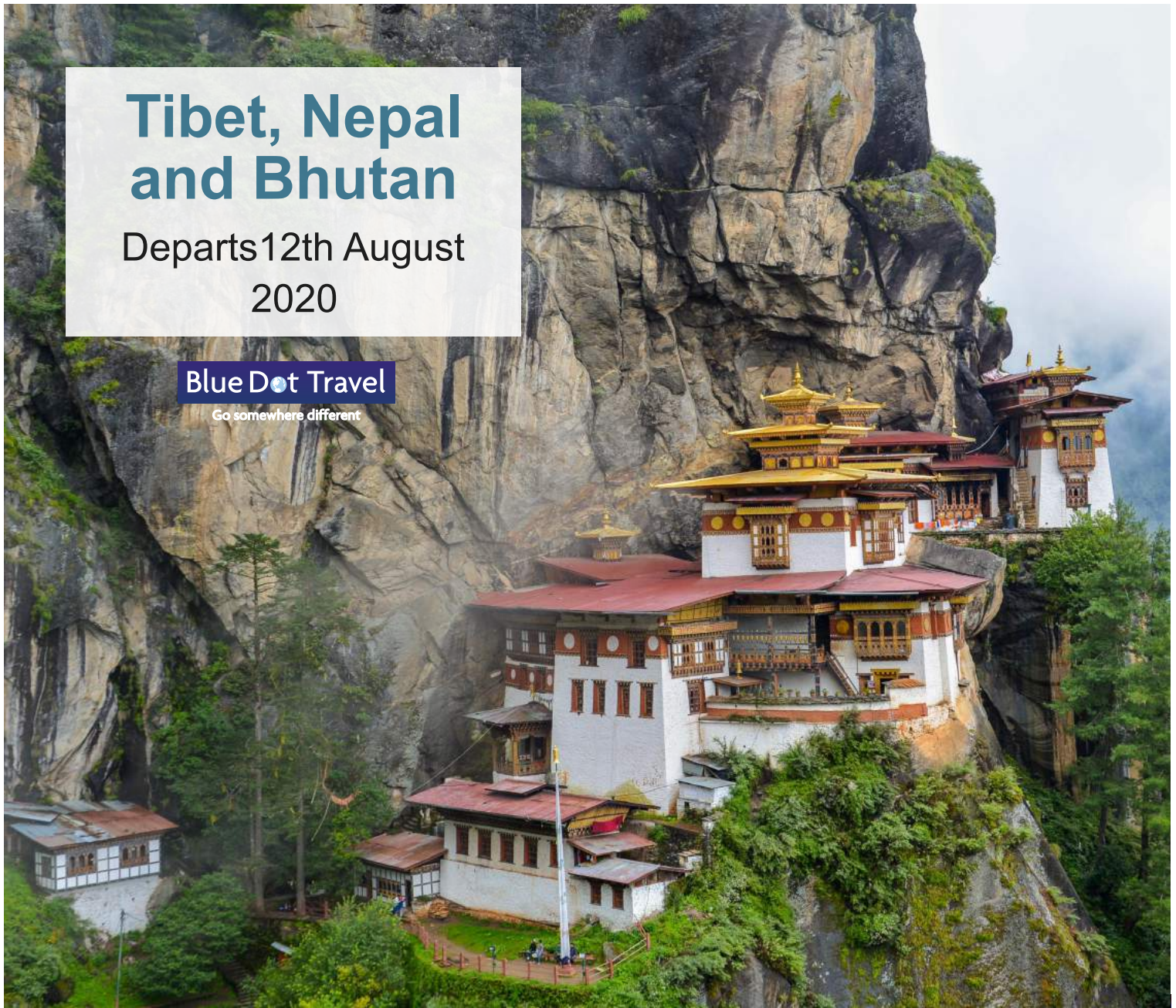


Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan

Departs 12th August
