EXPLORE!

TRIP NOTES

PRICE GUARANTEE 100% NO SURCHARGES

Inside the Hidden Kingdoms (BH 2017)

CULTURAL DISCOVERY

TRIPDURATI(
21
DAYS

Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Full On

Tour Type: Small Groups
Accommodation
Grade: Standard

Trip Code: BH

Trip Highlights - Inside the Hidden Kingdoms

- ✓ The Sundarbans - Take a cruise through the UNESCO World Heritage landscapes of one of the world's largest mangrove forests
- ✓ Darjeeling - Take a ride on the 'Toy Train' in this famous hill station
- ✓ Gangtok - Soak up the atmosphere in the colourful Sikkimese capital
- ✓ Thimpu - Spend time in the most relaxed capital city in the world
- ✓ Punakha - Visit the stunning Dzong, located at the confluence of two rivers

Trip Essentials

Accommodation:	18 nights Standard Hotel 1 night Simple Overnight Train 1 night Premium Camping
Included Meals:	20 breakfasts, 8 lunches, 7 dinners
Start Point:	Join trip: Kolkata
End Point:	Trip ends: Kathmandu
Transport:	Bus, Boat, Flight
Countries:	Nepal, India, Bhutan

Inside the Hidden Kingdoms

Travel with us on this cultural adventure from bustling Kolkata and the nearby Sundarbans, through the tea plantations of Darjeeling and into the Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan. Along the way we explore relics of the Raj, ruined monasteries and ancient temples. These awe-inspiring religious sites are set against the dramatic backdrop of the Himalayan Mountains.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Accommodation Grade: Standard

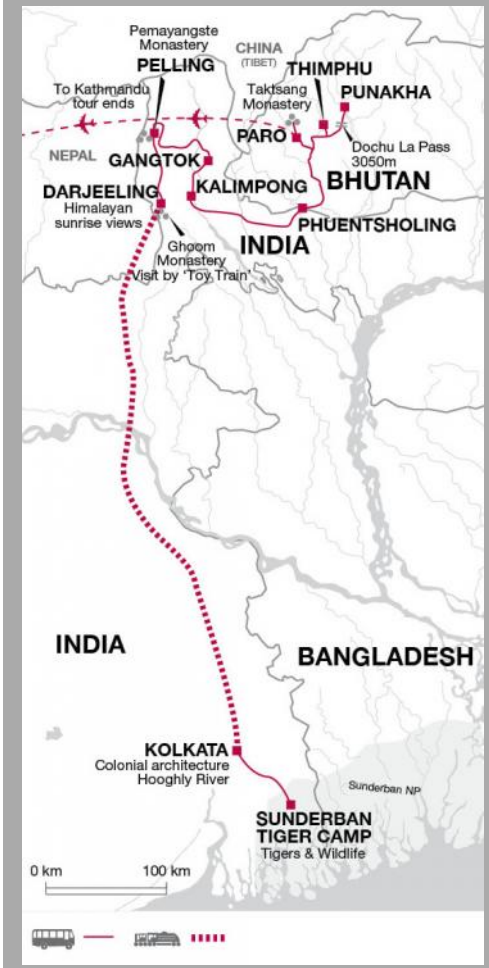
Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Tour Pace: Full On

These fast paced tours move on quickly from place to place and with lots of early starts and long busy days, they're packed with experiences.



Your trip itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

DAY 1 Join trip in Kolkata (Calcutta)

Our trip begins this evening in Kolkata (Calcutta). Once the capital of British India, Kolkata has had a turbulent past. It was central to the struggle for Indian independence and thousands of Bengali refugees came here at the start of the 1900's. It is a city of striking contrasts and can be overwhelming initially, but the unusual sights, pungent smells and the chaotic sounds of the country's second largest city are an experience unique to India. Flights to Kolkata often arrive in the middle of the night, so while the trip begins today we will expect some of the group to arrive in the early hours of day two.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: None

DAY 2 Explore Kolkata's temples and historic buildings

Today we intend to explore this most interesting of cities, with a tour of some of its major sites. We plan to visit St John's Church and the many historic Raj buildings around Dalhousie Square, the Jain and Kali temples and the magnificent marble dome of the Victoria memorial, where the sumptuous grandeur of European and Mughal influences come together in a blaze of white marble. We also visit the clay modeller's village of Kumartuli where the potters spend all year creating a wealth of images and idols for the annual festivals and, as the time approaches for the models to be prepared for the coming pujas, the streets are filled with an overwhelming display of brightly coloured and richly attired idols.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3 Discover more of Kolkata; visit to Belur Math and Dakshineswar Kali Temple

