

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN AND ROYAL RAJASTHAN: BUDDHISM AND TEMPLES & TIGERS IN THE LAND OF THE MAHARAJAS



DATE: OCTOBER 15 – NOVEMBER 1, 2004

Friday, October 15th

Depart USA for India

Overnight spent aboard flight.

Saturday, October 16th

Delhi

Tonight upon arrival in Delhi, we are met and transferred to our hotel. Overnight at the luxurious Hotel Imperial.
(Meals en route)

Sunday, October 17th

Delhi

This morning enjoy a late breakfast followed by a sightseeing trip of **Old and New Delhi** (Central Vista, Rajghat and Red Fort /Humayuns tomb). Delhi, the rambunctious heart of India, is one of the world's most vibrant cities. We uncover some its delights – from the majestic Red Fort to cosmopolitan Connaught Place. Travelers to Delhi get two cities for the price of one. "Old Delhi", the capital of Muslim India between the mid-17th and late 19th centuries, is filled with mosques, monuments and forts. There are colorful bazaars, narrow streets and barely controlled chaos. In contrast, New Delhi, the imperial city created by the British Raj, has spacious tree-lined avenues and imposing government buildings. This evening you will enjoy a wonderful Sound and Light show at the Old Fort. Overnight at Hotel Imperial.

(B)

Monday, October 18th

Delhi / Paro

After a leisurely breakfast, we transfer to the airport for a late morning flight from Delhi to **Paro**, with a stopover at Kathmandu. The flight from Delhi to Paro in an 18-seater Dornier is breathtaking as you fly above the Southern slopes of Kanchenjunga and **Mount Everest**, Chomolhari and Mt Jichu Drake in Bhutan. Disembark at Paro International Airport and transfer to our hotel in Paro.

(B, L, D)

Tuesday, October 19th

Paro

Today we drive to Drugyel Dzong, a ruined fortress outside of **Paro**. It is here that the Bhutanese finally defeated the Tibetans. The views of Mt. Chomolhari (7329 m. 24029 ft) are gorgeous from here. After lunch we visit a Bhutanese farm house. Return to Paro for the night. (Those wishing to trek 4 hrs return trip to Taktsang, the Tigers Nest situated 700m above Paro on sheer cliffs, may do so and return by evening). Overnight in Paro.

(B, L, D)

Wednesday, October 20th

Paro / Punakha

This morning we drive through thick forests of blue pine, ascending to the Dochu La Pass and descending to **Punakha** at the confluence of the Pho Chu (Father) and Do Chu (Mother) river. This valley is surrounded by terraces of wheat and rice fields. Here we will visit the Punakha Dzong, a fortress built in 1637 by the founder of the State - this was the winter residence of the royal family until 1955. Overnight in Hotel at Punakha.

(B, L, D)

Thursday, October 21st

Punakha / Gangtey / Chuzomsa

Today we drive to Central Bhutan to visit the Black mountains and the Black-necked Crane Centre at **Gangtey** (approx 3 hrs). The Black-necked crane is an endangered species and here at Gangtey is a large breeding ground and winter habitat for these cranes. These large, beautiful and graceful birds migrate each year from Tibet and Siberia to this glacial valley on the western slopes of the Black Mountains. Neither electricity nor telephones are allowed here in order to keep the valley natural for these rare birds. Punishment imposed on anyone injuring a

Black Necked Crane is lifetime imprisonment! The Gangtey Monastery is built atop a small hill overlooking rolling hills and green meadows surrounded by snowcapped mountains and the Phobjika Valley. The Monastery is surrounded by a large village. This is the largest Monastery of the Nyingmapa Lama sect of **Buddhism**. Drive on to the Chuzomsa Cottages for our overnight stay.

(B, L, D)

Friday, October 22nd

Chusomsa / Thimpu

After breakfast we travel to **Thimpu**, the capital of Bhutan. After check in to the hotel, our sightseeing will consist of: Taschicho Dzong, the main secretariat building where the ministries offices of the King and the Throne Room are located; the Handicrafts emporium where Bhutanese textiles can be bought; the painting and wood craft Schools where traditional arts are kept alive; the National Library where ancient books are preserved.

In the evening you attend folk dances and local music at the festival venue (in case our dates coincide with the festivals). Overnight at Thimpu.

(B, L, D)

Saturday, October 23rd

Thimpu

In the morning you visit the Simtokha Dzong, the oldest Dzong of Bhutan which houses the largest monastic Schools in the country. In the afternoon we are free to explore on our own. A visit to the famous weekend market is a must in Bhutan. The marketplace is alive with fresh and organic fruits, rice, chilies, wonderful textiles, handicrafts, art, jewelry and so much color.

(B, L, D)

Sunday, October 24th

Thimpu / Paro

In the late morning we depart for **Paro** by road (a 2 hr scenic drive). On arrival check into your Hotel at Paro.

(B, L, D)

Monday, October 25th

Paro / New Delhi / Agra

Today board our flight to Delhi on Druk Air - 18-seater Dornier, from the International Airport at 7:00 a.m., arriving in Delhi via Kathmandu at 10:30 a.m. Upon arrival at the airport, we will drive to **Agra** (4 hrs) -stopping enroute for lunch and visiting Sikandra, the tomb of Emperor Akbar on the way. There is a herd of black-buck (semi wild) which are sometimes seen on the vast grounds of Sikandra. Late afternoon / evening visit the **Taj Mahal**, built by the Emperor Shah Jehan as a memorial to his beloved queen. Later in the evening visit factories and showrooms to see a demonstration of marble inlay work as it was practiced by the families of the artisans who were involved with the building of the Taj Mahal. Overnight at Agra's Taj View Hotel.