2020

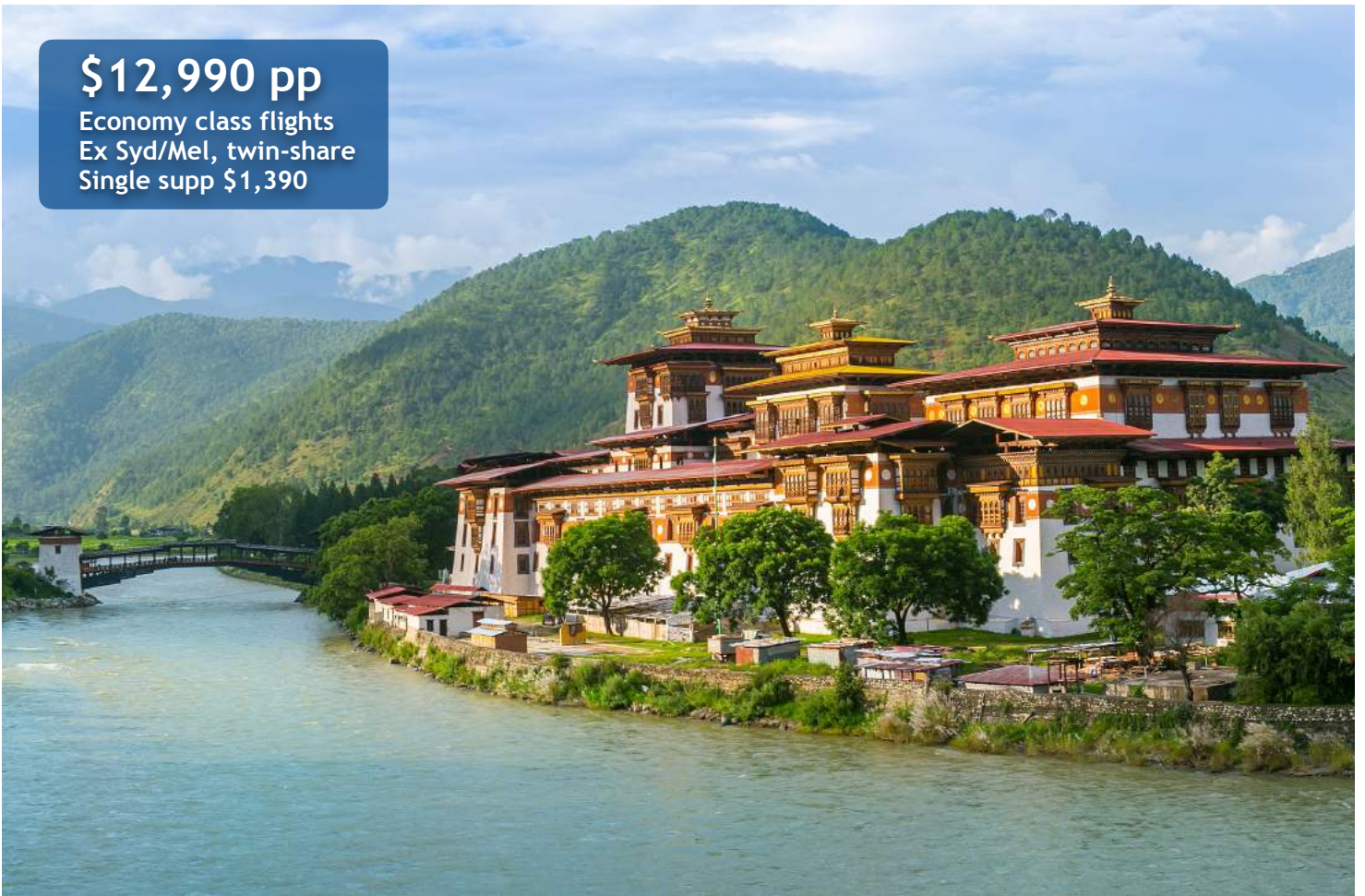
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TIBET, NEPAL AND BHUTAN

