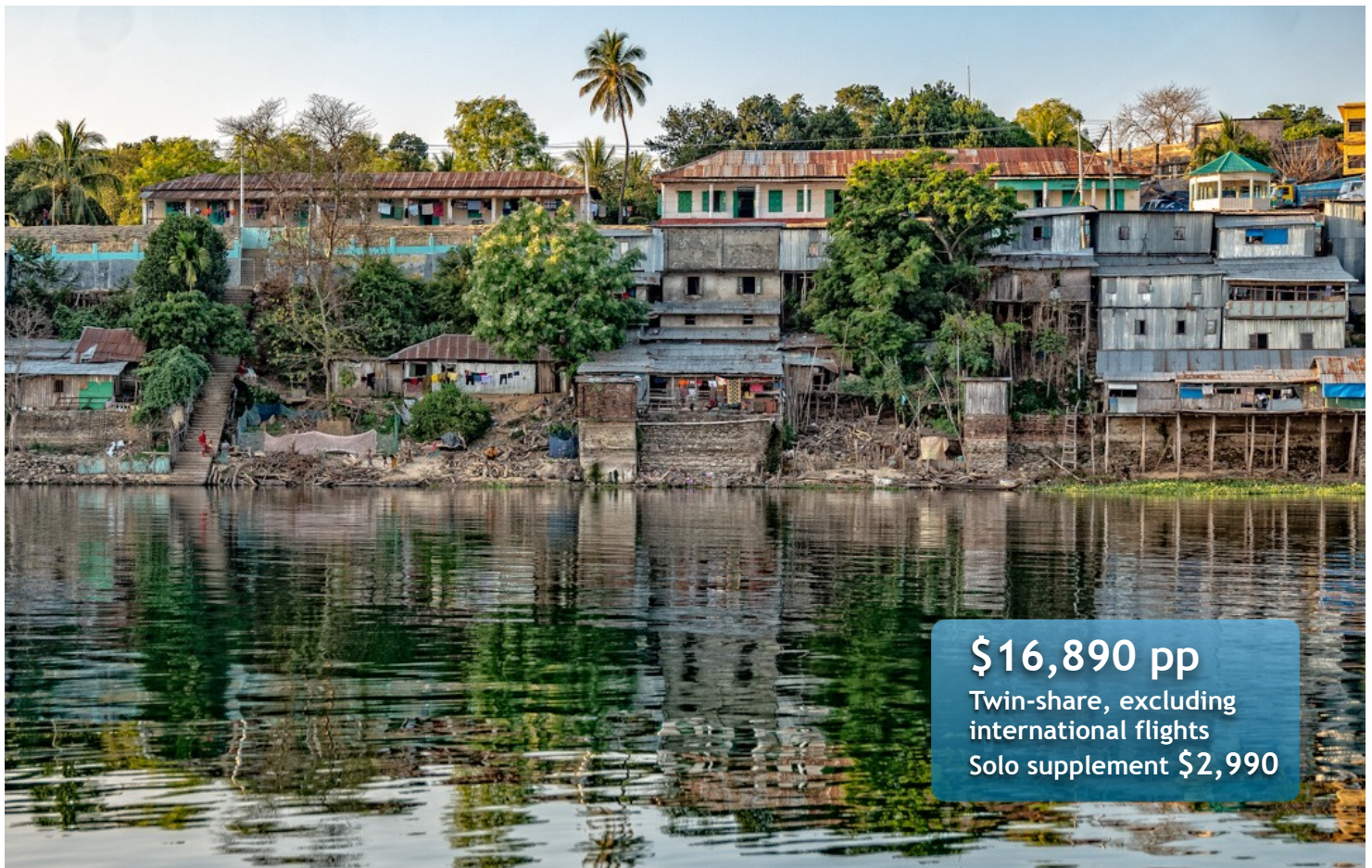


Bangladesh and Bhutan

Departing
November 2027

Blue Dot Travel





\$16,890 pp

Twin-share, excluding
international flights

Solo supplement \$2,990

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, Sunday 21st 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 a late evening arrival.



