EXPLORE! Tour Notes

PRICE GUARANTEE 100% NO SURCHARGES

Festivals of Bhutan (BI 2016 BLACK CRANE FESTIVAL)

CULTURAL DISCOVERY

TRIPDURATI
12
DAYS

Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Full On

Tour Type: Small Groups
Accommodation
Grade: Standard

Trip Code: BI

Trip Highlights - Festivals of Bhutan

- ✓ Punakha - The ancient capital of Bhutan. Visit Punakha Dzong and hike in the Punakha Valley
- ✓ Phobjika Valley - Look out for the rare black-necked crane
- ✓ Paro - Climb up to the 'Tiger's Nest' Monastery, perched high on the cliff side
- ✓ Thimpu - Walk through the most relaxed capital in the world
- ✓ Kathmandu - Explore the old city on foot before visiting the Pashupatinath temple complex

Trip Essentials

Accommodation:	3 nights Premium Hotel 8 nights Standard Hotel
Included Meals:	11 breakfasts, 8 lunches, 8 dinners
Start Point:	Join trip: Kathmandu
End Point:	Trip ends: Kathmandu
Transport:	Bus, Flight
Countries:	Nepal, Bhutan

Festivals of Bhutan

Peaceful monasteries, jagged Himalayan mountains and deep valleys are all part of this fascinating journey through the Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan. We meet the welcoming locals for whom tradition and ritual are still a way of life. After discovering this unique country's rich cultural heritage we return to Kathmandu to sample bustling Nepalese city life.

Why Book this trip

Black Neck Crane Festival
Celebrated annually in the Phobjikha Valley this one day Bhutanese Tshechu (festival) is organised to coincide with the arrival of the majestic black crane ahead of the coming winter. This tour is planned so we can take part in this unique celebration. As well as seeing masked dancers, synonymous with Tshechus in Bhutan, this festival has black crane themed performances, folk songs and handicraft stalls; and also offers the opportunity to learn about the importance of the conservation of this endangered bird within the local community.

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

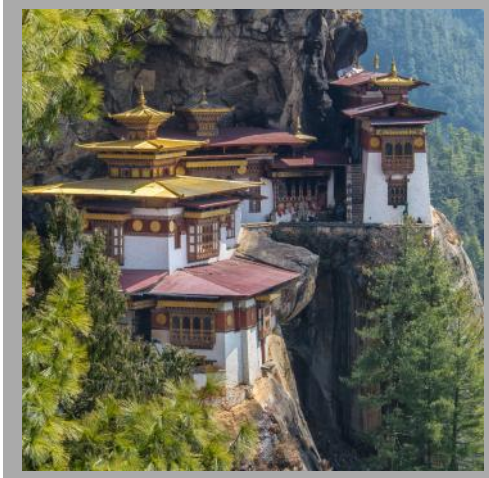
Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

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.

Your Tour Leader

A Tour Leader is an integral part of any Explore tour and your tour will be led by one of our experienced tour leaders who have been handpicked and expertly trained. We believe that our Tour Leaders are the key to the success of our tours; they are passionate travellers who are bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Your tour Leader will also take care of all the planning and organisation throughout your journey. Their passionate approach will make this tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others.

DAY 1 Join tour in Kathmandu

Our tour begins this afternoon in the busy Nepal capital Kathmandu.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: None

DAY 2 Fly to Bhutan and explore the peaceful city of Paro

Leaving Kathmandu behind we fly to Paro, beautifully set amidst the wooded valleys of Western Bhutan. It lies along the banks of Paro Chu River, overlooking terraced farmland, and is home to some of the largest and oldest of Bhutan's majestic dzongs - fabulous buildings that serve as the political, religious on military centres of their regions. On arrival we will be met by our Bhutanese tour leader and transfer the short distance to our hotel and if time allows we shall take a brief orientation of the town and visit the Rimpung Dzong.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 3 Cross the Dochu La Pass en route to Punakha

Departing Paro we turn east, taking the mountain trails that head through the beautiful landscapes of the Black Mountains and across the high Dochu La Pass (3200m). Our journey takes us across lands blanketed in rice terraces and scattered villages and, as we climb up towards the heights of Dochu La, the road becomes festooned with colourful prayer flags. On a clear day this meandering highway offers some breathtaking views across the Bhutan Himalayas towards the towering peak of Gangkhar Punsum (7541m), the highest mountain in the country. Descending towards the bewitching Punakha Valley the landscape changes; from forests of pine and oak, through rhododendron, alder and cypress, to turn more tropical as we approach the valley floor. In the warmer climate around Punakha we can find cactus, oranges and bamboo. The fertile valley, drained by the Phochu and Mochu Rivers, produces a perfect environment for farming. We will stop and visit the Chimmi Lhakhang Monastery, the ‘Mad Monk’ monastery built at the end of the 15th century by the Lama Drukpa Kuenley, the revered and decidedly controversial saint who is believed to have subdued the demoness of the Dochu La. To say that this remarkable yogi’s teachings went against the normal conventions of Buddhist dharma would be something of an understatement, given that he was prone to the most outrageous excesses to get his message over. The Lama believed that the rigid doctines of the day were isolating the priests from the ordinary people, so he set out to break down these barriers by deliberate provocation by, in his own words, using '...fair and foul words for mantras'.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4 Explore Punakha's dramatically located Dzong

