



HIMALAYAN KINGDOMS

Go Beyond Tour | 24 Days | Physical Level 2

Kolkata – Darjeeling – Pelling – Gangtok – Kalimpong –
Phuentsholing – Thimphu – Gangtey – Punakha – Paro - Kolkata

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 breath taking Sikkim
- Spot rhinos and elephants on safari
- Soak up Bhutan's culture
- Hike Tiger's Nest Monastery

TOUR MAP



HIMALAYAN KINGDOMS TOUR INCLUSIONS:

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

The only thing 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 check out 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 with unique culture, interactions with local people the experiences of a lifetime.

PHYSICAL LEVEL 2:

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 2 on the physical level scale. A reasonable level of fitness is required but it's more about spending time on your feet rather than covering large distances. You'll be getting on and off coaches, walking around the sights and climbing steep steps, often without handrails.

- There will be sightseeing on foot for extended periods of time on uneven ground
- Sightseeing at palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps, often without handrails
- The hike to Tiger's Nest Monastery is the most challenging on this tour, taking 5-6 hours on a steep uphill trail
- 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 tours, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

JOINING YOUR TOUR:

The tour is 24 days in duration including an overnight international flight in one direction as this is the most likely flight option from Australia.

Travellers booked on 'Land Only', the price includes your arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour, or when booking pre and post night accommodation with Wendy Wu Tours. Please email your international flight times to info@wendywutours.com.au so we can arrange your transfers accordingly.

Join the tour on Day 1 in Kolkata and end the tour on Day 23 also in Kolkata. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

ITINERARY CHANGES:

It's 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'll make the best possible arrangements maintaining the integrity of your trip.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1: Arrive Kolkata

Meals: D

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.



Early check-in is not included. Additional nights' before and after your tour can be arranged. Please contact our Reservations team to book.

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 Kolkata 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

Meals: B, L, D

After an early breakfast, you will explore the city of Kolkata, visiting sites such as fragrant flower market, Howrah Bridge, and Kumar Tuli. This afternoon sightseeing will include the Victoria Memorial, the Kalighat Temple and drive past Fort Williams.

Sightseeing today includes approximately 5 hours on foot.



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 to Darjeeling**Meals: B, L, D**

After breakfast, enjoy a leisurely morning before transferring to the airport for your flight to Bagdogra.

On arrival, enjoy lunch before continuing by road into the Himalayan foothills to Darjeeling, a scenic journey of approximately 3 hours. Arrive in the early evening.

**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 4: Darjeeling**Meals: B, L, D**

This morning, board Darjeeling's famous Toy Train for a scenic journey through the Himalayan foothills to Ghoom. Continue to the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute to discover the region's mountaineering heritage and the achievements of Tenzing Norgay. Explore the neighbouring Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, known for its conservation of Himalayan species including red pandas and snow leopards, before visiting the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre. Return to your hotel in the late afternoon, with the evening at leisure.



Sightseeing today will be approximately 4 hours and you can expect some slopes, steps and uneven surfaces due to Darjeeling's hilly terrain.

Please note: Electricity shortages are common in Darjeeling.

Destination Information

Toy Train - One of India's most iconic rail journeys aboard the historic Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, a UNESCO World Heritage-listed railway. Travel aboard the charming narrow-gauge 'Toy Train' as it winds through Darjeeling's bustling streets and mountain scenery towards Ghoom, one of India's highest railway stations. Along the way, enjoy views across the surrounding hills and experience the famous Batasia Loop, where the railway curves around the hillside against a spectacular Himalayan backdrop.

Himalayan Mountaineering Institute - Discover Darjeeling's mountaineering heritage, established following the historic first ascent of Mount Everest by Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary. Explore fascinating displays of mountaineering equipment, photographs and memorabilia, and learn about the expeditions and climbers who have conquered some of the Himalayas' greatest peaks.

Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park - Specialising in the conservation of rare Himalayan wildlife, explore its hillside pathways to see species adapted to the high-altitude environment, including the red panda, snow leopard and Himalayan wolf, while learning about the park's important breeding and conservation programmes

Day 5: Darjeeling

Meals: B, L, D

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.

Later, visit a local tea estate to discover Darjeeling's renowned tea-growing heritage, followed by a tea tasting and lunch. The remainder of the day is at leisure.



