

NOBLE CALEDONIA

MOUNTAIN KINGDOMS OF THE HIMALAYAS

An escorted tour of Nepal,
Bhutan & North East India

9th to 24th April, 20th April to 5th May
& 15th to 30th October 2021



Tiger Nest Monastery

Our new escorted tour offers the opportunity to travel through the unique mountain Kingdoms of the Himalayas with a small party of like-minded travellers, a journey which would be difficult to undertake independently with ease.

We begin in Nepal, a land of sublime scenery draped along the spine of the Himalayas where we will spend time exploring the cultural heritage and monuments of the Kathmandu Valley including the Medieval city squares of the Hindu capital of Kathmandu and the nearby cities of Patan and Bhaktapur. From Nepal we will fly to Bhutan, the 'Land of the Thunder Dragon', nestled between India and the Tibetan Plateau in the heart of the Himalayas. This little-visited country offers a fascinating insight into a Buddhist culture and is steeped in tradition with warm and hospitable people. We will spend time exploring the capital city of Thimpu, Punakha and its majestic 'Palace of Great Happiness' as well as the beautiful Paro valley which is home to many of Bhutan's oldest temples and monasteries, including Tiger's Nest. Added to this, we will be surrounded by some of the most incredible scenery; rugged snow-capped mountain ranges and beautiful Himalayan landscapes dotted with colourful prayer flags.

We continue to Darjeeling for the final part of our adventure in the Himalayan foothills of India's West Bengal region. Here we will spend our time amidst emerald-green tea plantations enjoying the colonial-era architecture and views of the snow-covered Himalayan mountains. We will visit Tiger Hill, take a ride on the Toy Train, a marvel of engineering offering mesmerising views and learn about Everest explorers at the Himalaya Mountaineering Institute. Finally we reach Kolkata where we will have time to explore this fascinating city before what promises to be an endlessly fascinating journey comes to a close.

THE ITINERARY

Day 1 London to Kathmandu, Nepal.
Fly by scheduled indirect flight.

Day 2 Kathmandu. Arrive today in the Nepalese capital and transfer to our hotel, the Marriott Hotel Kathmandu. The remainder of the day is free to relax or explore independently before we meet for dinner in the hotel. (D)

Day 3 Bhaktapur & Kathmandu. After breakfast in the hotel we drive the short distance to Bhaktapur, which was founded in the 9th century and, like Kathmandu, is a city of the Newar people. One of the three Medieval city states in the Kathmandu Valley, Bhaktapur is the best preserved with remarkable architecture and exquisite woodcarvings. The centre

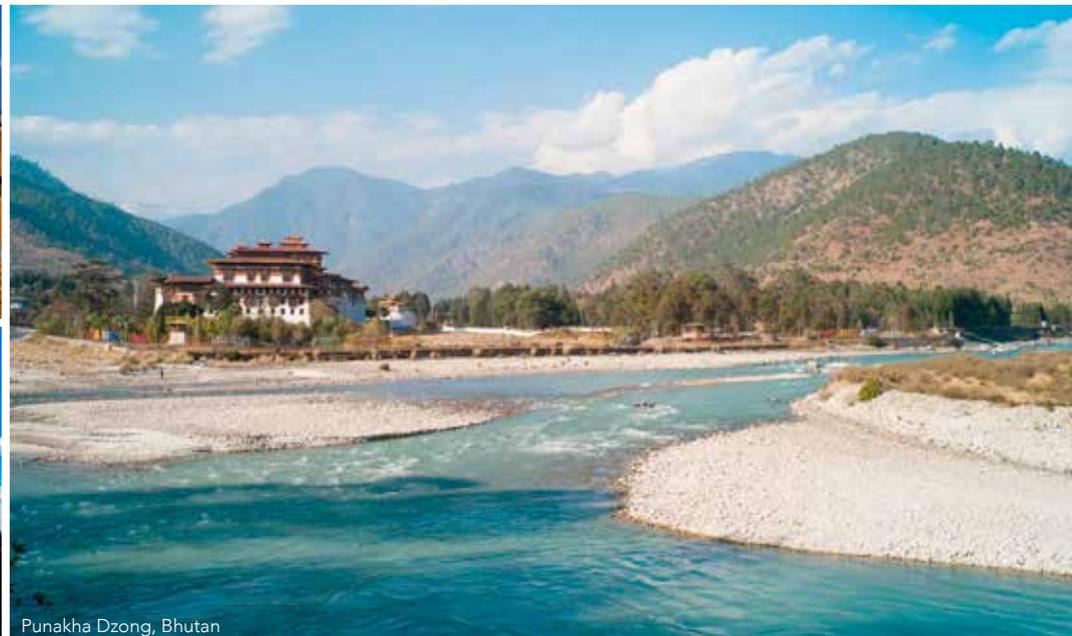
is Bhaktapur Durbar Square, a UNESCO World Heritage Site where we see the Lion Gate, the Golden Gate and the statues of kings on stone monoliths. The Golden Gate was erected by King Ranajit Malla as the entrance to the main courtyard of the Fifty-five Window Palace. Meanwhile in the alleys we will see the local artisans weaving cloth or drying pottery. After lunch in a local restaurant we will return to Kathmandu for some free time. This evening we will have dinner in the city and will be joined by a Sherpa who will talk to us about their experiences climbing Mount Everest. (B, L, D)

