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— TRANSFORMING DREAMS INTO MEMORIES —

15 Day Bhutan – The Last Shangri-La



ESCORTED ITINERARY – PRE-SET DATES – NON-FLEXIBLE INCLUSIONS

A Celebrity Escorted Tour

Detailed Itinerary: Included meals are shown with the letters B, L and D. 10475DBL

Friday 12 April: Bangkok

The tour commences in Bangkok at the Novotel Suvarnabhumi Airport Hotel. Current Druk Air schedules make a pre-tour stay at Bangkok Airport impossible to avoid.

Saturday 13 April: Bangkok to Paro

Our Druk Air flight departs for Paro early this morning. After some time to settle in and a hearty lunch we visit the imposing Paro Dzong also known as Rinpung Dzong which means 'fortress on a heap of jewels', built in 1646 by Shabdrung Nawang Namgyal. Housed in the Dzong's

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ancient watchtower is the Paro Museum (Ta Dzong), which houses a wonderful collection of art, armoury and weaponry and textiles and is a beautifully maintained showcase of Bhutanese history. Dzongs are large monastery forts which dominate every major town in Bhutan. They are the administrative and religious centres of the district and were once the mainstay of each district's defences against invading Tibetans and, often, rival Bhutanese clans. The evening, like most in Bhutan, is free to relax and enjoy some real Bhutanese hospitality with our welcome dinner. Overnight Paro (L, D)

Sunday 14 April: In Paro

Today we visit the far reaches of the Paro valley and the ruined monastery/fortress of Drugyel Dzong. The dzong was destroyed by fire early in the 20th century. However, it is an interesting coincidence that the destruction of the fortress occurred around the time when the Governor of Paro was opposing the Tongsa Penlop, who eventually became installed as the first hereditary ruler of Bhutan. On a clear day views of the 7326m snow domed peaks of sacred Mt Chomolhari can be seen. On the way back from Drugyel we stop at the famous Tiger's Nest, or Taktsang Monastery, which is perched some 600m up on a cliff overlooking the Paro valley and is said to be the spot where the legendary Indian saint, Guru Padmasambhawa, flew from Tibet on the back of a tiger to defeat five demons who were opposing the spread of Buddhism in Bhutan. Tragically damaged by fire in 1998, it has now been restored to its former glory. Overnight Paro (B, L, D)

Monday 15 April: In Paro

Today we visit a textile weaving centre in Paro. There will also be time for some local walks as well as a visit to Kyichu Lhakhang, one of Bhutan's oldest and most beautiful temples. This temple was originally constructed in the 7th century as a geomantic temple and is today one of the most sacred shrines in the kingdom. The orange tree outside is said to bear fruit all year round. Overnight Paro (B, L, D)

Tuesday 16 April: To Thimphu

After breakfast we take the 90-minute drive to the least-visited of all the Himalayan capitals, Thimphu. The road twists its way gradually up and into the broad Thimphu Valley. The first large monastery fortress we pass in the valley is Simtokha Dzong and like many of these large castles was built by the first ruler of Bhutan, Nawang Namgyal in 1629. On arrival we have lunch then take an orientation walk through the bustling township. Overnight Thimphu (B, L, D)

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Wednesday 17 April: In Thimphu

Our day begins with a visit to the Tashichho Dzong, the Monastic and civil centre of Bhutan. The dzong houses the Royal Chamber, the ministries of government and a school for young monks. It is also the summer headquarters of the Je Khempo, Bhutan's Head Abbot and head of the religious Drukpa Kagyupa school. The original dzong was destroyed by fire in 1772. When the third King of Bhutan, Jigme Dorje Wangchuk made Thimphu his capital, he rebuilt the dzong using traditional methods. This became the seat of government and was completed in 1969. We also visit the Textile Museum, the Heritage Museum and, time permitting, the thangka painting centre. Overnight Thimphu (B, L, D)

Thursday 18 April: In Thimphu

Today is free to see more of the local sights or wander the street stalls and get a real feel for daily life in the bustling Himalayan capital. Overnight Thimphu (B, L, D)

