

Overseas Adventure Travel®

THE LEADER IN CUSTOMIZED SMALL GROUP ADVENTURES SINCE 1978

Your O.A.T. Adventure Travel Planning Guide®



Heart of India

2026

Overseas Adventure Travel®

347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210

Dear Traveler,

I am thrilled that you are considering exploring the world with O.A.T. There are so many wonderful destinations to discover, and the itinerary described inside is a perfect way to fulfill a travel dream.

When you join us, you will slip seamlessly into local life as you explore off the beaten path in your small group. Like all our itineraries, this one is designed to give you an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. You will get to know community leaders and try your hand at local trades during your *A Day in the Life* experience, share traditional fare and lively conversation during a Home-Hosted Visit, discuss the Controversial Topics impacting everyday life, and visit sites supported by Grand Circle Foundation. And if you choose to travel solo, you will enjoy all these cultural experiences at an unmatched value, with our FREE Single Supplements—just one of the reasons we continue to be the leader in solo travel.

To ensure you experience the true culture and feel supported every step of the way, we provide the services of a local Trip Experience Leader from the beginning of your adventure to the end. Along with introducing you to the history and culture of their homeland, these friendly experts will gladly help you out with any special requests to make your trip even more special. You can also rely on the seasoned team at our regional office, who are ready to help 24/7 in case any unexpected circumstances arise.

Plus, you can put your own personal stamp on your trip, like the **87% of our travelers who customize their experience**. Perhaps you will choose to see more of your destination by adding an optional trip extension to your itinerary. You can also arrive a few days early to explore independently and get acclimated, customize your air itinerary, and more.

I hope you find this Travel Planning Guide helpful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact one of our Travel Counselors at **1-800-955-1925**.

Warm regards,



Harriet R. Lewis
Chair
Overseas Adventure Travel

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Taj Mahal, Agra

Heart of India Small Group Adventure

India: Delhi, Jaipur, Ranthambore, Abhaneri Camp, Agra, Lucknow, Varanasi

Small groups of no more than 16 travelers, guaranteed

16 days starting from \$4,695

including international airfare

Single Supplement: **FREE**

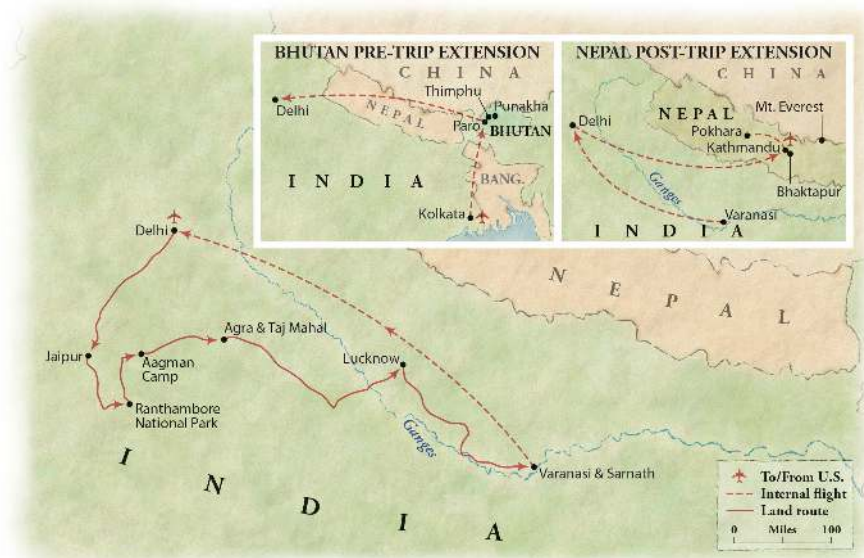
For departure dates & prices, visit www.oattravel.com/hoi2026pricing

Explore India, where every moment brings new stimulation. The scent of roasted cumin seeds wafting through a Delhi bazaar ... a young girl's bracelets jangling as she prepares for a festival ... Hindu pilgrims descending ghats into the holy Ganges. From the excitement of the "Golden Triangle" cities of Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur to the tranquility of the unexpected retreats between them—including two nights in Ranthambore National Park—we explore it all on this tour of India.

IT'S INCLUDED

- 15 nights accommodation, including 1 night at an O.A.T. camp
- International airfare, airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges unless you choose to make your own air arrangements
- All land transportation and 1 internal flight
- 34 meals—15 breakfasts, 9 lunches, and 10 dinners (including 1 Home-Hosted Dinner)
- 25 small group activities
- Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- Gratuities for local guides, drivers, camp staff, and luggage porters
- 5% Frequent Traveler Credit toward your next adventure

Prices are accurate as of the date of this publishing and are subject to change.



ITINERARY SUMMARY

DAYS	DESTINATION
1	Fly to Delhi, India
2-4	Delhi
5-6	Overland to Jaipur
7-8	Ranthambore
9	O.A.T. Private Camp
10-11	Agra • Taj Mahal
12-13	Lucknow
14-15	Varanasi
16	Fly to Delhi
17	Return to U.S.

WHAT TO EXPECT

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Moderately Easy

Pacing: 7 locations in 16 days with 2 one-night stays

Physical Requirements: Travel over some rugged paths, as well as bumpy, unpaved, dusty roads, both by bus and on foot. Several long overland drives of 5-6 hours with rest stops along the way. Must be able to participate in 3-5 hours of daily physical activities. Hot temperatures during summer months, often around or exceeding 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

Flight time: Travel time will be 14-27 hours and will most likely have two connections

View all physical requirements at www.oattravel.com/hoi

INDIA: THE O.A.T. DIFFERENCE

Unbeatable Value: Travel at the lowest price and per diems in the industry.

O.A.T. Exclusives: Experience India under the stars during a tented camp stay in rural Rajasthan. Plus, meet with locals to discuss **Controversial Topics** affecting Indians today—such as acid attacks and the patriarchy with a brave survivor.

PERSONALIZE YOUR ADVENTURE

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

Bhutan: The Last Shangri-La
PRE-TRIP: 8 nights from **\$2,795**

Nepal: Kathmandu & Pokhara
POST-TRIP: 5 nights from **\$1,995**

ARRIVE EARLY

We recommend that you relax after a long flight or explore more in depth before your trip. Prices shown include accommodations and private airport transfer.

- Arrive early in **Kolkata** before your Bhutan pre-trip extension from **\$170** per room, per night
- Arrive early in **Delhi** before your main adventure from **\$210** per room, per night

Heart of India

YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

8 nights in *Bhutan: The Last Shangri-La*

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Day 2 Arrive in Kolkata, India

Day 3 Explore Kolkata • Local interaction

Day 4 Fly to Paro, Bhutan • Transfer to Thimphu

Day 5 Thimphu

Day 6 Thimphu • Travel the Dochula Pass to Punakha

Day 7 Hike to Chimi Lhakhang Monastery • Nunnery visit

Day 8 Punakha • Paro Dzong & Kyichu Lhakhang

Day 9 Paro • Tiger's Nest Monastery

Day 10 Paro • Transfer to Delhi & join main trip

Day 1 Depart U.S. to Delhi, India

Afternoon/Evening: You depart today on your overnight flight from the U.S. to Delhi, India.

Day 2 Arrive in Delhi, India

- Destination: Delhi
- Accommodations: Metropolitan Hotel Delhi or similar

Afternoon: You'll arrive in Delhi in the afternoon or evening. An O.A.T. representative will meet you at the airport and assist with your transfer to your hotel. Here we'll be joined by travelers who arrived early in Delhi or took our optional *Bhutan: The Last Shangri-La* pre-trip extension.

After settling in, you may wish to join your fellow travelers and Trip Experience Leader in a short orientation walk to acquaint you with the neighborhood.

Dinner: On your own. During your orientation walk, you might ask your Trip Experience Leader for restaurant recommendations, should you want any.

Evening: On your own—you are free to rest in your room after your long flight to prepare for tomorrow's discoveries, or reach out to your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations on activities in the area.

Day 3 Sikh Temple visit • Community kitchen volunteer opportunity

- Destination: Delhi
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Metropolitan Hotel Delhi or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Following a leisurely start to the morning, we'll join our Trip Experience Leader for a Welcome Briefing. We will learn that India is a kaleidoscope of extremes. Throughout your explorations of Delhi, you'll be exposed to sounds, smells, and local lifestyles that may be jarring—so come prepared with an open mind to all of these new experiences.

Then, we'll drive to Bangla Sahib Sikh temple, where we'll learn about one of the world's newest religions. Sikhism is a monotheistic faith that originated in the Punjab region of India in the late 15th century, and currently is practiced by tens of millions of people around the world. At the temple, we'll have a chance learn more about this religious minority, who believe strongly in giving back to the community, as we'll experience firsthand this afternoon.

Our explorations of the temple include a visit to the on-site community kitchen. Upwards of 30,000 people a day are served meals here by volunteers. This type of philanthropy goes far back in the history of the religion; in fact, there is even a Punjabi term for a Sikh community kitchen: *langar*. The underlying principle of this practice is that everyone who comes here, regardless of religion, social caste, gender, or other socio-economic factors, is welcomed and provided a meal. Today, our group will have the chance to take part in this selfless service by volunteering in the kitchen or serving meals.

Lunch: If you'd like, you may choose to enjoy a meal with locals at the community kitchen. Food served is always vegetarian, as traditional Sikhs do not believe in harming living things. Alternatively, you are free to eat elsewhere on your own if you prefer. Check with your Trip Experience Leader for restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: We'll return to our hotel around mid-afternoon, and the rest of the day is yours.

Dinner: On your own, whenever you'd like. Your Trip Experience Leader will be happy to provide recommendations. One specialty you may want to seek out here is butter chicken, or *Punjabi murgh makhani*, chunks of chicken served in a mildly spiced tomato sauce, flavored with butter and spices.

Evening: On your own—you are free to return to your room to rest before your explorations tomorrow, or join fellow travelers in the main hotel area for a nightcap to discuss the day's activities.

Day 4 Humayun's Tomb visit • Explore Raj Ghat • Controversial Topic: Hindu and Muslim relations in India

- Destination: Delhi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Metropolitan Hotel Delhi or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: The day's discoveries begin with a short drive to Humayun's Tomb. The tomb was the first of its kind built for a Mughal emperor, a 16th-century tribute to the emperor by his Persian-born wife. It is believed to have inspired the Taj Mahal, which was erected about a century later.

After enjoying ample time to admire the rich architecture and learn about the history of the late Mughal emperor, we'll continue on to the Raj Ghat neighborhood and memorial. Here, we'll spend time exploring the memorial to Mahatma Gandhi. It is here that, in 1948, the last rights of this legendary pacifist were performed. A simple, black marble platform marks the spot where Gandhi was cremated; it is almost always covered in flowers left by pilgrims, well-wishers, and visitors. Atop the platform, an eternal flame burns in honor of Gandhi's life and works.

Then, we'll make our way to the nearby residence of a local middle-class Muslim family. We'll sit down in their living room for a frank conversation on the **Controversial Topic** of relations between Hindus and Muslims in Indian society.

India gained independence from the British Empire in 1947, thereby establishing formerly British India as two separate states, India and Pakistan. The partition sparked a flame of decolonization—and genocidal violence—that displaced approximately 10 million people, dividing Hindu Indians and Pakistani Muslims on both physical and religious lines. This tumultuous separation left an air of distrust and hostility between Hindus and Muslims in this region that is still felt today.

As recently as 2019, laws were enacted by the Indian government that many Muslims perceive as threatening to their culture, religion, and language. The family we meet with today will share their experiences as members of this religious minority.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we'll drive through Lutyens' Delhi, a section named after the British architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, who led the charge on much of the architectural

design of the area when India was still part of the British Empire. As we drive through this historical section, we'll observe important landmarks as our Trip Experience Leader shares their various histories with us.

We'll return to our hotel after our drive concludes, and the balance of the afternoon is yours to explore independently. For those interested in visiting a historical shopping spot, head over to Khan Market. Established in 1951 by Freedom Fighter Khan Abdul Jabbar Khan, this market is Delhi's most expensive place to rent a shop in India. Inside, it boasts a number of boutiques and places to eat and drink. Alternatively, you could visit Hanuman Temple, an ancient Hindu place of worship dedicated to the revered god Hanuman or "Monkey God." And it's appropriately named, as you will almost certainly be greeted by monkeys upon exploring, as they are fed by temple staff.

Dinner: We'll enjoy a Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant this evening. This will be a great opportunity to indulge in local cuisine, continue getting to know your fellow travelers, and toast to the journey ahead.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend your evening as you wish, whether you want to retire to your room to rest before tomorrow's discoveries or to head back out by cab or *tuk-tuk* to explore the nearby bazaar.

Day 5 Overland to Jaipur • Home-Hosted Dinner

- Destination: Jaipur
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Radisson Jaipur City Center or similar

Activity Note: We have an early wake-up call today and a drive of about 6 hours across dusty, sometimes bumpy roads to reach Jaipur.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll rise early this morning to begin our overland transfer to Jaipur, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that's often referred to as the "Pink City" for the rosy hue of its sandstone buildings. We'll make several stops along the way to stretch our legs, including at an authentic roadside tea stall.

Upon arrival in Jaipur, we'll check in to our hotel.

Lunch: On your own in Jaipur. Your Trip Experience Leader can provide recommendations on the best locales for whatever your preferences are. For a regional specialty, ask your Trip Experience Leader where you can find *laal maans*, mutton curry simmered in a yogurt sauce with various spices.

Afternoon: The afternoon is free for you to make your own discoveries and begin getting acquainted with Jaipur. You may be interested in exploring the bustling bazaars of the Old City. Or, perhaps you'll head to the City Palace, where you'll find colorful textiles and outfits on display that belonged to past *maharajas* (princes) of Jaipur.

Dinner: We'll be welcomed into the home of a local family for a **Home-Hosted Dinner**. We'll have the opportunity to meet multiple generations of the family, which will offer us insight into the varying viewpoints within India's society.

The meal will feature a traditional Rajasthani dish you'll help prepare. The meal will taste all the richer having helped prepare it ourselves, and the conversation around the table will give us a glimpse into everyday Indian family life. For example: We'll have the opportunity to converse about a topic that divides the older and younger generations—arranged marriages versus love marriages.

Despite the general success arranged marriages seem to have in modern-day India, members of the younger generations have begun to voice their preference to choose their own spouses—even those who belong to a separate caste. These young Indians still face an uphill battle for acceptance, however, as inter-caste marriages are still viewed as a dishonor to the family.

Evening: After bidding farewell to our hosts and returning to our hotel, the remainder of the evening is yours to do as you'd like.

Day 6 Jaipur • Visit Amber Fort

- Destination: Jaipur
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Radisson Jaipur City Center or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Our day begins with a visit to Jaipur's Amber (pronounced "am-er," with a silent "b") Fort-Palace. One of the largest forts in Rajasthan, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is considered a very well-preserved 16th-century structure. Built on four levels out of pink and yellow sandstone and white marble, the fort boasts a number of unique courtyards, one of which is known as the *Sheesh Mahal* (mirror palace). Located in the Jai Mandir section of the fort and once the private quarters of the *Maharaja* (Indian prince) and his family, we'll find intricately embellished walls and ceilings, featuring glass inlaid panels and convex mirror mosaics.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: The afternoon is yours to spend as you choose. Perhaps you'll explore Birla Temple, an ornate temple made entirely from white marble. Or, visit a local paper factory to discover this delicate art of handmade paper production.

Dinner: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader would be happy to provide restaurant recommendations.

Evening: Yours to do as you please. You might enjoy a nightcap at the hotel bar or turn in early to prepare for our transfer tomorrow.

Day 7 Overland to Ranthambore National Park • Game-viewing drive

- Destination: Ranthambore
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Nahargarh Hotel or similar

Activity Note: We will drive for about five hours through rural countryside and along bumpy roads to reach Ranthambore. If you arrive in Ranthambore on a Wednesday, when the main zones of the park are closed, your included safari will occur on another day of your itinerary.