Day 2, Monday 22nd 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 residence, 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, Tuesday 23rd November DHAKA & RIVER CRUISE

Today, we will participate in various activities during a day-long 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 in Demra. Its claim to fame is weaving the finest Jamdani Saris, giving it the prestigious title of Intangible World Heritage site. In the evening, we will stroll around Aarong, Dhaka's famous chain of handicraft shops. **B/L/D**



Day 4, Wednesday 24th November DHAKA – MONGLA VIA NARAIL

After an early breakfast, check out of 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 method with tamed and trained otters. Board the local fisherman's boat and watch the way the otters catch fish by diving into the river. Then, visit the 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, with 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, Thursday 25th 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, Friday 26th 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, Saturday 27th 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, Sunday 28th 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, Monday 29th 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, Tuesday 30th 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 an authentic Monipuri dinner in this village. **B/L/D**



Day 11, Wednesday 1st December
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, Thursday 2nd December
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, Friday 3rd December
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 Meghalaya 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, Saturday 4th December SHILLONG – SAMDRUP JONGKHAR

After breakfast, we'll depart Shillong and drive to the East Bhutan Border town of Samdrup Jongkhar, where we'll 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, Sunday 5th December 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. Tashigang is the main market for all 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, Monday 6th December TASHI YANGTSE

This morning we'll drive about 2 hours to Tashi Yangtse. The small town of Tashi Yangtse is centred on the large Chorten Kora, modelled after the Bodnath Stupa in Kathmandu, Nepal. 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 tourists make it this far! On the way, visit the sacred temple of Gom Kora. Guru Rinpoche meditated here and left his body print on the rock. The temple itself contains murals, said to date from the 15th Century, and a variety of sacred relics can be seen here. From the Gom Kora temple, you can take a short, about 15-minute, uphill hike to Kapali Draphu, a sacred site known for its profound spiritual energy, blessed spring water, and connection to Guru Rinpoche. The trail offers beautiful views over the surrounding valleys. Then continue to Tashi Yangtse. Late afternoon, walk around the small town and visit Chorten Kora, where we will see a few older people praying and circumambulating the Kora. Overnight in Tashi Yangtse.

B/L/D

Day 17, Tuesday 7th December TASHI YANGTSE TO MONGAR

Today we start our journey to Mongar by 7 am, which will take around 4 hours. The highlight is the Mongar Festival

held at Mongar Dzong. We will see locals dressed in their finest clothes, who have walked from miles around to attend the festivities. They come to watch masked dances, to pray, and to feast. While the underlying purpose of the festival is spiritual, dances are more often like plays, telling stories in which good triumphs over evil, or depicting significant historical events, especially those surrounding the life of Bhutan's patron saint, Padmasambhava (also known as Guru Rinpoche). Overnight in Mongar. **B/L/D**

Day 18, Wednesday 8th December MONGAR TO BUMTHANG

Today is a long but rewarding 7-hour drive. On the way, we will stop at Ura village, a quite 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, Thursday 9th December BUMTHANG

Today we take a day excursion to Tang valley, the most remote of Bumthang's valleys, at 2700 metres. First, we drive about 30 minutes to Membar Tsho (the "burning lake"), which is one of Bhutan's most important pilgrimage sites. After visiting Membar Tsho, continue our drive (about an hour) to Tang Ogyen Choling, where you can visit the palace, now a museum, offering an interesting insight into life in an aristocratic family in the last century. We will arrange a packed picnic lunch at Ogyen Choling and then drive back to Bumthang. On the way, visit Ta Rimochen Lhakhang. Founded in the 14th Century, this Nyingma monastery is named for the tiger stripes visible on the rock behind the temple. Late afternoon, there may be time to visit Jamba Lhakhang and walk from there along the farm road to visit Kurjey Lhakhang. Overnight in Bumthang. **B/L/D**



Day 20, Friday 10th 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 for about 3 hours to Gangtey, where we can enjoy views of the immense, remote Phobjikha Valley, 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 each November after spending the summer in Tibet. Visit Gangtey Gumpa (one of Bhutan's oldest monasteries and recently extensively renovated). Overnight in Gangtey. **B/L/D**

Day 21, Saturday 11th December GANGTEY TO PUNAKHA

After breakfast, we'll drive about 2.5 hours to the old capital, Punakha. You will notice the change of climate and

vegetation as we approach low-lying Punakha at 1,250 metres. On the way, we will stop to visit Chimi Lhakhang (Temple of Fertility), built in the 15th century by the 'Divine Madman' (Lama Drukpa Kuenley) and set amongst terraced fields in the village of Sopsokha, then Kaja Throm local market. Afterwards, we'll visit the imposing Punakha Dzong, "Palace of Great Happiness". Built in 1637, it is strategically placed at the confluence of two rivers, the Po Chu and the Mo Chu. Overnight in Punakha. **B/L/D**