This morning we visit the local Saturday Market before continuing on to Punakha Dzong. Built on a sandbank at the confluence of these two rivers sits the majestic 17th century Punakha Dzong, once the seat of Bhutanese government, but today the winter retreat of His Holiness the Je Khenpo, the Chief Abbot of Bhutan. A superb example of Bhutanese monastic architecture, the dzong presents us with a collection of tiered halls, inner courtyards and golden spires that have managed to survive numerous fires, floods and earthquakes over the intervening centuries. This afternoon we can hike to Khamsum Yuley Chorten. This is a lovely 2 hour round trip through the valley littered with farms and houses. We will call in at a typical farm house to try yak butter tea and learn more about everyday life for families in Bhutan.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5 Drive to the beautiful farming valley of Gangtey

Today we have a long but beautiful drive through the glacial landscapes of the Phobjika Valley, an area that is a prime wintering ground for the rare black necked cranes that flock here from the Tibetan Plateau between October and March to feed. The area is also home to sambars, red foxes, Himalayan black bears and muntjaks. We'll stop at the famous Gangtey Monastery. Built in the early years of the 17th century the goemba was built by Tenzing Legpai Dhendup, the second reincarnation of Pema Ligpa, and its Tibetan style prayer hall is one of the largest in Bhutan. The monastery is still an active seminary and its government-funded college offers a nine-year course in Buddhist studies. We will then begin our walk down the picturesque valley and back to Phobjika village where we visit the black-necked-crane information centre to learn more about this interesting bird.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6 Watch the dances at the Black Necked Crane Festival

Today we join locals in celebrating at the annual Black Neck Crane Festival. The festival celebrations take place in the courtyard of Gantey Gompa and focus on celebrating the arrival of the Black Neck Cranes who make the Phobjika Valley there home during the winter months. The festival centres around cultural dances and songs, often containing reference to the birds, and makes use of Bhutans traditional carved wooden masks. There is a large focus on conservation of the area and the cranes habitat during the festival.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7 Travel to Thimpu, Bhutan's relaxed capital city

We'll leave early this morning heading for Thimpu, the Bhutanese capital that occupies the wooded western banks of the Wang Chhu. Our journey winds its way past paddy fields and apple orchards, forests of pine and tiny hamlets whose houses are decorated with the Tashi Tagye, the 8 symbolic signs of Himalayan Buddhism. If time allows, we will walk along Thimpu's bustling streets, soaking up the rich atmosphere of this most unique of capitals, one that doesn't possess even a single traffic light. Our driving time today will be around 8 hours including stops along the way.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 8 Visit Tashicho Dzong and Thimpu's memorial chorten

A full day in the capital affords us the opportunity to take in its highlights. We'll visit the King Jigme Dorij Wangchuk memorial, a Tibetan-style chorten built to commemorate the country's third king and today one of the centre points of daily life in the city. Our next stop is the imposing 17th century fortified monastery of Tashicho Dzong (Fortress of the Glorious Religion), a religious centre of Bhutan and the spectacularly located seat of its government since the early 1960s. We'll also visit the Takin Enclosure before taking in a thangka painting workshop or a visit to the paper making factory. For those who are interested, we can wander through the traditional handicrafts market and perhaps pick up a few souvenirs along the way. By law all the buildings within the city are required to be designed in traditional style and decorated with Buddhist motifs and religious symbols. Even the short-lived introduction of the city's only traffic light saw it originally placed in a chorten.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 9 Return to Paro and hike to the Tiger's Nest Monastery

We leave Thimpu behind and head back towards Paro. Where we will head out to the fabulous Taktsang Monastery, one of the most revered in the country and precariously located on a cliff face some 900m above the Paro Valley. The name translates as Tiger's Nest and local legend recounts how Guru Rinpoche, who founded the Drukpa Sect and brought Buddhism to Bhutan, flew here on the back of a tiger and founded the monastery on the site of a cave where he spent a few months deep in meditation. The demanding hike up to the monastery follows a path that cuts through oak and pine forests before emerging onto a ridge with amazing views of the monastery and surrounding area. We will also visit the temple of Kyichu Lhakhang en route back to the city, one of the holiest temples in Bhutan and said to have been built by the Tibetan king Songsten Gampo in 659AD. This temple was believed to have been just one of many, part of an incredible undertaking of over 100 temples, built to subdue a demoness that lived in this land. The temples were built across Tibet and Bhutan, as a means of pinning down the ogress and converting the people to Buddhism and Kyichu Lhakhang is believed to hold down the left foot of this huge demon.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 10 Fly to Kathmandu. Walk through the Durbar Square