During the rainy season throughout August and September, the main zones of Ranthambore are closed on Tuesdays. If you arrive in Ranthambore on a Tuesday during this period, your included safari will occur on another day of your itinerary.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We will begin our overland transfer to the wildlife reserve of Ranthambore this morning, arriving at our hotel in time for lunch.

Lunch: At the hotel in Ranthambore.

Afternoon: This afternoon, we will venture into Ranthambore National Park, known for its Bengal tiger population. Located near the town of Sawai Madhopur, the park is one of the eleven sites chosen for Project Tiger, India's national tiger conservation program, the largest such effort in the world. The park is comprised of more than a hundred square

miles of deciduous forest and several large lakes, and until 1970, it was a hunting preserve of the *maharajas*. In addition to tigers, we'll have a chance to spot leopards, wild boars, striped hyenas, sloth bears, and more during this afternoon's game drive. We'll also come across various lakes, home to a large population of crocodiles, as well as a wide range of water birds in season. More than 450 bird species frequent this area, from crested serpent eagles to painted storks.

We'll explore the park in an 18-passenger canter (an open safari vehicle which offers a rustic but effective mode of transport) in the company of a naturalist guide. We'll search for wildlife, as well as unique local flora, such as massive *banyan* trees. An important tip: Pack your binoculars for this excursion. Though it is rare, we may see the Royal Bengal tiger, usually sleeping by day in the tall grass; therefore, an optical instrument will definitely come in handy. A recent census showed 60 tigers in the reserve, an increase of approximately 34 tigers in the last couple of years and a clear indication conservation efforts are having a positive effect. Still, although those leading the charge have reason to hope, there have been setbacks throughout the process, specifically conflicts between local villagers and wildlife.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish, whether you want to retire to your room to rest before tomorrow's discoveries or join your fellow travelers in the lounge to discuss today's wildlife sightings and compare photos.

Day 8 *A Day in the Life* of a local village • Conversation about child marriage • Visit to a Grand Circle Foundation-supported school

- Destination: Ranthambore
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Nahargarh Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Our bus ride to the village will take us over bumpy, dusty roads. The afternoon school visit is dependent on whether or not school is in session.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: After breakfast, we'll make our way to a local village for our *A Day in the Life* experience, with a stop along the way to purchase some fresh produce for our visit.

Upon arrival, our first stop will be the village temple complex where we'll meet local women and girls from the community. Once we've made our introductions, we'll help prepare a small breakfast for our hosts before sitting down with them for a conversation about child marriage in India.

Child marriage is illegal in India and has been since a law was passed in 1929. Despite this, the practice is still all too prevalent in Indian society today—27% of girls here are married before the legal age of 18, which makes India one of the top 10 countries with the highest number of child brides in the world. The issue is deeply rooted in traditional community beliefs and practices—including the notion that a wife should be subservient, and that female children are burdensome to their families. The local women we speak to today will share their own views about this difficult subject, and would be happy to answer any questions our group might have.

After our conversation, we'll split into even smaller groups and embark on a tour of the village with a local girl or young woman as our guide. This is a unique opportunity to experience daily life here. Depending on the season, you may have the opportunity to help a local with their daily chores, such as working in the field, churning butter, milking a cow or goat, and feeding the cattle. We'll then enjoy tea with the family before heading off to meet the rest of our group at the home of local villager.

Then, we'll help prepare a traditional lunch together. We might cook *roti* (Indian flatbread), mixed vegetables, and homemade lemonade with ingredients we've brought with us from Jaipur.

Lunch: We'll sit down with the local women who have been our hosts and guides today to enjoy the meal we prepared. While their English may be limited, this is still a wonderful chance to get to know these women on an individual level—learning about their lives and aspirations for the future. Your Trip Experience Leader will be on hand to help with any translation needs.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll make our way to our next stop—a village school supported in part by **Grand Circle Foundation**.

Grand Circle Foundation

Government Senior Secondary School

Total donated: **\$12,900**

Partner since: **2018**

Upon arrival, we will meet principal, who will tell us about the school, give us a tour, and participate in a Q&A with us before we split into smaller groups and begin our interactions with the school children. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the education

system in a remote Indian village, as well as how religious traditions in India have become secularized.

Some of us will sit with the older students in their classrooms and help them with their lessons, while others will interact with the younger children outside in the school yard. If you wish, you can bring along deflated soccer balls and basketballs, educational books with pictures for the school library, maps of the world and U.S., crayons, coloring books, and pads of drawing paper to donate to the school. Alternatively, you could check with your Trip Experience Leader before your trip for suggestions on what they may need.

After our school visit, we'll head to the Dhonk Cooperative, a local women's cooperative that is developing women leaders and entrepreneurs within the community. We'll hear how this group got started and how their efforts are helping to provide much needed items, like farming equipment, to the village. This interaction will provide an in-depth understanding of what it means to be a woman in modern India, especially in a society where men are usually the providers for the family.

We'll also get a first-hand perspective from a woman at the cooperative on a complicated issue plaguing Ranthambore: tiger poaching. Although poaching is illegal, it is also often a lucrative way for men to provide for their families in this rural area, which has limited economic opportunities.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: Free for your own discoveries. Join fellow travelers in the hotel lounge for a nightcap, or preserve your memories of today's cultural experience by writing in your travel journal.

Day 9 Optional morning canter safari • Overland to O.A.T. Camp • Meditation and yoga session

- Destination: O.A.T. Camp, rural Rajasthan
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: O.A.T. Camp

Activity Note: We will drive for about five hours through rural countryside and along bumpy roads, with stops along the way, to reach the O.A.T. Camp.

Early Morning: You may choose to rise early this morning for a final, optional game-viewing drive. You'll once again board an open-air canter—along with your fellow travelers and other visitors—and set off from your hotel on a journey through Ranthambore National Park in search of exotic wildlife and unique flora. This will also offer another opportunity to spot a Bengal tiger. After your optional tour concludes, you'll have time to refresh at the hotel before our day's discoveries begin.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Travelers who opted not to take the optional tour will enjoy a relaxed start to the day. Once we reconvene as a group, we'll begin our overland transfer to the O.A.T. camp in rural Rajasthan.

Lunch: We'll enjoy a packed lunch en route to camp.

Afternoon: Upon arrival at our yoga and wellness camp, you'll have some time to freshen up, settle in, and enjoy the calm of your surroundings. Our campsite is nestled among small plots of land used by local farmers to grow a rich diversity of crops, offering a true taste of rustic village life in India. Look for the mustard blooms, which, in season, resemble thousands of buttercups waving in the breeze.

Later this afternoon, you may choose to join an optional meditation session. After it concludes, a local yoga guru will give a talk on how yoga helps link the individual to their inner self, before leading a gentle yoga class.

Following the class, we welcome locals from the nearby village to our camp. They may build a bonfire and share their traditional songs and dances with us. You are free to join in the festive dancing or watch from your seat by the bonfire.

Dinner: At the camp.

Evening: At leisure. Perhaps rest up in your cottage or take a bike ride around the camp.

Day 10 Abhaneri step well • Overland to Agra

- Destination: Agra
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Radisson Hotel Agra or similar

Activity Note: We will drive for about five hours from the O.A.T. camp to Agra along bumpy roads, with stops along the way.

Early Morning: You can rise early this morning if you wish to participate in an elective yoga class at camp. Then, we'll set off to nearby Abhaneri. Here, we'll view an ancient *baolis*, essentially a stepwell or waterway built to provide a constant water supply to local inhabitants—a site many travelers do not get to experience. This once-isolated spot, now home to a bazaar and various shops, allows us to conjure scenes of the past, when entire communities gathered here to get water, socialize, and settle disputes.

Then, we'll head back to camp.

Breakfast: At the camp.

Morning: You'll have some free time to rest in your tent and pack before we depart for Agra. Throughout our drive, our Trip Experience Leader will regale us with stories of the ancient Mughal Empire. We'll also enjoy sweeping views of the Rajasthani countryside from the vantage point of the open road.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Bharatpur en route to Agra.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll continue on to Agra, arriving in the mid-afternoon. After we check in to our hotel, you'll have some time to relax after the long drive or set out on your own to get acquainted with Agra. You might consider taking a short *tuk-tuk* ride to the old quarter, to meander the winding back lanes and browse the rainbow-hued wares of the bazaars.

Dinner: On your own—your Trip Experience Leader can provide recommendations on the best locales for whatever your preferences are.

Evening: Free for your own discoveries. For a local dessert, ask your Trip Experience Leader where to find *petha*, a chewy candy made from a gourd vegetable and typically eaten dry or dipped in sugar syrup.

Day 11 Controversial Topic: Acid attacks against women • Taj Mahal • Agra Fort

- Destination: Agra
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Radisson Hotel Agra or similar

Activity Note: The Taj Mahal is not open on Fridays. If this day falls on a Friday, we visit the Taj Mahal on the evening of Day 10 instead.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Our day begins with a visit to a sight unlike any other in the entire world: the iconic Taj Mahal.

This grand edifice, built by Shah Jahan from 1631 to 1653 to enshrine the remains of his Queen Mumtaz Mahal, took 20,000 workers to build. We walk into the inner chambers of this renowned “Monument to Love,” and seek out several vantage points from which to soak up the scene. The semi-translucent white marble is inlaid with thousands of semi-precious stones and the building has four identical facades, a perfect exercise in symmetry. It’s truly a wonder of the world—and an essential part of any India travel itinerary. Throughout our exploration, our Trip Experience Leader will bring this scene to life as they describe the history, culture, and personal stories of this monument. We’ll have plenty of time to explore and take photos during our visit.

Our next stop is a cozy café known as Sheroes. Whereas the Taj Mahal stands as a testament to romantic devotion, Sheroes represents the violence that can befall women in patriarchal societies when love goes bad: The women who work at this exceptional place are all victims of acid attacks perpetrated by vengeful partners and scorned suitors.

After watching a short documentary about the struggles victims face, we’ll have the opportunity to discuss the **Controversial Topic** of acid attacks in India with two café workers who are both survivors of acid attacks.

Unfortunately, acid attacks are on the rise in India. In 2010, there were 27 reported attacks; today, that number is closer to 300. Approximately 85% of victims are female, and in a majority of cases, the attackers are men motivated by romantic revenge. Acid attacks have been illegal in India since 2013 and are punishable by up to ten years in prison. However, only 5% of alleged attackers are convicted.

India’s acid attack survivors face an uphill battle: They are openly gawked at and harassed by strangers and friends alike, and often face discrimination from universities and employers. One notable exception is Sheroes. Founded in 2013, the café not only offers survivors employment, but also the chance to learn new career skills, connect with other women in similar circumstances, and share their stories with visitors from India and beyond.

Lunch: On your own at the café. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend some of their favorite options. Perhaps you’ll try *bedai*, the spicy, puffy bread this region is known for.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we’ll make our way to the sprawling Agra Fort on the bank of the Yamuna River. This immense fort and palace were the seat of power for four generations of Mughal emperors; they ruled all of northern India from the early 16th century until the consolidation by British colonial rule in the early 1800s. We’ll admire the fort’s architecture, an almost perfect fusion between military and ornate designs, as we explore on foot.

After our visit to the fort concludes, we’ll return to the hotel. You may spend the rest of the day as you wish. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend local sites and activities, including a walk in the neighborhood, or a visit to the opulent Itmad-ud-Daula tomb, nicknamed the “Baby Taj.” You might also consider a visit to the Botanical Gardens or taking a stroll through the bustling spice market.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: Free for your own discoveries. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for their recommendations.

Day 12 Overland to Lucknow • Kathak dance school visit

- Destination: Lucknow
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Novotel Lucknow Gomti Nagar Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Today's transfer to Lucknow will take about 5 hours by bus, with two stops along the way.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Following breakfast, we'll begin our journey to Lucknow, the capital city of northern India's Uttar Pradesh region. Though our drive will take several hours, it will feature an abundance of scenic views, and we'll enjoy a few opportunities to stretch our legs.

Lunch: At the hotel upon our arrival.

Afternoon: You'll have some free time to make your own discoveries in Lucknow, or perhaps spend some time refreshing in your hotel room. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for their recommendations.

Then, we'll drive to the Kathak Dance Training Center. Here, we will interact with students and teachers of this traditional dance form as well as enjoy a private performance. Celebrated as a form of storytelling through rhythmic footwork, hand gestures, and facial expressions, Kathak performances have been patronized by Lucknow's nobility for centuries.

Next, we'll walk over to the Hazratganj Market area to enjoy dinner.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: After returning to the hotel, the evening is free for your own discoveries. Perhaps you'd like to stroll through Ambedkar Park, a public park dedicated to the 20th-century Indian polymath and father of the

Indian Constitution, B.R. Ambedkar, featuring various structures and sculptures such as rows of stately stone elephants.

Day 13 Explore Old Lucknow • Cooking lesson

- Destination: Lucknow
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Novotel Lucknow Gomti Nagar Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Our day begins with a visit to the historic Imambara neighborhood, also known as Old Lucknow. Since the 18th and 19th centuries, it has served as the seat of power for Nawabs, a title for semi-autonomous Muslim rulers of the Mughal Empire. "Nawab" comes from the Persian "Nuwwab," which translates to "deputy." As we discover the neighborhood, we'll uncover local life and have the opportunity to better understand this historical area. At the heart of the neighborhood is Bara Imambara, an 18th-century architectural wonder currently used by Shia Muslims for the purpose of *Azadari*, the Islamic practice of mourning of Imam Husayn ibn Ali's death anniversary at the Battle of Karbala in 680. Built by Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula in 1784, the structure's central hall is believed to be the largest vaulted chamber in the world and the Imambara itself is the oldest in Lucknow. We'll have the opportunity here to share a moment with local people participating in worship.

At the conclusion of our visit to Bara Imambara, we'll drive to the home of a local family for a hands-on lesson in preparing one of Lucknow's most famous dishes: the kebab. Typically, a kebab consists of slow-roasted meat served on a skewer or shaved over naan; here in Lucknow, one of the most common types is tunday kebab, minced buffalo meats simmered and seasoned with up to 160 spices.

Lunch: We'll sit down with our hosts to feast on our creation. Enjoy your kebab like many Lucknow natives do with a yogurt sauce on the side.

Afternoon: We'll return to our hotel after lunch, and the remainder of the afternoon is yours to do as you please. Perhaps you'll venture to La Martinière College and Residency, where you can admire the distinctive buildings and grounds of this French-style educational institution.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: After dinner, we'll return to our hotel together. The rest of the evening is free for your own discoveries. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for their recommendations.

Day 14 Overland to Varanasi • Sacred light ceremony on the Ganges

- Destination: Varanasi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Taj Ganges, Varanasi or similar

Activity Note: Today's transfer to Varanasi will take about 6 hours by bus.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll rise early this morning to begin our overland journey to the spiritual capital of India: Varanasi, the divine heart of the Mother Ganges, which takes approximately 6 hours. Hindus consider it one of the holiest places in the world, and as such, it draws millions of visitors each year looking to wash away their sins and cremate loved ones in this sacred river. Cremation, in particular, is a very common practice here because Hindus believe that spreading their ashes in the holy waters will end their cycle of reincarnation, gifting them with their final death. Varanasi is one of the oldest cities in the world and

has an intense, palpable atmosphere of spiritual devotion. Pilgrims from every part of India crowd the narrow streets and the riverside *ghats*. During your time here, expect to be exposed to a variety of sights, sounds, and smells—including beggars and Hindu death rituals—that may be jarring for some travelers. Approach Varanasi with an open mind and a sense of respect for the Hindu traditions you may see.

Today's drive is a lengthy one, but we'll make some rest stops along the way.

Lunch: We'll enjoy a late lunch at our hotel in Varanasi upon arrival.

