

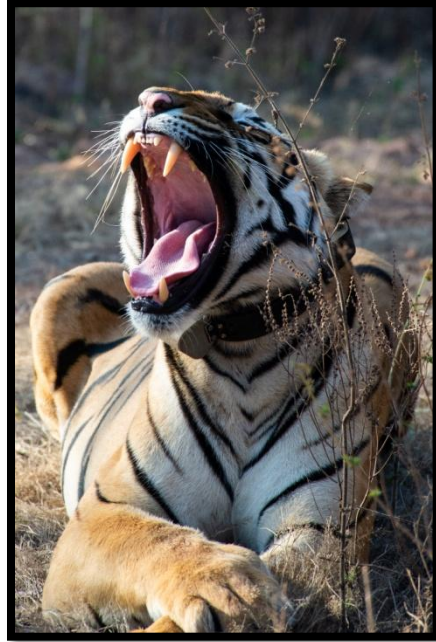
Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve

Chandrapur, India

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Species list key:

SS = single sighting

SI = single individual

P0 = no photo opportunity

MS = multiple sightings

MI = multiple individuals

P1 = poor photo opportunity

P2 = average photo opportunity

P3 = excellent photo opportunity

Species		Notes	
Tiger	MS/MI/P3	11 different individuals; variety of behaviors	Lifer
Sloth Bear	MS/MI/P3	3 sightings; 2 ran off when we stopped jeep	Lifer
Dhole	MS/MI/P3	Same pair seen multiple times	Lifer
Ruddy Mongoose	MS/MI/P2	Five individuals, including a pair	Lifer
Gray Mongoose	SS/SI/P0	Quick sighting	Lifer
Indian Treeshrew	MS/MI/P1	Two sightings; Laura spotted both first	Lifer
Gray Langur	MS/MI/P3	Many	Lifer
Three-striped Palm Squirrel	MS/MI/P2		Lifer
Indian Hare	MS/MI/P1	Only seen on pre-dawn drive to far gate	Lifer
Eurasian Wild Boar	MS/MI/P2		Lifer
Spotted Deer	MS/MI/P3		Lifer
Sambar Deer	MS/MI/P3		
Red Muntjac	MS/MI/P1	Only two individuals	
Gaur	MS/MI/P3	Watched tiger hunt calf	Lifer
Nilgai	MS/MI/P2		Lifer
Four-horned Antelope	SS/SI/P1		Lifer
Indian Flying Fox	SS/MI/P2	I asked to see a roost	Lifer

NOTES:

-We made our lodging reservations and gate requests early. The reserve is broken into core and buffer areas. Tiger sightings are more common in the core and numerous people we encountered at the lodge had safaris only to the buffer zone as the permits for the core had all been spoken for when they booked their trips.

-Svasara Jungle Lodge was fantastic. Great people, great food and very close to a popular gate (Kolara). Mattia Altieri wrote a trip report for mammalwatching and stayed at this Lodge.

-I am embarrassed at how long it took me to figure this out. We were not driving around looking for random tigers, we were looking to find known tigers holding territories in the area we could access at each gate. Current tiger population is over 150 individuals, however 80% of the protected area is not open to tourists so the majority of these tigers are not realistically available for viewing. Gather current information regarding sightings and (perhaps) cubs before deciding on visiting.

-As of December 1, 2018 cell phones are banned in the park. Our guide told us that mobiles had become a real problem. People were increasingly pressuring drivers to get closer for photos and information was being shared in real time regarding tiger locations (I am not sure how much of a problem that second point was... the jeeps do not have radios, but information travels very fast by mouth). But the final straw was a man who was standing in a jeep trying to get a selfie with a tiger in the background when the jeep moved forward he fell out. Our guide happened to be in the next jeep and moved to get the vehicle between the man and the tiger and got him in his vehicle. "I saved his life" said our guide. So plan ahead if you normally rely on your cell phone as a camera .

-There is an extra camera fee. Currently it is 200INR for a camera with a lens of less than 200mm and 250INR for larger cameras.

-Morning and afternoon safari are about four hours in length each. They can be very very dusty. Cameras, binoculars, eyes and lungs all need some protection.

-Speaking of binoculars, we found them to be incredibly rare. Our local guide had a pair and often passed them along to other jeeps as most guides and not a single other guest that we saw had binoculars. I was surprised by that.

-We booked 14 "safaris" (jeep drives) and chose not to pay the extra for private drives. However, we only shared 6 times (3 of those times with only a single person). Your results may vary...

