



## Himalayan Kingdoms

Go Beyond | 24 Days | Physical Level 4

Kolkata – Siliguri – Darjeeling – Pelling – Gangtok – Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuary – Phuentshling – Thimphu – Gangtey - Punakha – Paro

High amongst lofty mountains, embark on an incredible journey through the breathtaking Indian state of Sikkim and the magical kingdom of Bhutan, a lesser known but truly spectacular section of the Himalayas.

- Discover vibrant Kolkata
- Explore breathtaking Sikkim
- Spot rhinos and elephants on safari
- Soak up Bhutan's culture
- Hike to Tiger's Nest Monastery



### Himalayan Kingdoms tour inclusions:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All Meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English-speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers)
- Visa fees for Australian passport holders
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides

*The only things you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary.*

### Go Beyond Tours:

Venture off the beaten track to explore fascinating destinations away from the tourist trail. You will discover the local culture in depth and see sights rarely witnessed by other travellers. These tours take you away from the comforts of home but will reward you with the experiences of a lifetime.

### Physical Level 4:

All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights. 'Himalayan Kingdoms' is rated 4 on the physical level scale. This is one of the more demanding trips Wendy Wu Tours offers. As a whole, this itinerary requires a high level of fitness.

- There will be sightseeing on foot for extended periods of time on uneven ground
- Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps, often without handrails. For more information on hiking at Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest) please see the travel information at the end of this document
- You will be at a moderately high altitude throughout most of the tour; it is recommended that you rest and drink lots of water to help acclimatize

Of course, our National Escorts and local guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary. If you require any more information about the pace of our Go Beyond Tours, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

### Country Profile: India & Bhutan

**India** - India evokes images of colourful religious festivals, deserts lined with historic forts, tented camps nestled in sand dunes, delicious food and royal palaces. Abundant wildlife such as the Asian Elephant and the Royal Bengal Tiger are found in the numerous national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. All of these images of India may be experienced on our tours, but the most lasting memories that you will take away with you is of the happy, smiling people.

**Bhutan** - Known to the Bhutanese as Druk Yul, 'Land of the Thunder Dragon', Bhutan opened its doors to tourism in 1974 and is perhaps the world's most exclusive tourist destination. Bhutan has successfully retained its distinct cultural entity, enabling travellers to experience the full glory of this ancient land. It is embodied in its monastic, strategic fortresses (known as Dzongs), ancient temples (lhakhangs), monasteries (gompas) and stupas (chortens), which dot the countryside with prayer flags.

### Joining Your Tour

The tour is 24 days in duration including international flights. Please note that due to flight schedules you may arrive/depart on Day 2.

Travellers booked on 'Land Only, the price includes visa fees and your arrival/ departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to reservations. Join the tour on Day 1 in Kolkata and end the tour on Day 23 in Kolkata. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

### Itinerary Changes

It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate. In these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements maintaining the integrity of your trip.

### Day 1: Arrive Kolkata

Fly to Kolkata for a two-night stay. You will be met at the Kolkata International Airport in the Arrivals Hall by your National Escort or Local Guide from Wendy Wu Tours. Together with any other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer 45 minutes to an hour to your hotel and check-in.



### Destination Information

**Kolkata** - Formally known as Calcutta, Kolkata was once the British capital in India until it was transferred to New Delhi in 1912. Modern day Kolkata can trace its history back to 1690 when the villages Sutanuti, Godindapur and Kolikata were formally signed over to the British East India Company. Over the next 200 years the British turned these villages, located on the Hooghly River, into a miniature version of London with large English gardens, boulevards and buildings. As well as renaming the city, the actual street names have also been changed from their old English names to Indian ones, though the locals still refer to them by their original names.

### Day 2: Kolkata

Enjoy the morning free at leisure. In the afternoon explore the city of Kolkata, visiting sites such as the Victoria Memorial, the Kalighat Temple and drive past Fort Williams.

Sightseeing today includes approximately 3 hours on foot and includes a visit to Kalighat Temple. Please note that many foreigners find the temple confronting as they still make live animal sacrifices here (usually at midday) and can be crowded and pushy. To create the image of blood running on the ground, for example, they grind hibiscus flowers with water to run deep red. Goats are ritually sacrificed each day to honour the goddess Kali, known for her destructiveness. There is an obligatory donation of at least INR 50 (GBP 60p) each person at the temple. This is not included in your tour cost.



### Destination Information

**Victoria Memorial** - Commonly known as the British Taj Mahal. Built using marble from other Indian palaces, including marble once found in the Red Fort in Delhi, this grand, white marble building was built in honour of Queen Victoria after her death.

**Kalighat Temple** - The original Kali Temple was built more than 350 years ago on this location where Sati, Lord Shiva's consort, was destroyed by the Sudarshan Chakra and it is thought one of her toes fell here.

**Fort Williams** - Dating back to the British Raj, Fort Williams is situated on the banks of Hooghly River and was named after King William III. Taking nearly 10 years to complete, the fort spans an area of 5sq km.