Afternoon: After lunch, you have the option to rest at your hotel after our travel day. Or, perhaps you'd like to venture out and get your first taste of the frenzied energy that is Varanasi. Cars, bikes, *tuk-tuks*, pedestrians, and even cows all weave and jostle through the packed streets, making for an experience that awakens all five senses. Your Trip Experience Leader is a wealth of information in navigating this ancient city, so be sure to check with them for ideas, should you want any. For a cool treat, seek out a *lassi*, the refreshing yogurt drink that comes in a variety of flavors (mango is quite popular), or visit the nearby wholesale flower market.

As the day comes to a close, we'll head to the bathing *ghats*, a series of steps that lead to the sacred River Ganges. People flock in large numbers every day to bathe and worship in the temples built beside the riverbank. We can photograph riverside temples and bathing *ghats*; however, photography of the cremation *ghats* is not permitted. After taking in our surroundings on land, we'll board a boat for a unique vantage point, absorbing the timelessness of Varanasi. When the sun sets, the temple priests begin to perform *aarti*, the sacred light ceremony, on the banks of Mother

Ganga. We'll have an advantageous view of the *aarti* ceremony, as many tourists watch from among the crowds on the riverbank. Also, we will be surrounded by pilgrims who are experiencing a sacred, once-in-a-lifetime Hindu rite, making for an immersive experience.

Dinner: On your own this evening. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for their recommendations.

Evening: Free for your own discoveries.

Day 15 Visit Buddhist learning center of Sarnath

- Destination: Varanasi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Taj Ganges, Varanasi or similar

Activity Note: The Sarnath Museum is closed on Fridays. If your visit falls on a Friday, you will have additional time to explore the Buddhist temple.

Early Morning: Early risers have the option to take a leisurely morning boat ride on the Ganges, followed by a stroll through the narrow lanes of Varanasi.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Around mid-morning, we'll drive to the ancient Buddhist learning center of Sarnath. Here, Gautama Buddha preached his first sermon to his disciples, as portrayed in Bernardo Bertolucci's film *Little Buddha*. We will visit the Sarnath Museum, which houses some of the great treasures of Indian Buddhist art, including Ashoka's Lion Capital—the National Emblem of India—and the magnificent Teaching Buddha, among the most beautiful sculptures in the world. During our visit, we can explore and photograph excavated Buddhist *stupas* and pillars unearthed during the British archaeological explorations in 1836.

Lunch: Upon our return to Varanasi, you're free to enjoy lunch on your own.

Afternoon: Enjoy time to explore or rest before this evening's activities.

Dinner: We'll reconvene for a Farewell Dinner at our hotel this evening. As we dine on Indian specialties, we'll toast to the discoveries we've made.

Evening: Free for your own discoveries. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations in the area around our hotel.

Day 16 Fly to Delhi or begin Nepal: Kathmandu & Pokhara post-trip extension

- Destination: Delhi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Lemon Tree Premier Hotel

Activity Note: If you're continuing your travels on our *Nepal: Kathmandu & Pokhara* post-trip extension, you will fly to Kathmandu via Delhi early this morning.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: The morning is yours to make your final discoveries in Varanasi. You may choose to stroll along the *ghats* one last time to see the pilgrims and *sadhus* (holy men) at prayer, or visit one of the city's many colorful and fragrant markets. Your Trip Experience Leader can offer suggestions and guidance.

Lunch: On your own. You may choose to enjoy an early lunch at a local restaurant in Varanasi or pick up food at the airport after going through security later on.

Afternoon: We'll begin making our way to the airport for our flight to Delhi. Upon arrival in Delhi, we'll transfer to our hotel, conveniently located near the airport.

Dinner: Included at the hotel for travelers not taking the post-trip extension.

Evening: On your own—you might choose to return to your room to rest before your return flight home tomorrow, or join fellow travelers in the main hotel area for a nightcap to discuss the highlights of your adventure.

Day 17 Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Activity Note: Depending on individual flight schedules, your departure may be late evening on Day 16 or very early on Day 17. For very early departures, a boxed breakfast will be provided at the hotel.

Early Morning: Transfer to the airport very early this morning for your return flight home.

END YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

5 nights in *Nepal: Kathmandu & Pokhara*

Day 1 Depart from Varanasi, India • Arrive Kathmandu, Nepal

Day 2 Explore Kathmandu • Kumari visit

Day 3 Optional Mount Everest flight • Fly to Pokhara

Day 4 Optional Heli-tour to Annapurna base camp • Phewa Lake boat ride & village visit

Day 5 Fly to Kathmandu • Discover Bhaktapur

Day 6 Return flights to U.S. via Doha, Qatar

OPTIONAL TOURS

During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with your Trip Experience Leader. He or she will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and Discover credit cards. We also accept Visa and MasterCard debit cards, but it must be a debit card that allows you to sign for purchases.

In order to correctly process these charges, there can be a delay of 2–3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2–3 months following your return.

Please note: *Optional tour prices are listed in U.S. dollar estimates determined at the time of publication and are subject to change. Optional tours may vary.*

Morning Canter Safari

(Day 9 \$65 per person)

Enjoy a final, optional game-viewing drive aboard a shared 18-passenger canter, like the one we used earlier in our adventure. In the company of our fellow travelers and other visitors, we'll embark on a game-viewing drive to discover the exotic wildlife and unique, local flora Ranthambore National Park has to offer in the early morning hours. This will also offer another opportunity to spot a Bengal tiger.

Please note: *This optional tour must be reserved at least 60 days prior to your trip's departure, and a copy of your passport will be required at the time you make your reservation. (This passport copy requirement only applies to the Optional Canter Safari; your Trip Experience Leader's passport will apply to the entire group on the Canter Safari that's already included on Day 7 of your adventure.)*

PRE-TRIP

Bhutan: The Last Shangri-La

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » Airfare from Kolkata to Bhutan and from Bhutan to Delhi
- » 8 nights accommodation
- » 20 meals—8 breakfasts, 6 lunches, and 6 dinners
- » 11 small group activities
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- » All transfers

PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

The kingdom of Bhutan cautiously controls tourism to protect its legacy as one of the world's top ten biodiversity hotspots. Experience a magical, mystical world of elaborate temple-fortresses, ancient customs, and mind-boggling Himalayan scenery.

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Afternoon/Evening: Depart the U.S. today on an overnight flight to Kolkata, India.

Day 2 Arrive in Kolkata, India

- Destination: Kolkata
- Accommodations: Lalit Great Eastern Kolkata or similar

Activity Note: Depending on your flight schedule, you will arrive in Kolkata either late tonight or very early in the morning of Day 3.

Evening: You'll be met at the airport by an O.A.T. representative who will assist with your transfer to your hotel in Kolkata.

Day 3 Explore Kolkata • Local interaction

- Destination: Kolkata
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Lalit Great Eastern Kolkata or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Spend the first part of the morning relaxing at the hotel and enjoying some free time to explore on your own. Later, we'll gather for a Welcome Briefing with our fellow travelers and local Trip Experience Leader, followed by a short orientation walk around the area of the hotel.

After our walk concludes, we'll embark on a sightseeing tour of the city, both by bus and foot. During our explorations, we'll stop at the Flower Market, the General Post Office, the Governor's House, and the riverfront area.

Lunch: On your own. Perhaps you'll try *kathi* rolls, wraps composed of *roti* and boldly spiced stuffing.

Afternoon: We'll continue our bus tour after lunch, passing by the Victoria Memorial for a view of the outside. Then we'll visit the Mother House, where Mother Theresa set up her Missionaries of Charity in 1950. It was here that she worked for nearly half a century caring for Kolkata's ill and impoverished. Mother Theresa died at the Mother House in 1997 and was laid to rest in a tomb on the premises.

Dinner: On your own. Ask your Trip Experience Leader where you can try specialties unique to Kolkata. Maybe you'll visit a street stand for some rice and fish curry.

Evening: You are free to explore at your own pace, browsing the local markets, strolling the streets, or reflecting on the day with fellow travelers at the hotel.

Day 4 Fly to Paro, Bhutan • Transfer to Thimphu

- Destination: Thimphu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Thimphu Tower or similar

Activity Note: We will have a very early wake-up call to catch our flight to Paro.

Breakfast: A boxed breakfast will be available for our drive to the airport.

Morning: We leave for the airport early this morning to catch our flight to Paro. In clear weather, the flight to Bhutan provides a wonderful view of Himalayan scenery, so make sure to take a peek out your window.

Our Bhutanese Trip Experience Leader will meet us on arrival at the Paro airport and assist with our transfer to Thimphu (7,600 feet), the

modern capital of Bhutan, with a stop along the way at the confluence of the Paro and Thimphu rivers for photos.

Lunch: At the hotel in Thimphu.

Afternoon: We'll enjoy free time before reconvening with our fellow travelers and Trip Experience Leader for a briefing about what to expect over the next few days. Then, we'll embark on a brief orientation walk to get familiar with our hotel's neighborhood.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: You have the freedom to explore on your own tonight or retire early to rest before tomorrow's discoveries.

Day 5 Thimphu

- Destination: Thimphu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Thimphu Tower or similar

Activity Note: Some of the sites we visit today are closed on weekends and government holidays. In this case, we will adjust our itinerary as needed.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Intricately designed and brimming with traditional Bhutanese art, architecture, and culture, this tiny capital of Bhutan is nothing less than Shangri-La. As we spend the day exploring, notice the touches of modernity, each one introduced thoughtfully and gradually to protect the environment.

Our discoveries begin with a visit to the Memorial Chorten, which we will explore on foot. Built in 1974 in memory of King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, the "Father of Modern Bhutan," this multi-storied monument displays numerous paintings and statues that provide a rare insight into Buddhist philosophy.

We'll have ample time to interact with locals we may meet and take photos at the monument before making our way to Kuensel Phodrang, a massive 167-foot-tall statue of Buddha Dordenma built on a hill overlooking the Thimphu Valley. A chapel inside the base of the three-story structure includes some 125,000 smaller statues of Buddha.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Our explorations of Thimphu continue after lunch with a visit to a factory that produces handmade paper. Here, we'll see the detailed artistry of traditional crafts and textiles. We'll also talk to local workers to learn about the methods and processes for producing their craft.

At the conclusion of our visit, we'll return to the hotel and enjoy time to pursue our own interests.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: The evening is yours to explore on your own, enjoy the hotel's amenities, or rest.

Day 6 Thimphu • Travel the Dochula Pass to Punakha

- Destination: Punakha
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Zhingkhams Resort or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll begin our drive to Punakha after breakfast. During the journey, we venture over the 10,000-foot Dochula Pass. Weather permitting, we can see the craggy peaks of Bhutan's northern Himalayan border. We'll make a brief stop here to take in the views before continuing on to Punakha.

The fertile valley of Punakha is drained by the Phochu and Mochu rivers and blessed with a temperate climate. Before Thimphu was made the capital of Bhutan, Punakha held the title as the winter capital because of its more temperate climate. Today, it is the winter seat of the Je Khenpo (the Chief Abbot of the Central Monastic Body of Bhutan) and the Central Monk Body.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Punakha.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll walk to a nearby bazaar, where we'll get our first chance to mingle with the people of Punakha. Browse the stalls, sample the wares, and perhaps even barter with locals for a memento.

From there, we'll venture to the Punakha Dzong (or "Palace of Great Happiness"), built at the junction of the Phochu and Mochu rivers in 1637 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. This majestic *dzong* served as both the religious and the administrative center of Bhutan in the past. It measures some 600 by 240 feet and has a six-story, gold-domed tower. Inside are courtyards and religious statuary that hint at the depth of history and spiritual tradition embodied here. Your guide will teach you about this intricate culture that is exotic to us, though long established here. We may also have the opportunity to interact with local monks in the area.

After our visit concludes, we'll make our way to our hotel and check in.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: Further explore Punakha by night, reflect on the day's discoveries with fellow travelers, or rest up for tomorrow during a free evening.

Day 7 Hike to Chimi Lhakhang Monastery • Nunnery visit

- Destination: Punakha
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Zhingkhram Resort or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Our day begins with a gradual hike to Chimi Lhakhang Monastery. Situated on a hillock below the village of Metshina, the temple was built by Lama Drukpa Kuenley (also known as the “Divine Madman”) and is believed to enable conception to childless women who visit it and receive a blessing.

A walk through the village near the temple will give you rare glimpses into the daily life and lifestyle of the villagers. We’ll also visit a local farmhouse and spend time with its occupants, enjoying the warmth of their hospitality.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we’ll drive to Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhang Nunnery. We’ll enjoy a nature drive through the region’s surrounding valleys and learn more about the region’s abundant flora and fauna en route. Perched on a ridge above the Punakha Valley, the complex includes a nunnery, two-story temple, and a 14-foot bronze statue of Avalokiteshvara—an earthly manifestation of the Buddha. During our visit, the nuns will teach us about their way of life, explain why they chose to become nuns, and how their families reacted to their decision.

We’ll return to our hotel after departing the nunnery, and the rest of the afternoon is yours to do as you’d like.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: Spend a free night exploring on your own, enjoying a drink in the hotel lobby, or preparing for tomorrow’s travel.

Day 8 Punakha • Paro Dzong & Kyichu Lhakhang

- Destination: Paro
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Tashi Namgay Resort & Spa or similar

Activity Note: Today’s transfer will take about 5.5 hours, with stops along the way.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We make the long drive to Paro via Thimphu this morning, making a stop along the way at Dochula Pass for another opportunity to view the region’s landscape.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Paro.

Afternoon: Our discoveries in Paro begin this afternoon with a visit to Paro Dzong: “Fortress on a Heap of Jewels.” Considered by many to be the most impressive *dzong* in Bhutan, it’s a fine climax to our explorations of these structures. Gleaming white above the surrounding valleys, this *dzong* was built in 1646 to defend the valley against repeated invasion from Tibet. As you walk around the *dzong*, you may have the opportunity to interact with a resident monk.

From there, we’ll continue on to the sacred Kyichu Lhakhang. The temple was reportedly built in AD 659 by King Songtsen Gampo of Tibet. According to legend, it pins the left foot of an ogress so large that she covers Bhutan and most of eastern Tibet. We’ll spend some time exploring the temple and its grounds, before making our way to our hotel. After checking in, you’ll have time to explore Paro more on your own, or unwind in your room after the day’s activities.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: You will have free time following dinner to venture into Paro by night or enjoy the company of fellow travelers at the hotel.

Day 9 Paro • Tiger's Nest Monastery

- Destination: Paro
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Tashi Namgay Resort & Spa or similar

Activity Note: This day includes an early start and a 2-hour uphill hike at high altitude. Travelers do not have to participate in this walk if they feel it may be too difficult.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Following breakfast, we'll make our way to the trail head for Tiger's Nest (Taktsang) Monastery. Perched seemingly impossibly on a cliff 3,000 feet above the valley floor, Taktsang is a place of pilgrimage for locals. Legend has it that Guru Rinpoche flew to the site of the monastery on the back of a tigress from Tibet, and meditated there for three months—thus bringing Buddhism to Bhutan. The main building of the temple was destroyed by fire in April 1998 but has now been restored to its original splendor and glory. Led by our Trip Experience Leader, the hike to the monastery is challenging, about two hours each way over steep and bumpy paths. It is possible to take the ride up partially by horseback.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: We'll return to our hotel after lunch, and the rest of the afternoon is yours.

Dinner: We'll gather for a Farewell Dinner at the hotel to reflect on our Bhutan discoveries and toast to our adventures.

Evening: Enjoy some free time to make any final explorations, or prepare for tomorrow's travel to India.

Day 10 Paro • Transfer to Delhi & join main trip

- Destination: Delhi
- Included Meals: Breakfast

Activity Note: This morning has a very early wake-up call. When you arrive in Delhi, you'll have free time to eat lunch and dinner and explore on your own while you wait for the rest of your fellow travelers to arrive. You meet them tomorrow as we all continue on Day 3 of the main trip.

Early Morning: We'll make our way to the airport very early this morning.

Breakfast: At the airport.

Morning: You'll board a flight to Delhi via Kathmandu or Kolkata. An O.A.T. representative will meet you at the Delhi airport to assist with your transfer to your hotel. You'll have the balance of the day free before meeting fellow travelers on your *Heart of India* adventure.