Today we fly back to Nepal and have a day of sightseeing with a local guide. Our sightseeing this morning takes in the sumptuous majesty of Durbar Square and its collection of ornate palaces, courtyards and temples, spanning some three centuries of dynastic rule by Malla, Shah and Rana kings. We will also visit the Asan Bazaar and the Kumari Ghar, home to the Kumari Devi; a living goddess worshipped by both followers of the Hindu and Buddhist faiths. Later today we also plan to visit the Temple of Pashupatinath on the banks of the Bagmati River, the oldest and holiest Hindu shrine in Nepal and regarded by many as the most revered temple of Shiva on the planet. The river is considered holy because its waters eventually flow into the sacred Ganges, and the ghats - steps leading down to the river - are regularly swamped by pilgrims bathing in the waters. This area is also one of the city’s most important cremation areas, where both royalty and the common people have their ashes sprinkled on the waters of the Bagmati, to make their way downriver towards the sacred Ganges. Returning back to the city we pay a visit to the stupa of Bodnath, at 40m the highest in

the Kathmandu Valley and one of the largest on the planet. Revered by Buddhists this remarkable structure is a dazzling vibrancy of prayer flags, monks and pilgrims, all overlooked by the ever-present and all seeing eyes of the Buddha himself.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 11 Free time to explore Kathmandu's temples and bazaars

Today we have an unescorted free day to further explore the delights of Kathmandu and the surrounding area. Depending upon your interests you might like to spend it visiting the almost perfectly preserved Newari town of Bhaktapur in the eastern corner of the Kathmandu Valley. Also known as Bhadgaun or the City of the Devotees, Bhaktapur evokes the feel of a medieval village, a snapshot of a time when the city lay along the prosperous trade routes between Tibet, China and India. The ancient centre of the town is a dazzling collection of temples, palaces and monasteries that have earned it a place on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. A wander through this cultural gem affords an opportunity to take in its beguiling charms and enjoy the site of artisans going about their craft much as they have for generations. You can watch potters throwing clay on traditional wooden wheels, watch jewellers and artists as they go about their daily business and wander through the handicraft shops and stalls seeking out some exquisite bargains. Another alternative for this afternoon is a trip up to the nearby the hilltop temple of Swayambunath, the captivating 'Monkey Temple', whose all-seeing Buddha eyes gaze out across the Kathmandu Valley. The temple is aptly named and the cheeky monkeys that inhabit its ancient walls are not averse to trying to relieve passers by of food, bags and cameras, so be warned.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 12 Tour ends in Kathmandu

Our tour ends this morning after breakfast.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Accommodation Notes

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: 11 breakfasts, 8 lunches,8 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

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

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

Kathmandu - Bhaktapur US$ 35 (minimum 4 people).

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 look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided.
Accordingly you should allow approx. £30 for gratuities for local staff.

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

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.

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

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. 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.

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.

Passengers with dual or multiple passports must ensure that they use the same passport for entry to all countries on this trip.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

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.

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.

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 can be cold so make allowance for warmer clothing and a waterproof accordingly. Clothes should be casual and practical but to avoid giving offence to local people you may need to cover legs, heads and arms. Shorts and leggings are not appropriate. A scarf or bandanna can be useful on the dustier sections of road. For Dzong visits, you will need collared, longsleeved shirts, long trousers and closed shoes.

Equipment

Binoculars, torch, water bottle, insect repellent, high factor suncream (at least factor 15), good quality sunglasses and a lip salve with sun protection. You may wish to take a walking pole with you for the Tigers Nest walk and a swimming costume if you wish to swim at the Kathmandu hotel.

Footwear

Light walking boots/comfortable walking shoes, trainers. Ankle support is recommended for the Tigers Nest hike.

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

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

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.

Our commitment to the environment

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), Dekamer (a turtle rescue centre in Turkey) and Kids Saving the Rainforest (a wildlife rescue centre in Costa Rica supported through the LATA foundation). We also care passionately about the world's wildlife. We are patrons of the Born Free Organisation and Friends of Conservation.

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

- The Travel Foundation

  Explore are active members and supporters of the Travel Foundation which has established a variety of sustainable tourism projects in destinations and works with industry to improve practice. Visit their website www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk
- Tourism Concern

  Explore support the work of Tourism Concern who campaign for fairly and ethically traded tourism, and are part of its Ethical Tour Operator Group www.tourismconcern.org.uk
- For further information on responsible travel go to www.explore.co.uk/ResponsibleTourism/

Know before you go

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

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: 2016 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2016. 2017/18 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2017.

These trip notes were printed on 28/10/2016 12:04:00