adhere to mask and hand cleaning protocols of course. Obviously, it is a busy city and so we will do our best to maintain social distancing using longer lenses and private vehicles. (Please see special terms and conditions also)



The Team

Manjit has been leading photography walks in Kolkata for many years, enthusiastically sharing his beloved home-city with visitors from all over the world. He really knows the historical and cultural layers of the city and its people, and we will draw upon the special relationships he has built over the years. He is a skilled and committed photographer and generously coaches his guests in making better images. Robert, an experienced phototour leader and award-winning photographer, has visited Kolkata several times, always finding new stories and making picture essays.

Robert van Koesveld

Robert is a full-time photographer whose work reflects his life-time interest in cultural travel. Since retiring early from his psycho-therapy practice in Perth, he has concentrated on photography, and travels extensively. Robert co-authored (with wife Libby Lloyd) the photo book 'Bhutan Heartland: Travels in the Land of the Thunder Dragon' (Fremantle Press, 2010). His book 'Geiko and Maiko of Kyoto' (Presence Publishing, 2016), in advance form, won the Australian Professional Photography Awards category of Best Photo Book for 2015. As well as leading phototours in Bhutan, India, China and Japan, he has had solo exhibitions in Kyoto and Dubai, and articles published in Kyoto Journal and Better Photography magazines. Robert is interested in capturing 'spirit of place' and 'people with presence' in a cultural context. He is increasingly fascinated with the liminal – the space between. www.robertvankoesveld.com

Manjit Singh Hoonjan

Manjit pioneered heritage and cultural walking phototours in Kolkata and is a full-time guide of these much-valued experiences, recommended by The Guardian, The Telegraph and the Wall Street Journal; he recently assisted Steve McCurry photographing for five days in Kolkata. Manjit's passion for Kolkata and his personable style means he has gathered an extraordinary range of knowledge and contacts, so that each tour is unique, responding to the interests of the guest. As a professional photographer he is primarily focused on the people of his home-city who bring alive its fascinating history, cultural richness, unique architecture and urban narratives. His photos have been published in many publications, including National Geographic, Outlook Traveller, Financial Times (UK) magazine, Esquire (Malaysia) and Lonely Planet. His images of the idol-makers colony (Kumortuli) and the Durga Puja Festival were recently showcased in London. His philosophy of travel and photography reflects Henry Miller's: "One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things".



Tour Dates: 27 September – 3 October 2022

Price: INR 349000 (approx. \$US4450, \$AU6420)

The Durga Puja Photography Workshop is entirely in Kolkata India.

1. What's Included in the Photography Workshop

- Robert van Koesveld and Manjit Singh Hoonjan as your workshop guides and coaches
- Full Single Room accommodation in Kolkata
- Your room is included for guests arriving late at night on 27th, before the workshop begins on the 28th September.
- Breakfast, bottled water, dinner for the first and last day.
- All tips and gratuities while with the group
- Airport pickup and drop-off at start and end of tour
- Small group of 3-6 guests
- Pre-trip advice and briefing notes

2. What's NOT Included

- Lunch and Dinner, (dinner for the first and final dinners together is included)
- International flights
- Domestic flights
- Visa for India.
- Travel insurance with covid cover. (**Required)
- Camera insurance
- Personal expenses
- Room Service extras, minibar, or alcoholic drinks.

A deposit of INR 100000 per person is required when booking this tour. The balance should be paid by 45 days before departure.

For further information and to reserve your place please email:

info@calcuttaphototours.com

The tour operator is Calcutta Photo Tours
264/D Bepin Behari Ganguly Street,
Kolkata – 700012

WhatsApp & Phone: +918777761008

Manjit Singh Hoonjan
PHOTOGRAPHY



Robust van Kooijeld
PHOTOGRAPHY







Season's Greetings

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