POST-TRIP

Nepal: Kathmandu & Pokhara

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » Round trip airfare between Delhi and Kathmandu, and Kathmandu and Pokhara
- » 5 nights accommodation
- » 9 meals—5 breakfasts, 2 lunches, and 2 dinners
- » 6 small group activities
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- » All transfers

POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Experience the diversity and the magic of Nepal, an enchanting kingdom gilded in Hindu and Buddhist culture nestled beneath the rugged peaks of eight of the world's ten highest mountains. Discover two sides of Nepal on a journey from the modern capital of Kathmandu to the lakeside city of Pokhara.

Day 1 Depart from Varanasi, India • Arrive Kathmandu, Nepal

- Destination: Kathmandu
- Accommodations: Radisson Kathmandu or similar

Activity Note: This day begins on Day 16 of the main trip, or Day 18 of our festival departures.

Morning: We fly from Varanasi to Delhi this morning, where we have a layover.

Lunch: On your own. You can grab food at the Delhi airport to enjoy during your layover or when you land in Nepal.

Afternoon: Our journey to Nepal continues after lunch when we catch our flight to Kathmandu. Upon arrival late this afternoon, we'll transfer to our hotel.

Dinner: On your own. You are free to dine in one of the hotel restaurants, or get your first taste of Nepali cuisine at a local restaurant. Your Trip Experience Leader will be happy to make recommendations.

Evening: Free for you to do as you'd like. You might like to explore Kathmandu during a nighttime stroll, or retire early after today's transfer.

Day 2 Explore Kathmandu • Kumari visit

- Destination: Kathmandu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Radisson Kathmandu or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll join our Trip Experience Leader for a Welcome Briefing before taking a short orientation walk to get acquainted with the neighborhood surrounding our hotel.

Then, we'll head out for a city tour with our Trip Experience Leader to learn more about Nepal's largest city and capital, Kathmandu. Our tour begins with Patan Durbar Square, one of the seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Nepal that are preserved within a protected Monument Zone. Within the square, we visit the residence of the medieval Malla rulers of Patan, now a historical art museum. The Patan Durbar Square is reputedly the most picturesque of all the ancient Malla cities with its intricately carved architecture, delicate wind chimes, and ornate fountains.

We'll also visit Kumari Ghar, or House of the Living Goddess, home to a young girl who is believed to be the incarnation of the demon-slaying Hindu goddess Durga. After our visit, we'll have a chance to meet and interact with a former Kumari who now lives nearby. These interactions are wonderful opportunities to see how women can be deified in Nepalese culture, as well as to ask questions about the practice.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: We continue to explore the temples in Patan after lunch before returning to our hotel. The rest of the afternoon is free for you to do as you'd like.

Perhaps you will decide to visit the holiest temple in Nepal: the Boudhanath Stupa. Like Mecca is to Muslims, Boudhanath Stupa, standing 118 feet high, is the main pilgrimage site for Tibetan Buddhists. Tens of thousands of pilgrims make the journey each year. The temple's hemispherical dome represents the emptiness from which everything begins; rising above the dome, the harmika shines the Buddha's eyes in four directions that symbolize his total awareness. When Tibetan refugees entered Nepal, they settled around the

Boudhanath Stupa, creating a small village that elicits the holy atmosphere of Tibet's sacred city, Lhasa.

We'll reconvene at our hotel late this afternoon for an insightful conversation with some individuals who have summited Mount Everest. Hear about their experiences on the legendary climb, and ask any questions you may have.

Dinner: Enjoy traditional fare during a Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant.

Evening: You will have free time following dinner to venture into Kathmandu by night or enjoy the company of fellow travelers at the hotel.

Day 3 Optional Mount Everest flight • Fly to Pokhara

- Destination: Pokhara
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Mount Kailash Resort or similar

Early morning: At dawn, you may elect to enjoy an optional flight to Everest, known in Nepal as Sagarmatha or "Goddess of the Sky." Avid climbers call this mountain "the ultimate climb," and with its summit height of 29,029 feet above sea level, Mount Everest earns the title of the tallest peak on Earth. Rising majestically out of the Himalayan range, its snowy peak and intricate geography offer us breathtaking views from the air.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We fly to Pokhara this morning, enjoying panoramic views of the Annapurna range from our plane. Once an important trade city along the India-Tibet trade route, Pokhara (4,593 feet) is now the gateway for trekkers to

the Annapurna Circuit and offers a refreshingly laid-back counterpoint to Kathmandu's frenetic pace.

Upon arrival, we'll transfer to our hotel. After checking in, we'll enjoy a brief orientation walk with our Trip Experience Leader.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations during the orientation walk.

Afternoon: The afternoon takes us to the Gorkha Museum, dedicated to the history of Nepal's Gurkha soldiers (native Nepalese recruited to the British and Indian armies). While there, we'll even have an opportunity to hear a firsthand testimony on this topic from an ex-army member.

We'll return to the hotel after visiting the museum, and the balance of the day is yours.

Dinner: On your own—perhaps you'll return to a local restaurant that you discovered during your free time this afternoon.

Evening: Your free time continues into the evening when you may venture into Pokhara by night or enjoy a nightcap with fellow travelers at the hotel bar.

Day 4 Optional Heli-tour to Annapurna base camp • Phewa Lake boat ride & village visit

- Destination: Pokhara
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Mount Kailash Resort or similar

Activity Note: Today's optional helicopter tour is weather-dependent and may be canceled on short notice depending on local conditions.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Enjoy a couple of hours of leisure time this morning. Or—weather permitting—you may choose to join an optional helicopter tour to Annapurna Base Camp. Surrounded on all sides by 26,000-foot peaks, the views from the helicopter are some of the most coveted in the world.

Then, around mid-morning, we'll enjoy a boat ride on Phewa Lake. This serene body of water is ringed by trees and soaring mountains at 2,917 feet and is framed by the Sarangkot and Kaskikot hills. We'll break into even smaller groups to board paddle boats or small motorized boats for our cruise across the placid waters. Afterward, we'll visit a nearby village situated on a ridge, affording us scenic views. We'll have the chance to take in the traditional Nepali houses and observe how daily life unfolds here.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: The remainder of the day is free for your own discoveries. Perhaps you'd like to browse the nearby markets in search of a memento, or take a stroll along one of the city's scenic footpaths.

Dinner: On your own—you may eat at the hotel or ask your Trip Experience Leader for a recommendation. You may want to try *momo*, a South Asian dumpling popular across much of Asia, including the Himalayan region.

Evening: During your free time, you may see more of this Nepalese city at your own pace or retire early to rest before our travels tomorrow.

Day 5 Fly to Kathmandu • Discover Bhaktapur

- Destination: Kathmandu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Radisson Kathmandu or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We fly to Kathmandu and transfer to Bhaktapur (Bhatgaon) upon arrival. The “City of Devotees,” Bhaktapur is a UNESCO World Heritage Site spanning four square miles. The city was the crown jewel of the Malla Empire 700 years ago, and today features its historic Durbar Square, ancient courtyards, holy temples, and twisting streets where artisans still practice age-old traditions.

Lunch: On your own—your Trip Experience Leader will be happy to provide a recommendation.

Afternoon: We’ll set off with our Trip Experience Leader to explore some of Bhaktapur’s sites on a guided bus tour, including a pottery workshop and one of the city’s temples. At Nyatapola Square, we’ll get to meet with members of the 25 or so families

who are engaged in the pottery industry. Watch these artisans craft bowls, cups, and other vessels using the same traditional methods their ancestors have used for hundreds of years; perhaps you will even choose to try your own hand at the craft.

After our tour concludes, we’ll return to the hotel, at which point we’ll enjoy free time until dinner this evening.

Dinner: We celebrate our discoveries and savor a final Nepalese meal during a Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant.

Evening: You may wish to retire early for our return flights home tomorrow.

Day 6 Return flights to U.S. via Doha, Qatar

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Free to relax or finish packing for this afternoon’s flight.

Lunch: On your own.

Afternoon: We’ll depart for the airport for our return flights to the U.S. via Doha, Qatar.

OPTIONAL TOURS

Mount Everest flight

(Day 3 \$280 per person)

At dawn, you may elect to enjoy an optional flight to Everest (weather permitting), known in Tibet as *Sagarmatha* or “Goddess of the Sky.” Avid climbers call this mountain “the ultimate climb,” and with its astounding summit height of 29,029 feet above sea level, Mount Everest earns the title of the tallest peak on Earth.

Rising majestically out of the Himalayan range, its snowy peak and intricate geography offer us breathtaking views from the air.

This optional tour only operates if weather permits.

Heli-tour to Annapurna Base Camp

(Day 4 \$600 per person)

Travel by helicopter among the Himalaya's iconic 26,000-foot peaks, eventually reaching Annapurna Base Camp, a coveted destination for mountaineers around the world. We'll land there, at an elevation of 13,550 feet above sea level, before returning to Pokhara via a route that takes trekkers up to a week.

Please note: *This optional tour must be reserved prior to your trip's departure. A minimum (and maximum) of 5 travelers must reserve in order for the tour to operate. Should a second helicopter be necessary, it will also require a minimum of 5 travelers to operate. This optional tour is weather-dependent and may be canceled on short notice.*

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Your Passport

- Must be in good condition
- Must be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- Must have the required number of blank pages (details below)
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable

Need to Renew Your Passport?

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit the U.S. Department of State’s official website at **www.travel.state.gov** for information on obtaining a new passport or renewing your existing passport. The U.S. Department of State allows for passport renewal by mail or, for applicable citizens, renewal online. We advise you review the process and requirements for online passport renewal on the official website.

You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

Recommended Blank Pages

Please confirm that your passport has enough blank pages for this adventure.

- **Main trip only:** If you are taking only the main trip, you will need 3 blank passport pages.
- **Pre-trip extension to Bhutan:** You will need 2 additional passport pages, for a total of 5.
- **Post-trip extension to Nepal:** You will need 2 additional passport pages, for a total of 5.
- **Stopover in Dubai:** You will need an additional passport page. Add 1 to the number of pages needed for the main trip and any extensions.

Visas Required

We’ll be sending you a detailed packet with instructions, application forms, and fees about 100 days prior to your departure. In the meantime, we’re providing the information below as a guideline on what to expect. This info is for U.S. citizens only. All visas and fees are subject to change.

- **India: Visa required. This visa must be obtained in advance.** If you are taking both the Bhutan and Nepal extensions, it must be a multiple-entry visa.
- **Bhutan (optional pre-trip extension): Visa required.** We recommend you get this visa onsite. We will need a photocopy or scan of your passport at least 60 days prior to your departure. You will receive detailed instructions on how to do this in your Visa Packet. If

we do not receive a passport copy by 60 days prior to your departure, your visa may not be approved by the Bhutan government. You must travel with the same passport you use for the scan, and that passport needs to match your reservation. If you renew or change your passport, **do so before taking the scan and call us immediately** with the new passport number, dates, etc.

- **Nepal (optional post-trip extension): Visa required. We recommended you obtain this in advance.** Although a Nepal visa can be obtained on arrival, we recommend that you get your visa before you leave home to avoid problems at the border. A 15-day single-entry visa should suffice for our extension.
- **United Arab Emirates (optional Stopover in Dubai): Visa required.** We recommend you get this visa onsite. Currently the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) allows U.S. citizens to get a tourist visa free of charge on arrival in Dubai.

Traveling Without a U.S. Passport?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, or if your passport is from any country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about visa requirements. We recommend the services of PVS International, a national visa service located in Washington D.C.; they can be reached at **1-800-556-9990** or **www.pvsinternational.org**.

Traveling With a Minor?

Some governments may require certain documentation for minors to enter and depart the country or to obtain a visa (if applicable). For further detail on the required documentation, please contact your local embassy or consulate.

Emergency Photocopies of Key Documents

We recommend you carry color photocopies of key documents including the photo page of your passport plus any applicable visas, air itinerary, credit cards (front and back), and an alternative form of ID. Add emergency phone numbers like your credit card company and the number for your travel protection plan. Store copies separate from the originals.

If you plan to email this information to yourself, please keep in mind that email is not always secure; consider using password protection or encryption. Also email is not always available worldwide. As an alternative, you could load these documents onto a flash drive instead, which can do double-duty as a place to backup photos during your trip.

Overseas Taxes & Fees

This tour may have taxes and fees that cannot be included in your airline ticket price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. All taxes are subject to change without notice and can be paid in cash (either U.S. or local currency).

RIGORS, VACCINES & GENERAL HEALTH

Is This Adventure Right for You?

Please review the information below prior to departing on this adventure. We reserve the right for our Trip Experience Leaders to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their condition would adversely affect the health, safety, or enjoyment of themselves or of other travelers.

PACING

- 7 locations in 16 days with 2 one-night stays
- Multiple pre-dawn departures

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Not appropriate for travelers using wheelchairs or other mobility aids
- Must be able to withstand hot temperatures, including averages around and beyond 100 degrees Fahrenheit
- Must be able to walk 2-3 miles unassisted each day and participate in 3-5 hours of daily physical activities, including scaling several steep steps without handrails
- We reserve the right for Trip Experience Leaders to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience
- You may encounter animals on this trip. We make every effort to keep these encounters safe, however animals may behave unpredictably or dangerously at times. Please use caution when interacting with animals on this trip: Keep a safe distance, stay alert, and respect the animals

CLIMATE

- Daytime temperatures range from 90-100°F (particularly in April)
- August and September are hot and humid, with heavy rains
- Northern India experiences poor air quality in November and December, especially in Delhi
- Winter months are cold and foggy

TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- Travel over some rugged paths, as well as bumpy, unpaved, dusty roads, both by bus and on foot
- Travel through India via bus (no heat or toilet on board), train, rickshaw, and game-viewing vehicle

- Several long overland drives of 5-6 hours

FLIGHT INFORMATION

- Travel time will be 14-27 hours and will most likely have two connections

ACCOMMODATIONS & FACILITIES

- One night in a comfortable but basic tented camp with private baths
- Asian squat-style toilets must be used in some villages without other facilities
- Most hotels in Bhutan do not have elevators, so if you are taking the optional extension in Bhutan, you must be able to climb stairs

CUISINE

- Meals will be based on the local cuisine; Western food is limited

CULTURAL INSIGHT

- We may see people living in poverty, which could be distressing for some travelers

Steps to Take Before Your Trip

Before you leave on this adventure, we recommend the following:

- Check with the CDC for their recommendations for the countries you'll be visiting. You can contact them online at www.cdc.gov/travel or by phone at **1-800-232-4636**.
- Have a medical checkup with your doctor at least 6 weeks before your trip.
- Pick up any necessary medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Have a dental and/or eye checkup. (Recommended, but less urgent)

No Vaccines Required

Recommended Vaccines

At the time of writing there were no required vaccines for this trip. The CDC recommends that all travelers be up to date on their routine vaccinations and on basic travel vaccines like Hepatitis A and Typhoid, but these are suggestions only. However, this could change in future so we encourage you to check with the CDC yourself before meeting with your doctor.

Medication Suggestions

- An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- Pain medication in the unlikely event of an injury in a remote location
- Altitude sickness medication (if you are taking the extension to Bhutan)

- At time of writing, the CDC did recommend discussing anti-malaria medication with your doctor for India. The CDC also mentioned that malaria was present in Bhutan and Nepal, but not the areas we visit on this itinerary. Check with the CDC and your doctor first because these medications can have strong side effects.

Traveling with Medications

- **Pack medications in your carry-on bag** to avoid loss and to have them handy.
- **Keep medicines in their original, labeled containers** for a quicker security screen at the airport and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas.
- **Bring copies of your prescriptions**, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name to be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications.

We recommend checking with the State Department for medication restrictions by country: **travel.state.gov** (Go to “Find International Travel Information”, select “Country Information”, then enter the country into the search bar; if you don’t see any medications specifically mentioned under the “Health” section, then you can presume major U.S. brands should be OK).

