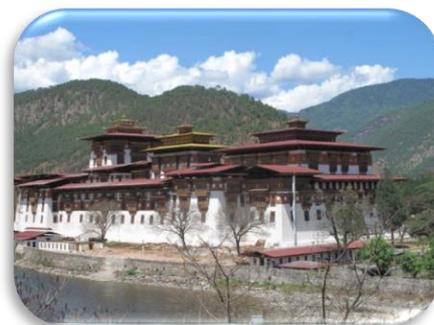


Tour Highlights

A comprehensive tour of Bhutan traversing the country from west to east visiting Thimpu, Paro, the Haa Valley, Punakha, Bumthang, and a chance to witness festivals rarely seen by tourists in Mongar and Tashigang.

- Two days in the Himalayan foothills at Darjeeling
- Steam charter trains on the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (including a dining charter!)
- Chartered tram ride in Kolkata
- A full day at the festival in Mongar
- Time at the festival in Tashigang
- Dinner on the Brahmaputra River in Guwahati
- Option of extra days in Bombay, including the Matheran Hill Railway or Elephanta and a city tour.



Wednesday 20th November

We will check in from a choice of regional airports for our flights to ...

Thursday 21st November - Kolkata

...Kolkata. A coach will take us to our city centre hotel, where our rooms will be ready. In the afternoon, we'll take a short cruise on the River Hooghly (one of the mouths of the Ganges) for a first view of Indian life.

Friday 22nd November – Overnight train



Kolkata is an amazingly vibrant city. We will charter a tram for a ride out to Shyambazar and you will feel part of the buzz of the street markets and city life without the hassle of fighting through the crowds on the footpaths. After a break for lunch, we'll trace some of the history of the city, which used to be the capital of India in the early Raj days with a gentle walk through the old city – amongst others, we'll cover Raj Bhavan (based on Kedleston Hall), Dalhousie Square, the 'Black Hole', street food, Howrah Bridge (British built) and Howrah Station, the busiest in India. After dinner, we head for Sealdah station to catch the overnight Darjeeling Mail.....

Saturday 23rd November - Siliguri

... to Siliguri. We'll be met and taken on the half-hour journey to the Cinderella hotel, our base for the night. Here you can relax in the gardens, visit the local Buddhist monastery or enjoy a walking tour of the bazaar in this bustling city. In the afternoon, we'll head for the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway's Siliguri base to see some of the steam locomotives that have been running this line since 1879. One of them will be hauling our dining train: enjoy a full three course dinner whilst the train blasts uphill through the jungle at dusk. Magical!



Sunday 24th November - Darjeeling

We will take road transport up to Kurseong, where a steam charter train will be waiting for us. This will take us way up through the Himalayan foothills, running mainly on a mountainside ledge, to Darjeeling, where we will be staying at the legendary Windamere Hotel.

Monday 25th November - Darjeeling



If the weather is agreeable, we'll take an early walk down to Observation Point to watch the sun rising on Kanchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world, which dominates this mountain market town. The rest of the day is free in Darjeeling, with plenty to see, including the Mountaineering Institute, the Tibetan Self-help Centre, the Himalayan Zoo, Das Studios' historic photographs and the Oxford bookshop. If you would like to travel on the steam-hauled 'joy train' up to the railway museum in Ghum, let us know by 31 July, and we will book it for you.

Tuesday 26th November - Phuntsholing

We have a long drive today, but a very beautiful one. We leave Darjeeling, heading east and drop down into the Teesta Valley, following the river south to the impressive Coronation Bridge which we cross and continue east through the Dooars region of West Bengal, home of vibrant tea plantations and dense jungle. The Bhutanese Arch marks the entrance to 'The Land of the Thunder Dragon' - mysterious, magical Bhutan, where Gross National Happiness is considered more important than the Gross National Product. The contrast to India is immediate and we should arrive in time to take a walk around Phuntsholing, where we'll stay the night.