### Day 3: Kolkata - Siliguri

Rise early this morning and explore the flower market, where you will have an amazing view of Howrah Bridge, one of the busiest cantilever bridges in the world. Visit Kimhartuli and a Jain temple dedicated to Paresnath, who was the 23rd Jain Tirthankaras. Sightseeing this morning will involve approximately 2 to 3 hours on foot. In the afternoon, transfer to the railway station to board your 8 hour train to New Jalpaiguri. Upon arrival, drive to Siliguri and check into your hotel for an overnight stay.

*Please note: As the train is a day train, your seats will be in an AC Chair Car. More than likely you will not be able to purchase any food or drink on the train, so if you need snacks make sure to pre-purchase them before boarding. The train carriages are shared, so at all times please be aware of your belongings.*

#### **Destination Information**

**Flower Market** - Located beneath the east end of Howrah Bridge and is probably eastern India's largest flower market with hundreds of stalls.

**Kumhartuli** - The artisan's colony where clay idols are made for Hindu festivals.

**Siliguri** - Best known as the gateway to North East India, Siliguri is located in West Bengal. A sprawling city, it's the perfect base to explore the surrounding area.

#### **Day 4: Siliguri - Darjeeling**

Darjeeling altitude – 2,134m

Depart Siliguri and begin the 3 to 4 hour drive to Darjeeling, passing through hills and tea plantations. Upon arrival proceed to your hotel for a two-night stay.

*Please note: Electricity shortages are common in Darjeeling.*



#### **Destination Information**

**Darjeeling** - Nestled in the lower Himalayas, Darjeeling has an altitude of 2,134m. The name is derived from 'Dorje Ling' meaning 'the place of the Dorje', or 'the Mystic'. Darjeeling is more commonly associated with the production of high-quality tea.

## Day 5: Darjeeling

Ghoom altitude – 2,258m

Rise early this morning to catch a jeep or sumo bus to Tiger Hill, located 15km outside of town. Here you will enjoy a jeep ride to Tiger Hill, where you will get a clear view of the sun rising over Mt. Kanchenjunga (weather dependent). There will be some light walking to get to the lookout. Visit the Yiga Choling Monastery before returning to Darjeeling for breakfast. Ride the famous steam powered 'Toy Train' for about an hour around the hillside before visiting the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (closed on Thursdays) and a nearby tea plantation.



### Destination Information

**Ghoom Monastery** - Also known as Yiga Choling Monastery. One of the oldest monasteries in the area; it enshrines an image of the 'Coming Buddha' or 'Maitriya Buddha'. It was constructed in 1875 and belongs to the Gelugpa Sect.

**Toy Train** - The UNESCO World Heritage listed steam powered 'Toy Train' travels around the hillside. The 'Toy Train' is considered an engineering marvel and is sure to be one of the highlights of your time in India.

**Himalayan Mountaineering Institute** - Founded in 1954, the HMI has provided training for many of India's leading mountaineers. The institute also houses a museum, which showcases memorabilia from the 1922 and 1924 Everest expeditions as well of more recent attempts.

## Day 6: Darjeeling - Pelling

Commence the 6 to 7 hour drive to Pelling in Sikkim. Just before arriving in Pelling, visit the Pemayangtse Monastery – refer to Appropriate Dress below. Upon arrival in Pelling, check in to your hotel for a two-night stay.

### Destination Information

**Pemayangtse Monastery** - Perched at an altitude of 2,084m, it is one of the oldest monasteries in Sikkim. Originally built for 'ta-sang' lamas (the purest of monks), the monastery now serves the entire community. One of the major attractions of the Pemayangtse Monastery is a seven-tiered painted wooden structure, portraying Guru Rimpoche's Heavenly Palace 'Santopalri'. The Chaam (monk dance) is held every year, on the 28th and 29th day of the 12th month on the Tibetan Lunar calendar. The lamas also take part in the dance and dress up in beautiful costumes to represent Mahakala and Guru Drag-dmar.

**Sikkim** - Located in the eastern Himalayas, the state of Sikkim is spread below Mt. Kanchenjunga. Sikkim is bound by Tibet in the north, West Bengal in the south, Tibet and Bhutan in the east and Nepal in the west. Pelling is famous for its views of Mt. Kanchenjunga, which the locals worship as a protecting deity, as well as its proximity to a number of significant ancient Tibetan monasteries.

## Day 7: Pelling

Explore Khecheopalri Lake and Kanchenjunga Falls this morning, travelling in jeeps or sumo bus for your sightseeing. Drive approximately an hour and a half to Khecheopalri Lake then Kanchenjunga Falls over road that is uneven and unsealed. Sightseeing here is leisurely, before returning to Pelling to enjoy the rest of the afternoon at leisure.

### Destination Information

**Khecheopalri Lake** - Considered to be one of the most sacred lakes in Sikkim by both Buddhist and Hindus. It is believed that whatever is wished for in front of the lake will come true. There is also a myth that when a leaf falls on the placid clear water surface, a bird immediately picks it up.

**Kanchenjunga Falls** - A perennial waterfall noted for its beauty and serenity.

## Day 8: Pelling - Gangtok

Gangtok altitude – 1,677m

Commence the 4 to 5 hour drive to Gangtok this morning, visiting Tashiding Monastery en route.

### Destination Information

**Tashiding Monastery** - The monastery was founded in 1717 by one of the three lamas who brought Buddhism to Sikkim. It provides breathtaking views of the scenery below.

