

# EXPLORE!

Book with confidence



## Inside the Hidden Kingdoms

BHUTAN, INDIA, NEPAL - TRIP CODE BH  
FESTIVAL

### Why book this trip?

Travel from bustling Kolkata and the nearby mangrove area of the Sundarbans, through Eastern India and into the fascinating Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan. With the backdrop of the dramatic Himalayan Mountain range, discover relics of the Raj, ruined monasteries and ancient temples.

- **North East India** - Travel through lush scenery and learn about the influence of Buddhism in this region of India
- **Bhutan** - Learn all about the land which measures its success in 'Gross Domestic Happiness'
- **Kathmandu** - End your trip in the chaotic yet intriguing capital of Nepal, home to Durbar Square and Pashupatinath temple



**INCLUDED MEALS**  
Breakfast: 21  
Lunch: 9  
Dinner: 8



**TRIP STAFF**  
Explore Tour  
Leader  
Driver(s)  
Local Guide(s)



**TRANSPORT**  
Bus  
Boat  
Flight



**ACCOMMODATION**



**TRIP PACE:**  
Full on



**GROUP SIZE:**  
10 - 16

## Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

## Trip information

### Country information

#### Bhutan

##### Climate

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.

##### Time difference to GMT

+6

##### Plugs

2 Pin Round

##### Religion

Lamaistic Buddhist, Indian/Nepalese Hinduism.

##### Language

Dzongkha, plus various Nepalese and Tibetan dialects.

#### India

## Climate

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.

Time difference to GMT	Plugs	Religion
+5	3 Pin Round	Catholicism, Hindu, Islam and Sikhism

## Language

Hindi and English.

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## Nepal

### Climate

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 January, while from February to May the skies may be hazy. Monsoon rains are strongest in June, July and August. The coldest months are December and January.

Time difference to GMT	Plugs	Religion	Language
+5.45	2 Pin Round	Hinduism	Nepali

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## Budgeting and packing

### Optional 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.

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

### Clothing

High altitude night temperatures in the Himalaya are cold so make allowance for warmer clothing, including jumpers, warm pyjamas, 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. When visiting the Dzongs in Bhutan you will need to make sure legs and arms are fully covered so wear long-sleeved shirts/ t-shirts, trousers as well as closed shoes.

## Footwear

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

## Luggage

20kg

## Luggage: On tour

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

## 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.

## Tipping

### Explore leader

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

### 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.

## Bhutan

### Food and drink

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.

Lunch price	Dinner price	Beer price	Water price
£7	£10	£2	£1

### Foreign Exchange

Local currency	Recommended Currency For Exchange	Where To Exchange
Ngultrum	USD and GBP	Your Tour leader will advise you.

### 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.

## **India**

### **Food and drink**

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.

<b>Lunch price</b>	<b>Dinner price</b>	<b>Beer price</b>	<b>Water price</b>
£8	£10	£3	£0.5

### **Foreign Exchange**

#### **Local currency**

Indian Rupee Recently new 500 and 2000 rupee notes have been brought 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.

#### **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.

## **Nepal**

### **Food and drink**

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.

<b>Lunch price</b>	<b>Dinner price</b>	<b>Beer price</b>	<b>Water price</b>
£7	£10	£3	£0.3

## Foreign Exchange

<b>Local currency</b>	<b>Recommended Currency For Exchange</b>	<b>Where To Exchange</b>
Nepali Rupee.	US\$ or GBP.	In major cities and towns

### 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.

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## Transport, Accommodation & Meals

### Transport Information

Bus, Boat, Flight

### 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.

### Food and drink

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 yak cheese. It is usually served as a side dish so you can be as brave as you

like!

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## Essential Information

### Government Travel Safety Advice

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 [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

### 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.

### Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

### Visa and Passport Information

India: Visas are required for citizens of the UK, Australia, New Zealand, US and Canada and can be obtained in the form of an e-visa. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

The e-visa can be applied for through the official Indian government visa website only - <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/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 28 selected entry points which can be found via the official Indian Government website link above. However, you can exit from any of the authorised immigration check posts in India.

