



BENGAL & BHUTAN EXPLORED, (ZKK)

Kolkata to Kathmandu 15 Days, departing 22nd March 2023



TRIP OVERVIEW

Trip Style: Overlanding

Route: Kolkata to Kathmandu

Duration: 15 Days

Transport: Jeep, Private Bus, Overnight Train, Flight

Accommodation: Overnight Train 1 night
Basic Hotel 8 nights
Guesthouse 2 nights
Comfortable Hotel 3 nights

Meals: Breakfasts x 10, Lunches x 9, Dinners x 10

Physical Challenge: ● ● ○ ○ ○

Your itinerary may include easy-paced day walks, bike rides, and other activities that are not too strenuous.

Lifestyle Challenge: ● ● ○ ○ ○

You may be camping some of the time but the pace of the trip is fairly relaxed and the facilities and road conditions are generally of a high standard.



DAILY ITINERARY

Day 1 - Kolkata (22nd March 2023)

Border Information: If you are joining in Kolkata, you will most likely enter India at Kolkata Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport (IATA code: CCU).

There will be an important group meeting at the joining hotel at 10:00am. Please look out for a note from your tour leader at the hotel reception when you arrive for more details about this meeting. The afternoon is free to explore Kolkata.

Please note that many of the options listed below will only be possible for those with extra time in Kolkata before the start of your trip with us - please contact the Sales team if you would like to book pre-tour accommodation with us to have extra time exploring Kolkata.

We will meet in the evening to board an overnight sleeper train from Kolkata to Siliguri - accommodation will be aboard the train tonight, where there are bunk beds with sheets provided.

Accommodation:

Day 2 - Darjeeling (23rd March 2023)

We will arrive into Siliguri at around 9:00am this morning, meeting our jeeps and drivers at the station for our onward journey through the narrow winding roads to Darjeeling. The town of Darjeeling is really more a collection of villages situated on a high ridge, linked by a series of steps and winding lanes and surrounded by rice and tea terraces.

Jeeps are used in this region rather than our overland truck as they are perfect for the narrow, steep and winding roads of the area.

Day 3 - Darjeeling (24th March 2023)

Today is a free day in Darjeeling to relax, enjoy the surrounding area and take part in some optional activities.

Day 4 - Phuntsholing (25th March 2023)

Meals: Dinner

Border Information: Exit India at Jaigaon, enter Bhutan at Phuntsholing.

This morning we will drive in locally-chartered jeeps from Darjeeling to the Bhutanese border at Phuntsholing, where our local Bhutanese guide will be waiting to receive us at the border gate. Your tour leader will collect all the group's passports to get the visa process underway in order to save time in the morning.

(Please note we will be travelling in a locally chartered bus throughout Bhutan and not our normal overlanding truck).

Day 5 - Thimphu (26th March 2023)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

This morning we will finalise our visas and then start our journey into Bhutan with a drive in a locally-chartered bus from the warmer climes of Phuntsholing up to the capital of Thimphu, nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas.

We will have time in the evening to take a stroll around Thimphu and start to take in the atmosphere and culture of this beautiful country and its gentle way of life.

Day 6 - Thimphu (27th March 2023)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we will have a day in Thimphu for sightseeing. We will have an included city tour from our local guides, including the Changangkha Temple, Memorial Chorten and the Takin Reserve, and there will also be plenty of time for free exploration and visiting the Thimphu markets.

Day 7 - Punakha (28th March 2023)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

In the morning we will drive to the old capital Punakha, via the Dochu La Pass at 3050m, where we will stop for a hot drink and to enjoy spectacular panoramic views of the Eastern Himalaya ranges. We will notice the change of climate and vegetation as we approach the low-lying Punakha at 1250m altitude.

This afternoon we will visit the imposing Punakha Dzong (Palace of Great Happiness). Built in 1637 CE, it is strategically placed at the confluence of two rivers, the Po Chu and the Mo Chu. After this, we will take a pleasant walk for an hour or so across the terraced fields to Chimi Lhakhang (Temple of Fertility) built in the 15th century by the 'Divine Madman' (Lama Drukpa Kuenley).

In Punakha we will stay in a local farmhouse, where we will experience a genuine slice of Bhutanese life and hospitality. The facilities here will be rather basic, but the accommodation is exactly how a typical Bhutanese family live, and the food is in no way adapted for tourists.

Day 8 - Bumthang (29th March 2023)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we drive to Trongsa, the gateway to central Bhutan at 2180m. Set amidst spectacular scenery, Trongsa Dzong, the ancestral home of Bhutan's royal family, commands the eye from miles away. We can also visit Ta Dzong - the newly opened museum in the watchtower is dedicated to the Wangchuk dynasty, tells the stories of the Dzong and the valley, and features personal belongings of the kings and queens of Bhutan.

We then continue through some of Bhutan's most beautiful landscapes to Bumthang, an area of high valleys at 2580-3100m.

In Bumthang we will stay again in a local farmhouse with basic facilities.