**Gangtok** - The name Gangtok is taken from the Sikkimese word for 'hilltop'. It is perched atop a ridge of the Himalaya and is the capital of Sikkim. The town itself, whilst still steeped in tradition and custom, is rapidly embracing the modern world. The region is famous for the exotic and colourful flowers including the Rhododendron, Orchids and Blue Poppies.

## Day 9: Gangtok

Explore Enchey Monastery this morning located on a hilltop above Gangtok – please refer to Appropriate Dress below. Next visit Sikkim Research Institute of Technology (SRIT) and Do Drul Chorten.



### Destination Information

**Enchey Monastery** - The 200-year-old Enchey Monastery was rebuilt in 1910 and belongs to the Nyingmapa Order. It was once the hermitage site of Lama Drupthob Karpo, a tantric master known for his power of flying; the monastery was built on a site blessed by him. Enchey means 'Solitary Temple' and was built here with the intention that no other construction would be built near it.

**Sikkim Research Institute of Technology (SRIT)** - Situated in Deorali and within walking distance from the main town of Gangtok. Also known as the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, after the late Chogyal of Sikkim, Palden Thondup Namgyal the institute's brainchild, the institute has since become one of the most prestigious depository of Tibetan literature. Rare manuscripts, paintings, thangkas, statues, religious objects and other works of art and history can be found here. This institute was established to promote research into the language and traditions of Tibet, as well as the Mahayana sect of Buddhism.

**Do Drul Chorten** - A Tibetan pagoda built by Trullshi Rimpoche, head of the Nyingma order of Tibetan Buddhism, in the year 1945.

### Day 10: Gangtok – Kalimpong

Depart Gangtok and drive 1 hour to the Dharam Chakra Centre and the Old Rumtek Monastery. Explore the two sites before commencing the 3 hour drive to Kalimpong, where you will proceed to your hotel for a two-night stay.

#### Destination Information

**Dharma Chakra Centre** - Built in 1960 by the late Gyalwa Karmapa XVI, the Dharma Chakra Centre is a replica of the original Kagyurpa Monastery in Tsurphu, Tibet. Located within the complex is the main monastery, the memorial stupa of the Gyalwa Karmapa XVI inlaid with gold plate and semi-precious stones, Shri Nalanda Institute for Higher Buddhist Studies and the Jamyang Khang Primary School.

**Old Rumtek Monastery** - Originally built in 1730 by the IX Karmapa but was destroyed by fire and had to be reconstructed to its present state.

**Kalimpong** - Located deep in the valleys of the Himalayas, Kalimpong is a bustling, though still relatively small bazaar town set among the rolling foothills of 'Deolo and Durbindra'. Kalimpong belonged to the Chogyals of Sikkim until the beginning of the 18th century, when it was taken from them by the Bhutanese. In the 19th century it passed into the hands of the British and thus became part of West Bengal.

### Day 11: Kalimpong

Today is at leisure to take a break from the driving and relax in this quaint town. You may choose to visit the Hindu Temple in town, or the local Catholic Church, markets or a local monastery to hear the monks chanting.





### Day 12: Kalimpong – Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuary

Say goodbye to Kalimpong as you drive approximately 4 hours to Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuary and check into your hotel. In the afternoon embark on a 2 hour jeep safari through park.



#### Destination Information

**Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuary** - Located on the bank of the Murti River in the Dooars Plains in North Bengal, the park is famous for its natural population of the great Indian one horned rhino. This small forest area was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1949 and a national park in 1992. Besides the one horned rhino, other major fauna of the park includes Indian elephants, bison, leopards and more than 200 species of birds.

### Day 13: Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuary - Phuentsholing

Depart Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuary and drive 3 and a half hours to Phuentsholing where you will meet your Bhutanese National Escort or Local Guide. Proceed to your hotel and check-in before visiting the Zangtho Pelri Lhakhang - refer to Appropriate Dress below.

#### Destination Information

**Phuentsholing** - This small, modern town in the south of Bhutan is the gateway for overland travellers. Phuentsholing is a fascinating mixture of Bhutanese and Indian cultures where the people, languages, costumes and goods from both countries are all intermixed. On top of a low hill at nearby Kharbandi, a small Gompa is situated in a garden of tropical plants and flowers, overlooking the town surrounding the plains. The Amo Chu, commonly known as the Torsa River, flows alongside this town and is a favourite spot for fishermen.

**Zangtho Pelri Lhakhang** - Located in the centre of the city, the Lhakhang or temple represents the heaven of Guru Rinpoche.

### Day 14: Phuentsholing – Thimphu

Thimphu altitude – 2,248m to 2,648m

Leave Phuentsholing this morning and drive 6 to 7 hours along the national highway to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, for a two-night stay. The main highway is undergoing widening; therefore ongoing construction may be present. En route to the capital, visit Kharbandi Gompa, where there will be light sightseeing.



### Destination Information

**Kharbandi Gompa** - A Tibetan Buddhist monastery founded in 1967 by the royal grandmother. The monastery contains paintings based on the life of Buddha.

**Thimphu** - The centre of government, religion and commerce in Bhutan and is located in a valley with the Wang Chhu River running through the centre of town. Thimphu is the busiest town in Bhutan but remains the only capital in the world without traffic lights. They were once installed but removed after only one day because too many people complained about them being impersonal. Local police have now taken their place.