Day 4 Swayambhunath, Patan & Kathmandu. Spend the morning at the UNESCO site of

Swayambhunath situated on a hill overlooking the Kathmandu Valley. Built in 460 AD it has become one of the holiest Buddhist stupas in Nepal but also incorporates Hindu temples on the site. The white dome and golden spire painted with the eyes of Buddha and with prayer wheels at the base are also mobbed by the resident monkeys causing it to be known as the "Monkey Temple". Continue to the ancient city of Patan where we visit the historic Durbar Square, the Golden Gate, the sky piercing temple of Taleju and the statue of Yogendra Malla, Krishna Mandir, Hiranya Varna Mahavihar and Mahabouddha. After some free time for lunch we return to Kathmandu Durbar Square which is located in the heart of the old city. There are around 50 temples in



the vicinity and we will see the 17th century Durbar complex, Hanuman Dhoka, Parvati temple, great Bell and Drum, Bhairav and Taleju Temple. All around the splendour of these historical monuments is the hustle and bustle of the market place. (B, D)



Day 5 Kathmandu to Thimpu, Bhutan. This morning we transfer to the airport for our scheduled flight to Paro. The flight is one of the most spectacular in the entire Himalayas offering fascinating views and an exciting descent into the Kingdom. Bhutan's first gift to you as you disembark from the aircraft will be cool, clean fresh mountain air. On arrival we drive to Thimphu, Bhutan's capital city, and check in to our hotel, Le Meridien, where we have lunch before driving to the Great Buddha Dordenma statue offering wonderful views over the valley of Thimphu. Before this evening's dinner in the hotel, we will be joined by a Bhutanese scholar who will talk to us about Bhutan and Gross National Happiness. The Gross National Happiness philosophy serves as a beacon for Bhutan in its search for greater wellbeing and advancement of the Bhutanese people. (B, L, D)

Day 6 Thimpu. Spend the day exploring the city's main highlights including The National Library, which was established in 1967 to preserve ancient Dzongkha and Tibetan texts. At the Textile Museum we learn about the national art of weaving and see the exhibitions introducing the major weaving techniques, styles of local dress and textiles made by women and men. Meet the students at the Institute for Zorig Chusum, known as Arts & Crafts School where students learn the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. The Folk Heritage Museum is dedicated to connecting people with the rich Bhutanese Folk heritage and rural history through exhibits, demonstrations, educational programs and documentation of

Bhutanese rural life. Conclude the tour of the day with a visit of Tashichho Dzong, "fortress of the glorious religion". This is the centre of government and religion, site of monarch's throne room and seat of Je Khenpo or Chief Abbot. Built in 1641 by the political and religious unifier of Bhutan, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, it was reconstructed in 1960s in traditional Bhutanese manner, without nails or architectural plans. (B, L, D)

Day 7 Thimpu to Punakha. Leaving Thimpu we will see the Memorial Chorten, a stupa built in the memory of Bhutan's third King, His Late Majesty, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, who is popularly regarded as Father of modern Bhutan. Continue to the Dochula Pass, take in the view and admire the chorten, mani wall, and prayer flags which decorate the highest point on the road. If skies are clear, we can see many Himalayan peaks including Zongphugang, a table-mountain that dominates the isolated region of Lunana and Gangkar puensum, the highest peak in Bhutan at 7,497 metres. From here we visit the Royal Botanical Park, the first botanical park in Bhutan which forms the backdrop of the Dochula Pass before arriving in Punakha which served as the capital of Bhutan and seat of government until 1955 and still it is the winter seat of Je Khenpo. Blessed with a temperate climate and owing to its natural drainage from the Pho Chhu (male) and Mo Chhu (female) rivers, the fertile Punakha valley produces abundant crops and fruits. Check in to the Dhensa Resort and after lunch take a short walking excursion to Chimi Lhakhang, situated on a hilllock in the centre of the valley. The trail leads across rice fields

to the tiny settlement of Pana, meaning 'field'. A walk through the village near the temple will give you rare glimpses into the daily life and lifestyle of the villagers. (B, L, D)