Friday 19 April: To Punakha

After breakfast today, we depart Punakha, the old winter capital of the Bhutanese monarchs and clergy. Leaving Thimphu the road climbs via a series of zigzags over the spectacular Dochu La Pass at 3,000m. On a clear day panoramic views can be had of the eastern Himalaya, including Bhutan's highest mountain, Gangkar Punsum (7,550m). The road drops down through varied forests, finally emerging into the highly-cultivated Punakha valley. The main monastery/fortress was the power base for the old system of re-incarnating rulers. The remains of the original ruler of Bhutan, Nawang Namgyal, are kept in a small room at the top of the highest tower and only the king and the head of the monastic order, the Je Khempo, are allowed to enter this room. We have lunch on arrival before a visit to the dzong and a short walk through the paddy fields to Chimi Lhakhang, a monastery built by Lama Drukpa Kunley (also known as the Divine Madman) with a most colourful history, which is a short walk through the paddy fields. Overnight Punakha (B, L, D)

Saturday 20 April: In Punakha

Today is at leisure to take in more of the local sights, enjoy a picnic lunch on the banks of the river and enjoy this pristine and beautiful valley. Overnight Gangtey (B, L, D)

Sunday 21 April: To Gangtey

Today we drive for four to five hours to the beautiful Phobjikha Valley, a stunning glacial valley on the western slopes of the Black Mountains. It is also one of the most important wildlife reserves in the country and the seasonal home of the rare black-necked crane, which spends

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winters in this serene valley. We may also be lucky enough to see muntjaks (barking deer), wild boars, sambars, Himalayan black bears, leopards and red foxes – all native to this region. Gangtey Gompa sits on top of a conical hill in the middle of the valley with the small township nestling at its feet. Overnight Gangtey (B, L, D)

Monday 22 April: In Gangtey

Today we visit the Black Crane Information Centre and take a short nature walk in the valley. Then there will be time to simply relax and wander the village and soak up this special time in this exquisite and remote Himalayan valley. Overnight Gangtey (B, L, D)

Tuesday 23 April: Return to Punakha

We retrace our steps to Punakha where we will have an overnight stay. Overnight Paro (B, L, D)

Wednesday 24 April: Drive to Paro

This morning we head back to Paro and spend a leisurely evening in this beautiful valley. Overnight Paro (B, L, D)

Thursday 25 April: At leisure in Paro

A day free today to wander into Paro town, take a walk along the river and just take time out to soak up the magic of this extraordinary place. For those who wish to try a traditional hot stone bath we can arrange this on this afternoon in Paro. Our last evening in Bhutan will feature some local dancers and musicians who will offer us songs which are centuries old and reflect the rich artistic traditions still very much alive in Bhutan. Overnight Punakha (B, L, D)

Friday 26 April: Departure

This morning we transfer to Paro airport for the Druk Air flight to Bangkok, departing mid-morning. (B)

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Celebrity Host: Judy Tenzing

Has a degree in South Asian History. She has a lifelong passion for travel and over 30 years experience as a tour leader on the sub-continent and in Asia.

Judy Tenzing is a historian with a passion for all things South Asian – India, the Himalaya, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. Her deep knowledge and love for the history, music, textiles and literature of these regions adds a rich dimension to the tours she leads.

Judy has a degree in South Asian History as well as post graduate qualifications in secondary teaching. She has taught at the University of Sydney's Centre for Continuing Education – offering courses in the histories of India, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet and Myanmar, as well as courses on the religions and cultural traditions of these regions.

Judy's main passions are India of the Raj as well as the Mughal period in India. This naturally leads to a deep interest in the histories of surrounding cultures and nations, notably Tibet, Myanmar and Bhutan – all of which are intricately entwined with that of India. In addition, Judy had taught World Religions at senior secondary level for over a decade and this enables an even deeper understanding of the great subcontinent, where faith and history are inseparable. Judy led her first tour for Academy Travel in 2012 and has been a regular leader since then, accompanying groups to India, Myanmar, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Judy is also a regular presenter for Academy Travel at the Nicholson Lectures at the University of Sydney.

We asked Judy, what do tour members take away from travelling with you?

"I think the one element most people enjoy about the tours I lead is my passion for the places we visit. Nothing is more infectious and my groups seem to absorb this love for the people and places we encounter. I love travelling and I love teaching – what better way to share this than guide a tour for a company like Academy."

**** It is recommended that you consider adding additional days to your custom itinerary, in order to have a more comprehensive visit in each of the destinations contained within the itinerary. This short 7-day trip is a highlights trip and will only give you a brief overview of each destination.**

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