Day 22, Sunday 12th December **PUNAKHA**

Take a picturesque day hike to Jiligang temple. First, we hike across the suspension bridge to the beautiful temple of Khamsum Yuelley Namgyel Chorten on a ridge above the Punakha Valley. Stop at the village of Yebisa to meet the locals. Continue traversing the valley hillside towards Amankora. Above the luxury lodge, you gradually climb to Jiligang temple (meaning 'hill of the cat'), which was constructed by Lam Drukpa Kuenley in the middle of the 15th century, when Buddhism was flourishing in western Bhutan. Inside the temple, in the main stupa, is a statue of the God of compassion and of the Lama Drukpa Kuenley himself. The temple is now privately owned by the Lama's descendants. From here, we will descend towards the valley of Chubu and Samdzinkha, where local farmers tend their crops. Your driver will come as far as he can along the farm



road to meet you. Those who wish can take a raft down the Pho Chu River for about 1.5 hours, all the way to just below Punakha Dzong (a small fee applies). Those who don't wish to raft can continue on foot or by vehicle. Overnight in Punakha **B/L/D**

Day 23, Monday 13th December **THIMPHU & DRUK WANGYEL FESTIVAL**

Early this morning, we will drive about 2.5 hours to the capital, Thimphu, via the Dochu La Pass, where we will stop to enjoy spectacular panoramic views of the Eastern Himalayan ranges. We will also stop to visit the Druk Wangyel Festival, a one-day cultural and patriotic Tshechu (festival) celebrated amid snowy peaks and the 108 memorial chortens (stupas) at Dochu La Pass. The festival was instituted in 2011 by Her Majesty the Queen Mother to honour the leadership and bravery of His Majesty the Fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, and the Royal Bhutan Army following a 2003 military operation that removed armed insurgents from Bhutanese territory. After spending a few hours at the festival, we will continue the drive to Thimphu. Once there, we will visit the huge statue of Buddha Dordenma, which commands a tremendous view of the Thimphu valley. The huge 3-storey throne holds several chapels, and the body itself is filled with 125,000 smaller statues of Buddha. Next, we will visit the Takin Reserve, which showcases the unique national animal, the Takin. Then you could walk through the Craft Bazaar, which has an array of stalls run by local handicraft shops selling purely home-made articles with no imports. We can also walk down to visit the farmers' market, where farmers display their vegetables and other products. Overnight in Thimphu. **B/L/D**

Day 24, Tuesday 14th December **PARO**

We'll drive about 1.5 hours to Paro, situated in a beautiful valley, where we will visit the National Museum, located in the Ta Dzong (watchtower), which was built on a hill above Rinpung Dzong to defend it and the Paro valley during times of war. The Ta Dzong houses a magnificent collection of Bhutanese artefacts – costumes, religious paintings, arms, textiles and a fascinating collection of Bhutan stamps. From the National Museum, take a leisurely 1-hour hike along the forested hillside to Zuri Dzong. The walk passes Gonsaka Lhakhang and then Zuri Dzong, offering wonderful views down into the valley and of Paro Dzong. Zuri Dzong dates from 1352 and is home to the valley's local protector gods. Continue your walk down to the Uma Resort junction, where you turn right towards Paro Dzong. Here, you should again have a good view of Paro Dzong and the town. Our driver will be waiting at the Paro bridge to pick you up. Then, visit the impressive Paro Rinpung Dzong, one of the finest examples of Bhutanese architecture. Next to the 7th century Kyichu Lhakhang, a temple of historical significance and one of the most sacred shrines in Bhutan. This evening, we will visit the Namgay Artisanal Brewery for drinks and dinner with its lovely views overlooking the valley. Overnight in Paro. **B/L/D**

Day 25, Wednesday 15th 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 time allows 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 round-trip journey is approximately 5 hours and involves uneven steps. We 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, Thursday 16th December **TO DELHI**

Our guide will accompany us to the airport early in the morning and wish us Tashi Delek (goodbye and good luck). Overnight at the airport hotel. **B**

Day 27, Friday 17th 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.