We will pay an early morning visit to the colourful flower market where tons of brightly coloured marigolds are sold by traders, before driving to Belur Math on the banks of the sacred Ganges. A place of pilgrimage for people all over the world, the site is famous for its tranquil setting and the architecture of its buildings, in particular the Ramakrishna temple which is designed to celebrate the diversity of Indian Religions and resembles a temple, a mosque, a church when viewed from different vantage points. After exploring Belur Math we'll take a short boat ride across the river to the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. Constructed in the 19th century by wealthy widow Rani Rasmani, it is said that the goddess Kali appeared to her in a dream promising to manifest herself at the site if a temple was constructed in her honour.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4 Search for wildlife in the Sundarbans

After breakfast this morning we leave Kolkata for the unique landscapes of the Sundarbans. Translating as the 'beautiful jungle', this UNESCO World Heritage setting is home to one of the largest mangrove forests on the planet. Set amongst a vast delta that is fed by the waters of the Padma, Brahmaputra and Meghna Rivers, the area is a haven for Bengal tigers, crocodiles and a remarkable diversity of birds. A short cruise takes us to the Sundarban Tiger Camp, our base for the next two nights. We'll have lunch before heading out by boat again to the Sajnekhali Tiger project area. There is a small museum and a watch tower for spotting tigers and other wildlife, and a crocodile enclosure and a turtle hatchery which helps preserve these endangered animals. The nearby heron sanctuary is a beautiful spot, and Egrets are common visitors to this part of the jungle and are likely to be spotted.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5 Cruise through narrow creeks to Dobanke wildlife viewing platform

Starting early we continue our exploration of the Sundarbans, cruising along winding creeks and through dense mangrove forest in search of the wildlife the area is famous for. If we are in luck we may spot Royal Bengal tigers relaxing on the mudflats next to the rivers and creeks. Other wildlife we can see includes Fishing cats, Leopard cats, Macaques, Wild boar, Indian grey mongoose, Pangolin, and Chital, as well as an abundance of birdlife. We'll make a stop at Dobanke Watch Tower where we'll enjoy a canopy walk to view the animal and bird life at the tree tops, and visit the spotted deer rehabilitation centre. In the afternoon we pay a visit to some of the local villages where we'll get an insight in to local culture and life, including the challenges of living with Bengal Tigers as neighbours.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6 Return to Kolkata. Overnight train and drive to Darjeeling

After a final cruise in the Sundarbans, a visit to Sudhanyakhali Watch tower and lunch at the Tiger Camp, we'll leave for Kolkata. There'll be time for an evening meal in the city before boarding the Darjeeling Mail overnight sleeper train.

Overnight: **Simple Overnight Train**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 7 Continue to Darjeeling and enjoy an orientation walk of the town

Our train in scheduled to arrive in to New Jalpaiguri station at 08.00 and we'll stop for breakfast before continuing by road to the hill station of Darjeeling. In the days of the Raj the Bengal government escaped from the Calcutta heat to take up its official summer residence here and today's city dwellers still do likewise with Darjeeling being a popular holiday spot. At 2134m, the town is beautifully situated on a mountain ridge; the near vertical streets are crowded with a colourful mixture of Hindus and hill tribes - Lepchas, Bhutias and Tibetans among them. On a clear day the views over the mountains to the snowy Himalayan peaks are magnificent. There'll be time to relax after the train journey before enjoying an afternoon orientation walk of the town.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 8 Watch the sunrise across the Himalaya at Tiger Hill

Tiger Hill is the area's highest viewpoint (2590m), some 8 miles from Darjeeling and weather permitting, we plan to make a dawn excursion here to contemplate the sunrise and the beauty of the world's third highest mountain Kanchenjunga (8586m) and other eastern Himalayan peaks. If the morning is very clear it may also be possible to see Mt Everest (8848m). There are many things to see in the town; the Himalayan Zoological Park which has had success at breeding snow leopard, Tibetan wolf and Red panda, the Mountaineering Institute with its Everest Museum or you may wish to visit the Tibetan Refugee centre where Tibetan craft work is on sale. This afternoon will be left free for you to explore Darjeeling and take some of the other smaller walks around town.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 9 Ride on the Toy Train to Ghoom Monastery