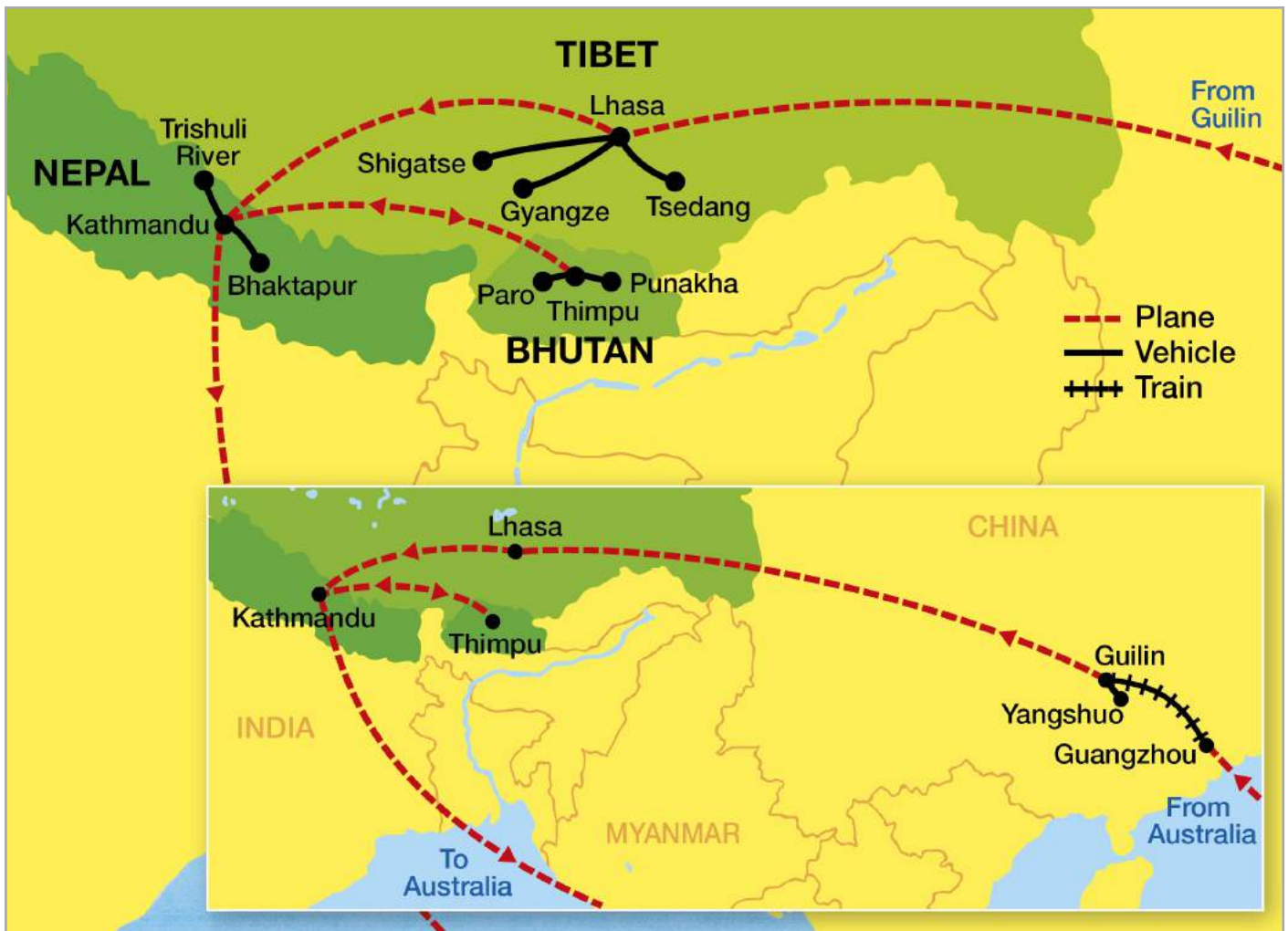
Embark on a journey of extremes, striking across the starkly beautiful landscapes of the most remote Himalayan regions of South Asia. This tour will immerse you in the rich Buddhist culture of these ancient worlds as we pass through the roof of the world—Tibet, discover the birthplace of Buddha—Nepal & finally arrive in Shangri-La - Bhutan, the land of Mt. Everest.

This 22-day adventure begins with a visit to the stunning limestone karst river valleys and terraced rice paddies of Guilin. We then move onto the highlight of the tour when we fly into the Tibetan capital of Lhasa where we attend the famous Shoton Festival. Just once a year, the monks display their precious religious artefacts from the Sera and Drepung monasteries whilst we relax and experience the timeless wonder of Tibetan operas performed in the grounds of Norbulingka palace, the former summer residence of the Dalai Lama.

An awe-inspiring flight over the roof of the world brings us to Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. The tiny Kingdom of Nepal sits atop the Himalayas wedged between India, Tibet and China.

The kingdom of Bhutan, known to the Bhutanese as Druk Yul, Land of the Thunder Dragon, is a land-locked nation in the Himalayan Mountains bordering Chinese Tibet to the north and the Indian sub-continent to the south. Partly because of its physical isolation, this small Buddhist nation was never colonised or conquered, and retains a strong sense of national identity. About 50% of the people are Bhote, with ethnic Nepalese and other migrant and indigenous groups making up the balance. One of the world's least developed societies, Bhutan maybe one of it's happiest. The distinctive Bhutanese philosophy of Gross National Happiness has a played a pivotal role in the development of the nation.