Destination Information

Tiger Hill - One of Darjeeling's most celebrated viewpoints, renowned for its spectacular panoramas across the Himalayas. Visit at sunrise to watch the first light illuminate the magnificent peaks of Kanchenjunga in shades of gold and pink.

Day 6: Darjeeling to Pelling

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast enjoy a scenic drive through the Himalayan landscapes to Pelling, a journey of approximately 4 hours.

This afternoon, visit Pemayangtse Monastery, one of Sikkim's oldest and most revered Buddhist monasteries. Set on a hilltop above Pelling, explore its colourful interiors and, weather permitting, enjoy beautiful views towards the Himalayas.



*Please dress respectfully as this is an active Buddhist Monastery. For more information refer to **Appropriate Dress** below.*

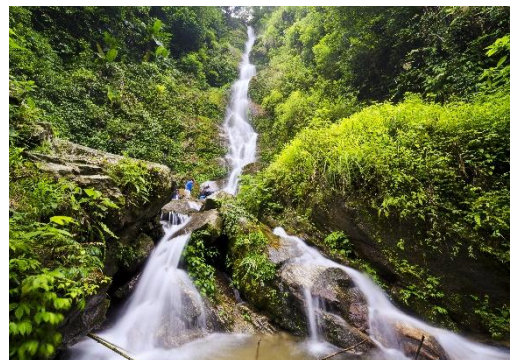
Destination Information

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.

Day 7: Pelling

Meals: B, L, D

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 the road that is uneven and unsealed. Sightseeing here is leisurely. Following this, you will return 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

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, leave Pelling and begin the scenic 5 hour drive to Gangtok. En route, visit Tashiding Monastery, one of Sikkim's most sacred Buddhist monasteries, set on a hilltop overlooking the surrounding mountains and valleys. Stop for lunch before arriving in Gangtok this afternoon.

Exploring Tashiding involves steps, uphill walking and some uneven surfaces.

**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

Meals: B, L, D

This morning, explore Gangtok, beginning with a visit to Enchey Monastery, a peaceful Buddhist monastery known for its colourful prayer hall and traditional architecture. Continue to Tashi View Point, where, weather permitting, you can enjoy panoramic views towards the magnificent Kanchenjunga range.

Sightseeing this morning will involve approximately 2 hours on foot.



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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.

Day 10: Gangtok to Kalimpong

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, visit Rumtek Monastery, one of Sikkim's most important Buddhist monasteries, where traditional Tibetan architecture and richly decorated interiors provide insight into the region's spiritual heritage. After lunch continue through the Himalayan foothills to Kalimpong.

Travelling to Kalimpong will take approximately 4 hours.

**Destination Information**

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

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, enjoy a full day at leisure to explore Kalimpong at your own pace. You may wish to visit Durpin Monastery for panoramic views across the surrounding hills, or simply browse the shops and markets for local handicrafts. Alternatively, relax at your hotel and enjoy the peaceful surroundings.



Day 12: Kalimpong to Phuentsholing

Meals: B, L, D

Leave Kalimpong and drive 5 hours through the foothills towards Jaigaon, on the India–Bhutan border. Complete the immigration formalities and cross into Phuentsholing, where you will meet your Bhutanese National Escort.



Later this afternoon, visit Zangtho Pelri Lhakhang, a peaceful Buddhist temple in the heart of the town. Admire its traditional Bhutanese architecture, colourful murals and intricate paintings depicting the life of Guru Rinpoche and take time to explore the surrounding gardens and prayer wheels.

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Destination Information

Zangtho Pelri Lhakhang - A charming Buddhist temple in the heart of Phuentsholing, offering a peaceful introduction to Bhutan's spiritual traditions. Built in traditional Bhutanese style, the temple features intricate woodwork, colourful murals and detailed paintings depicting the life and teachings of Guru Rinpoche.

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.

Day 13: Phuentsholing to Thimphu

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, leave Phuentsholing and begin the scenic 6 hour journey into Bhutan's mountains towards the capital, Thimphu. En route, visit Kharbandi Gompa, a peaceful hilltop monastery housing statue of Guru Rinpoche, Shakyamuni Buddha and Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. From its elevated setting, enjoy sweeping views over Phuentsholing. Continue through mountainous scenery to Thimphu, arriving in time for a late lunch.



