

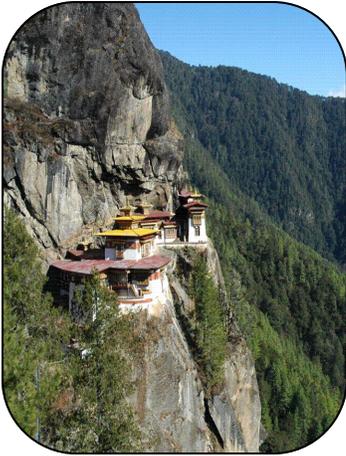
BHUTAN & INDIA SAFARI

A Himalayan Mountain Adventure

October 23, 2018 - 24 Days



a world to experience



Fares Per Person:

\$12,150 double/twin

\$13,115 single



t²⁵our
a more intimate travel experience

- > Please add 0.2% GST.
- > **Early Bookers:** \$300 discount on first 4 seats; \$150 on next 4
- > **Experience Points:** Earn 220 points from this tour.
Redeem **220 points** if you book by **July 10**.

Himalayan High Points

Get ready for a fairytale adventure like no other as we explore two unique areas of the Himalayan Mountains: Bhutan and Northern India.

Bhutan is a small remote country located between China-ruled Tibet in the north and India to the south. Lonely Planet ranked Bhutan as the world's top destination of 2013 and CNN did the same in 2017. Bhutan is very protective of its natural and cultural richness. It is only in this century that Bhutan is cautiously opening up to the world, but tourism is very restricted and well-monitored. Individual travel is not permitted here — you must book through a local tour company and be with a guide for your entire visit. Bhutan has given the world the unique concept of GNH (Gross National Happiness), rating the country's success not in terms of monetary standing but by the sense of individual happiness quotient. The country is very deeply rooted in Buddhism, and most Buddhist practices and beliefs have stayed unchanged for centuries. Maroon-robed monks and nuns of all ages are a common sight in Bhutan. You will find a well-structured peaceful society where the people are warm and hospitable.

India by contrast is a land of great dramas, an ancient, vast, over-populated, and stimulating land that has been described as a marvelously fluid functioning anarchy. Our focus is the eastern Himalayan region of India with its incredible wildlife sanctuary, Kaziranga National Park. Since we are so close, we have included time to experience the world wonder of the Taj Mahal and the chaotic flavours of the great city of Delhi.

These destinations are about as foreign from Canada as you can get!

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Includes

- Transportation to/from Vancouver Airport
- Air Canada flight from Vancouver to Delhi, India
- Current air taxes, fees and fuel surcharges
- 21 nights of accommodation and hotel taxes
- Flight from Delhi to Paro, Bhutan
- Mini-coach transportation throughout Bhutan
- Bhutan guide for 13 days
- Visa fee for Bhutan
- National Museum of Bhutan
- Bird watching in Chelela Pass
- Kichu Lhakhang Temple
- Tagtshang Monastery, or Tiger's Nest
- Buddha Point
- Trashichodzong capital building
- Takin National Animal Enclosure
- Zorig Chusum National Institute
- National Textile Museum or Folk Heritage Museum
- Punakha Dzong
- Rafting trip on Mochu or Phochu Rivers
- Gangtey Gonpa Buddhist Institute
- Gangtey Nature Trail
- Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park
- Kurjey Temple
- Zangdorbi Primary School
- Mebartso Burning Lake
- Ugyen Chholing Palace
- Ura Tsechu Buddhist Festival
- Phrumshingla National Park
- Tour of cheese farm, honey cooperative, and Rad Panda Beer Brewery
- Flight from Jakar to Paro
- Flight from Paro to Guwahati, India
- Transportation in India for 7 days
- India guide for 7 days
- Kaziranga National Park
- 2 Jeep safaris in Kaziranga National Park
- Elephant ride
- Kaziranga Orchid Center
- Ferry to/from Majuli Island
- Anuati and Ultra Kamalabari (monasteries)
- Flight from Guwahati to Delhi
- Taj Mahal
- Mughal Red Fort
- Sightseeing tour of New Delhi
- Flight from Delhi to Vancouver
- Luggage handling at hotels and airlines
- Gratuities to local guides and drivers
- Knowledgeable Wells Gray tour director
- **63 meals:** 22 breakfasts, 20 lunches, 21 dinners

