

Bangladesh and Bhutan

Departing
15 November 2024

Blue Dot Travel

Go somewhere different





\$15,490 pp

Twin-share, excludes
international flights
Single supp \$1,600

BANGLADESH AND BHUTAN

Bangladesh, the Land of Bengal, is a South Asian country marked by lush greenery and many waterways. It is one of the most densely populated countries on the planet with over 150 million inhabitants living in a fascinating way with their environment. About half the total area of the country is no higher than 10m above sea level, which has led to a unique river-based way of life. The Ganges and Brahmaputra are the two main rivers of Bangladesh, carrying tonnes of silt from the mighty Himalayas. Apart from these two rivers, there are hundreds more comprising a very wide and complex river system. Bangladesh is home to the largest mangrove forest in the world, the Sundarbans, best explored as the locals do: by boat. The hilly areas of the North and South-east are lush green landscapes of terraced tea plantations, occupied by smaller tribal groups. The capital city Dhaka, with nearly 17 million people, is a gloriously noisy and chaotic place, bubbling with energy. Predominantly Muslim, Bangla culture is warm and welcoming, and with tourism still in its infancy, there are wonderful opportunities to get to know the locals.

The Kingdom of Bhutan, known to the locals as Druk Yul, the Land of the Thunder Dragon, is a small landlocked nation in the Himalayas. Mainly due to its physical location, Bhutan was never colonised or conquered and retains its strong sense of national identity. Nearly three quarters of the country is covered in forest. Its highest peak, Kulu Kangri, is over 7,500 metres. The country's population is very small at just 700,000. Most are Bhote Buddhists and ethnic Nepalese. The Taktsang monastery (known as Tigers Nest) is the country's best known icon but there are many more highlights on offer. While Bhutan may be one of the least developed societies, it may just be one of the happiest. The Gross National Happiness philosophy developed by ruler King Jigme Singye Wangchuk measures the well-being and happiness of the people, rather than material wealth measurements.

If you're the sort of traveller who enjoys connecting with friendly locals, in a place where you're unlikely to bump into many tourists, then this is the trip for you.



Day 1, Friday 15th November
DEPARTURE

Today, we depart Australia for Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. On arrival, we'll transfer to the hotel, where we stay for three nights. All flights are to be confirmed - likely to be late evening arrival.



Day 2, Saturday
16th November
DHAKA

This morning, after breakfast, the group will tour this fascinating city of 17 million people. We'll start the day at Dhaka

University –the oldest and largest university in Bangladesh and the most distinguished institution for higher education and research in the Indian Subcontinent. Then, on to experience the Puran Dhaka (the old quarters). Visit the most beautiful Nawab's resident, Ahasan Manzil, also known as "Pink Palace", and then start walking through the Old Hindu Streets and taste the old town's colour, smell, sound and activities. This is one of the oldest areas of Dhaka and stretches along a narrow lane, lined with richly decorated brick buildings built during the late Mughal or Colonial period. Then, we'll visit the Independent Museum - an underground museum with a beautiful architectural view that depicts Bangladesh's struggle for independence and shows the nation's history. *B/L/D*

Day 3 Sunday, 17th November
DHAKA & RIVER CRUISE

Today, we will experience various activities through a daylong Shitalakhya River Cruise. After breakfast, we will be driven to Kanchan Bridge to board the cruise boat. The boat will sail towards Demra and visit Murapara Zamindar House, which is currently used as a college. We will also visit a village along the river to experience the rural lifestyle. Next, we'll visit a small Weaver village called Rupshi, located at Demra. Its claim to fame is weaving the finest Jamdani Saris, giving it the prestigious title of Intangible World Heritage place. In the evening, we will stroll around Aarong, Dhaka's famous handicraft chain shop. *B/L/D*