Passports must have at least 6 months validity from the date of arrival in India and at least two blank pages for stamping. Visa applications will take approximately 4 days to process.

There are different validity visas and the costs are as follows:

30-day validity (travelling between April and June) - \$10

30-day validity (travelling between July and March) - \$25

1-year validity - \$40

5-year validity- \$80

Those applying for a 30 day electronic visa can only apply within 30 days of arrival for your visa to be

valid. Furthermore double entry is permitted and you can only obtain two 30-day visas in a calendar year.

Please note these costs are subject to frequent change so you should check on the official Indian government visa website mentioned above. Biometric data will be collected on arrival in India.

If you are not eligible for the e-Tourist Visa, please refer to VFS Global to apply for your Indian visa - [https://www.vfsglobal.com/india/uk/how\\_to\\_apply.html](https://www.vfsglobal.com/india/uk/how_to_apply.html)

Whilst the online form offers a relatively quick way to apply for a visa, some applicants have reported difficulty in completing the form. If you do require assistance, then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. They can complete the online visa on your behalf for a fee of £30 + the visa cost. See [www.travcour.com](http://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.

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

Nepal: An entry visa is required by UK, New Zealand, Australian, US & 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 30USD for a 15 day visa, 50USD for a 30 day visa and 125USD for a 90 day visa. All visas are issued as multiple entry visas and are valid from the date they are issued. There have been reports of lengthy delays when completing the form to obtain the visa at the airport, especially during peak times. We therefore recommend that you fill in the visa information prior to arrival using the following link: <http://online.nepalimmigration.gov.np/>. This will produce a receipt with a barcode, which you will need to print off and produce on arrival to obtain the visa. Please note if you are filling in the form before you arrive, please do so only within 15 days of arrival as application forms are only stored for a maximum of 15 days.

Whether you are filling in the form on arrival or before, a passport-sized photograph for immigration is required along with the exact cash. Payment must be made in cash, UK sterling and US dollars are both accepted.

If you are ineligible for the visa on arrival or wish to obtain a visa before you travel, please refer to your nearest Nepal embassy.

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. Your visa is included in the tour cost.

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

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may be able to apply through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See [www.travcour.com](http://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.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity



for your chosen destination.

## Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

## Transfers

Find out more about [Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions](#) before you book.

### 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 below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

### 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 complimentary transfers will be arranged from the Explore designated airport or train station to your trips joining point, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. Generally the airport or station that Explore have selected will be the one that is closest to the town or city where the trip starts, or the one nearest to the joining point. It will be either an airport or train station but not both.

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, Polar, 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 [click here](#)

## 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. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

## Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. Read more about them here.

### 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 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.

## Bhutan

### Vaccinations

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.) Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. 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 Explore Travel Health and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

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## India

### Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against Tetanus, Infectious Hepatitis, Typhoid and Polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. 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 Explore Travel Health and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