Day 8 Punakha. A morning hike will take us to Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Temple which was built by Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Ashi Tshering Yangdon Wangchuck and stands out on a beautiful ridge above the Punakha valley. It took nine years to build and Holy Scriptures rather than engineering manuals were consulted to construct this four-storey temple. It is a fine example of Bhutanese architecture and artistic traditions. After lunch we will see Punakha Dzong (or Palace of Great Happiness), built at the junction of the Pho Chhu and Mo Chhu rivers in 1637. This majestic dzong served as both the religious and the administrative centre of Bhutan in the past. It measures some 600 by 240 feet and has a six-story, gold-domed tower. Inside are courtyards and religious statuary that hint at the depth of history and spiritual tradition embodied here. (B, L, D)

Day 9 Punakha to Paro. After breakfast we take the scenic highway to Paro. En-route we visit Simtokha Dzong, the oldest fortress of the country, built in 1629, which now houses the School for Buddhist studies. The beautiful valley of Paro encapsulates within itself a rich culture, scenic beauty and hundreds of myths and legends. It is home to many of Bhutan's oldest temples and monasteries, the National Museum and the country's only international airport. Mount Chomolhari reigns in white glory at the northern end of the valley and its glacial water

plunge through deep gorges to form Pa Chhu (Paro river). Paro is also one of the most fertile valleys in the Kingdom producing a bulk of the locally famous red rice from its terraced fields. Check in to Le Meridien hotel, our base for the next two nights, and after lunch we visit Ta Dzong (National Museum) where an extensive collection includes antique Thangka paintings, textiles, weapons and armour, household objects and a rich assortment of natural and historic artefacts. We then take the trail to visit Rinpung Dzong (Paro Dzong), meaning "fortress of the heap of jewels". Along the wooden galleries lining the inner courtyard are fine wall paintings illustrating Buddhist lore such as four friends, the old man of long life, the wheel of life, scenes from the life of Milarepa, Mount Sumeru and other cosmic Mandala. After our visit enjoy free time to explore Paro before dinner in the hotel. (B, L, D)

Day 10 Tiger's Nest Monastery & Paro. This morning, those feeling active can take the long trek to the Taktsang Monastery or Tiger's Nest. It is one of the most famous of Bhutan's monasteries, perched on the side of a cliff 900 metres above the Paro valley floor. It is said that Guru Rinpoche arrived here on the back of a tigress and meditated at this monastery and hence it is called 'Tiger's Nest'. This site has been recognised as a most sacred place; it was visited by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1646 and is now visited by all Bhutanese at least once in their lifetime. For those not wishing to hike you will drive to the base of Drukgyel Dzong, a 17th century fortress burned down in the early 1950s.



Tea Plantation, Darjeeling



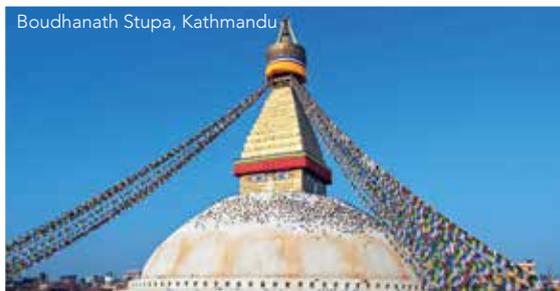
Toy Train, Darjeeling



Victoria Memorial, Kolkata



Swayambhunath



Boudhanath Stupa, Kathmandu



Here we will also see the beautiful typical Bhutanese farmhouses which are very colourful, decorative and traditionally built without the use of single nail. The majority of the population of Bhutan continues to live as it has for centuries – in small isolated farms and hamlets, surrounded by terraced fields of rice, maize and buckwheat. Also see Kyichu Lhakhang, one of the 108 temples built in the Himalayas by Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo. The building of this temple marks the introduction of Buddhism in Bhutan. (B, L, D)

Day 11 Paro to Darjeeling, India. After breakfast drive to Paro airport and board our scheduled flight to Bagdogra airport from where we transfer to Darjeeling and check in to The Elgin for our three night stay. Spread in ribbons over a steep mountain ridge, surrounded by emerald-green tea plantations and towered over by majestic Khangchendzonga, Darjeeling is the definitive Indian hill station and for many, West Bengal's premier destination. Here we can admire colonial-era architecture, Buddhist monasteries, and take a ride on the 140-year-old steam-billowing Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. Meanwhile, the steep and winding bazaars at the foot of the town bustle with an array of Himalayan products and faces from across Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet. (B, D)