### Day 15: Thimphu

Your sightseeing tour of Thimphu begins this morning with a visit to the National Library, the nearby Institute for Zorig Chusum and a viewing of the National Institute of Traditional Medicine. After lunch at the hotel, discover the National Memorial Chorten, browse a handicraft emporium, tour the Folk Heritage Museum and the Textile Museum before driving out of town to Thimphu Zoo to see the Bhutanese Takin. Later offer prayers to Buddha at Buddha Point and explore Trashi Chhoe Dzong. In total today, there will be approximately 3 to 4 hours of walking.



### Destination Information

**National Library** - Serves to preserve Bhutan's literacy history. Established in 1967, the library contains ancient Dzongkha and Tibetan texts and is a good example of traditional Bhutanese architecture.

**Institute for Zorig Chusum** - Also commonly known as the Painting School. The institute offers a six year course on the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan

**National Memorial Chorten** - The building of this chorten was originally the idea of Bhutan's 3rd King, H.M. Jigme Dorji Wangchuck ('the father of modern Bhutan'), who had wished to build a monument dedicated to world peace and prosperity. After His Majesty's untimely death in 1972, the royal family and cabinet resolved to fulfil his wishes and build the memorial.

**Folk Heritage Museum** - This museum is basically an old farmhouse built and decorated in traditional design and preserved as a reminder of the traditional way of life.

**National Textile Museum** - View the traditional dress of the various minorities found in Bhutan.

**Bhutanese Takin** - Bhutan's National animal is said to be the creation of the great saint Lama Drukpa Kunley. Legend says this is being created by Lama Kunley.

**Buddha Point** - Located a short drive from Thimphu city centre. Pay your obeisance and offer prayers to the Buddha, the largest statue in the country, then walk around and admire the view of Thimphu valley below.

**Trashi Chhoe Dzong** - The 'Fortress of the Glorious Religion', which was initially erected in 1641. It now houses some ministries, His Majesty's secretariat, and is also the summer residence of the Dratshang (the central monk body). It is open to visitors while the Monk Body moves in winter to Punakha.

## Day 16: Thimphu – Gangtey

After breakfast, begin the dramatic 5 and a half hour drive to Gangtey village. We pass through Dochu La, which is marked by prayer flags and chortens. On a clear day, there are superb views of the mountain ranges including Gangkar Puensum, the highest peak in Bhutan at 7,497m.

In the afternoon wander of the village and visit Gangtey Gumpa, the only Nyingmapa monastery in this region.

### Destination Information

**Dochu La Pass** - The pass is a popular tourist spot as it offers stunning 360 degree panoramic views of the Himalayan mountain range.

**Gangtey** - The charming village of Gangtey, at 2,900m above sea level, is one of the highest villages in Bhutan. Located in the stunning glacial valley of Phobjikha, the village is home to the endangered Black-necked Crane, which migrate from the Tibetan plateau in winter.

**Gangtey Gumpa** - Spectacularly perched on top of a small hill, the monastery is the biggest Nyingmapa monastery in Bhutan and the only one found on the western side of the Black Mountains. Founded in 1613, the monastery is home to approximately 140 Gomchen during the summer months.

## Day 17: Gangtey

Enjoy a day of leisure with the option of a hike through the valley for exceptional views across the stunning landscape.

## Day 18: Gangtey - Punakha

After breakfast, visit the Black-necked Crane Information Centre to find out more about these rare creatures. Later depart Gangtey and begin the 3 hour drive to Punakha. After checking into your hotel, visit Punakha Dzong and hike to Chimi Lhakhang.

### Destination Information

**Black-necked Crane Information Centre** - Situated on the edge of the forest and wetland along the main road of Phobjikha valley, the centre has an observation room equipped with high powered telescope and spotting scopes for catching the best view of the cranes. The centre also offers display information that outline the natural and cultural history of the area. There is a small gift shop, which sells handicrafts produced by the local people.

**Punakha** - Served as the capital of Bhutan until 1955 and is still the winter seat of the Je Khenpo (Chief Abbot). Blessed with a temperate climate and fed by the Pho Chhu (male) and Mo Chhu (female) rivers, Punakha is the most fertile valley in the country.

**Punakha Dzong** - Located on the junction of the two rivers. This Dzong is the second oldest in Bhutan (built between 1637-38) and is still a working monastery. During its life it has survived six fires, two floods, two earthquakes and endless sieges from Tibetan armies.

## Day 19: Punakha

Explore the area around Punakha today. Visit Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhang temple complex, which overlooks the valleys of Punakha and Wangdue Phodrang. Later discover Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten, which was built to remove negative forces and promote peace, stability and harmony in the changing world.

### Destination Information

**Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhang** - Perched on a ridge stands the magnificent Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhang temple complex, which houses a temple, a chorten and a nunnery. The temple is home to many statues, including a 14-foot main bronze statue of Avalokiteshvara (Chenrigzig chagtong chentong), one of the biggest in the country and made entirely by local Bhutanese artisans. The temple complex also houses a permanent higher learning and meditation centre for nuns where, apart from religious training, it provides life skill training such as tailoring, embroidery, statue making and thangka painting.

**Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten** - Commissioned by the Queen Mother, it took nine years to build this 4-storey temple. The temple is dedicated to the well-being of the kingdom, its people and all beings.

## Day 20: Punakha - Paro

This morning drive 4 and a half hours by road to Paro, stopping en route at the Simtokha Dzong. In the afternoon, visit Ta Dzong and Rinpung Dzong. A steady uphill walk is required to reach the ridge where the Dzongs sit; please refer to Appropriate Dress below for visiting the Dzongs.

### Destination Information

**Simtokha Dzong** - The oldest fortress of the Kingdom, the Dzong overlooks the entire Thimphu Valley. Built by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, who built many dzongs in Bhutan.

**Paro** - Paro's beautiful valley encapsulates a rich culture, scenic beauty and hundreds of myths and legends. It is home to many of Bhutan's oldest temples and monasteries, the country's only airport and the National Museum. The Paro valley is one of the Kingdom's most fertile, producing the bulk of Bhutan's famous red rice from its terraced fields.

**Ta Dzong** - Located on a ridge immediately above Rinpung Dzong. Ta Dzong was originally built as a watchtower to protect Rinpung Dzong; 'Ta' means 'to see' in Dzongkha, so the watchtower of a Dzong was called 'Ta Dzong'. On account of their function, watchtowers are always round in shape. In 1968, Paro's Ta Dzong was inaugurated as the National Museum and now holds a fascinating collection of art, relics, religious thangka paintings, Bhutan's exquisite postage stamps, coins and handicrafts, together with a small natural history collection.

**Rinpung Dzong** - The 'fortress of the heap of jewels', built in 1646 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. The approach to the Dzong is through a traditional covered bridge (called the Nemi Zam) and then up a paved stone path running alongside the imposing outerwalls.

## Day 21: Paro

This morning experience what is sure to be a highlight of your time in Bhutan - hike to the Taktsang Monastery (Tigers Nest)! Drive approximately 20 minutes to the start point for a hike to Taktsang Monastery. The moderate hike takes all morning, after which a vegetarian lunch is served at the cafeteria located inside the Monastery, which is run by monks. Return to Paro in the afternoon, visiting Kyichu Lhakhang, (if time permits) one of the oldest and most sacred temples of the Kingdom.



Please note: The trek to the Taktsang Monastery is very steep in some places and can be unstable on foot, particularly on the downward leg as the steps (close to 800 of them) are only found between the view point and the monastery with the remainder of the path being dirt. Despite this, the journey is certainly worthwhile on account of the superb views en route. If you have mobility issues or dislike heights, you may struggle to undertake this trek. Please speak to your National Escort or local guide if you have any concerns. Please read the Taktsang Monastery section of the travel information below for more details on today's hike.

### Destination Information

**Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest)** - One of the most famous monasteries in Bhutan. The monastery is perched on the side of a cliff, 900m above the Paro valley floor. It is said that Guru Rinpoche arrived here on the back of a tigress and meditated at this place, hence why the monastery is also called 'Tiger's Nest'. This site, which has long been recognised as a most sacred place, was visited by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1646, the religious and temporal ruler of Bhutan. It is a place of pilgrimage that Bhutanese try to visit at least once in their lifetime. In April 1998 a fire severely damaged the main structure of the building but it has since been fully restored to its original grandeur.

**Kyichu Lhakhang** - One of the oldest and most sacred temples of the Kingdom, Kyichu Lhakhang was built in 659AD by King Songtsen Gampo of Tibet; legend tells that it was built over the body of a giant 'demoness' who was preventing the spread of Buddhism.

## Day 22: Paro - Kolkata

Say farewell to Bhutan and transfer to the airport for your early morning flight to Kolkata. Upon arrival transfer to your hotel for an overnight stay. The remainder of the day is free at leisure to explore the area surrounding your hotel; take a tram trip, go for a ride in a rickshaw, or explore the markets (activities are at your own expense). Your hotel is located next to the main market district in Kolkata, known as Bidhan Chandra Roy Markets.



## Days 23-24: Depart Kolkata

You will be transferred to the airport according to the departure time of your flight today. Any time before your flight will be at leisure.

Late check-out is not included in our India group tours. If you wish to book a late check-out for your final day in India, please contact our reservations department who can confirm additional pricing and make this arrangement for you, subject to availability at the hotel.

## Himalayan Kingdoms Travel Information

### Visas

Entry visas are required by all visitors to India and Bhutan. Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department can assist you with the process of obtaining a visa. Please be advised that your passport must have at least 6 months validity left on it when you arrive back into Australia.

**For India:** Please be advised that all E-Visa Applications for India will be completed by Wendy Wu Tours. The information is available from <https://www.wendywutours.com.au/before-you-go/passports-visas-travel-health/> - Wendy Wu Tours requires the information sheet, a clear colour photo in JPEG format and clear colour passport copy emailed through to [documentation@wendywutours.com.au](mailto:documentation@wendywutours.com.au). Visas are valid for 120 days from the date of issue and allow you to stay in the country for up to 60 days. Visa application forms and all relevant documentation are due in our office 75 days prior to departure. Applications will not be accepted within 30 days of departure. E-Visas will be included with your final documentation approximately three to four weeks prior to your group tour's scheduled departure. If you require your E-Visa organised earlier, please contact us.