Ghoom Gompa (monastery) is about 8km south of Darjeeling and well worth a visit.The journey there is taken on the Toy Train line, a narrow gauge railway running between New Jaipaiguri and Darjeeling. Whilst we endeavour to book the traditional steam trains many of the trains servicing this route are now diesel. There will also be plenty of time to make short walks in the surrounding area or alternatively you could visit the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway museum. There will be an option to walk back to Darjeeling along the scenic ridge track via Allobari village (weather permitting) approximately 2hrs walk.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 10 Drive to Pelling. Evening walk to Sanga Choling Monastery

Today we have a long drive to Pelling (approximately 8 hours) and this afternoon we cross into the former Kingdom of Sikkim, annexed by India in 1975 to become the 22nd Indian state. On arrival in the town there will be the opportunity to take an optional walk to the Sanga Choling monastery, approximately one hour each way.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 11 Walk on the shores of Kecheopelri Lake; visit Pemayangtse Monastery

Today we visit Kecheopelri or the Wishing Lake, considered to be the holiest lake in Sikkim. It is a place of pilgrimage for Buddhists and Hindus alike. We will have a picnic lunch at the lake and then return to Pelling. This afternoon we will visit Pemayangste Monastery. This great monastery is the second oldest and one of the 60 still active, and is home to an exceptional collection of religious artworks. Established in the 8th century by the famous Indian teacher Padmasambhava, its members are devotees of a mystical type of Tantric Buddhism, characterised by the red caps they wear. Their religion is derived from Tibetan Lamaism, a curious mixture of Mahayana Buddhism, mythology and magic.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 12 Explore Sikkim's former capital. Drive to Gangtok

On our 8 hour drive along the mountain roads today we pay a short visit to Rabdentse, the former capital of Sikkim in the 16th century before continuing on through semi tropical forests, cardamom plantations and small villages to Gangtok the present day capital of Sikkim, spectacularly set on a long ridge flanking the Ranipul River and offering many fine vantage points of the entire Kanchenjunga range. On arrival in Gangtok we visit the Drodul Chorten, built to commemorate the victory of good over evil. Surrounding the chorten are 108 prayer wheels. We also pay a visit to the Institute of Tibetology whose collection of rare books and manuscripts will interest students of Buddhism. Here there are numerous priceless religious paintings, statues and other religious artwork.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 13 Visit a Tibetan craft centre. Free time to relax

Today we explore Gangtok. We will pay a visit to the Tashi Handicraft Centre, a small centre established to help Tibetan refugee women find work. There are many items of tapestry, knitting and embroidery in traditional ornate designs. The rest of the day is free to relax and soak up the capitals atmosphere.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 14 Drive to Kalimpong stopping at Rumtek Monastery

We drive today to the other side of the Ranipul Valley to the Gompa at Rumtek. The headquarters of the Kagyupa sect of Tibetan Buddhism was built in the 1960s as a replica of the Tsurpu's monastery in Tibet. The religious murals are still being added to today. We then continue to the little bazaar town of Kalimpong. The town was formerly an important trading post for wool merchants coming from Tibet and the local bazaar is still the place to meet people of a dozen different cultures and religions.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 15 Pass through vast tea estates and enter Bhutan

Departing for the Bhutanese border town of Phuentsholing we drive for approximately 6 hours through the vast tea estates of the Gangetic plains of Bengal. Approximately one quarter of India's tea is grown in West Bengal state. On arrival in Phuentsholing we will meet our Bhutanese local guide and there will be time for a wander in the town.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 16 Discover Thimpu's Tashichho Dzong

We drive towards Thimpu along winding roads, passing paddy fields, apple orchards, pine forests and small hamlets, protected by sculptures of the eight auspicious signs of the Tashi Tagye. The Bhutanese capital lies in a fertile valley formed by the Wang Chu River, and has expanded rapidly over the last couple of decades. On arrival in Thimpu we will have a sightseeing tour to see the Tashichho Dzong – the religious and political centre of Bhutan.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 17 Cross the Dochu La Pass en route to Punakha