Destination Information

Thimphu – Thimpu is 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 14: Thimpu

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, begin your explorations at the National Library of Bhutan, home to an important collection of ancient Buddhist texts and manuscripts. Continue to Zorig Chusum, where students learn Bhutan's 13 traditional arts and crafts, from painting and woodcarving to embroidery and sculpture.



This afternoon, learn about Bhutan's centuries-old approach to healing at the Institute of Traditional Medicine, before visiting the National Memorial Chorten. One of Thimphu's most important religious landmarks, the whitewashed stupa is a focal point of daily worship, where you may see local people circumambulating the chorten and turning prayer wheels.

Sightseeing today is approximately 4 hours with periods of standing and walking at each site. Expect some steps and uneven surfaces.

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.

Day 15: Thimpu

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast begin today's sightseeing at Buddha Point, home to the magnificent Buddha Dordenma statue. Continue to the Motithang Takin Preserve to see Bhutan's unusual national animal, the takin, and learn about this distinctive Himalayan species. Visit the Royal Textile Academy, where intricate fabrics, traditional dress and weaving techniques showcase Bhutan's rich textile heritage. End the day at the impressive Tashichho



Dzong, an imposing fortress-monastery and important centre of Bhutanese government and religion, with its traditional architecture, courtyards and beautifully decorated temples.

Destination Information

Bhutanese Takin - Bhutan's National animal is said to be the creation of the great saint Lama Drukpa Kunley.

Tashichho 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: Thimpu to Gangtey

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, leave Thimphu and travel towards Punakha, crossing the spectacular Dochula Pass (3,088 metres). Pause at the summit to admire the 108 chortens and colourful prayer flags and, on a clear day, enjoy panoramic views across the Himalayan peaks.



This afternoon, visit Gangtey Gumpa, an important Nyingma Buddhist monastery overlooking the beautiful Phobjikha Valley.

Today's journey time will be approximately 6 hours

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

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, enjoy a leisurely day in the beautiful Phobjikha Valley, with the option to explore its peaceful rural landscapes on foot. Take a gentle hike through the valley, passing traditional villages, farmland and forest while enjoying sweeping views of the surrounding mountains. Visit the Blacknecked Crane Information Centre to learn about the rare black-necked cranes that migrate to the valley during the winter months and the conservation efforts helping to protect them.



Day 18: Gangtey to Punakha

Meals: B, L, D

Today you will travel towards Punakha. En route, visit Chimi Lhakhang, a small hilltop temple dedicated to the colourful Buddhist saint Drukpa Kunley and traditionally associated with fertility and blessings. Reaching the temple involves a pleasant walk through rice fields and the village of Lobesa, offering a glimpse of rural Bhutanese life. Continue to magnificent Punakha Dzong, dramatically positioned at the confluence of the Pho Chhu and Mo Chhu rivers. Explore its impressive courtyards, temples and intricately decorated buildings while learning about the dzong's important role in Bhutanese history and religion.



Your journey time will be 4 hours today.

Destination Information

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

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, travel to Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten, a striking hilltop temple overlooking the Punakha Valley. Walk through rice fields before following an increasingly uphill trail to the chorten. Explore its beautifully decorated interior and enjoy panoramic views across the valley and Mo Chhu River before descending to rejoin your vehicle. Drive to Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhang, an impressive Buddhist temple and nunnery set high above the Punakha and Wangdue Phodrang valleys.



Today's excursions will mean approximately 4 hours on your feet. The visit to Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten includes uphill and downhill walking, uneven paths and a steep flight of steps approaching the chorten. Further steps and walking are involved at the temple complex in the afternoon.

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 to Paro

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast travel 5 hours through the mountains towards Paro, stopping en route at Simtokha Dzong, one of Bhutan's oldest surviving dzongs. Continue to Paro and explore two of the town's most important cultural landmarks. Visit Ta Dzong, a former watchtower that now houses the National Museum of Bhutan, with collections of traditional costumes, thangkas, religious artefacts and historic objects offering an insight into Bhutan's cultural heritage. Continue to the impressive Rinpung Dzong, a 17th-century fortress-monastery overlooking the Paro Valley. Explore its courtyards and admire the intricate woodwork and traditional Bhutanese architecture.



