



HIMALAYAN KINGDOMS

Go Beyond Tour | 25 Days | Physical Level 4

Kolkata – Siliguri – Darjeeling – Pelling – Gantonk – Kalimpong – Gorumara –
Phuentsholing – Thimphu – Gangtey – Punakha - 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
- All meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escorts (if your group is 10 or more passengers) or Local Guides
- Visa fees for New Zealand passport holders (please see visa section below for further information)
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides
- Safe and secure with IATA

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 4:

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

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

Of course, our National Escort and local guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

JOINING YOUR TOUR:

The tour is 25 days in duration including international flights. Please note, due to flight schedules passengers may depart/arrive on Day 2.

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. Please advise your international flight times to Reservations so we can arrange your transfers accordingly.

Join the tour on Day 2 in Kolkata and end the tour on Day 24 in Kolkata. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

ITINERARY CHANGES:

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

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1-2: Arrive Kolkata

Meals: D

Upon arrival into Kolkata, 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 for a two-night stay.



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

Meals: B, L, D

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 uncomfortable as they still make live animal sacrifices here (usually at midday) and it 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 to 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 to Siliguri

Meals: B, L, D

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 please always 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 to Darjeeling

Meals: B, L, D

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

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.

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 to Pelling

Meals: B, L, D

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

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**

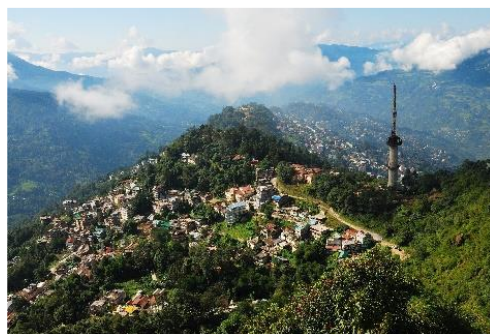
Khecheopalri Lake - Considered to be one of the most sacred lakes in Sikkim by both Buddhist and Hindus. It is believed that whatever is wished for in front of the lake will come true. There is also a myth that when a leaf falls on the placid clear water surface, a bird immediately picks it up.

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

Day 9: Pelling to Gangtok

Meals: B, L, D

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

**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

Meals: B, L, D

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, 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 to Kalimpong

Meals: B, L, D

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

Meals: B, L, D

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 to Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuary

Meals: B, L, D

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.

Please note passports will need to be taken to the wildlife sanctuary today to allow entry

**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 to Phuentsholing

Meals: B, L, D

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 to Thimphu

Meals: B, L, D

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

Meals: B, L, D

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: Thimpu to Gangtey

Meals: B, L, D

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

Meals: B, L, D

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



Day 19: Gangtey to Punakha

Meals: B, L, D

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



Destination Information

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

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

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

Day 20: Punakha

Meals: B, L, D

Explore the area around Punakha today. Visit Sangchen 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**

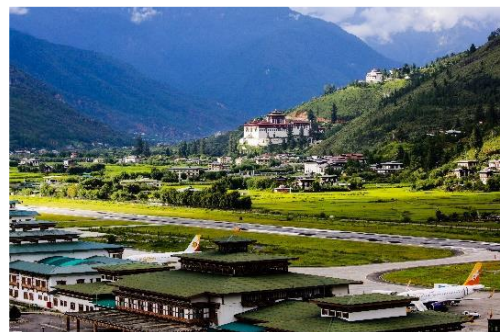
Sangchen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhang - Perched on a ridge stands the magnificent Sangchen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhang temple complex, which houses a temple, a chorten and a nunnery. The temple is home to many statues, including a 14-foot main bronze statue of Avalokiteshvara (Chenrigzig chagtong chentong), 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 21: Punakha to Paro

Meals: B, L, D

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 22: Paro

Meals: B, L, D

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 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 23: 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 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).

**Day 24-25: 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.

HIMALAYAN KINGDOM - TRAVEL INFORMATION

VISAS:

India: New Zealand passport holders currently do require a visa to enter India. Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department can assist you with the process of obtaining a visa. We will supply you with all paperwork if applicable and submit the visa application on your behalf. Your passport needs to be valid for at least six months beyond your intended return date to New Zealand and should have at least 2 blank pages for your Indian Visa.

