



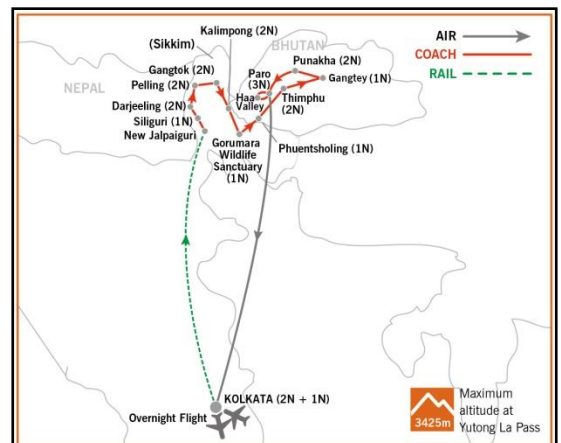
Himalayan Kingdoms – Sikkim & Bhutan Tour Dossier

Discovery Tour | 24 Days | Active

Take an incredible journey through Sikkim and Bhutan. Sikkim sits in the shadow of the world's highest mountains. Bhutan's rich Buddhist culture permeates everyday life.

Tour Highlights:

- **Kolkata** - Formerly known as Calcutta, it was the capital under the British Raj until 1911. Famous for its cricket culture, Bengali film industry and artistic heritage
- **Darjeeling** - Premier hill station set amongst a dramatic backdrop of tea plantations, mountain ridges & of course the Himalayas. Home to the famous Darjeeling tea
- **Pelling** - Famous for its stunning views of Mt Kanchenjunga, Pelling is surrounded by alpine forest, waterfalls and fascinating monasteries
- **Gangtok** - Cosmopolitan capital of Sikkim perched on a crest of the Himalayas, and once an important stop in the trade route between Tibet and India
- **Kalimpong** - Scenic bazaar town nestled in the Himalayan Valleys and a former hill station under the British Raj
- **Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuary** - Wildlife retreat declared a National Park in 1994, famous for its population of the Asiatic One Horned Rhino
- **Phuentsholing** - Overland gateway into Bhutan and thriving commercial centre situated at the base of the Himalayas
- **Thimphu** - Capital city of Bhutan and the centre of government, religion and commerce



- **Punakha** - Sits in a fertile valley that produces abundant crops and fruits and is home to the impressive Punakha Dzong
- **Gangtey** - A picturesque village overlooking the Phobjikha Valley, home to the endangered Black-necked Crane
- **Haa Valley** - One of the most beautiful areas in Bhutan, the unspoilt Haa Valley has recently been opened to tourism
- **Paro** - Gateway to the Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest) and home to many of Bhutan's oldest monasteries and temples

Himalayan Kingdoms – Sikkim & Bhutan tour inclusions

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- Meals as stated on your itinerary
- 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

Personal expenditures e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, tipping, meals not stated in the itinerary, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary are at your own expense.

Discovery Tours

Designed for those who wish to be further immersed in the authentic charm of Asia; our Discovery Tours include more cultural and active experiences. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts or Local Guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience. Our Discovery tours include:

- Walking through classic sites
- Unique cultural experiences and encounters
- Off the beaten track destinations
- More evenings at leisure for independent exploration

Active

'Himalayan Kingdoms – Sikkim & Bhutan' is an **active** tour. Active tours require a good level of fitness, as they are physically more demanding. They may involve hiking, and some travel to remote, high altitude areas where tourist facilities are less developed.

Our National Escort 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.

Country Profile: 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.

Country Profile: 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.

Itinerary Changes

1. 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 whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.
2. The domestic airlines in this region have frequent schedule changes. For this reason, we have indicated morning, afternoon or evening flights only in the following section. Your Local Guide or National Escort will inform you of any schedule changes as they are informed of them.
3. Due to severe delays caused by roadworks in Bhutan, we have had to amend the 2017 itinerary to miss Bumthang and Trongsa however alternative touring has been arranged.