Day 4, Monday 18th November
DHAKA – MONGLA VIA NARAIL

After early breakfast, check out from the hotel. We'll enjoy the drive through the newly built Bridge on the mighty Padma River. You'll feel a drastic change once you reach Gobra Bazar –a remote village of Narail, and visit the fishermen's village and Otter-fishing community, which is still practising an ancient and unique fishing mode with tamed and trained otters. Board the local fisherman's boat and watch the technique of how the otters catch fish diving into the river. Then, visit 11 Shiva Temples Complex at Bhatpara village, another remote village of Jashore District. The grouped temple is a large brick complex with clay terracotta plaques that has a wonderful history. In their peaceful natural setting, the temples have lost some of their

charm over time due to a lack of attention from authorities. Then we'll drive to the Mongla River Jetty. Board the vessel booked and stay for three nights to visit the Sundarban Forest. *B/L/D*



Day 5, Tuesday 19th November
SUNDARBAN CRUISE (UNESCO WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE)

Experience the pure wilderness over the largest mangrove forest on earth. For

those young at heart, there'll be an opportunity to go creek surfing by motorboat. You will also have the opportunity to walk through jungle trails with armed forest guards to walk along the beach and go island hopping and bird watching. On this cruise, you will see many birds, wild animals, Asian crocodiles and dolphins diving into the river. Reach Kotka Forest Station late morning for a jungle walk behind the forest office to see the deer and other wild animals. In the evening, our vessel will sail for Kachikhali Forest Station.

B/L/D

Day 6, Wednesday 20th November
SUNDARBAN CRUISE (UNESCO WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE)

Another pristine day in the Sundarbans. The more the cruise sails through the dense green expanse of water, the deeper you enter a planet like no other. It's another world where you are surrounded by life - and almost none of it human! *B/L/D*

Day 7, Thursday 21st November
SUNDARBAN – MONGLA PORT – BARISAL (VIA BAGERHAT)

Today, we'll sail back to Mongla, where we disembark and drive to Bagerhat. Stop at the 60 Domed Mosque at



Bagerhat - a UNESCO World Heritage Site – and then drive to Barisal through Bangladesh's cleanest and greenest country roads. The Barisal backwaters are crisscrossed by numerous rivers and rivulets, which is

how the water-bound landmass gave birth to a unique pattern of living. While on the backwaters, watch out for the floating markets - each specified for certain produce - guava or logs, paddy or furniture. The entire business takes place on the water. Overnight stay in Barisal for two nights. *B/L/D*

Day 8, Friday 22nd November
BARISAL BY BACKWATER

Today involves a full-day excursion via the backwaters, canals and rivulets of Barisal. Experience life in this remote region with floating rice markets, grains, fruits, vegetables and logs. Meet the locals on the river where well-to-do families buy boats, not cars! *B/L/D*

Day 9, Saturday 23rd November
BARISAL – SONARGAON

In the early morning, we'll visit the wholesale fish and vegetable markets. After breakfast, we'll drive to Sonargaon. Sonargaon is the ancient capital of undivided

Bengal before Murshidabad and Kolkata. The "Panam City" (Sunday close) will be our focus here, which is a fascinating tiny piece of an abandoned township, a half-closed passage between yesterday and today. It is one



of the most endangered historic sites in the world and a subject of significant archaeological and artistic interest. (The New York-based World Monument Fund included Panam Nagar in its World Monuments Watch List of 100 Most Endangered Sites in 2006. Spend time at the Folk Art and Craft Museum and visit the small one-dome Galdi Mosque, built in 1519 during the Bengal Sultanate period.

B/L/D

Day 10, Sunday 24th November
SONARGAON – RUPSHI – SREEMANGAL

This morning we will drive to Sreemangal –the major tea-growing area of Bangladesh, known as a city of two leaves and one bud. The road journey through the Asian highway will be memorable and attractive with wonderful natural view of the countryside, village markets and rivers. Upon arrival in Sreemangal, our



guide will take us to a small Pottery village in Mirzapur Union, to see how local craftsmen still work manually with a moving wheel. You may like to make a pot for your own.

Then, we'll visit Monipuri Village to learn about the tribe's weaving craftsmanship. Enjoy a tribal cultural program with authentic Monipuri dinner in this village. *B/L/D*

Day 11, Monday 25th November
SREEMANGAL

Today involves a day excursion in and around Sreemangal. We'll walk through Lawachara National Park and interact with the Khasia tribal people. We'll also learn about the Manipuri tribe's weaving craftsmanship. Dinner in the hotel.

