

# 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 the international flight. In Kolkata we will be staying at the **Vedic Village** – a world class **Ayurveda Spa** renowned for its age-old healing therapies of Yoga, Chinese medicine, Naturopathy and Massage. Situated on more than 100 acres of fertile organic farmlands, natural ponds and coconut groves, the Vedic Village offers an ambience for healing the body, mind and spirit. In the evening we will have our program introduction. Overnight - Kolkata.

### Day 4

After Breakfast we will explore Kolkata, the true cultural capital of India that possesses a distinct Bengali soul. Our program begins with a visit to the **Pareshnath Jain Temple** 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. After our lecture we will explore this magnificent temple with its riot of sculptural ornamentation. After lunch we visit 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. After our lecture we will explore this fantastic temple while we observe Hindus coming to perform their daily rituals and practices. Overnight – Kolkata.

### Day 5

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 is 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 6

In the morning visit **Yiga Choeling Gompa**, the most famous monastery in the area that enshrines a beautiful image of the future Buddha Maitreya. After Yiga Choeling we visit **Thupten Sangag Choeling** monastery where we will receive a lecture on Buddhist philosophy from the abbot of the monastery. In the late afternoon we will explore Darjeeling's wonderful market where we find people from all over the eastern Himalaya who come to work and trade. Overnight – Darjeeling.

### Day 7

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 the Lost Horizon! Overnight - Phuntsholing.



**Day 8**

In the morning we visit our first Buddhist monastery in Bhutan **Kharbandi Gompa**, 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 9**

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. After lunch we explore **Changangkha Monastery** with its superb collection of sacred art. Here we will receive a lecture from one of the prominent resident lamas on Buddhist meditation. Late afternoon is free time to stroll 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 10**

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** – "Palace of Great Happiness" built in 1637. In the late afternoon we will have time to stroll the charming town of Punakha. Overnight- Punakha

**Day 11**

Our day begins with a beautiful mountain drive to **Wangdue Phodrang Dzong** with its magnificent view overlooking the river. Founded in 1638, its prayer hall has a fantastic collection of sacred art. Large statues of Shakymuni Buddha and Guru Rinpoche, the founder of Tibetan Buddhism, greet us as we enter the prayer hall. Here we will meet another lama who will lecture our group on Buddhist psychology. After lunch we visit Radak Naktshang the town temple. Overnight Punakha

**Day 12**

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 13**

After breakfast we take a spectacular hike to Bhutan's most famous monastery **Taktshang Gompa – Tiger's Nest**. Perched on the side of a mountain cliff this is one of the most photographed monasteries in all of the Himalayas. It is one of the most sacred sites in Bhutan and attracts pilgrims from all over Bhutan. The views from this monastery across the valley are out of this world! Overnight Paro.

**Day 14**

In the morning we explore **Ugyen Pelri Palace**, one of the most beautiful examples of Bhutanese architecture. After lunch we will visit **Tshongdoe Naktshang**, the town temple where we see the locals coming to pray and make offerings. Late afternoon is free time to explore the town and market and to prepare for our next day departure back to Kolkata. Overnight - Paro



**Day 15**

We depart Paro on a flight back to Kolkata. Overnight Kolkata

**Day 16**

In the morning we will visit the Indian Museum, one of India's oldest museums that houses the finest collections of Buddhist stone sculptures collected from all parts of India. After lunch we will experience Kolkata's lively market! Overnight Kolkata

**Day 17**

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

**Day 18**

We arrive back in the States!