For an unforgettable journey across the roof of the world, grab your trekking shoes and come join us on this wonderful adventure.



Day 1, Wednesday 12th August

Depart Australia

Depart Australia for your flight to Guangzhou. Overnight in Guangzhou before your departure to Guilin tomorrow. *D*

Day 2, Thursday 13th August

Guangzhou to Guilin

Our journey begins with the bullet train from Guangzhou to Guilin. China's newly developed high-speed train system is an experience in itself, reaching speeds of up to 300km per hour. Upon arrival to Guilin, your afternoon is free to relax and savour the natural beauty of the area, with its dramatic karst landscapes, majestic rice terraces and picturesque river systems. We stay in Guilin for the next 2 nights. *B/D*



Day 3, Friday 14th August
Longsheng

Guilin is home to a variety of ethnic groups and today we will visit the Zhuang tribe

and Yao tribe, known for their intricate traditional clothing, art and architecture. The ancestors of the Zhuang tribe built the phenomenal Dragon's Backbone Rice Terraces over 650 years ago. The terraces received their name because the rice terraces resemble a dragon's scales, while the summit of the mountain range looks like the backbone of the dragon. *B/D*

Day 4, Saturday 15th August
Guilin to Yangshuo

The Li River is renowned as being one of "the world's top 10 watery wonders" according to National Geographic. Today we experience this wonder along the river cruise from Guilin to Yangshuo. Along your journey, the landscape is dotted with farms, traditional villages, towering karst peaks and majestic hills. Upon arrival at Yangshuo, you'll have free time to enjoy the local countryside. Overnight: Yangshuo. *B/D*



Day 5, Sunday 16th August
Yangshuo to Guilin

Xianggong Hill is a must-do for photography lovers. With its bird's eye view, it is the best point to take photos for Li River and surrounding scenery. With some spectacular photos under our belts, we continue



to the Reed Flute Cave, known as "the Palace of Natural Arts". These natural limestone caves are filled with stalactites, stalagmites

and other rock formations, transformed with multi-coloured lighting. With inscriptions within the cave dating back to the Tang Dynasty, the caves have been an attraction since ancient times. Overnight in Guilin.

B/D

Day 6, Monday 17th August
WELCOME TO TIBET

Welcome to Tibet, the Roof of the World. On a clear day, the views on our flight from Guilin to Lhasa are breath-taking, with panoramic views of the imposing Himalayan Mountains. Upon arrival, our local Tibetan guide will greet you with the traditional "Khata", a Tibetan white scarf symbolising good luck. This gesture is reflective of the heart-warming nature of Tibetan people, a true joy to encounter. The city of Lhasa sits at 3650m above sea level, and your afternoon is free to rest and acclimatise to the high altitude. We recommend taking time to rest, take gentle walks and to stay well hydrated. We will spend the next three nights in Lhasa. **B/D**

Day 7, Tuesday 18th August
Lhasa

Our day begins with a visit to the iconic Potala Palace, a masterpiece of Tibetan architecture. First built in the 7th century, it was the residences of the Dalai Lama until the 14th Dalai Lama fled during the 1959 Chinese invasion. The imposing structure, now a World Heritage Site, dominates the landscape of Lhasa with its 13-story complex that houses 10,000 shrines and over 1000 rooms. As you are guided through the ancient chambers of the palace, you get to see Tibetan art at its best. The Potala Palace has a vast array of intricate Tibetan murals and beautiful statues, as well as the tombs of the eight Dalai Lamas. In the afternoon, we visit the 1300-year-old Jokhang Temple, considered by most Tibetans to be the most sacred temple in Tibet. The Jokhang was founded during the reign of King Songtsen Gampo and housed the king's two brides: Princess Wencheng of the Chinese Tang dynasty and Princess Bhrikuti of Nepal. Both are said to have both brought important

Buddhist statues with them, which have now been revered for centuries by devout pilgrims. Follow in the footsteps of the devoted towards Barkhor street and the bustling Barkhor Bazaar. Conclude your day exploring this lively local neighbourhood, and the wonderful array of Tibetan Handicrafts and Buddhist artefacts showcased here. **B/D**