On the road to Punakha we climb up through oak, pine and rhododendron forest to reach Dochu La Pass (3050m). If the weather permits, magnificent views pan out across the mountains towards Gangar Pensum at 7541m, the tallest mountain in Bhutan. Dropping down into the valley, Punakha's benign climate allows orange and banana groves to flourish within sight of the snow capped Himalayan Mountains. Our accommodation tonight is set 8 kilometres from the centre of Punakha on the banks of the Mo Chu River. We camp in two man walk in tents with thick mattresses, all bedding and towels. Toilet tents are provided with flush toilets. There are shower tents with hot water available as well as the chance to try out a traditional hot stone bath. There is a central area with space

to relax around a camp fire and the cook team will create traditional Bhutanese meals to be served in the dining tent. Electricity is supplied in the dining and toilet tents and the walk ways are lit by small lamps but you will find a torch useful.

Overnight: **Premium Camping**
Your own tent available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 18 Visit the riverside dzong before driving to Paro

In the morning we pay a visit to Punakha Dzong. Built in 1637 on a sand bank at the confluence of the rivers Mochu and Phochu, this sacred dzong was the seat of the Bhutanese government until 1960 and is a fine example of Bhutanese monastic architecture with squat rectangular buildings made up of two or more tiered levels crowned by a tower and small golden spire above. Returning westwards we take an afternoon drive to Paro. (Approx. 5 hours.)

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 19 Hike to the Tiger's Nest Monastery

This morning there is an opportunity to climb up to visit the Taktsang or Tiger’s Nest Monastery. The monastery clings precariously to a cliff face, and local legend recounts that Guru Rinpoche, who founded the Drukpa Sect and brought Buddhism to Bhutan, flew here on the back of a tigress to start the first monastery. In the afternoon we’ll visit a local farm and have the chance to sample some yak butter tea and have a group talk with the farm host. Paro is also home to Kyichu, Bhutan’s oldest temple or lhakhang as it is also known.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 20 Fly to Kathmandu. Walk through Durbar Square

Today we fly the short distance to Kathmandu, the bustling Nepalese capital. On arrival we take a walking tour visiting the bazaar and the Durbar Square area, the centre of old Kathmandu. Much of the day to day life of Kathmandu takes place in the bazaar: a fascinating mixture of people selling fruit, vegetables and spices; potters spinning their wheels to produce small household bowls and containers for temple offerings; devotees visiting their favourite gods at temples and small shrines dotted along the sides of alleyways; rickshaw wallahs honking their horns and the ever present sacred cow wandering amongst it all. In the afternoon we plan to visit the Temple of Pashupatinath on the banks of the Bagmati River, the holiest Hindu shrine in Nepal. Please note: Our flight between Bhutan and Nepal is with Druk Air. Druk Air sometimes changes their flight schedule at short notice - if this happens, then we will inform you of any itinerary change as soon as possible.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 21 Tour ends in Kathmandu

Our tour ends this morning after breakfast.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Accommodation Notes

Accommodation in India is as varied as the country itself. On our tours we stay in a mix of hotels, heritage properties, camp sites and homestays. Standards do not equate to standards in the UK and it's best to approach each type of accommodation with an open mind. Service can be slow in places especially when travelling with a group. For the most part hotels do not have heating so in the winter months it can be chilly and if you feel the cold you may wish to ask for extra blankets. Hot water is not always available 24 hours a day in some of the smaller properties, and with a group staying you might find if you are showering last you may miss out on the hottest water.

Bhutan
Food in Bhutan whilst delicious can be a little on the repetitive side. Most meals consist of fresh vegetables, locally grown red rice

and often a meat dish. Vegetarians will eat well as many Bhutanese are totally vegetarian in accordance with their Buddhist faith. Every meal comes with Bhutan's national dish, chilli's with cheese! It might sound a little odd, and perhaps concerning for those not comfortable with spices but it's very tasty and a great accompaniment to a meal. The chillis vary in heat and are smothered in a cheese sauce made from nak cheese. It is usually served as a side dish so you can be as brave as you like!

Food & Drink

Included meals: 20 breakfasts, 8 lunches,7 dinners included in the price of this trip. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Trip

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the trip price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide.Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Nepal

Lunch £: 7.00

Dinner £: 10.00

India

Lunch £: 6.00

Dinner £: 8.00

Bhutan

Lunch £: 7.00

Dinner £: 10.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Nepal

Bottle of Beer £: 3.00

Water £: 0.30

India

Bottle of Beer £: 1.40

Water £: 0.50

Bhutan

Bottle of Beer £: 2.00

Water £: 1.00

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Some free time has been allowed for you to explore on your own or with your travelling companions.

Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Tipping - Local Crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise

a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.
Accordingly, you should allow for 70USD for tipping. This tip will need to be provided to the tour leader in USD rather than GBP.

Foreign Exchange

Nepal

ATM Availability: Although you may occasionally find cash machines these are very unreliable – do not rely on plastic!

Credit Card Acceptance: Credit cards are not generally accepted except in larger establishments in Kathmandu.

Travellers Cheques: Travellers cheques are not accepted as a valid mode of payment in Nepal.

Local Currency: Nepali Rupee.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US$ or GBP.

Where to Exchange: In major cities and towns

India

ATM Availability: ATMs are available in most large cities in India but they are very limited elsewhere so please do not rely on this.

Credit Card Acceptance: Very rarely, only in the larger outlets.

Travellers Cheques: Opportunities to exchange are limited.

Local Currency: Indian Rupee Recently new 500, 1000 and 2000 rupee notes have been bought in to circulation and as the old notes are no longer accepted there have been some cash flow issues. You don't need to worry about being given old notes as it's very easy to tell the difference, the new notes are pristine in comparison with most Indian money which is fairly tatty.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: GBP/US$ are the best currency to change into local currency.

Where to Exchange: The Indian rupee is a restricted currency and it is best not to obtain in the UK as rates are very poor. You can either change money at the airport on arrival or in major towns during the tour. Your Tour Leader will advise you on the best places in each town. Both GBP and USD cash are easy to exchange at the airport and at hotels however you will be restricted to changing £60 cash at a time and it's not possible to change money at these locations using a credit or debit card.

Bhutan

ATM Availability: You may occasionally find cash machines but they are very unreliable – do not rely on plastic!

Credit Card Acceptance: Very limited. There is a 5% surcharge for using them at places where the facility is available.

Travellers Cheques: Very limited opportunities to exchange.

Local Currency: Ngultrum

Recommended Currency for Exchange: USD and GBP

Where to Exchange: Your Tour leader will advise you.

Joining your Trip

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

EXPLORE!
The Adventure Travel Experts

CAMPBELL IRVINE
DIRECT TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel Insurance is essential. If you have not already arranged cover, please contact our recommended Travel Insurance providers www.campbellirvinedirect.com/Explore who offer Travel Insurance specifically designed to cover travel with Explore or call **Campbell Irvine Direct** on Tel: 020 7938 1734

Explore Worldwide is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Travel Aware

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at www.explore.co.uk/travel-safety
We strongly advise that you register with the FCO to receive updates to the travel advice for your chosen destination.

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Visa Information

India: Holders of passports endorsed 'British citizen' may be eligible for the e-Tourist Visa to enter India.

The visa can be applied for through the official Indian government visa website only - https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html. Please check all eligibility criteria that can be found on the website but important points are listed below -

You must be arriving into one of 16 selected entry points, however, you can exit from any of the authorised immigration check posts in India.

Entry points are - Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Goa, Kochi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Jaipur, Amritsar, Gaya, Lucknow, Trichy, Varanasi and Ahmedabad.

Passports must have at least 6 months validity from the date of arrival in India and at least two blank pages for stamping. The visa application will take approximately 4 days to process.
It is only valid for 30 days and is only allowed for a maximum of two visits in a calendar year.

The visa costs $60. Biometric data will be collected on arrival in India.

Whilst the online form offers a relatively quick way to apply for a visa, a number of applicants have reported difficulty in completing the form. Travcour will complete the on-line visa on your behalf for a fee of £25 + the visa cost. Please contact them directly if you wish to take up this service.

If you are not eligible for the e-Tourist Visa, please refer to VFS Global to apply for your Indian visa - http://in.vfsglobal.co.uk/how_to_apply.html.

Sikkim: Please do not apply for a Sikkim permit, this will be organised locally for you by our local agent.

Bhutan: A visa for Bhutan will be arranged locally. In order to do this please forward a scanned colour copy of your passport to Explore at least 8 weeks before your departure. You will pay for your Bhutan visa on arrival - allow approximately US$ 40 cash.