Joining Your Tour

The tour is 24 days in duration including international flights. Travellers booked on 'Land Only' arrangements should make their own way to the starting point. Join the tour on Day 1 in Urumqi and end the tour on Day 23 in Kolkata. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

Important Information Regarding Itinerary Changes and Flight Delays

Due to unforeseen circumstances, flights can be delayed, and therefore connecting flights may be missed. If you find yourself in this situation, please contact our India office on **+91 98 1899 0222/+91 98 1048 8398** (outside India) or **98 1899 0222/98 1048 8398** (within India) to urgently advise your arrival details have changed. Please ensure you have your trip number, tour name (both included in your final documentation) and new arrival details (flight number and arrival time) handy to pass on to our local office in India. This will ensure your National Escort/Local Guide can be informed of your most up to date information and ensure someone is at the airport to meet you on arrival. There is also a dedicated duty officer available 24 hours a day at the international airport, who can be contacted on **+91 81 3039 1236** if required upon arrival in Delhi.

If we are not advised of late changes and missed connections, Wendy Wu Tours cannot guarantee someone will be able to meet you upon arrival in India as our local office will have no way of knowing which flight you will be arriving on. Wendy Wu Tours will not be responsible for providing reimbursement of transportation costs from the airport to your hotel in the event that our local office was not advised of changes to arrival time

Himalayan Kingdoms Itinerary

DAY 1: AUSTRALIA TO KOLKATA

Fly with Singapore Airlines to Kolkata for a two-night stay. will be met at the Kolkata International Airport in the Arrivals Hall tonight by your National Escort/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 1 hour drive) to your hotel and check-in. *In the event of flight delays or changes to arrival times, please see the details above as to what to do in this circumstance.*

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.

Today Kolkata is experiencing massive growth in the number of new high-rise residential and office complexes being built as the city strives to house its 14.7 million

inhabitants and ease its poverty and overcrowding problems. It is also the only Indian city with an operating tram system.

DAY 2: KOLKATA

Enjoy the morning free at leisure. Sometime this morning a tour introduction will be held in the hotel. Food and drinks will not be served at this meeting; it is simply an opportunity for your group to meet and learn more about travelling in India.

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 (AUD \$1) each person at the temple. This is not included in your tour cost. Locals pay this so foreigners should too! Afterwards visit a Jain temple - refer to **Appropriate Dress** section below

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 the 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 TO SILIGURI VIA NEW JALPAIGURI

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 2-3 hours on foot.

In the afternoon, transfer to the railway station to board your train to New Jalpaiguri (train duration approximately 8 hours). Upon arrival, drive to Siliguri and check into your hotel for an overnight stay.

[N.B: As our train is a day train, our 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 exploring the surrounding area

DAY 4: SILIGURI TO DARJEELING

Depart Siliguri and begin the 3-4 hour (80km) 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 altitude – 2,134m

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

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 safari to Tiger Hill, where hopefully you will view a clear sunrise 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. Catch the famous steam powered 'Toy Train' (ride duration 1 hour) around the

hillside before visiting the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (closed on Thursdays) and a nearby tea plantation.

Destination Information

Tiger Hill - A highlight of the Darjeeling area, Tiger Hill is located approximately 11km from the city centre. It offers one of the most magnificent views over Mt. Kanchenjunga, the third highest peak in the world.

Ghoom altitude – 2,258m

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 displays memorabilia from the 1922 and 1924 Everest expeditions as well of more recent attempts.

DAY 6: DARJEELING TO PELLING

Commence the 6-7 hour (136km) drive to Pelling in Sikkim. Just before arriving in Pelling, visit the Pemayangtse Monastery – refer to **Appropriate Dress** below. Upon arrival in Pelling, proceed 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 1.5 hours (18km) 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 TO GANGTOK

Commence the 4-5 hour (130km) 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 altitude – 1,677m

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 (closed on Mondays), 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 Trulshri Rimpoche, head of the Nyingma order of Tibetan Buddhism, in the year 1945.

DAY 10: GANGTOK TO KALIMPONG

Depart Gangtok and drive 1 hour (24km) to the Dharam Chakra Centre and the Old Rumtek Monastery. Explore the two sites before commencing the 3 hour (80k) 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 TO GORUMARA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Say goodbye to Kalimpong as you drive approximately 4 hours (97km) to Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuary and check into your hotel. In the afternoon embark on a jeep safari through park (duration roughly 2 hours).

Destination Information

Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuary - Located on the bank of the Murti River in the Doars 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 TO PHUENTSHOLING

Depart Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuary and drive 3.5 hours (103km) to Phuentsholing where you will meet your Bhutanese National Escort/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 Gumpa 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 TO THIMPHU

Leave Phuentsholing this morning and drive 6-7 hours (180km) 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 altitude – 2,248m to 2,648m

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 3–4 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.