Day 8, Wednesday 19th August
Lhasa & Shoton Festival

Today you will experience the opening of the remarkable Shoton Festival. Tracing back to the 11th century, this festival marked the end of local monk's meditation retreats. Nowadays it has become a public festival for the whole nation. The festival's unique atmosphere is one of celebration, colour and music, set alongside the tranquillity of Lamas and monks chanting. This is a truly special time to visit Tibet. The festival opens with the Great Buddha Display: the unrolling of a massive 500sqm Buddha thangka tapestry that covers the entire hillside. Early risers crowd the hillside, jostling each other for the ideal spot until the whole mountain is fully dotted with people. At daybreak, sutra horns blare through the valley and the 20m long folded Buddha is carried by the strongest lamas to the hillside for the unveiling.

Once unrolled, followers begin worship and prayer by the Drepung Monastery. One of three key monasteries in Tibet, it served as a centre for learning and monastic

training for monks from all over Tibet.

Drepung Monastery housed more than 10,000 monks, served as residence to



the Dalai Lama, and is one of the world's largest monasteries. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to experience the Tibetan Opera, performed in public spaces during the festival. Tibetan Opera can be dated back to the 1400s and employs songs, dances, chants and drama to tell stories, with most of its repertoire deriving from Buddhist teachings and Tibetan history. Tibetan opera is characterised by elaborately painted masks and costumes, a marvel in themselves. The performance form was recognised by UNESCO in 2009 on their list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. In the afternoon we visit the Norbulingka Palace, the traditional summer palace of the Dalai Lamas, and famous for its beautifully maintained gardens and grounds. **B/D**

Day 9, Thursday 20th August
Lhasa to Tsedang

Depart Lhasa for our scenic drive to Tsedang, known as "the Cradle of Tibetan Civilisation". Enroute we visit the Samye Monastery, the first official Buddhist monastery in Tibet. This monastery is built in a unique

Mandala design, with its main hall representing the centre of the universe, and the outer temples representing the oceans and continents. This monastery is fascinating for both its historical significance and interesting design. We continue our journey to Tsedang, where we spend the night. Overnight: Tsedang. *B/D*



**Day 10,
Friday 21st
August
Tsedang to
Gyantse**

Our journey continues to creep further into the mountain ranges,

reaching Gampala pass at 4794m. Nestled amongst the base of the mountains, Lake Yamdrok beckons with its turquoise waters, colours changing with the movement of the sun and clouds. One of the three sacred lakes of Tibet, it is believed to have special spiritual power. We continue to Karola Glacier, the largest in Tibet at 9.4 sq km. This is the iconic Tibetan scene of towering peaks set against blue skies and colourful prayer flags. Our scenic journey concludes as we pass Mount Zhong in the early twilight and arrive into Gyantse, where we spend the night. *B/D*

**Day 11, Saturday 22nd August
Gyantse to Shigatse**

Our day begins at the Pelkor Chode Monastery in Gyantse. This monastery is important due to the three sects of Tibetan Buddhism - Sakyapa, Zhalupa and Gelukpa - that peacefully coexist here. The monastery includes a Kumbum style pagoda; a multi-storied aggregate of chapels characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism. After lunch we leave the mountains to continue our journey through Tibet's farming region to Shigatse, Tibet's second largest city. The high altitude levels can take their toll, so our day here is relaxed, with a short drive and time to recoup. Enjoy the views in this picturesque city set against the backdrop of Shigatse Dzong high upon the hilltop. Overnight: Gyantse. *B/D*

**Day 12, Sunday 23rd August
Shigatse**

This morning we visit the wonderfully preserved Tashilhunpo Monastery. Covering 70,000 sq metres, the monastery is now the largest functioning religious institution in Tibet – home to around 950 monks. The ancient buildings remain unchanged over centuries and exploring the cobbled lanes twisting around the buildings you really sense that this is one of the great monastic sights of Tibet. The monastery houses the 26m tall Maitreya Buddha statue, decorated with gold, copper, pearl, amber, coral and diamond and the largest gilded statue in the world. It also contains an

impressive collection of rare Buddhist wall paintings. After this fascinating visit, we drive back to Lhasa to overnight. *B/D*

**Day 13, Monday 24th August
WELCOME TO NEPAL**

This morning we take a short flight from Lhasa to Kathmandu, the laidback capital of Nepal. This tiny mountain nation is home to 8 of the world's 14 highest mountains, including Mt Everest. With many local's livelihood tied to these mountains, the tragic earthquakes of 2015 hit hard, and the country is gradually rebuilding itself. Progress is slow, and the impact is evident in our afternoon sightseeing tour. Visit the remains of the temples of Durbar Square and beautiful Swayambhunath Stupa, miraculously spared from major damage. Check in to your Kathmandu hotel where we spend 3 nights.

