



HIMALAYAN ODYSSEY

12 days / 11 nights

Day 1

Bagdogra 93kms – approx 3 hours

On arrival you will be met and transferred to Darjeeling.

Day 2

Darjeeling

Perched at altitude of 2,134m with a backdrop of the mighty Himalayan peaks, Darjeeling derives its name from Dorje-ling, meaning the place of Dorje. The people of the region believe that the King of gods, Indra, has thrown a thunder called Dorje at the place where Darjeeling stands today. In the early 1840s it was noticed that the climate of Darjeeling was very conducive to the growth of tea. Tea plantations were established and have expanded all over the area today because of growing demand. Huge tracts of forests were originally cut down and replaced with tea bushes that stretched for miles. The services of Chinese experts were then requisitioned to teach the art of tea making and thousands of Nepalese were hired in the tea plantations. Darjeeling tea, which had a premium value in the international market, began to be called the 'Champagne of the East' and for years formed the mainstay of the economy of this area. To this day, the name 'Darjeeling' continues to be synonymous with tea.

Full day sightseeing of Darjeeling which includes an early morning sunrise view from Tiger Hill (2,585m). Visit Ghoom monastery built in 1850 by Lama Sherab Gyatsho, a monk from Mongolia. The main feature of this Gelugpa monastery is the magnificent statue of Maitreya, 'the future Buddha' draped in white silk scarves of offering called Khadas. After breakfast visit the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute and the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Center where you can see Tibetan craftsmen making traditional items like carpet, woolen boots, wood carvings and feather goods. Overnight at the hotel in Darjeeling. B

Day 3

Darjeeling-Kalimpong 70kms – approx 3 hours

Nestling at a modest altitude of 1,250m, Kalimpong enjoys moderate climate. Forming a triangle with its more illustrious neighbours, it is known for flowers and nurseries. Entire hillsides are blaze with colour during the season.

This afternoon visit Tharpa Choling Monastery, belonging to the Gelugpa sect followed by visit to flower nurseries. Overnight at the hotel in Kalimpong. B

Day 4

Kalimpong-Gangtok 77kms – approx 3 hours

After breakfast drive to Gangtok-the capital of Sikkim.

A perfect symbol of the confluence of the past and present is Gangtok. Built on the flank of ridge, Gangtok is 1,600 m above sea level. The town's unique ambience derives from the happy blend of tradition and modernity. Along the deeply felt presence of stupas and monasteries, Gangtok also bustles like any other town. But with many of these oases of quietude, those unexpected pockets of peace exist.

Today's sightseeing of Gangtok include:

- Do-drul Chorten; one of the most important stupas built by Trulsi Rinpoche, head of the Nyingmapa order. It contains rare Mandalas of Dorje Phurpa, Holy Books, Montras.
- Enchey Monastery; This 200 year old monastery was built on the site blessed by the great tantric master Lama Druptab Karpa, known for his flying powers.
- Research Institute of Tibetology; it is world-wide center for study of Buddhist philosophy and religion, a treasure house of rare 'Thangka', Statues and over 200 Buddhist icons and prized objects of art.
- Directorate of Handicrafts & Handloom; it is the centre for promoting and keeping alive the traditional arts and crafts, a veritable storehouse of exquisite carpets, blankets and shawls in Lepcha weaves.

Overnight at the hotel in Gangtok. B

Day 5 **Gangtok**

This morning take an excursion to Rumtek Monastery. Situated about 24kms from Gangtok. Rumtek Dharma Chakra Centre is the seat of the Kagyupa order, one of the four major Tibetan Buddhist sects. Since the late 1960s, after the arrival of His Holiness, the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa, the Centre houses some of the world's most unique religious scriptures and objects. Traditional in design, it is replica of the original Kagyupa headquarters.

This afternoon take an excursion to Tashi View Point which offers enchanting view of Mount. Kanchenjunga and Mt. Siniolchu, one of the most graceful peaks in the world. Overnight at the hotel in Gangtok. B

Day 6 **Gangtok-Phuentsholing 200kms – approx 6 hours**

After breakfast drive to Bhutan's border town of Phuentsholing en route passing through lush green tea gardens.

The gateway to the south, Phuentsholing is a thriving commercial center on the northern edge of the Indian plains. Situated directly at the base of Himalayan foothills, Phuentsholing is a fascinating mixture of Indian and Bhutanese, a perfect example of mingling of people and their culture.

This evening visit Zangtho Pelri Lhakhang, the temple representing the heaven of Guru Rinpoche. Then take a stroll around town and local market. B

Day 7 **Phuentsholing-Thimphu 180kms – approx 6 hours**

After breakfast proceed to Thimphu, the modern capital of Bhutan situated at the altitude of 2,400m. Just after leaving Phuentsholing, visit Kharbandi Gompa, the beautiful monastery built by Royal Grand Mother.