-The system we encountered was a naturalist from the lodge, plus a driver and a "local guide" assigned at the gate. Our local guide was fantastic! Keshor came out with us every time we left from that gate. I am not sure how common that is. The advantages were many. He remembered what we had seen and what we "needed" and was very receptive to all kinds of requests.

Rather than providing a typical trip report that goes day by day, I thought I would try something different. Let's go mammal by mammal:

TIGER: Our very first jeep safari was the afternoon of December 26th. We met our lodge naturalist/guide Swarna and arrived at the gate to wait in line for the opening time and the checking of identification. As others mentioned in other trip reports, this seems to take longer than it needs to but we accepted it as a reality. We saw NO tigers that afternoon. Of the 11 jeep safaris we took from Kolara gate, that was the only time that happened. In hindsight, it couldn't have worked out better. It just heightened the anticipation and was a nice reminder that nothing is guaranteed. Later in the week, I asked a group of guides at the lodge what is the longest they had ever gone without seeing tigers in the core area. They recalled a time when the resident tigers had each made kills outside of the tourist area and a grueling nine days passed with zero sightings. But they also framed that as highly unusual.

The next morning we arrived at the gate before dawn and within an hour were looking at our first tiger. Our local guide found it when three other jeeps had failed to spot it. It was a subadult male and he was sleeping on the far side of a lake. Like, REALLY far side. We did not have spotting scopes but our 8x42 binoculars were strong enough to prove that it was indeed a tiger. We sat with it for a long time and he

did eventually get up and walk a bit, only to lay back down out of view. Again, in hindsight this was a great way to ease us into the world of tigers.

Locating tigers was an interesting and multi-sensory experience. Each morning and afternoon, the guides would scan the dirt road for pug marks. We once followed a fresh set of tracks that were not there in the morning until we reached a point where vehicles were no longer allowed. The tracks continued and we turned around hoping for a new lead on a different tiger. The guides knew the habits of the tigers well enough that if we saw a set of tracks crossing the road they would race off in a direction to intercept it at a known crossing. This of course also happened with live tiger sightings and the travel could get bumpy and, if you were not the lead jeep, dusty! Although our guides remained the same, our driver did not and the local guide seemed to be putting tremendous pressure on the driver to always be in the best position for when a tiger appeared.

For example, we would be heading down a dirt track to check a new area when another jeep would appear around a bend coming towards us. Now there was no need to go forward as it had just been checked by the other vehicle so it was a race to see if our driver could get his jeep turned around before the oncoming jeep reached us (and thus putting us in the far less dusty first position). During the entire maneuver, the local guide would be talking a mile a minute to the driver without us understanding a word of it but the context seemed pretty clear. Once, an aggressive move on our driver's part caused him to actually hit another vehicle. It was at slow speeds and there was no damage to the other vehicle but we lost a piece of bumper. I should also be clear that we never encouraged them to get closer to an animal or pressured them in any way. We chose to tip each drive instead of at the end of our stay and the tip remained the same regardless of what we saw. The drive with no tigers produced the same tip as the one where we had a tiger within 20 centimeters of the jeep.

In addition to sight, the guides use sound. Over the course of the week, we heard the alarm calls of all three deer species as well as Indian Peafowl and Gray Junglefowl. Alarming could be due to tigers, leopards, dhole and maybe sloth bears (although the guides both said no chance). Regardless, several of our tiger sightings were due to us following alarm calls.

Once, we had a female tiger right in the road. There were three jeeps already stopped when we arrived. The tigress stretched and made a scrape and disappeared into the jungle. Two of the jeeps raced off to a known water hole hoping to intercept her there. We waited near the spot where she was last seen while a second jeep took up a position about 100 meters down the road. After a few minutes, we heard the alarm of a sambar deer. Soon after we heard a similar noise but it sounded wet and choked off at the end. "Death cry", our guide whispered and we heard the sound repeated three more times. We believed we heard a sambar being choked to death in the jaws of a tiger.

One final sound: we once heard a tiger growl. We had stopped the jeep after hearing an alarm of a spotted deer and heard repeated growls from the jungle before a subadult male showed himself.

The last sense we used to help locate tigers was scent. There is one long section of paved road in the Park that is called the "tar road" by the guides. We were driving along when we smelled the unmistakable odor of a dead animal. The assumption was that a tiger had made a kill. We staked it out

for about an hour but had no sight or sound of tiger. The next morning, we headed directly for that spot and a female tiger with a radio collar (T7) was there with her three cubs (see photo below).