**For Bhutan:** A permit is required to enter Bhutan. Our partners in India will also arrange this, as it is not available from Australia. The Bhutan permit will also be applied for after the Indian Visa is issued. A scanned colour copy of your passport bio page will be taken by our Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department once your passport arrives in our office for the application of your Indian visa. The permit will then be applied for and a document will be sent back to our office. This is not your permit, just proof showing you have applied for one. Your actual travel permit will be stamped in your passport when you cross the border at Phuentsholing.

### Altitude

This itinerary visits several areas of high altitude. If you have an existing respiratory, vascular or coronary condition, we recommend checking with your doctor before undertaking this itinerary. The following parts of the itinerary have high altitude:

AMS (Acute Mountain Sickness) occurs in some people when they travel to altitudes over 3,000m. Mild symptoms of AMS include dizziness, fatigue, nausea or loss of appetite, breathlessness or headache. These usually develop over the first 36 hours at altitude and not immediately on arrival. AMS symptoms are experienced by people of varying ages and levels of fitness, and usually the symptoms will subside after a day or so. If symptoms worsen, you should seek medical advice and descend in altitude immediately. It is recommended to drink more water, non-alcoholic and non-caffeinated drinks and avoid exertion after arriving at altitudes over 3,000m.

Making sure you are well hydrated (by drinking lots of water and refraining from alcohol/caffeine) before and during the tour, as well as exercising to improve your aerobic fitness before you leave, are generally considered to be excellent ways to prevent or alleviate the severity of mild AMS. If you smoke, your doctor will probably also advise you to stop several weeks before your tour. During this tour, the Wendy Wu Tours group tour coach will be equipped with oxygen tanks for emergency situations. Take this Tour Dossier with you to your appointment to explain the altitude at which you will be travelling. Information on AMS can also be found in a document below or at [http://www.travelvax.com.au/resource\\_files/Travel-Tips---Altitude-Sickness.pdf](http://www.travelvax.com.au/resource_files/Travel-Tips---Altitude-Sickness.pdf)

## Insurance

We strongly encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the originals.

## Eating in India, Sikkim & Bhutan

India cuisine is one of the most influential, diverse and flavoursome culinary styles in the world. Indian dishes incorporate many spices and seasoning to create an explosion of flavours. Though Indian cuisine can vary greatly from the Indian food we get in Australia, it is important to keep an open mind and be adventurous. All meals (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive Himalayan Kingdom group tour, from the groups' arrival until the groups' day of departure. Please be aware that dishes selected for your meals reflect the cooking styles and signature dishes of the local area you are in. Sikkimese cuisine depends greatly on the seasonal produce. Most meals will include grains (rice or barley), potatoes, vegetables and some meat. Bhutanese cuisine consists of steamed rice (red or white) served with spicy curries and can be vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Most hotels offer buffet-style meals that include Continental, Chinese and Bhutanese food.

## Taksang Monastery (Tiger's Nest)

As the most famous of Bhutan's monasteries is perched on the side of a cliff 900m above the Paro Valley floor, this trek deserves its own mention. The climb is steep in some places and can be unstable under foot, particularly on the downward legs as steps are only found between the view point and the monastery with the remainder of the path being dirt. Despite this, the journey is certainly worthwhile on account of the superb views en route. However, this is quite a physically challenging hike and anyone with mobility issues or a dislike of heights may prefer to stop at the halfway point; the cafeteria where lunch is served! The view from this point is quite spectacular should you not wish to continue to the top.

The hike to the monastery can be broken down into various stages. The first stage is the trek to the cafeteria (lunch stop) which is situated on a rocky outcrop across a ravine from the monastery. This leg of the trek takes approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour, depending on your level of fitness. There are ponies for hire (payable locally), however a weight restriction of approximately 80kg is applied by local operators.

The second stage of the walk is from the cafeteria to the lookout opposite the monastery. This leg takes close to another hour. At this point some may be content to snap photos and return to the cafeteria.

The next stage is the trek/climb down the steps in the cliff face to the bottom of the ravine which crosses over a stream and waterfall before the path again ascends to the entrance of the monastery. Once here we should be able to enter into the monastery and view the cave where Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal meditated. (Please note that cameras are not allowed inside the monastery). The visit and climb to the entrance and back to the lookout will take about another hour.

If you require any more information about the pace of this tour, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

## Accommodation

All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and a telephone. Plumbing and electricity supplies can be erratic and quite often the power in hotel rooms is turned off while guests are out of the room. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort or Local Guide.

Your accommodation has been selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family-run guesthouse in a smaller town or a heritage-type hotel. In remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard but do please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between Australia and India. Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards are met. Please note double bed requests can be made at time of booking but can't be guaranteed.