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 TO GANGTEY

After breakfast, begin the dramatic 5.5 hour drive (150km) 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 Gompa, 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 Gompa - 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 TO 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 (30km) 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 altitude – 1300m

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

Chimi Lhakhang - Standing on a hillock, the monastery was built in 1499 by the 14th Drukpa, Ngawang Choegyel, after the site was blessed by the "Divine Madman" the maverick saint Drukpa Kuenley. Known as the 'Temple of Fertility'.

DAY 18: 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 19: PUNAKHA TO PARO

This morning drive 4.5 hours (129km) by road to Paro, stopping en route at the Simtokha Dzong. In the afternoon, visit Ta Dzong and Rinpung Dzong. Steady uphill walking is required to reach - Refer to **Appropriate Dress** below for visiting the Dzongs.

Destination Information

Simtokha Dzong - The oldest fortress in 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 20: 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 – see **Climbing Steps** section below. There are ponies for hire, but pony operators will not take any passenger over 80kg. **The cost of the pony ride is not included in the tour price and paid for at the time.** The moderate hike takes all morning meaning 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.

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.

Trek Summary - The trek to the Taktsang Monastery is very steep in some places and can be unstable on foot, particularly on the downward legs 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. However, if you have poor knees or hips, are prone to vertigo, dislike heights or are physically unfit, you would certainly struggle to undertake this trek or at best only make it to the cafeteria. One option is to hire a pony for the uphill journey only. Pony hire is at your own expense and ranges from 10-15 USD. Ponies cannot be hired for the downhill journey.

The hike to the monastery can be broken down into various stages:

The first stage is the trek to the cafeteria (where a vegetarian lunch will be served today) 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. Horses (which are really only small ponies) can be arranged for this leg of the trek at your own cost. At the cafeteria you will stop for some tea or coffee and biscuits while pondering the journey ahead and looking at the monastery in the distance above you.

The second stage of the trek is from the cafeteria to the lookout opposite the monastery. This leg of the trek takes close to 1 hour. At this point some may be content to snap photos and then return to the cafeteria.

The third stage is the trek/climb down the 475 steps in the cliff face to the bottom of the ravine. You will cross over a stream and waterfall before the path again ascends another 300 or so steps to the entrance of the monastery. Once here you should be able to enter into the monastery and view the cave where Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal meditated (cameras are not allowed inside the monastery). The visit and climb to the entrance and back to the lookout will take approximately one hour.

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 21: PARO – HAA VALLEY

After an early breakfast, embark on a day tour to Haa Valley. Drive approximately three hours (70km) to Haa, travelling over the Chele La pass (4,200). Stop at the top of the pass to admire the magnificent views of the eastern Himalaya range. Continue to the unspoilt valley of Haa, which was only opened to tourists in 2002. After a picnic lunch, explore the valley. Visit the famous Lhakhang Karpo (White Temple) followed by Lhakhang Nagpo (Black Temple).

Later in the afternoon, drive back to Paro on the same road, again enjoying grand views of the eastern Himalayan range and the lush green valleys beyond.

Destination Information

Haa Valley - The quaint Haa Valley has remained relatively untouched by modern life and is said to be one of the most beautiful regions in Bhutan, surrounded by alpine forests and mountain peaks. The valley is the ancestral home to the Dorji family, to which the queen grandmother, Ashi Kesang Wangchuck, belongs.

Lhakhang Karpo - Built in the 7th century by the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo during his missions to build 108

temples in one day. According to legend, a black and white pigeon was released to selected sites to build the temples. The white pigeon landed on the foothills of the three towering mountains worshipped as Rigsum Gonpo and is where the Lhakhang with its stunning white walls stands today.

Lhakhang Nagpo - The black pigeon released by the king landed a little north of the white pigeon, and this is where the black temple was built.

DAY 22: PARO TO KOLKATA

Farewell 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

(prices involved are at your own expense). Your hotel is located next to the main market district in Kolkata, known as Bidhan Chandra Roy Markets. These are located on the other side of JJ Nehru Road opposite the Oberoi Grand Hotel and the Peerless Inn. These markets specialise in Sari's and Indian dresses and suits.

DAY 23: DEPART KOLKATA

Enjoy the day at leisure to further explore the area. The streets surrounding the hotel are shopping heaven. Please be aware of your surroundings and your personal belongings in the markets and remember to never accept their initial quote - so bargain hard! After a late check-out, transfer to the airport for your flight home

DAY 24: ARRIVE AUSTRALIA

Arrive home today.

