



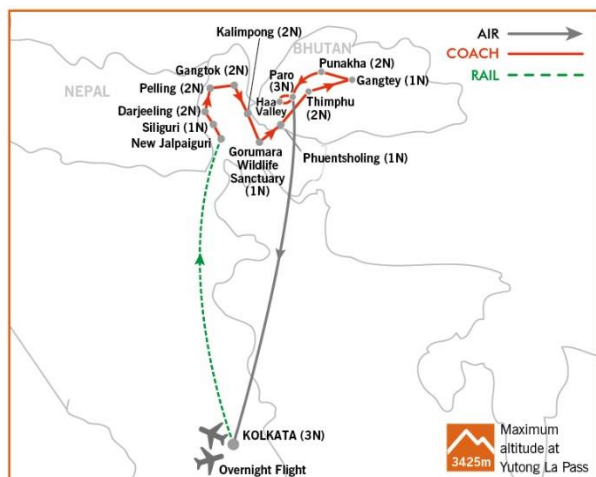
## Himalayan Kingdoms

Immerse Yourself | 24 Days | Active

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

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

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



### Himalayan Kingdoms tour inclusions:

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

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

### Immerse Yourself Tours:

Designed for those who wish to be further immersed in the authentic charm of Asia; our 'Immerse Yourself' 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 'Immerse Yourself' tours include:

- Walking through classic sites
- Unique cultural experiences and encounters
- Off the beaten track destinations

### Active Tours:

'Himalayan Kingdoms' is an **active** tour. This is one of the most demanding trips Wendy Wu Tours offers. As a whole, this itinerary requires a high level of fitness.

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

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

## Itinerary – Himalayan Kingdoms

### Days 1-2: Arrive Kolkata

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



#### Destination Information

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

### Day 3: Kolkata

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

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



#### Destination Information

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

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

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

#### Day 4: Kolkata - Siliguri

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

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

#### Destination Information

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

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

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

#### Day 5: Siliguri - Darjeeling

Darjeeling altitude – 2,134m

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

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



#### Destination Information

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



## Day 6: Darjeeling

Ghoom altitude – 2,258m

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



### Destination Information

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

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

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

## Day 7: Darjeeling - Pelling

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

### Destination Information

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

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

## Day 8: Pelling

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

### Destination Information

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

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

## Day 9: Pelling - Gangtok

Gangtok altitude – 1,677m

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

### Destination Information

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

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

## Day 10: Gangtok

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



### Destination Information

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

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

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

### Day 11: Gangtok – Kalimpong

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

#### Destination Information

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

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

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

### Day 12: 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 13: Kalimpong – Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuary

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



#### Destination Information

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

### Day 14: Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuary - Phuentsholing

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

#### Destination Information

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

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

### Day 15: Phuentsholing – Thimphu

Thimphu altitude – 2,248m to 2,648m

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





### Destination Information

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

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

### Day 16: Thimphu

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



### Destination Information

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Day 17: Thimphu – Gangtey

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

In the afternoon wander of the village and visit Gangtey 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 18: Gangtey - Punakha

Punakha altitude – 1300m

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

#### Destination Information

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

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

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

**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 19: Punakha

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

### Destination Information

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

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

## Day 20: Punakha - Paro

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

### Destination Information

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

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

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

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

## Day 21: Paro

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



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

### Destination Information

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

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

## Day 22: Paro – Haa Valley

After an early breakfast, embark on a day tour to Haa Valley. Drive approximately three hours 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 Songsten Gempo 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 23: Paro - Kolkata**

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



#### **Day 24: Depart Kolkata**

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

## Himalayan Kingdoms Travel Information

### Visas

**India:** A visa is required for entry into India. A standard visa processing service is included in your tour cost. You will need to complete the visa application form following the instructions on the visa help sheet. Once completed you will need to email or post the appropriate documents to our office in order for us to process your visa with the embassy. Once your visa has been approved we will send you a copy of the completed visa by email for you to print out and take with you when you travel to India. Any passports and visa applications that require an express service will incur an extra fee. Your passport must be valid for 6 months from your date of return from India, and should have at least 2 blank pages for your Indian visa.

In rare cases, you may be required to provide further information or documentation to the Indian embassy and/or be required to attend an interview at the embassy. If this is the case, we will notify you as soon as we have been advised.

**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 booking with us that you take out suitable travel insurance. You must provide us with the name of your insurer, policy number and their 24 hour emergency contact number when you book with us or as soon as possible thereafter. These details will be available to your national escort should they be required. Wendy Wu Tours will not be liable for any costs incurred by you due to your failure to take out suitable travel insurance from the date of booking.

### 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 the UK, it is important to keep an open mind and be adventurous. All meals (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive Himalayan Kingdom group tour, from the groups' arrival until the groups' day of departure. Please be aware that dishes selected for your meals reflect the cooking styles and signature dishes of the local area you are in. Sikkimese cuisine depends greatly on the seasonal produce. Most meals will include grains (rice or barley), potatoes, vegetables and some meat. Bhutanese cuisine consists of steamed rice (red or white) served with spicy curries and can be vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Most hotels offer buffet-style meals that include Continental, Chinese and Bhutanese food.

## Taksang Monastery (Tiger's Nest)

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

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

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

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

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

## Accommodation

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

Your accommodation has been selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family-run guesthouse in a smaller town or a heritage-type hotel. In remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but do please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between the UK 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.

## 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 the UK. 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.

## 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 the UK.

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 the UK. However, all of our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense as well as refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort or Local Guide.



## Souvenirs

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

## Group Size

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by a National Escort. There will usually be no more than 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.

## 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 attendants – on your behalf during the tour. 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.

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.

## Appropriate Dress

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

Religious sites and homes throughout India – for Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Muslims or Buddhists to name a few – require all visitors to remove their shoes to enter. Even if you then need to walk outdoors, over hot or rough



ground, you will not be allowed to wear shoes. You will often find shoe storage rooms near the entrance of a site where it is customary to leave your shoes near the entrance. Occasionally there are 'shoe minders' who will offer to keep your shoes safe for a 'tip' – this is not compulsory so each customer can choose to tip for this service or not. If you do not want to remove your shoes, you will have to remain outside.

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

### Climate

Please refer to our website or brochure for detailed temperature charts.

### After your booking

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice followed by deposit documentation, which includes a visa application form (if applicable), and a help sheet. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2 weeks prior to departure.

### Itinerary changes

It is our intention is 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.

**Last updated: August 2017**