Day 12 Darjeeling. Early risers have the option to visit nearby Tiger Hill for a sunrise view before returning to the hotel for breakfast. Later this morning we will take a ride on the Toy Train, a narrow-gauge course connecting Darjeeling and Siliguri which began operation in

1881 and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999. The train ride combines heritage, the marvel of engineering and is one of the best ways to experience the natural beauty of Darjeeling. From the train we will see the local markets, towns and bridges as well as passing through some lush green hills, jungles and tea farms with the mesmerising view of snow-covered Himalayan peaks and the world's third highest peak, Kanchenjunga as a backdrop. After an independent lunch we will explore Darjeeling further with a walk at Observatory Hill, Mall Road and Bhutia Busty. (B, D)

Day 13 Darjeeling. This morning spend time at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute which preserves and teaches about past mountaineering expeditions, especially about the Mount Everest Expedition by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, since the early 20th century. Continue to the Zoological Park which is the only specialised zoo in India, internationally recognised for its conservation breeding programmes of Red Panda, Himalayan Newt, Snow Leopards, Tibetan Wolf and other highly endangered animal species of the Eastern Himalaya. We will take lunch with a local family before making our way to the Tibetan Refugee Centre, which includes a Tibetan Buddhist temple, workshops producing carpets, woodcarvings, wool and woollen items and a photographic exhibition on Tibetan history. End the day at one of the tea estates where we can walk through a tea garden on the gentle hill slopes of Darjeeling and see the tea processing methods before enjoying a freshly brewed cup. (B, L, D)

Day 14 Darjeeling to Kolkata. Check out from the hotel and transfer to Bagdogra airport from where we will take a scheduled flight to Kolkata. Arrive this afternoon and transfer to the Oberoi Grand hotel where you can enjoy time at leisure before we meet for dinner tonight. (B, D)

Day 15 Kolkata. A morning city tour will include Dalhousie Square, an oasis at the heart of modern Kolkata where the plaza is ringed by historic architecture and contains the Lal Dighi, a body of water that reflects the buildings above. Continue to the Victoria Memorial, a huge monument made of white marble located in

the heart of the city, as well as the iconic Howrah Bridge, the flower market, St Paul Cathedral and the Mother House, the former home and last resting place of Mother Teresa. Take time to enjoy lunch in the city before we embark on an afternoon cruise on the Hooghly River. From the river we can see many of the city's landmarks as well as temples, ghats and historic buildings. Return to our hotel for the farewell dinner this evening. (B, D)

Day 16 Kolkata to London. Check out this morning and transfer to the airport for our scheduled indirect flight to London. Arrive this afternoon. (B)

PRICES PER PERSON

Based on double occupancy

Room	Price
Twin	£6795
Single	£8295

PRICE INCLUDES: Economy class scheduled air travel • 14 nights hotel accommodation as described • Meals as indicated (B-Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner) • Wine, beer or soft drinks with lunch & dinner • Guided excursions including entrance fees • English speaking local guides • Noble Caledonia Tour Manager • Gratuities • Transfers • Bhutan & Nepal visa.

Not Included: Travel insurance, India visa.

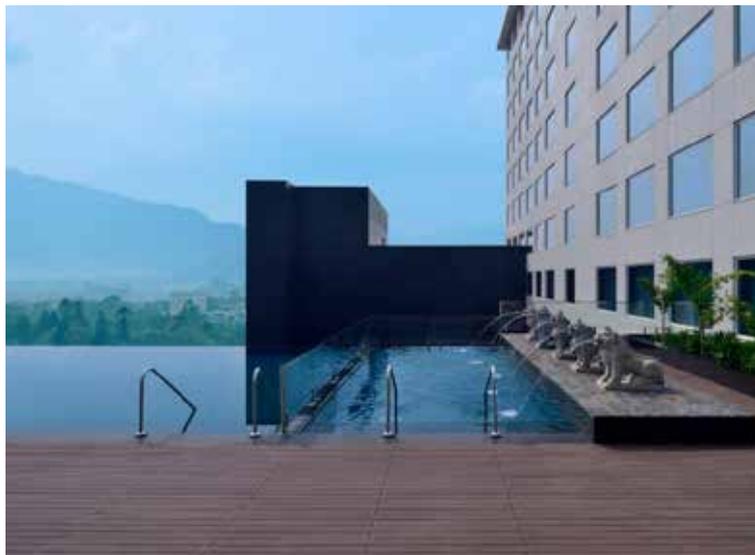
Group Size: We are restricting the group size to no more than 24 participants.