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

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. Your travel consultant will inform you if any changes are applicable prior to your departure.

INSURANCE:

We strongly recommend that you take out a policy as soon as you pay your deposit. Wendy Wu Tours cannot in any way be made liable for any additional cost incurred by the customer on any tour due to the customer not having adequate travel insurance.

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

EATING IN INDIA, SIKKIM & BHUTAN:

Indian 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 New Zealand, it is important to keep an open mind and be adventurous. Please be aware that dishes selected for your meals reflect the cooking styles and signature dishes of the local area you are in.

Dishes served in restaurants on our group tours are varied. Some will be vegetable-based with meat mixed in, and a few will be meat-based. Our restaurants are aware of the western palate – there are plenty of non-spiced options. When eating meals on group tours, you will usually be seated around a large table with other tour members.

Dishes will be served in the traditional 'family style'; meaning that various dishes will be laid out in the centre of the table. These dishes are intended to be shared amongst the group – there is always more than enough to feed everybody.

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.

We recommend that when it comes to Indian food, you stay open minded and try to be adventurous!

**PLEASE INFORM US OF ANY ALLERGIES AND/OR SPECIAL DIETARY REQUIREMENTS
AT TIME OF BOOKING**

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 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 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.

PORTERAGE:

Please be aware that portering is not included on our tours. You will therefore need to be able to handle your own luggage within the hotel and when using transportation like trains and coaches.

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 New Zealand 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.

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 recognise 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.

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.

Roads have generally been improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the sections above are approximations only.

Planes: Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines. The utmost care will be taken to ensure that your final documents will have the latest information, however your local guide will confirm this in destination. Boarding passes can be collected directly at the airport. The flights booked as part of your itinerary will always reflect the best timings to suit the touring itinerary, with direct flights wherever possible, however due to limited schedules some flights may require an early departure or late arrival.

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 New Zealand. 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.

LUGGAGE:

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

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 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.

CLIMBING STEPS:

Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps. These palaces were built to provide defense against potential invaders so nearly all of them stand on top of a hill, while the interiors have layers of narrow hallways and steps to slow down the advance of enemies once they were inside.

The steps tend to be quite large, not level and sometimes without handrails. Hindu and Buddhist temples or pagodas also tend to be built at an elevation, as this is the most auspicious position according to ancient beliefs. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside.

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

EXCHANGING CASH:

US Dollars can be easily exchanged, provided notes are new and undamaged. We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to remote areas and smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be limited. Try and keep some small notes and coins on you, as on street stalls and in small shops they may not have the change to break up a high denomination note. If you decide to use US dollars, make sure they are in a good state (not ripped, etc.) or they will not be accepted. ATMs are common and we recommend using an ATM inside a bank where possible. Most major credit cards are widely accepted across the continent, though please bear in mind the charges of your provider. Debit cards are also widely accepted but may have a limit to the amount of cash you can withdraw – consult your bank about this before travelling.

PERSONAL EXPENSES AND OPTIONAL TOURINGS:

Personal Expense - You will need to take some extra money to cover drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you.

Optional Tours - May be offered in each city you visit during your tour. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits and if seats are available.

Please ensure you have additional funds available if you feel you may wish to participate in any extra activities. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide, participation and tipping for optional excursions is completely at your discretion.

VACCINATIONS AND YOUR HEALTH:

We recommend that you contact either your Doctor or Health centre for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Safetravel has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful www.safetravel.govt.nz

BEFORE YOU LEAVE:

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with www.safetravel.govt.nz as in the event of an emergency, New Zealand Consular assistance will be more readily available.

Up until the day you travel, it is vital you keep up to date and familiarised with the entry requirements as these can change at short notice. You are personally responsible for completing any entry forms, conducting any covid tests (if necessary), etc and adhering to countries' specific entry requirements.

You can also access the New Zealand 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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