Other interesting tiger behavior we witnessed included swimming, drinking, clawing trees, spraying urine as a scent mark, cheek rubbing on scented trees and the famous female Maya vocalizing for her cubs.

Although there were times when we had dozens of vehicles at a sighting, there were a few times when there were less than five jeeps present. T7 walked past our jeep with me standing on the bench seat so close that I could no longer focus the 80-400mm zoom lens. We were one of four jeeps at that sighting.



SLOTH BEAR: Second on my hit list, I was not going to be happy leaving Tadoba without a bear sighting. I work with black bears here in NY and I have yet to see a bear species other than black and brown bears of North America. We went five whole days without a sloth bear but received a tip that one was seen earlier near a distant gate, so we drove all the way there only to be in exactly the right spot when the bear chose to cross the road. For maybe a minute and a half, we got to watch a sloth bear and I got some nice photos. We were told that sloth bear sightings were down drastically this year as a single tiger had killed a male sloth bear and also a female and her cubs in the area.

We did manage two more sloth bear sightings but both were very quick and did not provide photo opportunities or even chances to observe the bears. Both times, the bear bolted as soon as we stopped.



DHOLE: We had several encounters with the same pair of dogs. They had a den in a culvert pipe under the road. Once we saw them in broad daylight on our way back from the morning safari. We watched them scent mark. Another jeep from our lodge actually saw a pup out one day. Others saw a pack of dhole hunting, so there were more out there, we just never encountered them.



RUDDY MONGOOSE: On that first safari where we did not see a tiger, we had two sightings of ruddy mongoose, one being pretty long and close to the vehicle. We saw them a few more times. Shouldn't be hard to find if you wanted them

GRAY MONGOOSE: Single sighting that was pretty close but pretty quick. We were in some dense vegetation and it happened fast, but I could easily see that this was a different species of mongoose than the other.

INDIAN TREESHREW: Two sighting, each time the animal crossed the road in front of us. My wife was the first to spot each one. The second foraged around a bit close enough to watch it for a few minutes.

GRAY LANGUR: Extremely common. Lots of young ones. Great behaviors.

THREE-STRIPED PALM SQUIRREL: Several sightings and certainly could have spent more time with them if we requested it. According to our guide, there are no five-striped squirrels in the park.

INDIAN HARE: We had one morning safari at the Pangadi Gate and saw two hares in the headlights as we drove to the gate. If I had been sharp, I could have gotten a photo through the windshield.

EURASIAN WILD BOAR: A bit camera shy. Not too hard to find but never did I get a nice pose.

SPOTTED DEER: Super common. If you are unfamiliar with these deer, they are just not in sync like the deer in North America. We saw fawns of various ages, mating, antlers almost fully grown but still in velvet as well as antlers that had just barely begun to sprout. There were mixed age/sex herds as well as bachelor herds.... There was always something new to see.

SAMBAR DEER: Also very common. Easy daytime sightings, which was different than our experience in Borneo where we only saw them at night.

RED MUNTJAC: We only saw two and heard a third. Camera shy but beautiful animals.

NILGAI: Easy to find. We saw males in their nice dark coats as well as females with their lighter brown pelage. Not as easy to photograph as the sambar or spotted deer.

GAUR: only had a few sightings, but one involved a tiger trying to separate a calf from the herd. Nice big bull male as well as smaller males, females and the aforementioned calf. The tiger never did get the calf...



FOUR-HORNED ANTELOPE: We entered via the Pangadi Gate. I reminded the guide that we hadn't seen a four-horned antelope yet. He chuckled and said that won't be easy. Ten minutes later, we were staring at our only four-horned antelope (male). I said "I should have asked for him sooner."

INDIAN FLYING FOX: Seems like the guides know of several roost trees and if you ask, they will deliver, They were also found on the grounds of the lodge eating fruit at night.

OTHER NOTES ON MAMMALS: We made no attempts to poke around for bats or other nocturnal critters.

-LEOPARD: We never saw a leopard. We found pug marks and other jeeps from our lodge saw them on occasion (including one sighting of a black leopard. There are currently six known black leopards in the Tadoba preserve).

-SMALL CAT SPECIES: We stopped the jeep so I could look at some mongoose tracks and I spotted a very tiny cat track. Somehow, I ended up not photographing it, but I do not know what species it was from. There are a few options I gather.

All in all, just a fantastic trip. We loved the wildlife, the people and the food. With a limited amount of time, we decided to put all our eggs in one basket rather than trying to move around once in India. That provided us with less stress and we really felt we got to know the park and the tigers a lot better than if we had tried to squeeze in a second location.