(B)

Tuesday, October 26th

Agra / Fatehpur Sikri / Ranthambhor

After breakfast visit the Agra Fort built by the Emperor Akbar, and enjoy strolling through its vast gardens, arcades and palaces with a distinctive Persian influence. Drive to **Fatehpur Sikri**, visiting the Palaces, monuments and courtyards of Akbar the Greats capital, the Buland Darwaza the largest arched gateway built by the Mughals and the mother-of-pearl tomb of the sufi saint Salim Chishti. Drive to **Bharatpur** train station for the train at 3:46 p.m. to **Ranthambor Tiger Reserve**. Upon arrival at 6:02 p.m., we transfer to our picturesque hotel. This hotel is where Queen Elizabeth stayed when she visited in the 50's as a guest of the Maharaja of Jaipur. Tonight enjoy a barbeque dinner under the stars. Overnight at the Taj Sawai Madhopur Lodge in Ranthambor.

(B, D)

Wednesday, October 27th

Ranthambhor

After early morning tea, we take a three hour drive in the Park by jeep / Safari truck. Spend a thrilling morning viewing tigers, leopards, deer, peacocks and other wild life. Surrounded on one side by the Aravali mountain ranges and three large lakes, and dotted by numerous architectural remnants of the old fort, this park offers fantastic vistas almost everywhere. Return to the hotel for brunch. In the afternoon, there is an optional 3 hour drive into the Park by Jeep (with the option to visit - Ranthambhor Fort - a medieval Fort situated on a high plateau. There are ancient ruins of palaces and archways and other monuments here. Return for tea at the Castle Jhoomar

Baori - the old Maharaja's hunting lodge situated on a hill with views of the cliffs surrounding the National Park. Overnight at hotel.
(B, L, D)

Thursday, October 28th
Ranthambhor / Samode

This morning we have the option to take a shorter drive in the Park by Safari truck or visit the Ranthambhor School of Art to see local painters at work. Return to hotel for breakfast and depart for the Rail Station to board the train leaving at 10:35 a.m. for Jaipur -arriving Jaipur at 12:50 p.m. Transfer to bus for the drive to Samode Palace, visiting the City Palace, museums, and Observatory in the Pink City. Drive on to Samode Palace (2 hrs drive). Nestled in the Aravalli Mountains, Samode Palace is a magical retreat-beautifully frescoed walls, and lavish audience halls twinkle with hundreds of mirrors and gold inlay work. The evening is free to enjoy the ambience of this Palace and its gardens. Overnight at Samode Palace.
(B, GALA DINNER and fireworks)

Friday, October 29th
Samode / Jaipur

Today after breakfast, we drive to the Fort and Palaces of **Amer** situated on top of the surrounding mountains. Enjoy an elephant ride to the top of the Fort and then spend the morning marveling at the fabulous palaces filled with intricate carvings, stained glass panels and gold and silver inlaid ceilings. Originally built around 1000 AD, the Fort with its dazzling complex of palaces, pavilions and terraced gardens is a combination of Mughal and Rajput architecture. After descending from the fort on elephant back, proceed to the city of **Jaipur**, a fantastic 18th century city built entirely of red sandstone. Visit a carpet factory and see how woolen carpets are woven, also shop for handicrafts and jewelry for which Jaipur is famous. Overnight at Hotel Trident.
(B)

Saturday, October 30th
Jaipur / Udaipur / Ranakpur / Kumbalgarh

This morning at 7:50 a.m. depart by early morning flight to the Lake city of **Udaipur**, a romantic 16th century city. Arrive at 8:55 a.m. and drive to Ranakpur (2.5 hrs) to see the famous Jain temples with their exquisite filigree work on marble. This 15th Century Jain temple is built in white marble. The entire complex is built on 40,000 sq ft and comprises 29 halls, 5 spires, 20 domes and 420 pillars. The temple is enclosed on all four sides with a row of 86 chapels. All these architectural elements are covered with carvings so delicate that they look like lace and no two are alike! Later drive to **Kumbhalgarh** and visit the colossal Fort and city surrounded by high walls. The Kumbhalgarh Fort is situated at a height of 1100 metres in the Aravalli Hills which are amongst the oldest hill ranges in the world. Built in the 15th Century by Maharana Kumbha, it is an isolated and fascinating place and is the most important fort in the Mewar region of Rajasthan. We stay in a Heritage hotel built by the Udaipur Royal Family. Overnight at Hotel Aoodhi.
(B)

Sunday, October 31st
Udaipur

Today we drive back to **Udaipur** (2.5 hrs) .On arrival, visit the City Palace, the Sahelion ki bari (garden of the maids of honour). Later in the afternoon take a boat cruise on the Pichola Lake. Overnight in **Lake Palace Hotel**, a white marble palace that seems to float miraculously on the still waters of Lake Pichola. Considered one of the most romantic hotels in the world by Conde Nast, this is a 250-year old Palace.
(B)

Monday, November 1st
Udaipur / Delhi / Arrive USA

This morning after a leisurely breakfast, enjoy the ambience of the Lake Palace Hotel. Then depart by flight to **Delhi** (Departing at 1:05 p.m. and arriving in Delhi at 2:55 p.m.) Upon arrival at Delhi, transfer for sightseeing of the Qutub Minar/Humayun's tomb, both excellent examples of Indo-Afghan architecture. The rest of the afternoon is free for shopping in New Delhi's emporiums. In the evening enjoy a program on the Dances of India and then have an early dinner. Transfer to the airport for your flight back to USA.
(B, D)

*Meals included indicated by: B=breakfast L=lunch D=dinner
Itinerary is subject to change due to circumstances beyond our control or for the convenience of our travelers.*