The time on feet will be approximately 3 hours throughout the day. You can expect steps, sloping pathways and uneven surfaces at the dzongs and museum.

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

Meals: B, L, D

Start early this morning for the highlight of your time in Bhutan, the hike to Taktsang Monastery, better known as Tiger's Nest. Clinging dramatically to a cliffside above the Paro Valley, this sacred monastery is one of Bhutan's most iconic sights. Follow the mountain trail steadily uphill through pine forest, with spectacular views of the monastery appearing along the way. The final approach involves a long series of steep stone steps before crossing to the monastery complex. After time to explore, descend the same route and return to your hotel for a well-earned lunch and time to rest. Later this afternoon, visit Kyichu Lhakhang, one of Bhutan's oldest and most sacred Buddhist temples.



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 viewpoint and the monastery with the remainder of the path being dirt. Despite this, the journey is certainly worthwhile on account of the superb views enroute.

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 to Kolkata

Meals: B, L, D

Say farewell to Bhutan and transfer to the airport for your early morning flight to Kolkata. Upon arrival transfer approximately 45 minutes 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).

**Days 23-24: Depart Kolkata**

Meals: B

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 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 six months validity left on it when you arrive back into Australia.

All guests travelling to India must complete a mandatory digital e-Arrival card 72 hours prior to their arrival. The form can be completed and submitted online at indianvisaonline.gov.in/earrival/. Once completed, Travellers will receive a QR code to display upon arrival.

For the latest information on visa procedures, processing times and requirements, please kindly refer to our website <https://www.wendywutours.com.au/help-and-advice/passports-and-visas/>

Please note, the visa procedures and requirements may change at any time. These changes are often made by the relevant embassy or consulate, Wendy Wu Tours acts as a third party and has no influence on the process of a visa.

Bhutan: A permit is required to enter Bhutan. Our partners in India will arrange this, 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:

It is a condition of your booking that you are insured for the duration of your trip. We recommend comprehensive travel insurance to cover cancellation, medical requirements, luggage, repatriations and additional expenses. At a minimum, the policy is required to cover medical requirements including medical evacuations / repatriations. The choice of insurer is yours.

We strongly suggest you purchase insurance at the time you pay your deposit. This is because cancellation fees and charges are payable from that time. We may request you to provide evidence that you have taken out and paid for a policy to comply with this condition. If you fail to provide a certificate of currency of insurance within a reasonable time after our request, then this will be deemed a cancellation by you and standard cancellation fees will apply.

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.

TAKTSANG 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.

GROUP SIZE:

The group size on our Go Beyond Tours is on average 10-15 passengers, with a maximum group size of 18. You may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling. On our group tours we operate a seat-and-a-half policy, allowing you to travel in greater comfort.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). A national escort will accompany each group of 10 or more. 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.

ACCOMMODATION:

All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, 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.

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.

DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA:

Although India is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in Australia. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in Australia; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All 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, refer to notices and follow advice from your guide.

LUGGAGE:

All travellers are limited to two items of luggage each: a suitcase with a maximum weight of 20kg 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.

TIPPING POLICY:

Tipping while on holiday is common in most parts of the world and India is no exception. However, it is not always clear who it is appropriate to tip and how much. Furthermore, travellers may not have the right amounts of cash available at the right time. In order to avoid any inconvenience Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy where a stated amount is given to your national escort at the beginning of your tour and tips are disbursed amongst your main service providers (for example local guides and drivers) throughout your tour. 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. Any other tipping, such as tips for bathroom attendants or hotel porters that are taking luggage to your room, is at your discretion based on satisfaction of services received, as are gratuities for additional requested special services.

We generally find that most customers appreciate the convenience of our tipping policy but we do recognize that it may not suit everyone. However, as this is a group tour we ask that everyone follows the same protocol to be fair to other group members and to ensure smooth operation of your tour

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.

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.

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

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 less mountainous terrain. 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.

APPROPRIATE DRESS:

When visiting temples, both men and women should dress in conservative, non-revealing clothing. Full-length trousers with a shirt or t-shirt for men; and trousers 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.

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 including a visa application form (if applicable), and a help sheet. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

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