Staying Healthy on Your Trip

Jet Lag Tips

- Start your trip well-rested.
- Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave or switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane.
- Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before—and during—your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don’t push yourself to see a lot on your first day.
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

Allergies

If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, we advise you to notify us at least 30 days prior to your departure. Please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**, and we will communicate them to our regional office. Every effort will be made to accommodate you.

Water

- Tap water is not safe to drink. Stick to safe water options such as filtered, treated, or bottled water.
- We recommend that you bring a reusable water bottle from home so you can take full advantage of safe water sources whenever available.
- Or if you prefer bottled water, it is readily available and inexpensive. (Bottled water is not included in the price of your tour.)
- Other bottled drinks and juices are safe to drink, as are hot drinks that have been boiled.

Food

- We've carefully chosen the restaurants for your group meals.
- Carry a handkerchief to dry any wet utensils or plates.
- Be very careful with food sold from vendors on the street, and with uncooked fruit and other foods. Fruit that you peel yourself is usually safe.

Electricity Supply for Medical Devices

A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays. Travelers dependent on electricity supply for health reasons (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) may want to consider a different O.A.T. adventure.

Altitude Illness (optional extension to Bhutan)

If you are taking the optional extension to Bhutan, you will probably feel some effects from the high altitudes. Even if you've been to high elevations previously, you could have a different reaction this time. For most people, the symptoms are mild, and will pass in a day or so. The most common symptoms of altitude sickness are lightheadedness, shortness of breath, headache, nausea, sleeplessness, and loss of appetite. You should take it easy, avoid smoking and alcohol, and drink plenty of fluids. We suggest taking a rest of a couple hours when you first arrive to acclimate yourself. Some people take a prescription medication starting when they arrive or one day before. Don't take sleeping medications, as they suppress respiration. Even though you may experience a decreased appetite, force yourself to eat soups and other light foods.

If these 'normal' altitude symptoms become unmanageable, it is critical that you inform your Trip Experience Leader. Please let the Trip Experience Leader know if you experience any of the following: serious difficulty breathing, mental confusion, a severe and unremitting headache, continued difficulty breathing after a period of rest, or poor physical coordination (ataxia).

MONEY MATTERS: LOCAL CURRENCY & TIPPING GUIDELINES

Top Three Tips

- **Carry a mix of different types of payments**, such as local currency, an ATM card, and a credit card.
- **Traveler's checks are not accepted** in India, Bhutan, and Nepal.
- **A cash reserve is important for the optional extension to Bhutan**; you should assume that you will not be able to use a credit card or ATM card at all in Bhutan.

Local Currency

For current exchange rates, please refer to an online converter tool like www.xe.com/currencyconverter, your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

India: Indian Rupee (₹)

Bhutan: Bhutanese Ngultrum (Nu.)

Nepal: Nepalese rupee (Rs)

How to Exchange Money

Visitors (non-residents of India) are not permitted to bring Indian Rupees into or out of the country. Therefore, you must wait until you arrive to exchange money. You can change money at banks, most hotels, and money exchange offices. Please note torn, dirty, or taped U.S. bills may not be accepted for exchange. For more information on what type of currency can be used on this trip, see the “Currency” section.

The easiest way to exchange money on this trip is using an ATM (except in Bhutan). Using a local ATM on an international network will allow you to withdraw money from your U.S. account in local currency; your bank at home will calculate the conversion rate and charge you in U.S. dollars.

ATMs

When using the ATM, keep in mind that it may only accept cards from local banks, and may not allow cash advances on credit cards; you might need to try more than one ATM or more than one card. Many banks will charge a set fee or a percentage fee each time you use a foreign ATM. We recommend that you check with your bank before you depart. Don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)

In most countries, ATMs are widely available in major cities. If you are in a rural location, it will likely be harder to find an ATM. If you are visiting a country that has different expectation for ATMs, they will be listed below.

India: ATMs are readily available in cities and large towns in India but are more limited in small villages and the National Parks.

Bhutan: ATMs are very limited. We recommend that you bring enough cash (U.S. dollars and/or Indian rupees) to cover your basic expenses while in Bhutan as you cannot rely on ATMs alone.

Nepal: ATM's are available in large towns or cities, such as Kathmandu and Pokhara, but are not available in rural Nepal.

Credit & Debit Cards

While traveling, most countries and major cities will accept credit cards. We suggest that you bring one or two, especially if you are planning a large purchase (artwork, jewelry). We also suggest that you bring more than one brand of card (i.e. Visa, MasterCard, American Express) if possible, as not all are accepted around the world. If you are visiting a country that does not commonly accept credit cards, they will be listed below.

India: Credit and debit cards are accepted everywhere in India.

Bhutan: Credit and debit cards are rarely accepted—most vendors are still cash only. Be forewarned that you might not be able to use any credit cards while in Bhutan. It is best to bring a cash reserve to cover your basic expenses (in U.S. dollars and/or Indian rupees). Also note that goods and services in Bhutan are substantially more expensive than in India.

Nepal: Credit and debit cards are somewhat accepted in larger cities such as Kathmandu for major purchases but will be rarely accepted in the countryside.

Notify Card Providers of Upcoming Travel

Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges or withdrawals from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company and/or bank you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure. Some banks or credit card companies will also let you do this online.

You should also double-check what phone number you could call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don't assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1 800 numbers don't work outside of the U.S.!

Tipping Guidelines

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. But for those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines:

- **O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader:** It is customary to express a personal “thank you” to your Trip Experience Leader at the end of your trip. As a guideline, many travelers give \$8–\$12 USD (or equivalent in local currency) per person for each day their Trip Experience Leader

is with them. *Please note that these tips can only be in cash. If you are taking any of the optional extensions, your Trip Experience Leader during the extension(s) may not be the same as the one on your main trip.*

- **Housekeeping staff at hotels:** The equivalent of \$1-2 per room, per night
- **Waiters:** Your Trip Experience Leader will tip waiters for included meals. If you are dining on your own remember that it is common to tip anywhere from 5%-10% in restaurants.
- **Taxi drivers:** If you are taking a taxi by yourself, keep in mind that tipping is not common practice, but many people simply let the driver keep the change by rounding up the fare to the next whole number.
- **Included in Your Trip Price:** Gratuities are included for local guides, drivers, camp staff, and luggage porters on your main trip, extensions, and all optional tours.

Please note: For your convenience, tips to O.A.T. staff can be paid in U.S. dollars or local currency. Please do not use personal or traveler's checks for tips.

AIR, OPTIONAL TOURS & STAYING IN TOUCH

Land Only Travelers & Customized Air

Quick Definitions

- **Land Only:** You will be booking your own international flights. Airport transfers are not included.
- **Air-Inclusive:** You booked international air with us. Airport transfers are included as long as you didn't customize your trip's dates (see next bullet).
- **Arrive Early or Stopover (select adventures only):** If you chose one of these Customization options and purchased air through O.A.T, accommodations and airport transfers are included. However, if you chose one of our Customization options, but did not purchase air through O.A.T., accommodations are included, but airport transfers are not. If you chose one of our customization options, and purchase air through O.A.T. but not the accommodations, the airport transfers are not included. We have included transfer options below.
- **Customization on Your Own:** If you have not purchased air through O.A.T. and decided to arrive early, stay longer, or stop in a connecting city on your own, you are responsible for airport transfers and accommodations. For your convenience, a preliminary list of your included hotels is available on your My Planner at www.oattravel.com/myplanner under "My Reservations" to help you with selecting a hotel for your additional time.

Air Inclusive Travelers

If you have purchased international air with us, there are some points that may be helpful for you to know.

- **Flying with a Travel Companion:** If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.
- **Selecting Your Seats:** If your airline allows pre-assigned seats, you will be able to select and view them directly from the airline's website after booking. Some airlines will not allow seat confirmation until your reservation is ticketed 45-30 days prior to departure, and/or they may charge a nominal fee. You may locate your itinerary on an airline's website utilizing the Record Locator Number found on the Air Itinerary in your My Planner.

Airport Transfers Can Be Purchased

For eligible flights, airport transfers may be purchased separately as an optional add-on, subject to availability. To be eligible, your flight(s) must meet the following requirements:

- You must fly into or fly home from the same airport as O.A.T. travelers who purchased included airfare.
- Your flight(s) must arrive/depart on the same day that the group arrives or departs.
- If you are arriving early, you must have arranged the hotels through our Arrive Early personalization option

Airport transfers can be purchased up to 45 days prior to your departure; they are not available for purchase onsite. To learn more, or purchase airport transfers, please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**.

If you don't meet the requirements above, you'll need to make your own transfer arrangements. We suggest the Rome to Rio website as a handy resource: www.rome2rio.com

Optional Tours

Optional tours are additional add-on tours that allow you to personalize your adventure by tailoring it to your tastes and needs. And if you decide not to join an optional tour? Then you'll have free time to relax or explore on your own—it's about options, not obligations.

What You Need to Know

- All optional tours are subject to change and availability.
- Optional tours that are reserved with your Trip Experience Leader can be paid for using credit/debit cards only. We accept MasterCard, Visa, and Discover credit cards; we can also take MasterCard or Visa debit cards as long as the card allows you to sign for purchases. (You won't be able to enter a PIN.)
- To ensure that you are charged in U.S. dollars, your payment will be processed by our U.S. headquarters in Boston. This process can take up to three months, so we ask that you only use a card that will still be valid three months after your trip is over. The charge may appear on your credit card statement as being from Boston, MA or may be labeled as "OPT Boston".
- Your Trip Experience Leader will give you details on the optional tours while you're on the trip. But if you'd like to look over descriptions of them earlier, you can do so at any time by referring to your Day-to-Day Itinerary (available online by signing into My Planner at www.oattravel.com/myplanner).

Optional Tours: Reserve Before You Go

We strongly recommend that you reserve the following optional tours in advance. Unless otherwise noted, the deadline to do so is 45 days prior to your departure. Occasionally, space will be available for booking onsite, but this not guaranteed. Optional tours with O.A.T. can only be purchased with a credit card (Visa or MasterCard) or a debit card with credit card functionality. Because our headquarters are in Boston, charges may appear to be from Boston or might be labeled as "OPT Boston" (depending on your credit card company).

Heli-tour to Annapurna Base Camp

Travel by helicopter among the Himalaya's iconic 26,000-foot peaks, eventually reaching Annapurna Base Camp, a coveted destination for mountaineers around the world. We'll land there, at an elevation of 13,550 feet above sea level, before returning to Pokhara via a route that takes trekkers up to a week.

Please note: *This optional tour must be reserved prior to your trip's departure. A minimum (and maximum) of 5 travelers must reserve in order for the tour to operate. Should a second helicopter be necessary, it will also require a minimum of 5 travelers to operate. This optional tour is weather-dependent and may be canceled on short notice.*

This optional tour is offered during the *Nepal: Kathmandu & Pokhara* trip extension. The cost is \$600 per person.

Morning Canter Safari

Enjoy a final, optional game-viewing drive aboard a shared 18-passenger canter, like the one we used earlier in our adventure. In the company of our fellow travelers and other visitors, we'll embark on a game-viewing drive to discover the exotic wildlife and unique, local flora Ranthambore National Park has to offer in the early morning hours. This will also offer another opportunity to spot a Bengal tiger.

Please note: *This optional tour must be reserved at least 60 days prior to your trip's departure, and a copy of your passport will be required at the time you make your reservation. (This passport copy requirement only applies to the Optional Canter Safari; your Trip Experience Leader's passport will apply to the entire group on the Canter Safari that's already included on Day 7 of your adventure.)*

This optional tour is offered during the main trip. The cost is \$65 per person.

Communicating with Home from Abroad

To ensure you are available during your trip to friends and relatives at home, you will receive two copies of your hotel list, including phone numbers, with your Final Documents. One copy is for you to bring, and one to leave behind with friends or relatives in case they need to contact you during the trip.

Cell Phones

If you want to use your cell phone on the trip, check with your phone provider to see if your phone and service will work outside of the U.S. It may turn out to be cheaper to rent an international phone or buy a SIM card onsite. If you want to use a local SIM, just make certain your phone can accept one.

Calling Apps

Another option is to use a smartphone app like Skype, FaceTime, or WhatsApp. We recommend you use WhatsApp to communicate with home while abroad and with your Trip Experience Leader while onsite. You will need a Wi-Fi connection if you do not have international coverage. Other calling options include smartphone apps such as Skype or FaceTime. You will need a Wi-Fi connection for these apps and the calls may count towards your phone plan's data allowance. Many smartphones—and some tablets or laptops—come with one of these apps pre-installed or you can download them for free from the appropriate apps store.

Calling Cards and 1-800 Numbers

When calling the U.S. from a foreign country, a prepaid calling card can be useful because it circumvents unexpected charges from the hotel. Calling cards purchased locally are typically the best (less expensive, more likely to work with the local phones, etc.).

One reminder: Do not call U.S. 1-800 numbers outside the continental United States. This can result in costly long distance fees, since 1-800 numbers do not work outside the country.

Internet

Cyber cafes are available in big cities and towns throughout India. Most hotels will also offer some sort of Internet service, usually in their business center or lobby. All hotels in India offer free Wi-Fi but connections could be slow specially in the National Park and the camp.

How to Call Overseas

When calling overseas from the U.S., dial 011 for international exchange, then the country code (indicated by a plus sign: +), and then the number. Note that foreign phone numbers may not have the same number of digits as U.S. numbers; even within a country the number of digits can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone.

India: +91

Nepal: +977

Bhutan: +975

PACKING: WHAT TO BRING & LUGGAGE LIMITS

Luggage Limits

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One check bag and one carry-on per person.
Weight restrictions	Checked bag is limited to 33 lbs total . Carry-on is limited to 15 lbs total .
Size Restrictions	Standard airline size: checked luggage should not exceed 62 linear inches (length+ width + depth) and carry-on should not exceed 45 linear inches
Luggage Type	Duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Please do not bring a hard-sided (clamshell) suitcase.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
Pre-Trip to Bhutan: Checked bag is limited to 44 lbs (see note below) and carry-on is limited to 11 lbs. Standard size for checked luggage; carry-on dimensions are restricted to 17.5 x 13.5 x 8 inches. All other extensions: Same as main trip.	

REMARKS/SUGGESTIONS

Luggage rules: Luggage rules and limits are set by governmental and airline policy. Enforcement of the rules may include spot checks or may be inconsistent. However one thing is the same across the board: If you are found to have oversized or overweight luggage, you will be subject to additional fees, to be assessed by—and paid to—the airline in question.

Ban on Carriage of Lithium Battery Powered Self Balancing Devices in Passenger Baggage: Spare or loose batterie, including lithium ion cells or batteries, for portable electronic devices must be carried in the carry-on baggage only. Articles which have a primary purpose as a power source, i.e. power banks, are considered spare batteries.

Luggage weight for Bhutan pre-trip extension: Although your flights to/from Bhutan allow for 44 lbs of checked luggage, your flights within India only allow for 33 lbs. If you bring 44 lbs you'll face luggage fees in India, which could range from \$75-\$90 per person on the main trip alone (more if you are taking a post-trip extension). These fees—which are subject to change—would be paid by you to the airline in question at their discretion.

Carry-on size for Bhutan: We recommend that you keep your carry-on within the size limits outlined above for this extension. Depending on which plane is being used the day you fly to Bhutan, there may or may not be room in the overhead compartments for American-sized carry-ons. You are allowed to bring a personal item, such as a lady's purse, an overcoat, an umbrella, or a walking stick in addition to your carry-on.

TIP: Our regional staff suggests bringing your coat or jacket on the plane for the flight to Bhutan and wearing your sturdiest shoes. That way you have these items even if your checked luggage is lost or delayed, but they don't take up room in your small carry-on.