Special inclusion: Everest Summiteer Talk

The Himalayas have long-sparked the interest of explorers and tonight we have the privilege of hearing from accomplished Nepali mountaineer, Dawa Jamba Sherpa. Originally from the Makalu region of Nepal, Dawa grew up in the mountains and from a young age, he started climbing and working on mountaineering expeditions as a Sherpa. Dawa has summited Mount Everest five times and has successfully climbed fifteen other peaks over 5,500 m throughout Nepal. He has summited Cho Oyu (8,201m) in Tibet and led treks all over Nepal, India, Bhutan, and Tibet. Dawa has nearly 20 years of unparalleled experience throughout the Himalaya, and is our in-house expert on all things Everest and beyond. *B/D*

**Day 14,
Tuesday 25th
August
Bhaktapur and
Panauti**

Bhaktapur, or "City of the Devotees" is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Comprising three major squares, the city is like an open-air museum with towering temples, ancient sculptures and pagodas set alongside traditional houses and local artisans shaping pottery. Visit the Nyatapola Temple, with its five-storied pagoda, representing the five basic elements of the universe and the Siddhalaxmi temple, ordained with carvings dating back to the 16th century. The nearby National Gallery, once home to royalty, is a fascinating structure with 55 balcony windows, each a masterpiece of woodcarving design. At its entrance, the magnificent Golden Gate is embellished with Hindu figures and stands as a work of art in itself. A visit to Bhaktapur is not complete without sampling a

bowl of Juju Dhau (sweet curd) and Momos, the national dish of Nepal. What better way to enjoy these delicate dumplings than a hands-on cooking demonstration, included in today's lunch at the Heritage Hotel. This afternoon, enjoy a leisurely walk through Panauti, an ancient village situated on the banks of the Punyamati river. The remains of this medieval city are dotted with wooden temples, most notably, the 14th-century Indreshwar Mahadev, a magnificent piece of Newari architecture. We conclude our day with a traditional Nepali dinner and cultural evening. **B/D**



**Day 15,
Wednesday
26th August
Trishuli
River**

Nepal boasts some of the best white-waters in the world, thanks to its

mountainous steep terrain. But it is more than just rapids that make rafting here so special; it the magnificent vistas of traditional houses on hillsides, terraced paddy fields, deep gorges and valleys that you encounter on the way. Accompanied by a knowledgeable river guide, you will have the opportunity to experience the thrill of white-water rafting on Nepal's Trishuli River (grade 1-3 rapids). Get your heart racing on this 2-hour rafting experience, followed by lunch. **B/D**

**Day 16, Thursday 27th August
WELCOME TO BHUTAN**

A nation with a Gross National Happiness Index. Bhutan's fourth King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, created the GNH Index in the 1970s, as a way to celebrate spiritual values, rather than economic gains. With strict holds over tourism, Bhutan truly retains its traditional culture and values, which is what makes it such a unique and humbling place to visit. Have your camera ready for views of the world's highest mountain peaks, including Everest, on the spectacular flight from Kathmandu into Bhutan. Marvel at the imposing Rinpung Dzong as we arrive into Paro. Dzong architecture is a distinctive type of fortress architecture found mainly in Bhutan and characterised by towering exterior walls surrounding a complex of courtyards, temples, administrative offices, and monks' accommodation. Paro Dzong is known as the Rinpung Dzong, meaning a "fortress that sits on a heap of jewels". It was built in the 16th century on the foundation of a monastery built by Guru Rinpoche, regarded as the "second Buddha." Below the sheer walls of Paro Dzong, a traditional cantilever bridge known as Nyamai Zampa spans the river. Optional afternoon