B/L/D

Day 12, Tuesday 26th November
SYLHET

Very early morning after sunrise, we'll visit a Tea Garden and experience the collection of tea leaves walking through the garden. You can join the workers and collect the leaves; it will be a lifelong memory. Then drive to Sylhet. We'll take an afternoon stroll around the town to see the Kean Bridge, Clock Tower landmark and the bank of the Surma River. Overnight in Sylhet. *B/L/D*

Day 13, Wednesday 27th November
SYLHET TO SHILLONG, INDIA

Departure this morning for the Indian Border, continuing to Shillong (50 km to the border, approx 1.5 hrs, then 90 kms to Shillong, approx 2.5hrs). We'll stop at the picturesque border town of Tamabil for a tea break before saying farewell to Bangladesh.

WELCOME TO INDIA

We'll be received at the Dwaki Border on the Indian side before arriving in Shillong, the capital of Maghalaya state in India. Shillong (meaning 'the abode of the clouds'), is

located in undulating pine-covered hills. The city centre is 1,500m above sea level and currently has a population of around 270,000. It is also known as the Scotland of the East, home to several waterfalls. The state is famous for heavy rainfalls, numerous caves, beautiful landscapes and amazing people and culture. Check-in to our Shillong hotel. Dinner at the hotel. **B/L/D**

Day 14, Thursday 28th November SHILLONG – SAMDRUP JONGKHAR

After breakfast, we'll depart Shillong and drive to the East Bhutan Border town Samdrup Jongkhar, to be met by our Bhutanese guide (190 km, approx 4.5 hours).

WELCOME TO BHUTAN

Drive the short distance to the hotel, where there will be time to relax. Overnight in Samdrup Jongkhar. **B/L/D**

Day 15, Friday 29th November TASHIGANG

Today we drive about 6 hours from the warmer climes of the south up to Tashigang in the foothills of the Himalayas. Once an important trade centre with Tibet, Tashigang is in the heart of eastern Bhutan. It is one of the largest towns in the region and the second-largest district in Bhutan. Tashigang is also the main market for all the six districts in eastern Bhutan; people from Merak and Sakteng, a remote Eastern region, stroll through the town with unique



yak-hair hats and distinctive costumes. On the way we'll visit the weaving centre at Khaling (about an hour out of Tashigang) where special textiles are produced in the traditional Bhutanese way. We'll also stop at Kanglung, now the seat of Bhutan's first university. Kanglung was made famous by Jamie Zeppa's gripping account of her time living and teaching here as a young Canadian volunteer in her book *Beyond the Sky and the Earth*. Overnight in Tashigang. **B/L/D**

Day 16, Saturday 30th November TASHI YANGTSE

Today starts with an early morning drive to Bartsham. As we leave Tashigang and make our way to the Reju turn, we will glimpse the majestic Tashigang Dzong on the hilltop overlooking Drangmechu. From Reju we will drive approximately 1.5 hours to Bartsham Chador Lhakhang (depending on road conditions as this road is not yet sealed). You will see Bhutanese huts, pine trees and shepherds on the way. Walk around Bartsham village, which has eye-catching traditional houses and local shops, before visiting Bartsham Chador Lhakhang. Then, we'll continue our drive through Ramjar Valley down towards Khitshang and Doksum villages and on to Tashi Yangtse. The small town of Tashi Yangtse is concentrated around the large Chorten Kora, modelled after the Bodnath Stupa of Kathmandu in Nepal and much revered and visited by pilgrims. The town is also famous for its wooden cups and bowls made using water-driven and treadle lathes; it is also a centre for paper manufacture. Few Western Bhutanese have visited Tashi Yangtse as it is so far east, and certainly,

few Western tourists make it this far. Overnight in Tashi Yangtse. **B/L/D**

Day 17, Sunday 1st December TASHI YANGTSE TO MONGAR

Today, we'll travel to Mongar (approx 5 hours). On the way, visit the sacred temple of Gom Kora. It is said that Guru Rinpoche meditated here and left his body print on the rock. The temple contains murals from the 15th Century, various sacred relics, and a passageway enabling you to "test your sin level". Then we'll continue to Mongar - the drive takes about 4 hours. In the evening, take a stroll around Mongar township. Overnight in Mongar. **B/L/D**