HIMALAYAN KINGDOMS – SIKKIM & BHUTAN TRAVEL INFORMATION

Visas

Entry visas are required by all visitors to India and Bhutan and 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: Entry visas are required by all visitors to India and Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department can assist you with the process of obtaining a visa. Please be advised that all Visa Applications for India MUST be completed on-line at the VFS website: www.vfsglobal.com/india/australia. Wendy Wu Tours will assist you with instructions. Once the form is completed, the application and passport must be sent to Wendy Wu Tours. Visas are valid for 6 months from the date of issue and allow you to stay in the country for up to 6 months. Visa application forms and all relevant documentation are due in our office 70 days prior to departure. Applications will not be accepted within 50 days of departure. Passports will be returned with your final documentation 2-3 weeks prior to your group tour's scheduled departure. If you require your passport to be returned earlier, a \$15 courier fee will apply.

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 Visa 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.

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.

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/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 cannot 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.

Please note that seatbelts are not compulsory by law in India and therefore people largely choose not to wear them. For this reason some vehicles may not be fitted with seatbelts or they may be hidden underneath protective seat covers. It is recommended that where seatbelts are available customers must use them and remain seated at all times while the vehicle is moving. If you have any concerns, please notify your National Escort/Local Guides.

Planes: Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines.

Alternative Transport and Road Conditions

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. Depending on local conditions, you may experience an elephant ride in Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuary.

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 affect 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. Refer to your Travel Guide's TRANSPORT section for more information.

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 like remote Australian country roads, 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.

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 in 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/Local Guide.

Souvenirs

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions that demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone so we aim to take you to places that hold local interest. 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 18 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 only.

Tipping Policy

Tipping while on holiday is a firm and expected element in the tourism industry and India is no exception. To remove the uncertainty and stress of not knowing how much is appropriate to tip or to whom, Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy for

our group tours where a nominated tipping amount is paid upon commencement of the programme by each tour member. This amount is stated in all group pricing, however it is not collected in your final payment received by Wendy Wu Tours.

This nominated tipping amount is to be given to your National Escort at the beginning of your tour, who will then distribute it amongst your main service providers – guides, drivers and coach attendants – on your behalf during the tour. Any other tipping, such as tips for camera and video fees, bathroom attendants or hotel porters that are taking luggage to your room, is at your discretion as are gratuities for additional requested special services. We encourage passengers to have a supply of small denominations of local currency to distribute for personal tipping.

The tipping amount is determined based on the total number of passengers travelling in the group. The amount is designed to be at a reasonable level for travellers while being fair to the local people and includes a gratuity for the National Escort. The final tipping amount will be outlined in your final documentation, which is distributed 2 weeks prior to your tours departure.

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.

Luggage

All travellers are limited to two items of luggage each; a suitcase with a maximum weight of 15kg on domestic flights within India and 20kg on the Paro to Kolkata flight, and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of 7kgs. It is essential that your luggage is lockable. Please note that Indian 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 Delhi 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

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 AU\$250 per week should be sufficient; however for those that cannot resist a bargain, consider allocating a higher amount.

Optional tours may be offered in each city you visit during your tour at an additional cost. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide.

Climbing Steps

Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses/Dzongs and some temples/Chortens involves climbing some 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. Finally, the old hill station towns, such as Darjeeling, are

located at a higher and cooler elevation and were developed as resorts to escape the heat of the lowland. They are usually made up of interconnecting roads, steps and sloped pathways so walking around the town, or even within the grounds of your hotel, may require some physical effort.

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 viewpoint and the monastery with the remainder of the path being dirt. Despite this, the journey is certainly worthwhile because of the superb views en route. However, this is quite a physically challenging hike and any customers that have poor knees, are prone to vertigo, dislike heights or are physically unfit will certainly struggle to keep up and at best may only make it to 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. Horses (really only small ponies) can be arranged for this leg at your own cost. Please note that the pony operators will not take any passenger over approximately 80kg in weight.

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 that 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.

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.

Cultural Differences

India has many religions, cultures and histories. Foreign tourists, particularly female travellers, 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 backpack – 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 them, you will have to remain outside.

Bring some shoes that easily slip on and off, and carry a pair of thick, old socks in your backpack, which you can wear to protect your feet from any rough or hot surfaces. The following itinerary will indicate when you need to consider this.

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.

Before You Leave

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with 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 with deposit documentation via email. This includes important information and links to access the visa application form and instructions sheet online (if applicable). Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2 weeks prior to departure.

Updated: 17 March 2017