Don't Forget:

- **These luggage limits may change.** If the airline(s) notify us of any changes, we will include an update in your Final Documents booklet.
- It's a good idea to reconfirm baggage restrictions and fees directly with the airline a week or so prior to departure. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our website in the FAQ section.
- **Baggage fees are not included in your trip price;** they are payable directly to the airlines.
- The luggage limits above are based on your regional flights, which may be less than your international flights. Even if your international airline offers a larger weight limit, you will need to pack according to the lower restrictions.

Your Luggage

- **Checked Luggage:** One duffel bag or suitcase. Look for one with heavy nylon fabric, wrap-around handles, built-in wheels, and a heavy duty lockable zipper. Please do not bring a rigid (plastic shell) suitcase.
- **Carry-on Bag:** You are allowed one carry-on bag per person. We suggest a tote or small backpack that can be used as both a carry-on bag for your flight and to carry your daily necessities—water bottle, camera, etc—during your daily activities.
- **Locks:** For flights that originate in the U.S., you can either use a TSA-approved lock or leave your luggage unlocked. Outside of the U.S. we strongly recommend locking your luggage as a theft-prevention measure.

Clothing Suggestions: Functional Tips

As you will experience a wide range of temperatures and weather conditions, we suggest several layers of clothing. If you like to hand-wash your clothes, look for fabrics that will dry out overnight. You can buy clothing designed especially for travel, with features like wrinkle-resistant fabric or built-in sun protection.

- **Footwear:** You'll be on your feet a lot during the trip, and walking over some rough and slippery surfaces. The soles of your shoes should offer good traction.

Style Hints

- Dress on our trip is functional and casual.
- **Your dress should be somewhat conservative in order to be respectful of the local culture.** Sleeveless tops for ladies are acceptable in the larger cities in India and Nepal, but are not appropriate in the small villages, or in temples, or in Bhutan. Very short shorts (on men or women) and mini-skirts are considered disrespectful, and will draw unwanted attention.
- **Leather not allowed in some temples.** Since the cow is a sacred animal in the Hindu religion, many Indians do not wear leather. It is OK for you to wear leather on the street, and small leather items (belts and wallets) will usually be allowed in Hindu temples. However, temple attendants may ask that you leave large leather items—such as handbags—at the entrance, so consider bringing a cloth or canvas bag instead.

Recommended Packing Lists

We have included suggestions from Trip Experience Leaders and former travelers to help you pack. These packing lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. Each traveler's packing list may be different depending on the climate you are used to. We recommend using www.weather.com and consulting the "Climate" chapter of this handbook.

And don't forget a reusable water bottle—you'll need it to take advantage of any refills we offer as we are working to eliminate single-use plastic bottles on all of our trips.

Recommended Clothing

- ☐ Shirts: A mixture of short- and long-sleeved shirts in a breathable fabric, like cotton or cotton-blend. Polo shirts are more versatile than T-shirts. Sleeveless shirts are acceptable in India, but not Bhutan.
- ☐ Trousers and/or jeans: Comfortable and loose-fitting in a breathable fabric, like cotton or linen.
- ☐ Walking shorts: Shorts are generally acceptable in India, but in keeping with the more modest culture, please chose a longer cut (to the knee). Shorts are not allowed in Indian mosques and are not allowed in public places in Bhutan.
- ☐ For women—1 or 2 travel skirts: Our female Trip Experience Leaders suggest that, for India, a skirt and shirt is a great basic travel outfit. Shorts and pants are fine too, it is just that a skirt allows for air movement and is convenient when using squat toilets. Female travelers should also consider sports bras, especially for days with long overland transfers—the roads can be bumpy.
- ☐ Shoes and socks: Shoes should be comfortable walking or running shoes; a pair of light hiking boots or sturdy walking shoes is recommended for Bhutan. We suggest you bring at least one extra pair of socks to be used as “temple socks,” because wearing shoes of any type are not allowed inside temples.
- ☐ Light cotton or wool sweater: The air-conditioning in restaurants and on the bus can be cold.
- ☐ Wide-brim sun hat or visor for sun protection
- ☐ Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood
- ☐ Underwear and sleepwear
- ☐ Optional: swimsuit, in case a hotel has a whirlpool or pool

Seasonal Clothing Recommendations

For fall and winter (November–February in India; September–March in Bhutan):

- ☐ A warm jacket, like a Polartec fleece, or a heavy wool sweater
- ☐ Turtleneck(s) or scarf
- ☐ Warm sleepwear
- ☐ Hat and light gloves

Essential Items

- ☐ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, etc. Our hotels will provide the basics like soap and shampoo, but if you are sensitive to fragrances or new products, you may wish to bring your preferred brands. Most hotels do not provide a washcloth, so you may wish to pack one.
- ☐ Spare eyeglasses/contact lens
- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Sunscreen, SPF 15 or stronger
- ☐ Insect repellent with DEET
- ☐ Light folding umbrella, for rain and sun protection
- ☐ Moisturizer and chapstick
- ☐ Pocket-size tissues—most public restrooms will be out of toilet paper. (And out of soap, so bring some anti-bacterial hand lotion too.)
- ☐ Anti-bacterial hand lotion
- ☐ Packets of moist towelettes. These are useful after visits that involve removing your shoes, or can be used to freshen up during a hot day.
- ☐ Flashlight, extra batteries/bulb. A flashlight is highly recommended by our Trip Experience Leaders as power outages are common. (Plus it is useful at the camp.)
- ☐ Electrical converter & plug adapter
- ☐ Camera gear with extra batteries or battery charger
- ☐ Optional: For asthma sufferers (or other breathing complaints) a face mask may be useful, particularly in Delhi where there can be significant air pollution or for dusty roads in the National Park
- ☐ Optional: Ear plugs for the Bhutan extension. Noise pollution (such as barking dogs) is common in Bhutan. Past travelers have suggested bringing ear plugs for sleeping
- ☐ Optional: Packets of powdered sports drink mix with electrolytes (helps with hydration)

Medicines & First Aid Gear

- ☐ Your own prescription medicines

- ☐ Travel first aid kit: Band-Aids, headache and pain relief, laxatives and anti-diarrhea tablets, something for upset stomach. Maybe a cold remedy, moleskin foot pads, antibiotic cream, or allergy medication.
- ☐ An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- ☐ Optional: A pain medication for rare emergency purposes
- ☐ Optional: Altitude sickness medication (if you are taking the extension to Bhutan)
- ☐ Optional: Anti-malarial medication—discuss with your doctor)

TIP: *Hotels in Bhutan do not feature hair dryers, but the hotel in Kathmandu, Nepal does. In India, some hotels will feature hair dryers, but not all.*

Home-Hosted Visits

Many of our adventures feature a visit with a local family, often as part of the *A Day in the Life* experience. It is customary, though not necessary, to return your hosts' generosity with a small gift. If you do bring a gift, we recommend that you bring something the whole family can enjoy, or something that represents your region, state, or hometown. Get creative and keep it small—peach jelly from Georgia, maple sugar candy from New England, orange blossom soap from California; something that can be used or used up is best. When choosing a gift, be certain to consider the local culture as well. For example, we do not recommend alcohol in Muslim countries because it is forbidden in Islam, and your hosts may be religious. Not all O.A.T. adventures include a Home-Hosted Visit; please check your final itinerary before you depart.

Electricity Abroad

When traveling overseas, the voltage is usually different and the plugs might not be the same shape.

Voltage

Electricity in India, Bhutan, and Nepal is 220–230 volts. In the U.S. it is 110 volts. Most of the things a traveler will want to plug in—battery chargers, smartphones, tablets or computers—can run off both 110 and 220–240. But you should check the item or the owner's guide first to confirm this before you plug it in. If you have something that needs 110 volts—like a shaver or a hairdryer—you can bring a transformer to change the current. (But transformers tend to burn out, so it might be better to leave whatever it is at home.)

Plugs

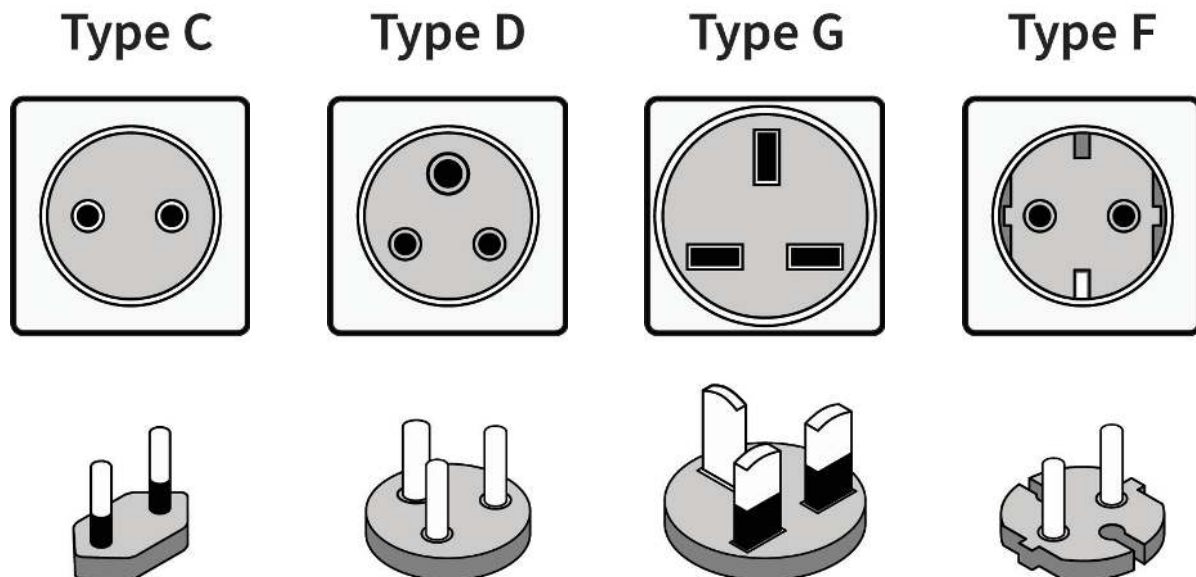
The shape of plugs will vary from country to country, and sometimes even within a country depending on when that building was built. To plug something from the U.S. into a local socket you'll need an adapter that fits between the plug and the socket. Because there are many different types of plugs in this region, it may be easier to purchase an all-in-one, universal adapter/converter combo. Versatile and lightweight, these can usually be found at your local electronics goods or hardware stores. Sometimes you can buy them at large retailers too, like Target or Walmart. If you forget to bring an adapter, you might also find them for sale at the airport when you arrive at your destination.

Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. Standard U.S. plugs are Type A and Type B. Here is the list of plugs for the countries on this trip:

India: C or D

Bhutan: C, D, or G. Sometimes F but this is rare

Nepal: C or D



Availability

A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays. In some places, the electricity may be supplied by a generator, and lighting may not be as bright as you are used to. Travelers dependent on electricity supply (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) should consider a different adventure or ensure their apparatus has back-up battery power.

CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

Bhutan: Bhutan has a wide range of climactic conditions, with areas at lower elevations—including Punakha and Wangdi—having cool, dry winters and hot, wet summers. Areas at higher elevations, such as Thimphu and Paro, are colder in comparison. For example, in winter (November–March) places like Paro are below freezing while Punakha is generally in the 40–60 °F range. Areas like Gangtey may even drop below 0° F during the winter months. Summertime highs rarely get above the 70s, except in Punakha, which can be hotter. As far as precipitation, expect snow in the winter and rain spring through autumn, with the strongest rains in summer. *Please note: If traveling during the winter, keep in mind that local hotels and restaurants do not have central heat. Hotel rooms will have an electric heater, but public spaces (i.e. lobbies) and restaurants will be cold.*

Dubai: Dubai has a typical desert climate. During the day, temperatures range from hot in the winter (high 70s–high 80s) to very hot in the summer (high 90s–100+). At night, the temperatures drop sharply; usually it is at least 20 degrees cooler. The city gets very little rain—less than 4 inches each year.

India: India is characterized by hot, tropical weather, with variations from region to region. Though seasons follow similar cycles as the Northern Hemisphere, the first months of spring and fall can be very warm to hot. Mornings are especially cold in winter months. Monsoon rains occur throughout most regions of India during the summer months, between June and September. As these are generally warm climates, some hotels and vehicles do not have heat.

Nepal: Nepal’s weather is generally predictable and pleasant. There are two seasons—the dry season from October to May and the rainy, monsoon season from June to September. About 80 percent of the rain falls during the rainy period, so the remainder of the year is relatively dry. Spring and autumn are the most pleasant seasons; winter temperatures drop to freezing with a high level of snowfall in the mountains. Late spring and summer temperatures range from 83° in the hill regions to more than 104° in the Terai.

Note on traveling to India in December and January

Starting roughly between the second and fourth week in December, Delhi, Agra, and Varanasi are affected by occasional ground fog. The fog season usually lasts about a month. As a result, it’s possible that the following will occur:

- Delays or diversions for international flights into and out of Delhi
- Disrupted viewing of the Taj Mahal during mornings and evenings
- Delays or cancellations on domestic travel to/from Varanasi.

Some activities may need to be rearranged in the itinerary as a result of occasional fog. Your Trip Experience Leader will manage any changes onsite. Although this talk of changes may sound daunting, keep in mind there is a great advantage of traveling at this time—the cooler climate. Not only is it more comfortable, but also touring is not limited to mornings and late afternoons.

Climate Averages & Online Forecast

The following charts reflect the **average** climate as opposed to exact weather conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. An extreme heat wave or cold snap could fall outside these ranges. As your departure approaches, we encourage you to use **www.weather.com** for a more accurate forecast of the locations you visit.

Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	DELHI, INDIA			JAIPUR, INDIA		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	69 to 44	83 to 41	0.7	72 to 47	70 to 35	0.4
FEB	75 to 48	78 to 35	0.6	78 to 52	63 to 29	0.3
MAR	86 to 57	71 to 30	0.4	88 to 61	52 to 19	0.3
APR	98 to 69	55 to 21	1.2	99 to 71	39 to 15	0.2
MAY	105 to 77	49 to 24	1.1	105 to 78	42 to 18	0.6
JUN	105 to 82	61 to 36	2.1	103 to 82	59 to 32	2.3
JUL	96 to 78	82 to 61	8.5	94 to 78	82 to 62	7.8
AUG	93 to 78	85 to 64	9.8	90 to 76	88 to 67	8.0
SEP	94 to 75	81 to 51	5.3	92 to 74	79 to 48	3.3
OCT	92 to 66	76 to 33	0.6	92 to 66	63 to 29	0.6
NOV	83 to 55	78 to 31	0.3	84 to 56	65 to 33	0.1
DEC	73 to 46	82 to 38	0.6	76 to 49	71 to 38	0.3

MONTH	AGRA, INDIA			THIMPHU, BHUTAN		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Average # of Days with Rainfall	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	73 to 55	51	3	54 to 27	--	0.6
FEB	76 to 58	58	9	58 to 33	--	1.6
MAR	89 to 68	34	6	62 to 39	--	0.9
APR	99 to 71	18	3	68 to 45	--	2.3
MAY	106 to 88	16	8	73 to 56	--	4.8
JUN	112 to 95	25	6	76 to 59	--	9.6
JUL	102 to 87	51	25	66 to 56	--	14.5
AUG	97 to 85	60	26	77 to 60	--	13.5
SEP	91 to 81	67	26	74 to 59	--	6.0
OCT	93 to 80	41	2	71 to 51	--	1.5
NOV	87 to 72	39	6	64 to 41	--	0.3
DEC	77 to 62	45	2	58 to 30	--	0.1

MONTH	KATHMANDU, NEPAL			DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	60 to 40	97 to 65	0.7	73 to 58	76 to 52	0.4
FEB	63 to 44	96 to 58	0.6	74 to 59	76 to 54	1.6
MAR	70 to 50	94 to 50	1.2	80 to 63	73 to 50	0.4
APR	77 to 57	90 to 48	1.5	88 to 69	67 to 46	0.4
MAY	79 to 63	92 to 59	4.0	97 to 76	59 to 41	0.4
JUN	80 to 69	93 to 70	7.9	100 to 80	66 to 46	0.4
JUL	79 to 70	96 to 80	14.8	103 to 85	65 to 49	0.4
AUG	79 to 70	95 to 79	12.8	103 to 86	66 to 49	0.4
SEP	78 to 67	97 to 78	7.4	100 to 81	72 to 50	0.4
OCT	74 to 59	97 to 73	2.2	93 to 74	74 to 50	0.4
NOV	68 to 49	97 to 71	0.1	86 to 67	75 to 50	0.4
DEC	61 to 42	98 to 68	0.4	77 to 61	78 to 53	0.8

ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

O.A.T. Trip Experience Leaders: A World of Difference

During your adventure, you'll be accompanied by one of our local, Trip Experience Leaders. All are fluent in English and possess the skills, certification, and experience necessary to ensure an enriching adventure. As locals of the regions you'll explore with them, our Trip Experience Leaders provide the kind of firsthand knowledge and insight that make local history, culture, and wildlife come alive. Coupled with their unbridled enthusiasm, caring personalities, and ability to bring diverse groups of travelers together, our Trip Experience Leaders ensure that your experience with O.A.T. is one you'll remember for a lifetime.