The drive from Phuentsholing is very pleasant with numerous scenic spots en route. Nearby Thimphu, visit Simtokha Dzong, the oldest fortress of the Kingdom built in 1627, it now houses the school for Buddhist studies. Overnight at the hotel in Thimphu. B

Day 8 **Thimphu**

After breakfast, enjoy a tour of Thimphu valley including the National Library, housing an extensive collection of priceless Buddhist manuscripts; the Institute for Zorig Chusum (commonly known as the Painting School) where students undergo a 6-year training course in Bhutan's 13 traditional arts and

crafts. Later visit Textile and Folk Heritage Museum, a fascinating testimony of the Bhutanese material culture and living traditions.

After lunch, visit Trashichhoedzong, 'fortress of the glorious religion'. This is the centre of government and religion, site of the monarch's throne room and seat of Je Khenpo or Chief Abbot. Built in 1641 by the political and religious unifier of Bhutan, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, it was reconstructed in the 1960s in traditional Bhutanese manner, without nails or architectural plans. Also visit the King's Memorial Chorten continuously circumambulated by people, murmuring mantras and spinning their prayer wheels. Construction of this landmark was the idea of Bhutan's third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (the father of modern Bhutan" who had wished to erect a monument to world peace and prosperity. Completed in 1974 after his untimely death, it serves both as a memorial to the Late King and as a monument to peace.

Then visit the government-run Handicrafts Emporium and local crafts shops, to browse through examples of Bhutan's fine traditional arts. Here you can buy hand-woven textiles, thangkha paintings, masks, ceramics, slate, woodcarvings, jewellery and interesting items made from local materials. Overnight at the hotel in Thimphu. B

Day 9 **Thipmhu-Punakha** 75kms – approx 3 hours

After early breakfast, drive up to Dochu-la pass (3,088m/ 10,130 ft) stopping briefly here to take in the view and admire the chorten, mani wall, and prayer flags which decorate the highest point on the road. If skies are clear, the following peaks can be seen from this pass (left to right): Masagang (7,158m), Tsendagang (6,960m), Terigang (7,060m), Jejegangphugang (7,158m), Kangphugang (7,170m), Zongphugang (7,060m), a table mountain that dominates the isolated region of Lunana – finally Gangkar puensum, the highest peak in Bhutan at 7,497m.

Later visit Punakha Dzong, built strategically at the junction of Pho Chhu and Mo Chhu rivers in 1637 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to serve as the religious and administrative centre of the region, Punakha Dzong has played an important role in Bhutan's history. Damaged by four catastrophic fires and an earthquake, the Dzong has been fully restored by the present King.

After that drive to Wangduephodrang visiting Dzong and local market. The district of Wangduephodrang is also famous for its bamboo products, slate and stone carvings. Overnight at the hotel in Punakha. B

Day 10 **Punakha-Paro** 125kms – approx 4 hours

After breakfast drive to Paro, the beautiful valley, encapsulates within itself a rich culture, scenic beauty and hundred of myths and legends.

This afternoon visit Ta Dzong, originally built as Watchtower, which now houses the National Museum. The extensive collection includes antique thangkha paintings, textiles, weapons & armour, household objects and a rich assortment of natural and historic artefacts.

Then walk down the trail to visit Rinpung Dzong (fortress of the heap of jewels), which has a long and fascinating history. Along the wooden galleries lining the inner courtyard are fine wall paintings illustrating Buddhist lore such as the four friends, the old man of long life, the wheel of life, scenes from the life of Milarepa, Mount. Sumeru and other cosmic Mandala. Overnight at the hotel in Paro. B

Day 11 **Paro**

This morning drive to Durkgyel Dzong, the ruined fortress from where Bhutanese warriors repelled several invasion by Tibetan armies. Also visit a traditional farm house which offers good insight into lifestyle of local people.

Then take an excursion to Taktsang Monastery. This famous Bhutan monastery is spectacularly perched on the side of a cliff 900m above the Paro valley floor. Taktsang is a place of pilgrimage, which Bhutanese try to visit at least once in a lifetime. It is said that in the 8th century Guru Rinpoche flew on the back of a tigress from eastern Bhutan to this place and meditated in a cave for 3 months, hence its name, 'Tiger's Nest'. The site, which has long been recognised as a sacred place was visited by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1646. The main structure was severely damaged by fire in 1998, but after many years of painstaking renovation work, the complex has now been fully restored to its former glory.

This evening visit Kyichu Lhakhang, one of the oldest and most sacred shrines of the Kingdom. Overnight at the hotel in Paro. B

Day 12

Paro

After breakfast you will be transferred to the airport for your onward flight. B