Day 9 - Bumthang (30th March 2023)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

We will spend today sightseeing in Bumthang, the spiritual heartland of Bhutan, with its many legendary monasteries, temples and palaces. Bumthang is the collective name for an area of 4 valleys - Chokhor, Tang, Ura and Chhume.

Our guide will take us on a fascinating walking and/or driving tour of a variety of sacred sites including Jamba Lhakhang, Kurjey Lhakhang and Tamshing Lhakhang. We can also visit Bhutan's largest Dzong, Jakar, with its picturesque location overlooking the Chokhor valley.

Day 10 - Gangtey (31st March 2023)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we drive to Gangtey at 2900m. On arrival we can enjoy the views of the immense and remote Phobjikha valley and the black mountain ranges.

We will visit Gangtey Gumpa (one of Bhutan's oldest monasteries which has recently been extensively renovated) and explore the valley where the villagers continue to live a traditional Bhutanese rural lifestyle. This is the site where black-necked cranes visit in their hundreds in November each year after spending the summer in Tibet.

Day 11 - Gangtey (1st April 2023)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we will head out for a day hike in the beautiful Phobjikha Valley. We will first visit the information Centre which has lots of information on the valley famous for its migrating birds. From here we will walk through local villages and forests of blue pine trees covered with lichen (know as old mans beard) and follow the nature trail to Kingathan Village. Here we will visit a temple built by the Queen Mother before making our way back to the hotel.

The walk takes approximately 6 - 7 hours for casual trekkers. This trail is especially recommended for bird lovers.

Day 12 - Paro (2nd April 2023)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

This morning we will take a trek up to the hill-top village of Rinchengang and learn about its interesting history. After this we will continue our drive to Paro, where we will have an included visit to Ringpung Dzong, one of the finest examples of Bhutanese architecture.

Day 13 - Paro (3rd April 2023)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we take a day walk to the 'Tiger's Nest', the sacred Taktsang monastery which clings to the rock face 900m above the valley floor. Guru Rinpoche is said to have flown to the site riding on a tigress, and subsequently meditated here for 3 months. It is one of Bhutan's most holy sites and draws pilgrims not only from Bhutan but also from neighbouring Buddhist countries.

Day 14 - Kathmandu (4th April 2023)

Meals: Breakfast

Border Information: Exit Bhutan at Paro, enter Nepal at Kathmandu.

Today we will take a short flight from Paro to Kathmandu in Nepal. On arrival we will have free time to explore the incredible city, soak up its atmosphere, and visit its historical sites.

Please note: The flights between Bhutan and Nepal will be with Druk Air or Bhutan Airlines - both airlines sometimes change their schedules at short notice. If this happens we will inform you of any itinerary changes as soon as possible.

Day 15 - Kathmandu - End Date (5th April 2023)

Border Information: If you are finishing your trip in Kathmandu, you will most likely exit Nepal at Kathmandu Tribhuvan International Airport (IATA code: KTM).

Today is the end day for passengers finishing their trip in Kathmandu. Please note there is no accommodation included on the trip tonight - please contact your sales agent if you are interested in booking extra nights of accommodation in order to fully explore and take part in some of the optional activities available.

Accommodation:

ITINERARY DISCLAIMER

The routes, activities and places visited described in these notes are intentions and are meant as a rough guide only. By their very nature, overland itineraries need to be flexible and the regions that we are travelling through are often unpredictable. We intend to follow the planned route but exact night stops and inclusions cannot be guaranteed and it sometimes happens that we decide to make a change to our planned itinerary. This may be for a variety of reasons; climatic, road or bureaucratic conditions may demand it. Changes to the itinerary may occur with little notice so please be prepared for modifications to your trip.

Drive Times

Drive times are listed in the day-to-day itinerary. These are the approximate number of hours that the vehicle will be in motion, and does not include any time taken for coffee or lunch stops, border crossings, photo stops, activities en route, comfort breaks, shopping stops, toilet stops, etc. The times given are approximate estimates only and whilst given with the best of intentions, the drive times are heavily dependent on traffic, road conditions, weather, police roadblocks, and many other factors.

Accommodation and Meals Included

The type of accommodation and included meals are listed for each day of the itinerary. These listings show our intention and on most departures the listings will be accurate. However due to the flexible nature of overland itineraries, climatic, bureaucratic or road conditions may demand changes to our listed intentions or groups may simply decide to amend the plans from time to time.

Optional Activities

A selection of optional activities is listed in the day-to-day itinerary. This list is designed to be a helpful guide as to what is commonly available in each location, and is neither an exhaustive list, a guarantee that the activity is available, or an endorsement or recommendation. Certain activities may not be available on your particular visit and it may not be possible to do all the activities listed in the time available at each destination. It is recommended to give yourself extra time in your joining or ending city if you would like to participate in some optional activities there. Prices listed are for entrance only and do not include transport costs to and from the sites or local guides unless indicated. The prices are displayed according to our latest information and in the best faith, but prices do fluctuate due to exchange rates, season, numbers of participants, and simple increases from the operator, and therefore any prices listed are a guide only and cannot be guaranteed. If you partake in any optional activities, you do so at your own risk and it must be clearly understood that your participation is your own decision and does not form part of your contract with Dragoman. You may be required to sign/complete a waiver form or optional activity form for some optional activities. For more information around activity safety and insurance, please see the Essential Information document.