Please note: We do not recommend this tour for those with walking difficulties. The high altitude of some of the destinations may affect some travellers and so you are advised to seek medical advice before booking. Some elements of the tour, including the hike to Taktsang Monastery, are extremely strenuous and should only be attempted by those with a good level of physical fitness.

IMPORTANT VISA INFORMATION: Please note that a visa is required for India along with at least six months' passport validity from the date of arrival into India and two blank passport pages. Applications can begin 120 days before entry and the application form must be completed online. The visa cost is approximately £110 per person. This information is correct at the time of printing and should the information change, we will be in touch with booked passengers with updated guidelines.

YOUR ACCOMMODATION

For our escorted tour we will be staying at the following properties:



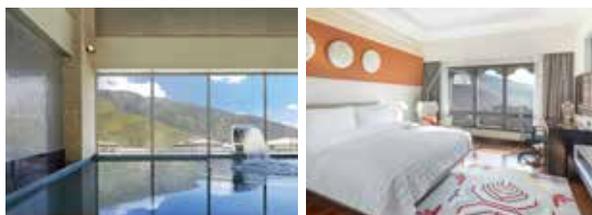
MARRIOTT HOTEL, KATHMANDU

Located in Kathmandu's vibrant city centre the Marriott Hotel offers a modern design, five-star service and deluxe amenities. Rooms are spacious and well-appointed with the majority enjoying beautiful views of the Himalayan Mountain range. All rooms feature complimentary Wi-Fi, air-conditioning, minibar, tea and coffee making facilities and a safe. There are a range of restaurants onsite offering international and Asian cuisine and the Raksi Music Bar overlooking a waterfall terrace offers delicious food and drinks. The hotel also features a spa and salon as well as an outdoor pool and 24-hour fitness centre.



LE MERIDIEN, THIMPU

Le Meridien is situated in the heart of Bhutan's capital city, just steps away from the shops and entertainment as well as some of Thimphu's most admired attractions. The 78 elegant guest rooms boast authentic Bhutanese-style furnishings and wonderful views of the local hillsides and city and include a flat-screen TV, complimentary Wi-Fi, air-conditioning, minibar, tea and coffee making facilities and a safe. The hotel's restaurants serve delicious cuisine and include the only Pan Asian restaurant in Thimphu. The other facilities include a swimming pool and spa, perfect for relaxing in after a day exploring.



DHENSA RESORT, PUNAKHA

Dhensa Boutique Resort sits in the centre of the lush and verdant Punakha Valley. Bordered by thick pine forests, the hotel overlooks the Punakha river and hundreds of paddy fields and is surrounded by peaceful walking trails. Dhensa Resort marries contemporary design with classic Himalayan style and the 24 spacious rooms all have private balconies as well as the usual modern amenities including complimentary Wi-Fi, air-conditioning and a flat-screen TV. Relax in the spa and sauna or enjoy coffee, snacks and meals at the elegant onsite restaurant which features a variety of different cuisines.





LE MERIDIEN, PARO

Le Meridien is ideally located on the edge of the Paro River, offering panoramic views of the Eastern Himalayas. All 59 guest rooms have striking views of the Himalayan Valley and Paro River and feature a flat-screen TV, complimentary Wi-Fi, air-conditioning, minibar, tea and coffee making facilities and a safe. There are two onsite restaurants as well as the Latitude Bar which is a wonderful setting from which to enjoy a pre-dinner drink. Other facilities include the Explore Spa, an indoor heated pool and a fitness centre.



THE ELGIN, DARJEELING

The Elgin was built over 125 years ago and is situated in the heart of Darjeeling. It has since been transformed into a luxury heritage hotel and many rooms offer wonderful views across the valley, featuring charming Victorian decor and a range of amenities including flat-screen television and complimentary Wi-Fi. The elegant Orchid Dining Room offers a selection of European and Asian cuisine and the Tea Lounge and Timber Bar are the ideal setting for enjoying a quiet drink in front of a roaring fire. There are also a range of treatments on offer at the onsite spa.



THE OBEROI GRAND, KOLKATA

The Oberoi Grand has been an icon in the city of Kolkata for more than a century and is affectionately referred to as the Grand Dame of Chowringhee. The hotel is classically furnished and the rooms are a combination of heritage style and modern amenities including a flat-screen television, complimentary Wi-Fi, tea and coffee making facilities and safe. There are three onsite restaurants including an authentic Thai restaurant and The Bar is a contemporary space to relax with a drink away from the bustle of the city. The hotel also features a spa, swimming pool and fitness centre.



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