Wednesday 27th November - Paro

Today we climb up towards Paro, on an excellent road where we can begin to appreciate the pristine environment of the country. You will see that nearly everyone will be in national dress, emphasising just how 'different' Bhutan is to other parts of the world. During the journey our local guide will keep us entertained with the history and ethos of the country and you will soon begin to see that the Bhutanese are educated, forward thinking, vibrant and fun loving, whilst maintaining their strongly Buddhist, traditional culture. We will make many photographic stops for both nature and the unique traditional architecture which is still practised in all new buildings. Beautifully carved wooden decoration and stunning, symbolic wall paintings adorn even the most humble of dwellings. We will stop for lunch in a small restaurant where you will experience the charm and hospitality that all Bhutanese show towards the few visitors that make it to their country.



Thursday 28th November – Paro

We have a full day sightseeing today in the lush, fertile Paro Valley. There is the option of hiking up the Taktsang Monastery, also known as Tiger's Nest'. Tradition has it that you can fly there on the back of a magic tiger but, unfortunately, you will have to walk! The monastery hangs 900 feet above the valley floor and involves a stiff



couple of hours up (and down!) but the rewards are rich for those able to manage it. We will also visit Paro Dzong - a joint religious, administrative and social centre, the national museum and have time to walk around the small, charming, intriguing town where you will be shown endless friendliness. You will notice that there is no advertising, no one is trying to sell you anything, but the small shops are full of delights.

Friday 29th November – Haa Valley to Timphu

We climb on a good road through ever-changing scenery and cross spectacular Che Le La Pass today. At nearly 4000m it is the highest drivable road in Bhutan. This time of year tends to have the clearest skies and we will hopefully get fabulous mountain views toward Jumolhari, the sacred mountain. We also have a good chance of seeing yaks on this road. The pass has great religious symbolism and is adorned with thousands of prayer flags. We will drop down into the unbelievably beautiful Haa Valley. In a country of few tourists only about 3% visit this remote, stunning area. We will stop in the tiny town, that was once an important trade route with Tibet, and meander along the valley towards Timphu, our home for the night. We will take a picnic lunch with us and may be able to stop at one of the many small farmhouses that dot the hillsides and take a look inside at the traditional way of life, unchanged for centuries.

If you don't have the time available to take the full tour through Eastern Bhutan and back via Guwahati, it is possible to leave the tour at this stage, have an extra day in the town of Paro, then take a local flight to Kolkata to connect with flights home.

Saturday 30th November - Timphu

We will start our tour of the tiny capital city of Thimphu by visiting the post office and having some stamps made with our photos on. We will visit Tashi Chhoe Dzong, home of the National Assembly, the National Institute of traditional medicine, and watch artists being trained in the thirteen traditional Bhutanese crafts at the National Institute for Zorig Chusum. At the National Memorial Chorten we will see the charming sight of many, many old people who spend the day here twirling the prayer wheels. We may be lucky enough to see an archery competition as well as the weekend market.

Sunday 1st December - Wangdue

This morning we cross the Dochula Pass (3050m), home of 108 memorial chortens. We will breakfast at the pass before dropping down into a warmer and very fertile valley to Punakha, the capital until 1955. We will cross a wooden cantilevered bridge to visit the serene Dzong, thought to be the most beautiful in Bhutan, which is stunningly situated at the confluence of two rivers. We will continue to Wangdue Phodrang for the night.

Monday 2nd December - Bumthang

This morning we take the beautiful road across Pe Le La Pass, known for its winter population of black cranes, and enter Central Bhutan. We continue to Trongsa, perched above a gorge, which sits in the geographical centre of Bhutan. Here we will have lunch and stroll around the sleepy, pretty town, visiting the Tower of Trongsa Museum. We will wind through the Chhume Valley to Jangar, the main town in Bumthang, for the night.