Indian Culture

India is home to more than 1.3 billion people of 2,000 different ethnicities, speaking 22 languages, and practicing more than six main religions. With so much diversity, a simple cultural summary is impossible, but there are some common themes.

The most significant of these is the caste system by which all of society is classified, an outgrowth of Hindu law that is nearly 3,000 years old. For Americans reared in a democracy that outwardly values egalitarianism, this strict, hierarchical division is difficult to comprehend. Indeed, discrimination based on caste has been illegal in India since 1948, and the government has established affirmative action programs to provide opportunities to members of historically disadvantaged castes. There is much more fluidity around caste today, and also plenty of regional adaptations. It would be rude to ask an Indian person about their caste, but it is acceptable to inquire about their occupation or vocation. Nonetheless, people in India still tend to be conscious of their own social positions and of those around them. It's rare for people to question or deviate from their expected roles, with occupation, social standing, and marriage partners being largely a matter of birth.

The main caste system is called *varna*, a broad classification that divides people into four major categories; *brahmin* (the uppermost and "purest," priestly caste), *kshatriya* (warriors or nobility), *vaishya* (merchant caste) and *shudra* (artisan, servant, or laborer caste). The lowest echelons of society are the *dalit* or untouchables, which includes the most impoverished and oppressed people, and non-Hindus. Nowadays, many people considered *dalit* have reclaimed the term to assert a political identity, similar to how LGBTQ people have done in the west. How *varna* actually operates is complex and variable, and in day to day life, it manifests itself in what is called *jati*, a more nuanced caste system that breaks society down into something like 2,000 classifications based on occupation or vocation.

Many Indians seem to have a sense of acceptance about one's social position, but this is not necessarily a matter of caste. For Hindus and Buddhists, there is a widespread belief in the notion of *karma*: the idea that one's personal circumstances are due to actions in one's past life, and one's current actions will affect future lives. It is part of *samsara*, the cycle of rebirth. Today, many younger people are challenging this fatalistic approach to life. Even so, most Indians value harmony and believe that the greater good of one's family (and caste) is more important than

individual desires. To preserve harmony or to avoid offense, they may speak indirectly. In general, you will find people to be conservative, cheerful, cooperative and eager to be of help. Hospitality is of paramount importance, even among the poorest people, and a matter of pride.

Accommodations

Our hotels are comfortable, but not luxurious. There can be occasional problems with electricity, hot water, and air conditioning. Our desert camp has electricity and hot water, but creature comforts are basic. There is no heating or air conditioning, so in many regards your experience will be the same as in an Indian village. Remember to bring a flashlight. In restaurants, hotels, and at cultural sites, everything works according to a slower sense of time than what you are used to. It's best to wind down and adjust to the pace and philosophy.

Language Barrier

You can have some great “conversations” with local people who do not speak English, even if you don't speak a word of the local language. Indeed, this non-verbal communication can be a highly rewarding part of travel. To break the ice, bring along some family photographs, or a few postcards of your hometown. If you want to meet kids, bring a puppet or other interactive toy. Your Trip Experience Leader can help get the ball rolling.

Your attire is a key part of your non-verbal presentation. Your clothing should show a respect for local tradition. This means you should dress in a relatively modest style. Avoid revealing or tight-fitting outfits.

A Note about India

Adventurous travelers will find India a spiritually fulfilling destination, rich with natural wonder. However, poverty, persistent begging, pollution, and poor sanitation can be distressing. In some of the small villages where we stop during our days of touring, we must make do with Asian squat-style toilets. (We'll have Western-style toilets in all our hotels and at the restaurants we use for included meals. So squat toilets will be the exception rather than rule, but in some places they are unavoidable.) Some hotels and businesses may not have elevators, so be prepared to climb stairs.

The Finer Points

Don't let the fine points of Indian etiquette worry you; locals know that visitors can't be expected to know every detail. Much of what is considered polite in India is similar to what's polite in the U.S. But as a matter of interest, we've put together a list of “finer points” that might surprise you:

- When someone hands you something, it is polite to accept it with the right hand. If you are eating with your hands, you should use your right hand to take food or to put it in your mouth. (But being a “lefty” is fine and eating left-handed with cutlery is OK too.)
- Indians are generally quiet when they eat, discussing amongst themselves before the food is served or after it is eaten.

- Kissing couples are frowned upon, but discreet displays of affection are allowed, and friends of the same gender may walk hand-in-hand or arm-and-arm.
- Your attire is a key part of your non-verbal presentation. Your clothing should show a respect for local tradition. This means you should dress in a relatively modest style. Avoid revealing or tight-fitting outfits.

Traffic

Traffic is horrific throughout India. Exercise extreme caution when attempting to cross any street. Traffic drives on the left here. Both past travelers and tour leaders alike recommend you hire either a taxi or an auto-rickshaw (at a nominal fee) for short-distance transport. In some destinations (as you will soon see), you would be wise to utilize a transport service just to cross the street.

Road Conditions in Bhutan

Bhutan is a hilly and mountainous country due to its location in the foothills and lower mountains of the Himalayas. Roads are winding with sharp hairpin bends (think up and down mountains, along valleys, and through high mountain passes). For safety reasons they may be limited to one lane only and/or have a strict speed limit of just 50 km per hour (about 30 miles an hour)—even on paved roads in good condition and even in cities. Expect that driving from Point A to Point B will take longer than it would in the U.S. and bring motion sickness medication if you are susceptible on winding roads.

Cultural Differences in Nepal

Be prepared to be confronted with a different standard of living. While poverty and poor sanitation can be distressing, please don't let that keep you from experiencing the amazing culture or rich natural heritage of Nepal.

Taking Photographs

When taking photos of people in most countries, be polite and ask permission to take a close-up. In many countries, you should not be taking photos of children or older women without permission. Do not take photographs of military personnel, military compounds, or other official institutions/personnel (such as police). This may result in the confiscation of your camera.

Please obey any signs regarding photos at museum or sites; the no-flash rule protects the fragile artifacts and artwork from damage by repeated exposure to light. Occasionally, there may also be a small fee levied by the museum or site for the privilege of taking photos.

Safety & Security

As you travel, exercise the same caution and awareness that you would in a large American city. Carry a one-day supply of cash, and your passport, in a travel pouch. Don't leave valuables unattended in your hotel room – use a room safe as needed. In any sort of puzzling street situation, try to keep one hand on your wallet or money belt.

Indian Cuisine

Considering India's varied geography, climate, religions, and outside influences, it's no wonder that the subcontinent's cuisine is one of the world's most diverse. India has 31 recognized regional cuisines, but there are common threads.

Indian cuisine is known for intense flavors, with many dishes built upon a foundation of spices such as cumin, cardamom, turmeric, coriander, cinnamon, nutmeg, saffron, and rose petal essence. A popular spice mix is ***garam masala***, which varies from chef to chef. Rice is a staple; as are pulses, the edible seeds of legumes like lentils, chickpeas, and beans. A well-known pulse is ***dal***, a lentil porridge that can be eaten by itself, or used as a thickener. Lest you think Indian cuisine is all about curry, note that the word "curry" is a British invention used to describe *all* Indian cuisine. In India, curry is simply a dish with sauce.

Northern Indian cuisine is dominant in many states including Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi (home to Jaipur, Delhi, Agra, and Lucknow), and is the most prevalent Indian cuisine outside India. It has a strong Mughal influence that uses dairy staples like ***ghee*** (clarified butter), ***paneer*** (a mild cheese), and yogurt. Try some of these delicious dishes:

- **Rogan josh:** A yogurt-based lamb stew fragrant with chilies.
- **Saag paneer:** A creamy spinach and cheese.
- **Korma:** Chicken or lamb simmered in coconut milk or yogurt with cumin, coriander, and cashews or almonds.
- **Butter Chicken:** This dish originated in Delhi and is made from flavorful stew of chicken chunks in a tomato-yogurt gravy.
- **Samosas:** This famous street food dish is made from fried pastry triangles filled with potatoes, onions, meats, and spices ***chana masala*** (chickpea stew); or ***nagori halwa*** (sweet puffed bread with a buttery paste).

Southern India is where you will find quick vegetarian food to go that is simply called "Meals Ready." Look for dishes like these:

- **Sambar:** This dish includes a selection of vegetables including tamarind-flavored peas.
- **Rasam:** A fiery tomato-lentil soup and yogurt. It is served in a round stainless-steel tray called a thali, or on a banana leaf.
- **Dosa:** A signature dish in Southern India that is a crepe-like pancake filled with dozens of vegetables, meats, and seasonings.
- **Meen curry:** A fish curry with coconut milk.
- **Pazham pori:** Banana fritters.

In western India, the state of **Gujarat** is famed for vegetarian and seafood dishes. You will find dishes like these:

- Gujarati **thali** plate: This multi-course feast typically includes one or two steamed or fried snacks; a green vegetable; a tuber or squash **shaak** curry; **kathol** (braised beans, chickpea or peas); one or more yogurt dishes; and many side dishes, with rice and an array of chutneys and condiments.
- **Vindaloo**: A Portuguese-inspired dish whose main ingredient is meat, poultry or seafood marinated in garlic, wine, vinegar, and chilies.

Eastern India is known for sweets like these:

- **Lassi**: If you visit **Varanasi** try a smooth, cool puree of yogurt, fruit, sugar and cream.
- **Nimish**: Frothy, creamy pudding flavored with saffron, cardamom, and rose water.
- **Rasgulla**: This sweet treat is made from semolina and cheese curd balls simmered in a sugary syrup.
- **Dachori**: This savory side is made from a crispy fried bread stuffed with bean paste and spices.

Bhutanese Cuisine

Bhutan may be tiny and landlocked, but its pantry is quite varied thanks to biomes that range from sub-tropical to alpine and from lowlands to highlands. In the south you can feast on bananas and oranges, while the northern highlands yield an array of tubers and plenty of dairy products. (Most Bhutanese dairy is based on yak's milk, but cow's milk products are also available.) People do eat meat here, mostly pork, yak, lamb, poultry, water buffalo, and beef; and the streams and lakes contribute a variety of freshwater fish and shellfish, especially trout.

If there is one common denominator, it's that Bhutanese food is big on chilies, which are a national passion. (But don't worry if you're not a fan of fire. The chefs at the restaurants where we dine always tone down the heat for foreign guests.) Other dishes to look for:

- **Ema datshi**: This national dish is a spicy stew with green chilies and vegetables such as green beans, potatoes (**kewa**), and mushrooms (**shamu**) simmered in cheese.
- **Phaksha paa**: Stir-fried pork with radish and spinach.
- **Phak sha phin tshoem**: Pork with rice noodles.
- **Sikam paa**: A favorite for pork lovers is this crispy pork belly.
- **Sha huentsu**: Stewed beef with spinach.
- **Bja sha maroo**: This savory dish consists of chicken in garlic, ginger and butter sauce. Your main dish will almost always be accompanied by rice, but in addition to white rice try the nutty-flavored red rice that Bhutanese prefer.
- **Khule** (buckwheat pancakes) and **puta** (buckwheat noodles): These replace any dish that is not accompanied by rice.

- **Momos:** These Tibetan dumplings that are the rage now on both sides of the Pacific, are also popular in Bhutan. There is also a buckwheat dough version called **hoentay**.
- **Goen hogay:** A traditional cucumber salad with chili flakes, tomato, cilantro, onions, and a crumble of **datshi** cheese, drizzled with oil.

Nepalese Cuisine

Nepalese cuisine borrows from the culinary canon of its neighbors India, Tibet and China. But since the country only opened its borders in 1950, chefs had to rely on locally produced ingredients to create their unique, hybrid gastronomy. Nepali food is quite healthy, with very little fat and a variety of vegetables and lean meat. The food is often hearty and slightly spicy—just what you need to survive long, cold winters. Common ingredients include lentils, potatoes, rice, tomatoes, cumin, coriander, chilies, garlic, and peppers. Western food will be very limited, so come prepared to try some new dishes.

First and foremost among them will be ***dal bhat***, the national dish. It is really not just one item but a set meal consisting of a starch (usually rice but sometimes potato or corn meal), a lentil soup, a curry (of chicken, meat, or vegetable), and a vast array of pickles, yogurts, chutneys, and other condiments. You will also find many dishes like these:

- **Gorkhali lamb:** An intensely flavorful dish that starts by searing chunks of lamb in a chili paste, then slow cooking it in a mild curry sauce with potatoes and onions.
- **Sel roti:** A simple snack found from a street vendor. These are like a cross between a doughnut and a bagel, a deep fried ring of rice dough that is sweet and crispy on the outside, soft and puffy on the inside. They are usually served with yogurt dipping sauce.
- **Chatamari:** (a.k.a. “Nepali Pizza”) is a rice flour crepe topped with minced meat, eggs, and onions.
- **Momos:** These popular pillows of flavor are Tibetan-inspired dumplings filled with meat and vegetables (or occasionally, ***paneer*** or ***chhurpi*** cheese or potato).
- **Thukpa:** This iconic noodle soup is usually made with carefully seasoned yak, goat, lamb, or chicken, though there are vegetarian versions. *Thukpa* goes great with *momos*.

In the Kathmandu Valley, you can sample **Newari** cuisine, the most celebrated style of Nepali cooking. It takes advantage of the bounty of the valley’s rich, alluvial soil with a variety of fish, fowl, meat and produce. The Newars are known for feasting, and if you arrive on the holiday of Indra Jatra, you may be able to sample the local ***thon*** as it flows freely from the mouth of a giant mask of the Lord Shiva. This is a potent, fermented rice liquor, but it’s available year-round, so your toasting opportunities are unlimited. The feast will include dishes like these:

- **Wo or bari:** These light Newari pancakes are what you start the feast with and are made with a ground lentil batter, and filled with vegetables or chicken or meat. The most beloved Newari meat is buffalo, which is leaner and more flavorful than beef.
- **Chhwela:** A spiced grilled buffalo meat

- **Kachila:** A minced raw buffalo meat.
- **Daaykula:** A buffalo meat boiled with fried spices.
- **Jeri** (also known as **jalebi**): This sweet never fails. A deep-fried, pretzel-shaped yellow-orange dough ring dipped in saffron syrup.
- **Doodh Peda:** Is a fudge-like milk confection flavored with cardamom and pistachios.
- **Laddu:** Sugary balls of semolina baked with butter, cardamom, cashews and grated coconut. You can wash it all down with a **dahi** (yogurt) based **lassi** smoothie.

Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More

There may be scheduled visits to local shops during your adventure. There is no requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. O.A.T. is not responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.

Returns

If you discover an issue with an item, you should contact the vendor directly and expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. We recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Keep in mind, local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up or that you are guaranteed a refund.

Crafts & Souvenirs

India

One simple way to find nice souvenirs at fair prices is to look at where an item was made—different cities are known for specific crafts. (And even if your itinerary doesn't take you to these exact cities, you can usually find these items on sale in other parts of India.)

