

# itinerary

## Bhutan Land of Thunder Dragons

### Days 1 & 2

Our caravan of insight and adventure begins as we depart **New York**.

### Day 3

Arrive in **Kolkata** and transfer to hotel. Rest from international flight. In the evening dinner and introduction to our program. Overnight — Kolkata.

### Day 4

After lunch we explore Kolkata, the true cultural capital of India that possesses a distinct Bengali soul. It is considered India's friendliest city and was once the capital of British India. Our program begins with a visit to the **Pareshnath Jain Temple** in the north-east section of the city where we will receive our first lecture on Jainism. The Jain religion is one of India's three most important spiritual traditions that originated in India besides Hinduism and Buddhism. Founded in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC by Mahavira, a contemporary of the Buddha, Jainism is dedicated and focused on Ahimsa – non-violence with a profound respect for nature and all living creatures. After our lecture we will explore this magnificent temple with its riot of sculptural ornamentation. Overnight — Kolkata.

### Day 5

Our day begins with a visit to Kolkata's most sacred Hindu temple, the **Dakshineswar Kali Temple** founded in 1847. Here we will receive a lecture on Hinduism, the major religion in India, and learn why Hinduism permeates every aspect of life in both the sacred and the profane worlds in India. After our lecture we will explore this fantastic temple while we observe Hindus coming to perform their daily rituals and practices. After lunch, we will explore another Hindu Temple dedicated Kali, the wife of Shiva, who is one of the fieriest female deities in the Hindu pantheon. In the evening we will experience a live performance of Bengali music and dance. Overnight — Kolkata.

### Day 6

We depart Kolkata on a short one hour flight to Bagdogra where we transfer to our private vehicles. Our **Himalayan Tour** begins as we drive into the picturesque foothills to **Darjeeling**, a popular hill station established by the British in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Darjeeling is one of the most charming towns in the eastern Himalaya that sits upon a 7000 foot ridge and surrounded by tea plantations. In the afternoon we explore **Bhutia Busty Gompa**, our first Tibetan Buddhist monastery that offers a fantastic view of **Kanchenjunga**, the world's third highest mountain. Overnight — Darjeeling.

### Day 7

In the morning visit **Yiga Choeling Gompa**, the most famous monastery in the area that enshrines a beautiful image of the future Buddha Maitreya. Late afternoon is free to explore Darjeeling's wonderful market where we find people from all over the eastern Himalaya who come to work and trade. Overnight — Darjeeling.



**Day 8**

From Darjeeling we depart on a marvelous mountain drive to **Phuntsoling**, the gateway to **Bhutan - the Land of Thunder Dragon**. Bhutan was the last Himalayan Kingdom to open its doors to travelers and is one of the most beautiful destinations on the planet. Some travelers believe it inspired the romantic novel *Lost Horizon*! Overnight - Phuntsholing.

**Day 9**

We begin our day with a visit to the beautiful **Kharibandi Gompa**, a monastery situated in a garden of tropical plants and flowers. After exploring Kharibandi Gompa, we then depart Phunsholing on a breathtaking drive through the lush forested valleys on our way to **Thimpu**. This drive offers magnificent mountain views as we drive through the tiny hamlets and villages.

In the afternoon we arrive in Thimpu, the capital of the Kingdom of Bhutan. Thimpu has been isolated from the rest of the world for centuries. In Thimpu we will explore all the beautiful monasteries with their centuries of collected sacred Buddhist art and the 400 – year old **Tashichho Dzong**, the official office of the King. Overnight — Thimpu.

**Day 10**

Our day begins with a visit to the **Simtokha Dzong**, the oldest fortress of its kind, built by the first leader of a unified Bhutan in 1627. Our tour of Thimpu includes **Changgankha Monastery** with its superb collection of sacred art. After lunch you explore the market where you will experience a bit of local life where you will have the opportunity to observe the remote mountain dwellers haggling and bartering over their goods as they have done for centuries. Overnight Thimpu.

**Day 11**

After breakfast we hike to **Taktsang Monastery** - Tiger's Nest that is one of the most venerated monasteries in the Buddhist Himalayan world. This monastery precariously clings to a side of a mountain far removed from the rest of the world. Late afternoon is free time to explore the market. Overnight. Thimpu.

**Day 12**

Our early morning departure to **Punakha** offers another spectacular mountain drive with breathtaking views of the mighty Himalayan range. This segment of our Bhutan tour is a photographer's paradise! Just before we enter Punakha we will visit **Chimi Lhakhang** temple dedicated to one of Bhutan's most famous meditation masters. After lunch we explore **Punthang Dechen Phodrang** fortress built in 1637. In the late afternoon we will have time to stroll the charming town of Punakha. Overnight Wangdue Phodrang.

**Day 13**

Early morning departure for the medieval town of **Paro** nestled on a beautiful terraced valley with pristine views of the surrounding mountains. Paro is home to some of Bhutan's oldest and most sacred monasteries. In the afternoon we will visit **Kyichu Lhakhang**, built in the seventh century by the famous Tibetan King Songsten Gampo. Overnight Paro.

**Day 14**

After breakfast you explore **Ugyen Pelri Palace**, one of the most beautiful examples of Bhutanese architecture. After lunch we will visit **Tshongdoe Naktsang**, the town temple where we see the locals coming to pray and make offerings. The late afternoon is dedicated to shopping and preparing for our next day departure back to Kolkata. Overnight — Paro.

**Day 15**

We depart Paro on a flight back to Kolkata. Afternoon is free time to rest. Overnight — Kolkata.



**Day 16**

Full free day to explore Kolkata, shop and prepare for our next day return home back to the States. I organize an optional visit to the **Vedic Village** out side of Kolkata where you can receive an **Ayurvedic massage!** Overnight Kolkata.

**Day 17**

Our wonderful journey of India and Bhutan comes to its end as we fly back to the States.