Tuesday 3rd December - Mongar

We take one of the most spectacular drives in the country today to Mongar, crossing two passes. Crossing into Eastern Bhutan the landscape changes and becomes much rockier. Content yourself that you are entering an area that, in a country of few tourists, even fewer get to see. Your reward is to see one of the more intimate Bhutanese festivals that very, very few tourists ever visit.

Wednesday 4th December - Mongar

We will visit the festival this morning, and immerse ourselves in the amazing, colourful, welcoming spectacle, a photographer's dream.

Thursday 5th December - Trashigang

An early start will see us moving on to Trashigang, 92 kms east of Mongar. Trashigang Festival will be in full swing and we will have ample time to visit.

Friday 6th December – Samdrup Jonghar

We make our way down to the Assamese Border and spend a last night in Bhutan in Samdrup Jonghar

Saturday 7th December - Guwahati

After clearing the border, we have a three-hour drive to Guwahati, the capital of Assam, alongside the Brahmaputra, a mile wide despite being 700 miles inland! Truly one of the world's great rivers. In the evening, we'll take a cruise on the river and dine on the water.



Sunday 8th December

After a free morning in Guwahati, we will be taken to the airport to catch the 1335 flight to Delhi, where we are due to arrive at 1625. You will need to check in at about 1830 for the 2125 flight via Dubai back to the UK...

Monday 9th December

.... where arrival is due in the early morning.

Optional extension to Mumbai

Sunday 8th December

We will need an early start to catch the 0835 direct flight to Mumbai, where we are due to arrive at 1210. Our coach will take us to the Vivanta President hotel for our next two nights. The afternoon is free.

Monday 9th December

A choice today. You can either stay in Mumbai and take a boat excursion to the caves of Elephanta with their extraordinary carvings or, take a 1½ hour train ride to Neral for an excursion on the narrow gauge Matheran Hill Railway to the traffic-free town of Matheran, Bombay's hill station.

Tuesday 10th December

Today there is a chance to experience the many facets of 'Maximum City'. Leave your pre-conceptions at home and take an optional tour of the Dharavi slum, home to over 1 million people. You will be amazed as we walk through this city within a city and see for ourselves the tanning, recycling, bakery, pottery making and many more small scale industries taking place – The Observer described it as “one of the



most inspiring economic models in Asia”. We will pass through the residential areas and you will get a real sense of the community spirit and friendliness that exists here. On the way we will see the Dhobi Ghat, the vast open- air laundry of Bombay. Then, in the afternoon we will go on a walking tour of Bombay visiting the Raj era architecture, including the Gate of India, Victoria Terminus Railway station and there is a chance to visit the famous Taj Mahal Hotel for a drink in the marvellously evocative bar. There will be time for dinner before leaving for the airport to check in ...

Wednesday 11th December

...for the flight home

What's included?

Economy class flights to/from India, breakfast and dinner (*) daily, accommodation in 3-4 star hotels (or best available locally), all transport, charter trains and excursions as set out in the itinerary and the services of a Darjeeling Tours Limited Tour Manager. All tips throughout the tour (except for the Tour Manager) are included and will be dealt with on your behalf. Personal and incidental expenses are not included.

(*) Dinner is not included in Kolkata or Mumbai, where there is plenty of choice, both in and out of the hotel. Food is not expensive, and this allows considerable individual flexibility.

Please note that you will need a full Indian visa (not an e-visa) for this tour, plus a Bhutan visa. As details for visa requirements change frequently, we will send out current information in August.

Prices

Fully inclusive price from the UK: short tour ending in Paro	£ 3,475 based on two people sharing
Fully inclusive price from the UK: full tour	£ 4,950 based on two people sharing
Three-day Mumbai extension	£ 185
Ground only price (international flights excluded): main tour	£ 4,375
Single supplement: main tour	£ 645
Single supplement: Mumbai extension	£ 115



Please note that carriers, flights times and train times are subject to change.

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