TOUR NOTES:

- In Bhutan, many of the attractions, dzongs, temples, and palaces that we visit are accessible only by walking. Although you may opt out of the longer treks, your experience of the destination is very often on foot, so you should be comfortable with walking at least 5 km with elevation change.
- The tour in Bhutan is usually at a high elevation, starting in Paro at 2,100 metres. Some places we visit are 3,000 to 4,000 metres altitude. Many people are affected by such high altitudes. Acclimatization is important for the first couple of days, so your body can adjust.
- Please ensure that you visit a travel health clinic at least 3 months prior to departure to find out if there are any inoculations recommended for the areas we are travelling. Most health units hold travel immunization consultations. There are usually charges associated with this service.
- Because of the closed nature of tourist activity in Bhutan, travel is higher priced than many other areas of the world. In fact, the Bhutan government takes 35% of the fee charged by the local tour operator up front.
- The flight from Vancouver to Delhi return is confirmed with Air Canada but the schedule could change. Air taxes and fuel surcharges could also change, in which case the tour fare will be adjusted. Flights in Bhutan and India cannot be booked yet (as of publishing this brochure) and fares and schedules are estimated from current flights.
- Triple bookings are not available.
- A passport is required and must be valid for 6 months after tour returns. A tourist visa is required for both India and Bhutan. Our Bhutan tour operator will assist with your visa for Bhutan about a month prior and the fee is included in your tour fare. For India, you must apply individually and our office or your travel agent will provide details of the application process nearer to departure. Cost is currently US\$50.
- The tour will be accompanied from British Columbia by a Wells Gray tour director. Thoroughly experienced multilingual guides travel with us throughout the tour in Bhutan and India. Local naturalists lead the wildlife-viewing safaris and local guides conduct sightseeing tours in several cities. You will be expertly guided and well looked after!
- This tour is limited to 17 people. Early booking is recommended!

Itinerary

Tuesday, October 23: *Meals: D*
Transportation is provided to Vancouver Airport. A get-acquainted dinner is planned. Our flight on Air Canada non-stop to Delhi leaves this evening.

Wednesday, October 24: *Meals in flight*
We are flying all day today and there is a time change of 13.5 hours to India time.

Thursday, October 25: *Meals: B,D*
We arrive in Delhi just after midnight and stay at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. Our ongoing flight is with Drukair, the Bhutanese carrier, from Delhi to Paro. **Welcome to Bhutan!** Our guide meets us and we check into the Hotel Tashi Namgyal for a three-night stay. This afternoon, we visit the **National Museum** which has cultural and natural exhibits, and an impressive view of the Paro Valley.

Friday, October 26: *Meals: B,L,D*
Bhutan is one of the most idyllic natural destinations in the world, with 72% of its surface under forest cover. It has healthy animal populations, including many species which are threatened elsewhere. Our day starts at 5 am with a drive to **Chelela Pass** for bird watching, including Himalayan monal pheasants, kalej pheasants, and blood pheasants. Chelela Pass is 3,900 metres elevation, one of the highest road points in Bhutan. If the weather is fine, Jomolhari Mountain which is 7,300 metres high should be visible. Normally, October provides favourable weather and excellent photographic opportunities to capture the greater Himalayas. A packed breakfast is served at Chelela, then we drive down into the **Haa Valley** which opened to tourists just five years ago. While exploring this paradise, we visit **Kichu Lhakhang**, a 7th century temple built by the Tibetan King, Thrisong Detsen. This temple is older than the Mahayana Buddhism, introduced in the 8th century.