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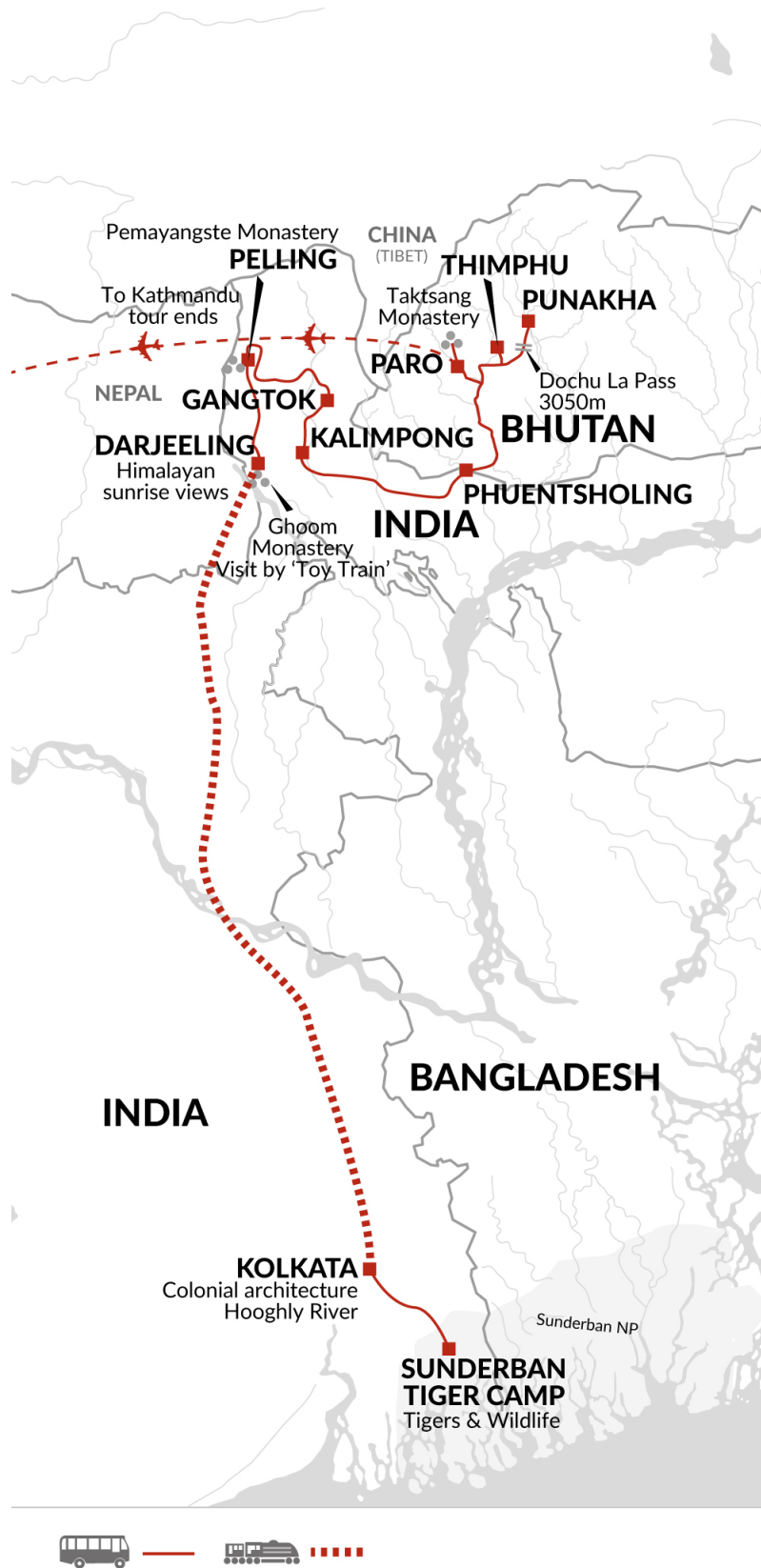
## Nepal

### Vaccinations

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. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. 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 Explore Travel Health and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to

change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

### Additional Information



## Why book this trip

Paro Festival

Paro Festival

Attending a Bhutanese Tshechu (festival) is one of the best ways to experience the ancient culture of this most fascinating of destinations. This tour is planned to coincide with Paro Tshechu, one of the most colourful and popular of Bhutanese festivals, which often includes the unfurling of the Thangka - a giant embroidered silk painting the size of a house! Held every spring, this event attracts locals from neighbouring districts and is an unforgettable way to experience the ancient culture of Bhutan.

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## Reviews

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AWARD WINNING  
EXPLORE LEADERS



PRICE GUARANTEE  
PROMISE



AIRPORT  
TRANSFERS