visit to the National Museum, time permitting. Overnight: Paro **B/D**

**Day 17, Friday 28th August
Tiger's Nest Monastery**

After an early breakfast, we embark on our hike to the legendary Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) - a breath-taking monastery, clinging to the cliff face above the valley. Our hike is not only surrounded by spectacular scenery but also the mythology of this magical location. As legend has it, Padmasambava, an 8th-century Buddhist master, travelled to Paro Taktsang on the back of a tigress. This gave the monastery its popular name - the Taktsang, which literally means Tiger's Nest. He is said to have meditated for three years, three months, three weeks, three days and three hours in a cave high upon the mountain. After this legendary feat, he began the conversion of the Bhutanese to Buddhism, now the prevalent religion. We hike back down to the cafeteria at the half-way point for a lunch with spectacular views, then continue to Kyichu temple, where 7th century Tibetan King Songsten Gampo established the 108 temples in the area to ward off demons. Today, the feeling of mysticism remains as elderly pilgrims shuffle through the temple spinning prayer wheels.

Overnight: Paro. **B/D**

Please note: A reasonable level of fitness is required for this hike. The roundtrip journey is



approx 5 hours and across uneven steps. We will be at altitudes of over 3000m, which can affect even the fittest traveller, so please see your doctor prior to travel if you have any health concerns.

**Day 18, Saturday 29th August
Paro to Punakha**

Our 4-hour drive from Paro to Punakha stretches along winding roads with 360-degree views of stunning Himalaya mountain range. Crossing through the beautiful Dochula pass, we see the 108 memorial chortens or stupas known as "Druk Wangyal Chortens" which were built to commemorate Bhutanese soldiers. This is a place of spiritual importance to many Bhutanese families. We visit Chimi Lhakhang, also known as the "Fertility Temple," built in 1499 by rogue Buddhist leader Drukpa Kunley. He is known as the "Mad Saint" for his unorthodox ways of teaching Buddhism including singing, humour and so-called outrageous behaviour. He is also the saint who advocated the use of phallus symbols as paintings on walls, which still ordain the temple today.

We finish our day at the stunning Punakha Dzong; 'the palace of great happiness', and arguably the

most beautiful Dzong in Bhutan. This Dzong was the second to be built in Bhutan and it served as the capital and seat of government until the mid-1950s. All of Bhutan's kings have been crowned here, and most recently the King of Bhutan was married there. The entire structure was built without the use of any nails, adding to its already impressive appeal.

Overnight: Punakha *B/D*



**Day 19,
Sunday
30th
August
Punakha
Valley to
Phobjikha
Valley**

We begin our day with a morning hike to

Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten (approx. 2 hours round trip). This stupa was built with the intention to protect Bhutan from evil forces and help bring peace to the world. Despite its recent construction it was built in accordance with strict traditions and commands an ideal position in the upper Punakha Valley with views across the Mo Chhu and mountainous peaks of Gasa. After our hike, we continue to Phobjikha valley, one of the most beautiful in Bhutan. Our drive takes mountain roads through oak and rhododendron forests, over high mountain passes and into wide glacial valleys. We stop en route at the bustling market town of Wangdue Phodrang, then spend the afternoon exploring the Phobjikha Valley area. Visit the Gangtey Monastery, the only Nyingmapa monastery in western Bhutan or enjoy one of the many walks available in the stunning surrounds. Overnight: Phobjikha. *B/D*

**Day 20, Monday 31st August
Phobjikha Valley to Thimpu**

This morning we drive from Phobjikha Valley to Thimpu (approx. 5 hours), arriving in time for lunch. Stretch your legs from the day's driving along the Wangditse Hike, a beautiful short trail offering fantastic views of the Trashie Chhoe Dzong and Thimpu city. The walk begins at the Radio (BBS) Tower, climbs past a stunning white chorten, then opens into a field of fluttering prayer flags. Afternoon at leisure in Thimpu. *B/D*

**Day 21, Tuesday 1st September
Thimpu**

Bhutan's laidback capital city is a charming mix of old and new. We have a full day to explore the highlights of the city, including its many museums and temples: The National Textile Museum gives the opportunity to learn about Bhutan's national art of weaving, and to witness artisans creating their intricate designs. The Folk Heritage Museum, an outdoor museum,