Saturday, October 27: *Meals: B,L,D*
We trek to **Tagtshang Monastery**, also called the Tiger's Nest, which is an 8th century temple built by Guru Rinpoche who introduced Tantric Buddhism to Bhutan. This is one of the country's most sacred sites and best known attractions, and visiting the temple is said to enhance your spiritual happiness. The hike is approximately 7 km round trip with about 450 metres ascent. Lunch is served at Tagtshang Cafeteria halfway to the monastery. If you do not feel you want to complete the climb, the views from the cafeteria are very good and give a great sense of the unique location of this structure. A horse can be arranged for a small fee.

Sunday, October 28: *Meals: B,L,D*
Leaving Paro, we visit the **Iron Bridge** built in 1433 by Thangtong Gyalpo, a famous Tibetan bridge builder who constructed 108 iron bridges throughout the Himalayas. On arrival in Bhutan's capital city, Thimpu, we check in at Hotel Jomolhari for two nights. This afternoon, we visit **Buddha Point** at Kuenselphodrang, one of the world's biggest Buddhas (51.5 metres) which was completed in 2015. Inside is a seven-storey temple which houses 100,008 eight-inch tall Buddhas. The site is surrounded by nearly 1,000 acres of blue pine forest.

Monday, October 29: *Meals: B,L,D*
We visit **Trashichodzong**, the capital building of Bhutan. Here we also see the small palace of the 5th King of Bhutan and see how the dzong is used by the monks and central government. Later, we visit the **Motihang Takin enclosure**. The Takin is Bhutan's national animal, a docile creature that appears to have the body of a cow and the head of a goat. Barking deer, goral, serow, and sambar deer are also found in the enclosure. The afternoon is dedicated to the **Institute of Zorig Chusum**, or School of the Thirteen Crafts. The sole objective is to preserve the rich culture and tradition of Bhutan and train students in all traditional art forms. The thirteen crafts include carpentry, painting, paper making, blacksmithery, weaving, sculpting, and boot making. Next is a choice of either **Folk Heritage Museum** which gives a very good perspective of traditional lives of Bhutan or **National Textile Museum** initiated by Ashi Tshering Pem Wangchhuck, one of the four queens of the 4th King where traditional weaving techniques and designs are exhibited. There is free time to visit the crafts emporium.

Tuesday, October 30: *Meals: B,L,D*
Today's drive takes us to **Dochula** for one of the most picturesque views of the Himalayas bordering Tibet. We experience diverse village landscapes and amazing terraced rice fields. Our next destination is Punakha, and we check in at Hotel Pema Karpo. After lunch, we visit **Punakha Dzong**, built in 1637 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who introduced the state religion of Drukpa Kajue to Bhutan. Dzongs are a very distinctive form of architecture and serve as the religious, military, administrative, and social centre, used by both the local government and the monk body. One of the highlights is in the main hall of this temple, where pictorial murals depict the life history of Buddha. A **raft trip** on either the Mochu River (gentle) or Phochu River (white water) is offered.

Wednesday, October 31:*Meals: B,L,D*

We drive to **Gangtey Gonpa**, built in 1613 by the grandson of Pema Lingpa. It is used as the Buddhist institute for Pedling tradition and higher Buddhist studies. It is also the seat of present Gangtey Trulku, the body emancipation of Pedmalingpa. Then we enjoy the 1½ hour long Gangtey Nature Trail walk through the beautiful forest and wetland. There may be a few flocks of **black-necked cranes** along the trail. The Phobjikha Valley wetland has about 450 of these cranes and they are fully protected under the Ramsar convention. We stay overnight at Hotel Dewachen.

Thursday, November 1:*Meals: B,L,D*

Today's scenic drive is through **Pelela Pass** to Trongsa with frequent stops at birding sights and viewpoints. We pass through **Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park** with its impressive virgin forest cover. We also stop at the viewpoint of Trongsa Dzong where traders between Eastern and Western Bhutan had to pass through the middle of the dzong using the only suspension bridge. Our overnight stay is in **Trongsa** at the Yangkhil Resort.