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

In the event of a real emergency once you have left your home country, please contact us on our out of office hours number. If you cannot get through on the phone, please leave a message with your name, reference number, contact details and a message with the help that you need and we will get back to you. Please bear in mind that real progress or action may not be possible until normal office hours, depending on the issue.

If your flight is delayed, please inform us as soon as you can and then make your way to the joining hotel as instructed in the Joining Point section of these notes.

Out of hours Number: +44 (0) 7985 106564

A FEW RULES

We expect all group members to act respectfully towards our staff and other group members. Bullying will not be tolerated.

Engaging in commercial or exploitative sexual activities, committing acts of violence or threatening violence towards local people, other group members or any member of our staff is not allowed. Any customer engaging in such activities will be required to leave the trip immediately with no refund of the trip price.

You must at all times comply with the laws, customs, foreign exchange and drug regulations of all countries visited and conduct yourself in accordance with our responsible travel policy. Any customer found contravening such laws or regulations will be required to leave the trip immediately with no refund of the trip price.

Although we are aware that in some parts of the world taking, carrying or selling drugs, or carrying weapons may be legal, it is not acceptable for Dragoman customers and our tour leaders have the right to ask you to leave the trip immediately with no refund of the trip price if you are found to be engaging in such activities.

ISSUES ON THE TRIP

While we always endeavour to provide the best possible holiday experience, due to the nature of travel and the areas we visit sometimes things can and do go wrong. Should any issue occur while you are on your trip, it is imperative that you discuss this with your group leader or our local partner straight away so that they can do their best to rectify the problem and save any potential negative impact on the rest of your trip.

We recognise that there may be times when your group leader may not be able to resolve a situation to your satisfaction. If this is the case please contact our customer relations department on customer-relations@dragoman.co.uk.

You may also choose to provide details in your feedback questionnaire which we ask you to complete at the end of your trip, but we do ask you to be aware that it is very difficult for us to provide any practical help after the trip is complete.

IMPORTANT NOTES

OVERLANDING LIFESTYLE

Dragoman was founded in 1981, and has had many years of experience of leading overland trips across 4 continents. Overlanding is all about sharing a great travelling experience with like-minded people. On your trip you'll travel in one of Dragoman's purpose-built iconic expedition vehicles on an off-the-beaten-track adventure along rugged roads, experiencing the sights, sounds and smells of the world up-close. Your journey will be overland, sometimes across vast distances, so some long days spent driving are inevitable - but these will be interspersed with breaks of a day or two at a destination or activity.

On an overland journey, you are more than just a passenger and everyone gets involved setting up camp - we supply the tent but it's up to you to pitch it! As part of your trip, you will be assigned a truck job which could be collecting firewood or water, luggage loading, organising food, stores, etc. Like all great adventures, the more you put in the more you'll get out! For more details of how an overlanding trip works, please see the Essential Information document.

SAFETY STANDARDS

We run adventure journeys in off the beaten track areas, which often have poor infrastructure. You should expect that some of these areas do not adhere to 'Western' safety standards. For more information, please see the Essential Information document

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN REMOTE AREAS

We will be travelling to areas in remote locations where medical assistance will not be available, and communications may be sparse. We do not carry satellite phones on our regular trips. Therefore, if you have a medical condition such as a heart condition that would put you at risk, we would suggest that this is not the trip for you. Also, please be aware that should an emergency occur, there is likely to be a considerable delay in accessing medical care, and by joining our trip you accept this risk.

VISAS, HEALTH, INSURANCE & MONEY

Before you travel there are vital things to consider such as:

- Any visas needed for your trip
- Any vaccinations needed (please consult your GP or travel clinic)
- Organising your local payment (the kitty)
- Buying travel insurance (insurance is compulsory to be allowed to join our trips)

For more information on these topics, please see the Essential Information Document.

ALTITUDE WARNING

Warning - this trip goes above 2800m.

Please note that this trip spends time above 2800 metres/9200 feet where it is possible for travellers to experience some adverse effects on your health due to the altitude, potentially including Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS), High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE) and High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE). Because of this it is very important that you make yourself aware of the cause and effects of travelling at altitude and monitor your health during this trip.

For further information please [download our AMS information sheet](#) or refer to the following website: www.high-altitude-medicine.com. If you are starting your trip in a destination above 2800m/9200ft we strongly advise reading this information prior to arrival. Your leader will also hand you a copy of the AMS information sheet during your trip as well as holding a short meeting prior to travelling to altitudes above 2800m/9200ft for the first time.

Some travel insurance companies will stipulate a maximum altitude limit. Please ensure that you are covered and if necessary pay the additional premium of extended cover.

INDIA NOTES

NEPAL NOTES

BHUTAN NOTES

Please ensure you have an up to date version of these notes. **These notes were printed on the 21st June 2021**