Day 18, Monday 2nd December MONGAR TO BUMTHANG

Today is a long but rewarding 7-hour drive. On the way, we will stop at Ura village, quite a large village situated at 3100m and dominated by its temple. Ura is in the highest of Bumthang's valleys and is believed to be the home of the earliest inhabitants of Bhutan. The village has about 40 houses closely set along cobbled streets, giving it a medieval atmosphere. Overnight in Bumthang. **B/L/D**

Day 19, Tuesday 3rd December BUMTHANG

After breakfast, we'll enjoy a tour of Bumthang, the spiritual heartland of Bhutan, with its many legendary monasteries, temples and palaces. Bumthang is the collective name for an area of 4 valleys - Chokhor, Tang, Ura and Chumey. Our guide will take us on a fascinating tour of a variety of sacred sites, including Jamba Lhakhang, Kurjey Lhakhang and Tamshing Lhakhang, followed by a visit to Membar Tsho 'the Flaming Lake', one of Bhutan's most important pilgrimage sites. Other optional activities include exploring Bhutan's largest Dzong (Jakar), a picturesque location that overlooks the Chokhor valley, or visiting Bumthang's famous Swiss cheese factory and dairy farm. Overnight in Bumthang. **B/L/D**



Day 20, Wednesday 4th December BUMTHANG TO GANGTEY

Today we'll drive over two hours through some of Bhutan's most beautiful landscapes to Trongsa, the gateway to central Bhutan. Set amidst spectacular scenery, Trongsa Dzong, the ancestral home of Bhutan's royal family, commands the eye from miles away. We'll also visit Ta Dzong, the museum in the watchtower dedicated to the Wangchuk dynasty, which tells the stories of the Dzong and the valley it has watched over for centuries and features the personal belongings of the Kings and Queens of Bhutan. After lunch, continue 3 hours or so to Gangtey, where we can enjoy the immense and remote Phobjikha Valley views and the black mountain ranges and monasteries. The villagers in Phobjikha continue to live a traditional Bhutanese rural lifestyle. This is the site where black-necked cranes visit in their hundreds in November each year after spending the summer in Tibet. Visit Gangtey Gompa (one of Bhutan's oldest monasteries and recently extensively renovated). Overnight in Gangtey. **B/L/D**



Day 21, Thursday 5th December BUMTHANG TO GANGTEY

Today we will take a walk around the Phobjikha Valley. Start our walk just below Hotel Dewachen, or be driven for a few minutes to Khewang temple. If the caretaker is there, we can visit the temple, otherwise continue walking along the farm road towards Gopu and Dogsena villages. Continue walking up to the top of Pangsa village where you turn left and cross the river, descending to Jangchub Gompa while keeping the river on your left side until you reach near the small stupa. From the stupa, turn right and walk uphill towards Gangtey Gompa, through forests of blue pine trees covered with lichen (known as old man's beard) via Semchubara village. Once near to Gangtey Gompa your driver will be waiting to take you to the hotel. The guide will discuss with the group how long the walk should be and can arrange for those who don't want to walk as far to be collected by vehicle at a convenient point. Total distance is 7 to 8 km (5 to 6 hours). Overnight in Gangtey. **B/L/D**



Day 22, Friday 6th December PUNAKHA

In the morning, we'll drive a couple of hours to the old capital, Punakha. You will notice the change of climate and vegetation as we

approach low-lying Punakha at 1250 metres. We'll take a pleasant walk (approx 1 hour) across the terraced fields of Sopsokha village to Chimi Lhakhang (Temple of Fertility) built in the 15th century by the 'Divine Madman' (Lama Drukpa Kuenley). In the afternoon, visit the imposing Punakha Dzong, the "Palace of Great Happiness". Built in 1637, it is strategically placed at the Po Chu and Mo Chu confluence. We'll hike to Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten via the village of Yebisa. The walk starts from the suspension bridge below Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten. Hike at a gentle pace for around 10 minutes from the bridge through the paddy rice fields of Yebisa village, then continue the hike for around 40 to 50 minutes up to the temple. The walk is still fairly gentle, but there are some steeper parts. From the top is a beautiful view of the valley and surrounding villages. The temple is 30 metres tall and is dedicated to the fifth King. After visiting the temple, descend for around 30 minutes until you reach the suspension bridge, where we will be picked up and transferred back to the hotel. Overnight in Punakha. **B/L/D**