replicates a traditional farmhouse with the aim of providing education on Bhutanese rural life. The National Institute for Zorig Chusum, commonly known as the "painting school" teaches six-year courses on the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. The skill of these students is outstanding, and their work is showcased both for exhibition and sale. The National Memorial Chorten is one of the most visible religious structures in Bhutan, and the site of daily worship for many of the city's residents. Changangkha Lhakhang temple, perched above the city, is a popular temple for parents, who come to get blessings for their newborns and young children. Built in the 13th century by Lam Phajo Dugom Zhigpo, the temple is considered the spiritual home of children born in the Chang valley. On the outskirts of the city, the Motithang Takin Preserve provides a protected habitat to Bhutan's national animal. The Takin is a large, heavily built goat-antelope unique to the dense woodlands of the eastern Himalayas. Further outside, the gigantic Buddha Dordenma statue gazes over the countryside from the ruins of Kuensel Phodrang. The 51m statue



houses thousands of smaller Buddha statues made of bronze and gold. The surrounding National Park is a lovely place to relax, take a stroll or simply enjoy the views of the valley below. Overnight in Thimpu and Farewell Dinner. *B/D*

**Day 22, Wednesday 2nd September
Departure from Paro**

Today our Himalayan adventure comes to an end. After breakfast, we take a short drive to Paro International airport for our flight back to Australia*. *B*

For those staying on to do the Ganges River cruise extension, we will depart from Paro, Bhutan and fly to Kolkata, India where we will stay for two nights before joining our Indian river cruise up the Ganges River to Varanasi on 4 September.

*Please note that at the time of writing, flight schedules had not been finalised and an additional night in Kathmandu may be required en route back to Australia. We will advise the group with plenty of advance notice if this is the case.



British defeat at Yorktown. We might also be able to spend a little time walking through the busy Ghazipur bazaar, a quintessential Indian experience. *B/L/D*

DAY 5, Tuesday 8th September

This morning, sail to Varanasi (also known as Benaras). The so-called City of Light is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities of the world, dating back to 3000 years ago.

Mark Twain once said: "Benaras is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together". An



accurate description, Varanasi is arresting to your every sense yet beautifully spiritual for those willing to let go and just be. It's the most important religious site for Hindus and visited by people from all walks of life who come here in the hope of attaining moksha or salvation. After lunch, visit the Buddhist site at Sarnath and the Deer Park where the Buddha preached his first sermon, as well as the nearby archaeological museum. *B/L/D*

DAY 6, Wednesday 9th September

This morning, drive to Chunar to visit the great Mughal Fort, the old British cemetery and the Mughal tombs nearby. Carpet-weaving and Chunar pottery are other attractions here. On the way back, visit Ramnagar to see the Maharaja's Palace and museum. *B/L/D*

DAY 7, Thursday 10th September

Take rowing boats at dawn past the busy and colourful bathing ghats of Varanasi. After breakfast on board Rajmahal, disembark again to take a walk through the busy alleys of Varanasi to experience the beating heart of the city. In the evening, take rowing boats to join the evening Ganga Aarti ceremony, where young priests perform their daily rituals with brass lamps and spiritual mantras in front of large crowds from all over India and the world. A truly mesmerising event, this aarti is the essence of Varanasi. Return to the ship moored at Rajghat. *B/L/D*

DAY 8, Friday 11th September

After breakfast, disembark and transfer to airport or railway station. *B*

Optional extension - Ganges River cruise from Patna to Varanasi

4-11 September 2020
Price AUD\$4,699 pp (twin share) plus domestic flight into Patna and domestic flight from Varanasi to meet international flight home, and any additional accommodation if required.

Day 1, Friday 4th September

Arrive at Patna by road, rail or air; transfer from airport or railway station to ship is included in the cruise cost. Embark on your cruise ship from afternoon onwards, and enjoy dinner on board while sailing upstream. *D*

Day 2, Saturday 5th September



This morning, cruise upstream during breakfast before landing to visit a spectacular small Moghul tomb at Maner.

Reboard and continue past

the confluence with the River Sone to the busy river port of Doriganj. Cruise on to an overnight stop near the confluence with the River Goghra. *B/L/D*

DAY 3, Sunday 6th September

Continue up past Ballia to Buxar, famous for the battle fought here in 1764 which, together with Plassey, laid the foundations of the British Raj. Visit the memorial on the battlefield and the old East India Company cemetery in town. Later, take a short cycle rickshaw ride up to the ghats of Buxar. *B/L/D*

DAY 4, Monday 7th September

Sail upstream today past Chausa to Ghazipur, still a centre for (official) opium production. Visit the imposing tomb of Lord Cornwallis, the General responsible for the