Friday, November 2:*Meals: B,L,D*

We drive through the beautiful valley of Chumey to **Bumthang**, where we check in at Kaila Guesthouse for four nights. This afternoon, we visit Kurjey, an 8th century temple built on the cave where Guru Rinpoche meditated to gain power to subdue the local deity. Later we meet the students at Zangdorbi Primary School.

Saturday, November 3:*Meals: B,L,D*

Today we explore the Tang Valley. **Mebartso, or the Burning Lake**, is one of the most sacred pilgrimage sites in Bhutan. In the 15th century, Pema Lingpa, one of the great Tertons "Discoverers of Hidden Treasures" of Tantric Buddhism, jumped into the lake with a lighted lamp, and after a couple of minutes emerged back with the lamp still burning and holding a statue and a treasure chest containing Tantric Buddhist sacred texts. This afternoon, we tour **Ugyen Chholing Palace**, built in the 16th century by descendants of Pema Lingpa and now a museum of family artifacts.

Sunday, November 4:*Meals: B,L,D*

We leave early to get the best sightings of high altitude birds like tragopan, blood pheasants, and monals along the road side. In the delightful village of Ura, we enjoy the **Ura Tsechu** which is an annual local Buddhist festival. If time permits, we visit the nearby Information Center of Phrumshingla National Park. The park represents fir and

temperate forests, and has a healthy population of tigers, red panda, and tragopans.

Monday, November 5:*Meals: B,L,D*

Today, we visit a cheese farm, a honey cooperative, and the Red Panda Beer brewery.

Tuesday, November 6:*Meals: B,L,D*

We take a short flight from nearby Jakar back to **Paro**, and stay overnight at Tagtsang View Hotel. There is a shopping opportunity in Paro this afternoon.

Wednesday, November 7:*Meals: B,L,D*

Bidding a fond farewell to Bhutan and our guide, we fly to **Guwahati** in northeastern India. Our Indian guide meets us and we stay overnight at Hotel Kiran.

Thursday, November 8:*Meals: B,L,D*

This morning, we drive to **Kaziranga National Park**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra River. More than 75% of the world's **Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros** can be found in this sanctuary. A century ago there were only 200 rhinos left and today, with successful breeding, there are over 2,500 in Kaziranga. Other animals that can be seen are the Asiatic water buffalo, elephants, tigers, swamp deer, barking deer, and hog deer, plus about 400 species of birds such as swamp francolin, great hornbill, Pallas's fish eagle, pied falconets, greater adjutant stork, long billed vulture, and the unique blue-naped pitta. We spend the afternoon in **jeeps on a safari** to view wildlife in their natural settings. We stay three nights at Kaziranga Borgos Resort.

Friday, November 9:*Meals: B,L,D*

In early morning, we go for an elephant ride, the best way to observe the vigour and charm of the enchanting wildlife of the park. We return to the resort for breakfast, then explore a village inhabited by the Mishing Tribe and the **Kaziranga Orchid Centre**. During the afternoon, we enjoy another jeep safari in the western range of Kaziranga National Park. This is an ideal time to visit this area with temperatures ranging from 5 to 25 C.

Saturday, November 10:*Meals: B,L,D*

We ride the ferry to **Majuli**, said to be the biggest river island in the world, located at the confluence of the huge Brahmaputra River and the Subansiri River. It is home to many migratory birds. We visit the **Anuati Sattras and Ultra Kamalabari Sattras** (similar to monasteries) and meet the monks.

Sunday, November 11:*Meals: B,L,D*

We drive back to Guwahati and take an afternoon flight to Delhi. Here we meet our second Indian guide and stay overnight at the Crowne Plaza Hotel.

