Kathmandu & Bhutan

Itinerary

Day 1:
Arrive in Kathmandu Welcome upon arrival and transfer to Hotel in Kathmandu, followed by the Welcome dinner in an authentic Nepali restaurant with the cultural dances.

Day 2:
Following Breakfast and meditation, there will be a full day sightseeing in the World Heritage sites of Kathmandu. It includes the ancient palaces of Kathmandu. Durbar Square is rich in art and architecture and listed in World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The Palace of 55 Windows built during the period of King Bhupatindra Malla in 1754 situated to the left as you enter through the city gate, it inspires admiration. The palace entrance, the Golden Gate known as Sunko Dhoka in Nepali is a masterpiece in reposes art. Boudhanath, thousands of Buddhas and heavenly stupa was built just after the demise of Lord Buddha and is largest single Chhyorten in the world. Many Kilos of gold were used in the decoration of the holy building. It is believed Deities incarnated as Lamas in the Baudanath stupa.

Day 3:
Depart for Bhutan after morning meditation and breakfast. The flight from Kathmandu will fly over the Himalayan ranges. You will get breathtaking views of the worlds highest and most majestic peaks as the plane approaches the Dragon Kingdom’s cloud scraping airstrip at the Paro International airport at an altitude of 7330 ft. Moments before the landing you can catch glimpses of the fertile valley of Paro and the winding Paro Chu (river) and the historical Rimpung Dzong (fortress) more popularly known as Paro Dzong. As you step out of the aircraft, you will actually feel the peace and tranquility of Bhutan. We will follow the Paro River and provide plenty of photo opportunities. On the way we will stop and cross the Paro river on a iron chain bridge built by Thangtong Gyalpo in the late 1300s, and is said to have built 108 of these bridges around Tibet and Bhutan. Many of them are still in use today. After about half an hour's drive you will reach the confluence of two rivers, one flowing from Thimphu and the other from Paro. From the confluence we will follow the Thimphu River for another hour. As you enter into Thimphu you will see the traffic being controlled by traffic men as there are no traffic lights in the Kingdom. After lunch at the hotel we will visit the Thimphu Memorial Stupa, a beautiful landmark built in memory of the late King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. Stay at Hotel.

Day 4:
Visit a local Monastery and drive to Punakha Today we will take an early morning pilgrimage to local Changangkha Lhakhang monastery and chant with the monks. This temple is an old fortress-like temple and monastic school perched on a ridge above the capital. We will start early for Punakha, the old capital of Bhutan. The journey will take about three hours. It will take you across the Dochula Pass (3050M) with a spectacular view of the eastern Himalayas. The pass is also marked by 108 stupas dedicated to world peace by Her Majesty the Queen of Bhutan, Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck. The descent will take us through sub-tropical vegetation and into Punakha. After lunch we will take short hike to Mad monk’s Chime Lhakhang or Monastery, it stands on a round hillock and was built in 1499 by the 14th Drukpa hierarch. He was known as the "Mad Saint" or “Divine Madman” for his unorthodox ways of teaching Buddhism by singing, humor and outrageous behavior. We will be staying at the Dachula Resort Hotel.

Day 5:
Early this morning we will journey to the Sangchen Liendrup Choling nunnery for a early morning chant. This nunnery was built by the King’s maternal Grandmother in 2010. After breakfast we will visit the Punakha Dzong and know about Puna Drubchen an annual festival introduced by Zhabdrung who consolidated control over western Bhutan subduing rivals belonging to the Lhapa, a branch of the Drikung Kagyu sect which had built some of the original dzongs in Bhutan, including Punakha Dzong in 1637-38 to commemorate the victories over the Tibetans.

The Punakha Dzong, built in 1637, was once the old capital of Bhutan and is today the winter residence of the Central Monastic Body. The Dzong occupies an important place in the history of monarchy in Bhutan as the first King of Bhutan. Wangchuck was crowned here in 1907. The Dzong also houses Bhutan's most sacred relic, the Ranjung Kharsapani (the self created image of Avolokitesvara). The inner-most sanctum of the temple houses the Marchen Lhakhang, containing the embalmed body of the Shabdrung, the first secular leader of Bhutan.

From the roof of the Dzong, monks blow on a pair of long horns, and the sound of cymbals, drums and trumpets fill the air. These dance festivals revive the people spiritually and in many ways refine them culturally because the dances communicate moral lessons, and both the performer and the observer benefit from the exchange. The Bardo dances, the main event of the Tsechu festival, serve as a reminder to Bhutanese of their future destiny depending on their past and present deeds. The dance of Noblemen and Ladies tells the story of flirting princesses who are punished for their indiscretions. The dance of the Stag enacts the tale of a hunter who was converted to Buddhism and gave up hunting. Night stay at Hotel.

Day 6:
Punakha-Paro. Today we will drive through Thimphu, en route to Paro, and stop for shopping and lunch in Thimpu. Afterwards and we will visit the Buddha Dordenma, a bronze statue, a 'Vajra Throne' Buddha overlooking Thimphu city, about 100 metres (330 ft) above the Wang Chuu river. The statue will house over one hundred thousand smaller Buddha statues, each of which, like the Buddha Dordenma itself, will be made of bronze and gilded in gold. After our visit to the Buddha Dordenma, we will proceed to our hotel.

Day 7:
Local sightseeing in Paro. Today we will wake up to the beauty of Bhutan. On a clear day, one can see the 24,000-ft domed ajestic Jumolhari in the background of the fortress, blessing the Paro valley. It is believed that the goddess Jumo resides on this sacred mountain. Further up the valley you will see the majestic Taktsang (Tigers Lair), clinging onto bare rock face.

We will visit Kichu Lhakang Temple which was built in 659 (7th century) by the Tibetan King Tshongtsen Gampo. It is believed he built 108 temples across the Himalayas and Kichu happens to be one of the last remaining ones. The Jowo Temple of Kyichu is one of the oldest temples in Bhutan, originally built in the 7th century by the Tibetan Emperor Songsten Gampo. It is considered to be one of the 108 temples he built. In the 8th century the temple was visited by Guru Rinpoche and it is believed he concealed many spiritual treasures here. Pilgrims turn the many prayer wheels 7 along the walls as they circumnambulate the temple. The fine statues of Boshisattvas and the Buddha are national treasures.

The wooden floor of the sanctum is inlaid with turquoise and coral gemstones offered by pilgrims. There is also a chorten that contains the ashes of the great Tibetan Lama Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. The teacher of the Dalai Lama.

Day 8:
After breakfast we will depart early in the morning and hike to Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) Monastery, which is the most famous monastery in Bhutan. Guru Rinpoche, an Indian saint is said to have flown on the back of a tigress from Singye Dzong in Lhuntse to meditate in a cave where Taktsang Monastery now stands. It is perched on the edge of a steep cliff, about 900 meters above Paro Valley. The hike to reach the viewpoint to the monastery makes for a nice half-day excursion. Hike back to Paro. In the afternoon when we return we can take an optional hot stone bath. Overnight at hotel.

Day 9:
Complete the departure formalities at the airport and bid you good bye with traditional Tashi Khadhar.