Day 23, Saturday 7th December THIMPHU VIA DOCHU LA

Today we drive to the capital Thimphu via Dochu La pass at 3050 metres, where we will stop for spectacular panoramic views of the Eastern Himalayan ranges – the drive will take just under 3 hours with a stop at the pass. After lunch, take an afternoon walk around town and soak in the atmosphere of this magical capital with its busy shops and bazaars and photogenic citizens in national dress. Next, we'll visit the huge statue of Buddha Dordenma, which commands a tremendous view of Thimphu Valley. The huge 3-storey throne holds several chapels and the body is filled with 125,000 smaller statues of Buddha. We'll also visit the Takin Reserve, showcasing the unique national animal, the Takin. If you would like to view or buy Bhutanese handicrafts, you may like to visit the new market opposite

Taj Tashi Hotel, which has an array of stalls run by local handicraft shops selling purely homemade articles. Overnight in Thimphu. **B/L/D**



Day 24, Sunday 8th December PARO

Today we'll drive to Paro, stopping to take in the magnificent Tamchhog Lhakhang, the hereditary place of worship for Bhutan's iron bridge builder. We'll visit the impressive Paro Rinpung Dzong, one of the finest examples of Bhutanese architecture, followed by the National Museum, housed in the Ta Dzong (watch tower). The structure was built on top of the hill above Rinpung Dzong during times of war, in an unusual circular construction resembling a conch shell. An earthquake in September 2011 badly damaged the Ta Dzong¹, but it has now been renovated, and you can see a magnificent collection of Bhutanese artefacts – costumes, religious paintings, arms, textiles and Bhutan stamps. Near to the museum, we may also be able to see a demonstration of traditional wood-turning skills by local artisans who make traditional wooden bowls and cups – and you can try your hand if you wish. Time permitting, we'll visit Dumtse Lhakhang, a temple built by Thangtong Gyalpo, the iron bridge builder. Overnight in Paro. **B/L/D**



Day 25, Monday 9th December TAKTSHANG MONASTERY

Today, we walk to the 'Tiger's Nest', the sacred Taktshang monastery, which clings to the rock face 900 metres above the valley floor. Guru Rinpoche is said to have flown to the site riding on a tigress. He subsequently meditated here for three months. It is one of Bhutan's most holy sites and draws pilgrims from Bhutan and neighbouring Buddhist countries. Perhaps have lunch at the Taktshang cafeteria, from where there is a spectacular view of the monastery. If any time is left for sightseeing after the hike, our guide will suggest something to see. Overnight in Paro. **B/L/D**



Note: A reasonable level of fitness is required for this hike. The roundtrip journey is approx 5 hours and across uneven steps. You will be at altitudes of over 3000m, which can affect even the fittest traveller, so please see your doctor before travel if you have any health concerns.

Day 26, Tuesday 10th December TO DELHI

Our guide will accompany us to the airport early in the morning and wish us Tashi Delek (goodbye and good luck). We will take a short flight to Delhi and then transfer to The Claridges Hotel. Located amidst tranquil surroundings in the city's heart, the hotel has been a landmark in Delhi since the 1950s. The afternoon in Delhi is at your leisure and unguided. You can explore some historic landmarks nearby or relax before your flight home. Overnight in Delhi at Claridges. **B/Meals in-flight**

Day 27, Wednesday 11th December IN TRANSIT

Depart Delhi for your flight home to Australia—all flights to be confirmed.



Icon indicates a day where there is **moderate physical exertion**. A basic level of fitness is required: eg. A trek over 'mostly flat' terrain or climbing several flights of steps without the support of handrails or elevators.



Icon indicates a day where there is a **particularly active section**. A good level of fitness is required: eg. A longer trek over non-groomed, uneven terrain, or ascending to reach a panorama. May also include exposure to higher altitude. **An alternate activity may be offered if you choose to sit out an active section.** Please call - we are happy to discuss each tour in more detail.