Monday, November 12:*Meals: B,L,D*

Agra is the medieval city of the famous 17th century masterpiece **Taj Mahal**, which is perhaps the most perfect architectural monument in the world. It was built in the memory of Mumtaz Mahal, the beloved wife of one of the greatest kings of the Mughal Empire, Shah Jehan. While the white-domed marble mausoleum is the most familiar component of the Taj Mahal, it is actually an integrated complex of structures, and we take time to explore the gardens, the outbuildings, and the exquisite interiors. Later we visit the **Mughal Red Fort** which was the main residence of the emperors of the Mughal Dynasty until 1638 when the capital was shifted from Agra to Delhi. We stay overnight at the Radisson Blu Agra Hotel.

Tuesday, November 13:*Meals: B,L,D*

We drive back to **Delhi** in the morning. With an estimated 24 million inhabitants, the national capital is India's second largest city. It epitomizes India's history of glory and disaster and its great capacity to absorb many cultures and yet remain itself. An afternoon tour of **New Delhi** includes sights such as the Qutab Minar, the 70-metre high Persian tower, the 1500-year old Iron Pillar, Embassy Row, the government buildings, and Connaught Place, the heart and main shopping district of the capital. We stay at the Crowne Plaza. Tonight, join the group for a special farewell dinner, celebrating our Himalayan adventure.

Wednesday, November 14:*Meals: B,L*

The morning and early afternoon is leisure time, then a transfer is provided to the airport. Our flight on Air Canada is non-stop to Vancouver, arriving in the evening, then we stay overnight at the Fairmont YVR Hotel.

Thursday, November 15:*Meals: B*

Transportation is provided to Victoria.

Tour Policies

Payments: A deposit of \$1,000 per person is requested at the time of booking and the balance is due July 10, 2018.

Discounts: Early bookers receive \$300 discount on first 4 seats and \$150 on next 4 seats for booking early with deposit. The discount is not offered after July 10.

Cancellation Policy: Up to June 8, your tour payments will be refunded less an administrative charge of \$100 per person. From June 9 to July 10, the cancellation charge is \$500 per person. From July 11 to August 10, the cancellation charge is 50% of the tour fare. After August 10, there is no refund.

Fare and hotel changes: Changes to taxes and foreign currency exchange rates, and surcharges from airlines and other tour suppliers can occur at any time and are beyond the control of Wells Gray Tours, therefore Wells Gray Tours reserves the right to increase fares due to such changes up until the time of departure. Hotels may also change to equivalent ones.

Tour 25: This is a Tour 25 departure, meaning capacity of the tour is limited, a more intimate travel experience. This tour is limited to 17 people. Early booking is recommended.

Photo Credit: Bhutan Travel

Travel Insurance: A Comprehensive Insurance policy is available through Wells Gray Tours and coverage is provided by Travel Guard. Policies purchased at deposit include a waiver of the pre-existing condition clause, otherwise policies can be purchased no later than at final payment. Please contact us for details.



Activity Level: High and sometimes rigorous activity including significant distances to walk and frequent steps. Bhutan is a country where many of the attractions are accessed by foot. Therefore you should be able to walk at least 5 km with elevation changes of up to 500 metres. Tagtshang Monastery is a 7 km walk return, and a horse can be rented for part of the trek. Seeing everything requires active participation.

See Tour Notes for additional information. This tour is not appropriate for people with canes or walkers. This tour is probably the most active one offered by Wells Gray, hence the plus sign after the 3 walkers. The tour director, local guides, and drivers have many responsibilities, so please do not expect them, or your fellow travellers, to provide ongoing assistance. Prior to Wells Gray accepting your booking, you will be required to sign a declaration that you are capable of travelling on an Activity Level 3 tour.

e-points: This tour earns 220 e-points. Each time you travel on a Wells Gray tour, you earn Experience Points, or e-points. One e-point equals \$1. Redeem your points on select tours or accumulate enough points to earn a free tour! Redemptions offered until July 10.

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