**Alternative or Basic Accommodation** - At Gorumara you will be staying overnight in basic Government run accommodation. In Bhutan, hotels on our tours are generally 'medium range'. Hotels in Bhutan (other than those which are classed as deluxe properties and are extremely overpriced and expensive) are allocated one month prior to travel by the tourist authority. Unless you are staying in one of these deluxe hotels or visiting outside of the peak times, no particular hotel or room category can be guaranteed prior to that. All hotels we do use have private bathrooms and have air conditioning and/or a ceiling fan and bar/restaurant facilities. Travellers should however be cautioned against expecting princely comfort! Tea and coffee facilities are generally not available in your room. Some hotels do not have fridges, though in the colder months they are unnecessary if you have a balcony.

Please bear in mind that all levels of hotels can sometimes suffer from minor problems and technical difficulties (see Electricity). At each hotel your Tour Leader will try to organise the rooming arrangements to suit everyone's requirements. If you are travelling as a couple please note that we cannot guarantee the availability of double beds. Refer to your Travel Guide's accommodation section for more information.

## Transport

**Coaches:** Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. Due to Indian Government regulations the use of curtains, tinted glass windows are prohibited across India.

**Planes:** Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines. Pre-flight allocation is not available on international and internal flight sectors.

**Alternative transport:** While in India, transport for all sightseeing will be in a small coach (no more than 24 seats). Transport in Darjeeling may be in separate 4WD vehicles (4 tour participants per vehicle). In Darjeeling, you will travel to Tiger Hill on board a sumo truck. During your time in Bhutan, you will be transported in a mini coach (no more than 18 seats) as the roads wind around mountains and through valleys, and it is easier to navigate in this type of vehicle. Your luggage will most likely travel in a second vehicle. Legroom on these small coaches may be restricted.

Most of the roads are also very winding and are cut into a cliff face, giving you a magnificent view of the scenery and mountains as you drive past. This means space to pass is at a premium, and although distances are not large the time to travel these distances is a lot longer than it would take in Australia. Continual road works are also taking place in Bhutan, with rocks being extracted to be used in the Hydro Electric Power Stations that are under construction in Bhutan. This will impact on drive times and may mean some days are full of driving including comfort stops throughout the day. Though there are toilet stops at cafes and restaurants, some will be at 'bush toilets' en route, hence it is a good idea to carry some toilet paper with you at all times.

**Road Conditions:** Time taken in getting from A to B in this region is usually dependent on the size of your group. Roads in Sikkim and particularly in Bhutan are mostly tarred but a single lane. Though marked as dual lanes, they



are invariably the width of one and a half lanes. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road – not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to.

**Trains:** This trip involves a train journey in AC class cars. Getting on and off the trains in India can be quite disordered as passengers will start boarding well before people have finished getting off! If your group is disembarking at a stop that is not the end of the line, the train will only stop for 10 minutes and you must have your luggage ready and by your side a few minutes before the train pulls into the station.

### Development in India, Sikkim & Bhutan

Although India is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. For example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade; concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in Australia.

The same information can be applied to travelling in Sikkim and Bhutan. While efforts are being made by local government to improve facilities and infrastructure, roads are still quite undeveloped. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as Australia. However, all of our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense as well as refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort or Local Guide.

### Public Holidays in India and Bhutan

**India** - Please note that celebrations can last a couple of days and during these times some businesses will be closed and coach, air and train travel may be affected. Tourist attractions will be open but may be crowded. India Republic Day is on 26<sup>th</sup> January, the Holi Festival – 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (The Hindu 'Festival of Colours' can include locals smearing coloured powder on one another. Every effort will be made to minimise the effect on passengers whilst touring). Diwali Festival is on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

**Bhutan** - Please note that celebrations can last a couple of days and during these times some businesses will be closed and coach, air and train travel may be affected. Tourist attractions will be open but may be crowded. Losar New Year is from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> February, the Birth Anniversary of His Majesty the King from the 21<sup>st</sup> February to 23<sup>rd</sup> February and Thimphu Tshechu from the 08<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2020.

### Souvenirs

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions, which demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

### Group Size

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by a National Escort. There will usually be no more than 15 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with Local Guides.

## Tipping Policy

Local tipping is customary in Asia. However, this can often lead to awkwardness in knowing when it is appropriate to tip and how much, as well as ensuring you have a suitable amount of change available at the time. For your convenience, with years of experiences in providing the best customer service, Wendy Wu Tours operates a kitty system on our Group Tours, so your National Escort will look after this aspect of your trip for you. It also ensures that the amounts paid are reasonable for you but still fair for the local people. The amount is stated on each Group Tour page will be advised again on your final documentation. Tipping is in US Dollars and will be collected by your National Escort on arrival and distributed throughout the tour on your behalf. Any additional tipping on any of our tours is welcomed at your discretion. Further guidance for tipping contributions will be outlined in your final documentation.

## Cultural Difference

India has many religions, cultures and histories. Foreign tourists, particularly female travelers, may be stared at as Indian women in some areas generally do not go out without their father or husband. Please be considerate of this, the local beliefs and customs and dress with consideration and modesty.

## Appropriate Dress

When visiting temples or mosques, both men and women should dress in conservative, non-revealing clothing. Full-length trousers with a shirt or t-shirt for men; and pants or skirts well below the knee with a top that covers the shoulders and upper arms for women. Women might also consider carrying a 'modesty shawl' in their daypack – this could be a sarong or light scarf – which they can wear over their shoulders and heads to feel more comfortable while sightseeing at mosques. When visiting Jain temples, you must not wear or take in any leather items such as belts, watches, camera straps, purses and shoes.