Nepal: An entry visa is required by UK, New Zealand, Australian, USA & Canadian citizens and can be obtained on arrival at Kathmandu Airport and various international border crossings between Nepal and its neighbouring countries. This currently costs 25USD for a 15 day visa, and 40USD for a 30 day visa. All visas are issued as multiple entry visas and are valid from the date they are issued. A passport-sized photograph for immigration is required. Payment must be made in cash, UK sterling and US dollars are both accepted.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Vaccinations & Protection

Nepal

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against malaria, infectious hepatitis, typhoid, tetanus, polio and Japanese encephalitis. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Although not compulsory, travellers may wish to take immunisation against meningococcal meningitis.

India

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against Tetanus, Infectious Hepatitis, Typhoid and Polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria (eg. Paludrine, Chloroquine, Mefloquine etc.). The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth and from your local healthcare provider.

Bhutan

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against malaria, tetanus, infectious hepatitis, typhoid and polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria (eg. Paludrine, Chloroquine, Mefloquine etc.) The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/ and from your local healthcare provider.

Preparing for your Trip

Climate

Nepal

Temperatures in the lower altitude regions are extremely pleasant. At Pokhara variations in temperature are very limited: from the coldest recorded of 8°C (46°F) to the highest of 31°C (88°F). The mountains are best admired, with greater air clarity, from October to March. Monsoon rains are strongest in June, July and August. The coldest months are December and January.

India

There is considerable variation between the different regions of India but, in general, the climate is tropical. Summer temperatures on the plains are very hot, but cooled by the South-West Monsoon, which lasts from June- September. During these months it can be very wet and therefore very humid. At altitude, temperatures can become quite cool at night even in the summer and may drop below freezing between December and February so warm clothing is necessary. In the winter, northern and mid India can be very cool, with cold evenings, so warm clothing, including plenty of layers, are essential. The south of India remains warm and sunny during the winter months.

Bhutan

The best weather lasts from September (after the monsoon) through to Jun and the mountains are best admired, with greater air clarity in the autumn. Spring (mid Mar-May) is cool & often stormy. Autumn is from Oct to mid Nov with clear skies, warm days & cool (sometimes cold) nights. As in any high mountain area it can rain, hail or snow at any time of year.

Clothing

High altitude night temperatures in the Himalaya are cold so make allowance for warmer clothing, including jumpers, warm pajamas, and socks, and a waterproof accordingly. On the Gangetic plains, only lightweight clothing is needed from March to November. If travelling from December through February you will need at least some warmer clothing for evenings. Local people may be offended by western styles of dress. Brief shorts tight fitting clothing etc. should be avoided by both men and woman. For Dzong visits, you will need collared, long-sleeved shirts and closed shoes.

Equipment

Bring a personal water bottle, sunhat, sunscreen, torch and mosquito repellent. You may also like to bring walking poles for our walk to the Tigers Nest Monastery.

Footwear

Comfortable closed shoes suitable for walking and sandals. Good walking shoes are needed to walk to the Tigers Nest monastery.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Luggage allowance on trip: 20kg

General Information

Country details

Nepal

Population: 29,331,000

Size of Country: 147,181 sq km

Major Language: Nepali

Religion: Hinduism

Time Difference to GMT: +5:45

India

Population: 1,210,193,422

Size of Country: 3,287,263 sq km

Major Language: Hindi and English.

Religion: Catholicism, Hindu, Muslim and Sikhism

Time Difference to GMT: +5

Bhutan

Population: 672,425

Size of Country: 38,394 sq km

Major Language: Dzongkha, plus various Nepalese and Tibetan dialects.

Religion: Lamaistic Buddhist, Indian/Nepalese Hinduism.

Time Difference to GMT: +6

Electric Supply & Plugs

Nepal

2 Pin Round

India

3 Pin Round

Bhutan

2 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We’ve been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailormade holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, or any number of unusual forms of transport. Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic

local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people) and have recently supported women's cooperatives in Borneo and Morocco. We are a member of Tourism Concern's Ethical Tour Operator Group (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) and support their campaign for fair and ethical tourism. We also care passionately about the world's wildlife and actively support and promote the Born Free Organisation and Mahouts Elephant Foundation.

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's LicenceÂ granted by the Civil Aviation Authority.Â Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017.

Trip Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2017 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2017. 2018/19 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2018.

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