Religious sites and homes throughout India – for Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Muslims or Buddhists to name a few – require all visitors to remove their shoes to enter. Even if you then need to walk outdoors, over hot or rough ground, you will not be allowed to wear shoes. You will often find shoe storage rooms near the entrance of a site where it is customary to leave your shoes near the entrance. Occasionally there are 'shoe minders' who will offer to keep your shoes safe for a 'tip' – this is not compulsory so each customer can choose to tip for this service or not. If you do not want to remove your shoes, you will have to remain outside.

We recommend shoes that easily slip on and off, and carry a pair of thick, old socks in your daypack, which you can wear to protect your feet from any rough or hot surfaces.

## Climbing Steps

Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps. These palaces were built to provide defense against potential invaders so nearly all of them stand on top of a hill, while the interiors have layers of narrow hallways and steps to slow down the advance of enemies once they were inside. The steps tend to be quite large, not level and sometimes without handrails. Hindu and Buddhist temples or pagodas also tend to be built at an elevation, as this is the most auspicious position according to ancient beliefs. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside.

People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.

## Packing list and Climate

You will find a complete packing list and a helpful climate chart in the 'Suggested Packing List', which will be included in the pre-departure information link sent within your deposit documentation. Seasonal weather patterns can be quite unpredictable. Up to the minute information on worldwide weather can be found on [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)

## Luggage

All travelers are limited to two items of luggage each; a suitcase with a maximum weight of 15kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of five kilograms. It is essential that your luggage is lockable. Please note that authorities will only allow bottles onto the aircraft if they have been checked in as main baggage. Bottles in hand luggage may be confiscated.

## Exchanging Cash

It is highly recommended that when travelling to cities outside of Kolkata, Thimphu and other main cities that extra care and attention is paid when exchanging money. US Dollars are easily exchanged throughout India however, other currencies such as Australian Dollars can generally be exchanged in hotels and airports provided notes are new and undamaged. We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to remote areas and smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be limited. Your National Escort/Local Guide will remind you to do this before departure.

## Personal Expenses & Optional Tours

Personal Expense - You will need to take some extra money to cover drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Based on the advice of previous customers an approximate amount of \$350AUD per person, per week should be sufficient; however, for those that can't resist a bargain or may wish to participate in all of the optional excursions, consider allocating a higher amount.

Optional Tours - May be offered in each city you visit during your tour. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits and if seats are available. Please ensure you have additional funds available if you feel you may wish to participate in any extra activities. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide, participation and tipping for optional excursions is completely at your discretion.

## Vaccinations and Your Health

We recommend that you contact either your GP or Travelvax (1300 360 164) for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Travelvax has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful [www.travelvax.com.au](http://www.travelvax.com.au)

## Before You Leave

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au) as in the event of an emergency, Australian Consular assistance will be more readily available. You can also access the Australian Government's travel advisory service for up to date information about your destination on the same website

## After your booking

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice followed by deposit documentation, which includes a visa application form (if applicable), and a help sheet. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 3 weeks prior to departure.

### Travelling on an Active Paced Tour

We hope you are looking forward to what we are sure will be a trip of a lifetime. Before you embark on this adventure, we ask you to consider the points listed below that relate to our active paced tours. This will ensure you understand what is involved with an active paced tour and therefore help you decide if your chosen tour is right for you.

This is to ensure that your tour runs as smoothly as possible for you and your fellow tour members.

Please consider the following aspects of active paced tours prior to confirming your arrangements;

- While we believe that age is no barrier, please give special consideration to the fact that medical assistance and public infrastructure can be limited in these areas.
- There will be long periods of physical activity, including walking, climbing of stairs, in/out of boats. Tour participants who will travel with a cane/walking stick may come across difficulties. It is our experience that using a cane/walking stick in these areas where there are rough and uneven surfaces, stairs to climb and high altitudes, becomes difficult.
- Only limited meal options will be available. People with special dietary requirements should expect difficulties on these tours. Please understand that depending on the trip you are taking, you may be given very little or no meat.
- Your tour may include basic accommodation facilities including home stays, guest houses, truck stops and tented accommodation. This may mean, no or limited hot water, and no private bathroom facilities.
- There will be long periods of driving on often unsealed, rural and bumpy roads in vehicles ranging from tour coaches to local jeeps and canter vehicles.
- Altitude affects people in many different ways and a certain level of fitness is required in order to limit the effects. Please discuss how to manage altitude sickness with a health care professional.
- Overnight trains only have basic bedding in four berth compartments with limited or no ladder facilities to climb to the top bunk. You may be sharing with other tour members or locals.
- Some tours may have sightseeing en route to the next destination. Therefore participation is required or you will need to remain with the coach until the rest of the group has finished touring.

National Escorts/ Local Guides will endeavor to provide rest stops in your itinerary where possible. Please be advised that some days may have a more physical programme than others.

If you are comfortable with the above mentioned aspects of travelling on an active paced tour, we look forward to welcoming you on what is sure to be a unique and memorable experience.

However, if you have any hesitations please contact your valued travel agent or our reservations department to discuss the tour further or explore alternative options.

**Last updated September 30, 2019**