- Delhi is a great location for buying silk carpets and Kashmir handicrafts.
- Phulkari, a stylized geometric embroidery, is popular in Amritsar and the Punjab region, commonly found on scarves, shawls, and other types of clothing.
- In Dharamshala, you'll find Tibetan-style items such as prayer flags, singing bowls, and Buddhist icons.

Bargaining: Bargaining is the norm in India, where anything sold by a street vendor and almost anything in a smaller shop has a flexible price. However, larger stores will have fixed prices.

Bhutan

Popular Bhutan souvenirs include postage stamps, lovely hand-woven fabrics, carved masks, woven baskets, thangkhas, wooden bowls, handmade paper and finely crafted metal objects. In Bhutan, the buying and selling of antiques is strictly forbidden.

Bargaining: Bargaining is a common practice in Bhutan, especially with street vendors and in smaller shops. Larger stores will have fixed prices.

Nepal

Popular buys include locally made textile objects such as lopsided topis (caps), knitted mittens and socks, and cotton scroll paintings called mandala or thanka. Contemporary Nepalese art, saranghi (a small, four-stringed viola played with a horse-hair bow), papier mâché dance masks, Buddhist statuettes and filigree ornaments, woodcarvings, bamboo flutes and other folk objects are also popular.

Bargaining: Bargaining is normal in Nepal when dealing with street vendors and smaller shops, though larger stores will have fixed prices.

U.S. Customs Regulations & Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, www.cbp.gov has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511**.

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is \$800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than \$800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S.** Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the export duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the import duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.
- It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins.

DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

India

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 1,269,219 square miles
- **Capital:** New Delhi
- **Languages:** Hindi is the official language; English is also spoken.
- **Ethnicity:** Indo-Aryan 72%, Dravidian 25%, Other 3%
- **Location:** India is bordered by Burma, Pakistan, the Arabian Sea, and the Bay of Bengal, as well as Bangladesh and Nepal.
- **Geography:** India consists of plateau and rolling plains, desert to the west, and the Himalaya Mountains in the north.
- **Population:** 1,251,695,584
- **Religion:** Hindu 79.8%, Muslim 14.2%, Christian 2.3%, Sikh 1.7%, other and unspecified 2%
- **Time Zone:** India is on Indian Standard Time and does not observe Daylight Saving Time. As a result, the time in India will either be 9.5 hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Time (in summer) or 10.5 hours ahead (in winter).

National Holidays: India

In addition to the holidays listed below, India celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Maha Shivaratri and Diwali. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/14 Maha Sankranti with Pongal

01/26 Republic Day

Feb or March Maha Shivratri (moves each year; see note above)

March Holi (moves each year)

August Raksha Bandhan (moves each year)

08/15 Independence Day

Aug or Sept Janmashtami Festival (moves each year)

10/02 Mahatma Gandhi Jayanti

Oct or Nov Diwali (moves each year)

Oct or Nov Chath Puja (moves each year)

Nov Guru Nanak Jayanti Day (moves each year)

12/25 Christmas Day

India: A Brief History

India has a history as sprawling as the subcontinent it inhabits. Humans first arrived here from Africa between 55,000 and 73,000 years ago. But the cradle of Indian civilization emerged in the Indus Valley around 4,500 BC. It evolved into the urban Harappan culture, which was the equal of those in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Harappan cities had brick homes, plumbing, sophisticated drainage systems, art, a system of weights and measures, and metallurgy.

Harappan civilization declined around 1500 B.C. One widely held theory ascribed its fall to invasion from the north and west of Aryan tribes, but evidence for this is scant, and Aryans may have already existed within India. They were not a racial group but Indo-Iranian people who identified along linguistic and religious lines. Aryans developed the Sanskrit literary tradition; the Vedic philosophies that are the basis of Hinduism; and the caste system. In the 7th century BC, Aryan culture spread to 16 northern kingdoms, which became the Nanda dynasty, and witnessed the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism.

By 321 BC, most of the north united under the Maurya Dynasty; and by the reign of the third Mauryan king, Asoka, almost the entire subcontinent was united. Asoka was a Buddhist whose Edicts set moral codes that all religions could embrace, even as he spread Buddhism throughout Asia. After his death in 232 BC, the empire again split into small states. In AD 320, the Gupta dynasty reunited India, ushering in a golden age of science, literature and the arts—a time when Hinduism flourished and Buddhism all but disappeared from the subcontinent.

Over the next thousand years, India was repeatedly invaded by Huns. By the 11th century, Afghan Muslims established a sultanate in Delhi. But in 1526, Babur, a descendent of Genghis Khan, seized the throne. Thus began the Mughal Empire, the Islamic dynasty of Mongol origin that held sway until the 1800s. During the Mughal era, Indian culture was as brilliant as any in the world. The Mughals built lavish palaces, mosques, and mausoleums, including the Taj Mahal, constructed under Shah Jahan. The arts and sciences flourished, as did shipbuilding and trade.

The Mughal grip began to loosen with the rise of European colonialism, starting with the 1498 discovery by Vasco de Gama of an ocean route to India. By 1751, the French had forcibly taken much of India, followed by the British. The British East India Company became the dominant political force by using Indian soldiers to assert its will over the government and commercial rivals. In 1857, Indian soldiers ended the monopoly of the British East India Company, but then Britain overtook the Indian government, initiating the era of the British Raj. The British built railways, canals, irrigation works, schools, and factories. They employed thousands in the civil service, and introduced democracy. But the greatest beneficiary of this was the British ruling class, while most of India remained impoverished and landless peasants.

Indian resentment reached a pitch by the First World War. Led by Mohandas Gandhi, nationalists gained control of Congress and began a campaign of non-cooperation with the British. When World War II began, Congress agreed to serve with the British only upon the condition of India's postwar independence. Britain rejected the proposal, but 2.5 million Indians did fight against the Japanese, and India was granted independence in 1947. The new nation erupted into rioting between Hindus and Muslims, and Gandhi's attempts to create unity were cut short when he was killed in 1948. This led to a fragile peace between the religious groups.

Under the rule of Jawaharlal Nehru, India undertook a policy of non-alignment, seeking to maintain peaceful relations with all major superpowers. After Nehru's death, his daughter, Indira Gandhi, was elected prime minister. Though she boosted the economy, she also declared an "Emergency" period to suspend civil liberties. The press was censored, critics were imprisoned, and forced sterilizations were enacted against the poor. In 1977, Gandhi was removed from office and jailed, but she was re-elected in 1980. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984. She was succeeded by her son Rajiv Gandhi, who was assassinated in 1991.

The Nehru-Gandhi heirs continued to hold high offices even as their Congress Party teetered. In 2014, it suffered a resounding defeat by the Bharatiya Janata Party of the charismatic Narendra Modi. As Prime Minister, Modi introduced sweeping economic reforms, mounted a nationwide sanitation campaign, and liberalized rules on foreign investment, to mixed results. He was re-elected in 2019, and again in 2024, and continues to receive high approval ratings.

Bhutan

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 14,824 square miles
- **Capital:** Thimphu
- **Languages:** Dzongkha is the official language; various Tibetan and Nepalese dialects are also spoken.
- **Ethnicity:** Ngalop (also known as Bhote) 50%, ethnic Nepalese 35% (includes Lhotsampas – one of several Nepalese ethnic groups), indigenous or migrant tribes 15%
- **Location:** Bhutan is bordered by China (the Tibet Autonomous Region) and India.

- **Geography:** Bhutan lies between the Tibet Autonomous Region to the north and the Indian states of Sikkim, West Bengal, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to the west and south. The Himalayas dominate the north of the country, and blizzards generated in the north each winter often drift southward into the central highlands. The highlands are the most populous part of the nation; and are characterised by their many rivers, isolated valleys, and the expansive forests that cover seventy percent of the nation.
- **Population:** 741,919
- **Religion:** Lamaistic Buddhist 75.3%, Indian- and Nepalese-influenced Hinduism 22.1%, other 2.6%
- **Time Zone:** Bhutan is on Bhutan Time, eleven hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 5pm in Thimphu.

National Holidays: Bhutan

In addition to the holidays listed below, Bhutan celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/02 Nyilo

02/05 Crown Prince Birthday

02/21 King's Birthday

05/02 King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck's Birthday

05/09 Shabdrung Kuchoe

06/02 King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's Coronation

06/21 Buddha's Parinirvana

08/05 King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck's Death Anniversary

11/01 King Jigme Khesar Namgyel's Coronation

12/17 National Day

Bhutan: A Brief History

In a land steeped in mystique, it's perhaps no surprise that Bhutan's history has not been learned through any straightforward narrative of chronological facts. The country was closed to the rest of the world until the 1950s, and what is known about its past has largely been recorded in folklore, songs, and religious scriptures that blend fantastical events with empirical ones. Little is known about Bhutan's ancient origins, but archaeological findings suggest that it was inhabited as early as 2000 BC by nomadic herders. It is believed that early inhabitants followed the animistic Bon religion. Buddhism may have arrived here around the second century AD, but scriptures which might have described the religion's early development have been lost.

For most Bhutanese, Bhutan's history begins with Padmasambhava, known as Guru Rinpoche. He is credited with bringing Buddhism from Tibet in 747 AD, and Bhutanese regard him as the second Buddha. Guru Rinpoche is said to have meditated in caves, transformed into many beings, performed miracles, and fought demons. He also built temples and monasteries, including the Taktshang monastery ("Tiger's Nest") built on a cliff above Paro Valley. Buddhism spread further in the 9th century, when Tibetan monks escaping turmoil fled to Bhutan.

Until the 1600s, Bhutan was a patchwork of warring fiefdoms. They were unified when the Tibetan lama and military leader Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal arrived in 1616 and declared himself religious ruler. His dual system of government split control between a spiritual leader and an administrative one, a policy that exists in modified form to this day. Through fortification and military consolidation, he built impressive *dzongs* or fortresses. Under Shabdrung, the southern valleys unified as *Druk Yul* (Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon), which is what the Bhutanese call their nation today. Shabdrung used cultural symbols and military force to define a national identity, including the initiation of sacred dances performed in annual *tsechu* festivals.

Shabdrung's death in 1705 was followed by 200 years of conflict and instability that lasted until 1907, when Ugyen Wangchuck was elected hereditary ruler of Bhutan, thereby beginning the Wangchuck Dynasty. In 1910, Ugyen signed the Treaty of Punakha with Britain, stating that British India would not interfere in Bhutan's internal affairs, and Bhutan would accept Britain's advice in foreign affairs. When Ugyen died in 1926, his son Jigme Wangchuck became king, but Bhutan's isolation continued. This began to change with the third king, Jigme Dorji, in 1952.

As China annexed Tibet in the 1950s, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (who had been educated in India and England) realized that Bhutan's isolationism was no longer tenable. He took steps to better integrate Bhutan into the world community, including land reform, the abolition of serfdom, and the establishment of a National Assembly. Bhutan was formally admitted to the United Nations in 1971, and when the king died in 1972, his 16-year-old son Jigme Singye Wangchuck assumed the throne. His coronation in 1974 was the first time the international press was allowed to enter Bhutan. The first group of tourists arrived later that year, and ever since, Bhutan has carefully managed tourism to preserve its natural and cultural heritage.

Jigme Singye Wangchuck continued the policy of controlled economic development with particular focus on cultural and environmental preservation. Among his goals was the improvement of what he termed "Gross National Happiness," an index that measures wellbeing and quality of life along with monetary factors. He emphasized education, decentralization of governance, the development of hydroelectricity and tourism, and rural development. Jigme Singye Wangchuck abdicated in December 2005 so his son Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck could assume the throne. This was in advance of a new constitution that would take effect in 2008, making Bhutan a full parliamentary democracy. His idea was that Bhutan's leader should have prior hands-on experience to safely guide the nation during its momentous transition.

In October 2011, the young king married student Jetsun Pema. In February 2016, the country rejoiced with the birth of the new heir, Gyalsey (Prince) Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck; and a second son was welcomed in 2020. His first daughter was born in 2023. King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck is known as "the People's King," and he has emphasized *Kidu*, a Bhutanese tradition which makes it a sacred duty to look tend the people's welfare through direct actions of kindness, relief, and mercy. He has regular audiences with ordinary citizens; has enacted land reforms to improve life for peasants; and has launched programs for young people supporting education, business, and civil service.

Nepal

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 56,827 square miles
- **Capital:** Kathmandu
- **Languages:** Nepali is the official language; Maithali, Bhojpuri, Tharu, Tamang, Newar, Magar, and Awadhi are also spoken.
- **Ethnicity:** Chhettri 16.6%, Brahman-Hill 12.2%, Magar 7.1%, Tharu 6.6%, Tamang 5.8%, Newar 5%, Kami 4.8%, Muslim 4.4%, Yadav 4%, Rai 2.3%, Gurung 2%, Damai/Dholii 1.8%, Thakuri 1.6%, Limbu 1.5%, Sarki 1.4%, Teli 1.4%, Chamar/Harijan/Ram 1.3%, Koiri/Kushwaha 1.2%, other 19%
- **Location:** Nepal is bordered by China and India.
- **Geography:** Nepal is typically thought of as mountainous. But it is actually home to widely diverse landscapes and ecosystems. There are three geographic areas or belts running from west to east: mountain, hill, and plains.
- **Population:** 31,551,305
- **Religions:** Hindu 81.3%, Buddhist 9%, Muslim 4.4%, Kirant 3.1%, Christian 1.4%, other 0.5%, unspecified 0.2%
- **Time Zone:** Nepal is on Standard Time, 9.75 hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 3:45pm in Kathmandu.

National Holidays: Nepal

Nepal celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Martyr's Memorial Day, Nepali New Year, Maghe Sankranti, and Buddha Day. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

2/19 Democracy Day

3/8 International Women's Day

4/21 Loktantra Diwas

5/1 Labour Day

5/28 Republic Day

9/20 Constitution Day

Nepal: A Brief History

Nepal's heart has always remained the Kathmandu Valley, where its recorded history begins. It starts with the Kirati people, who arrived from the east during the 7th or 8th century BC as sheep farmers, and ended up as kings. Though other groups had long been settled in the region, the Kiratis held power for 16 centuries. They practiced Hinduism, which is still the dominant religion, but around 563 BC, a prince was born in the southern town of Lumbini. He renounced his status,

preached a new philosophy, and became the Buddha. Buddhism gained a following here, but lost favor by 200 AD when the Licchavis of northern India overthrew the Kiratis, and reinstated Hinduism and its caste system. With them, a golden age of Nepali art and architecture began.

The Licchavi era ended by 879 AD when the Thakuri dynasty arose. Several hundred years later, the Thakuri King Arideva founded the Malla Dynasty, which heralded another creative burst of Nepali cultural expression. The Malla era's prosperity made Kathmandu shiny prize, but what attracted Prithvi Narayan Shah, the ruler of the western city-state of Gorkha, was the dream of a unified kingdom. After 27 years of fighting he overtook the Kathmandu Valley in 1768. For the next 24 years, the Gurkha Shahs held power with an army that seemingly could not be conquered. The Shahs maintained Nepal's independence, at a cost: in 1792, faced with defeat by Chinese troops, they agreed to pay tribute to the Chinese emperor—and did so until 1912.

As Britain gained power in India in the early 1800s, Nepal was forced to sign the 1816 Sugauli Treaty, which surrendered Sikkim and other lands. Some of it was returned to Nepal after they helped the British subdue the 1857 Indian Mutiny. And so the Shah dynasty maintained power until 1846, when Jung Bahadur convinced them to destroy their political enemies in what came to be known as the Kot Massacre. While the Shahs were reduced to figureheads, Jung named himself Rana and prime minister for life—and decreed that his noble title would be hereditary. Through both World Wars, the Rana-Shahs lived lavishly while the Nepalese barely survived in horrid conditions. Nepal's borders closed, and the country faded from world view.

After Britain withdrew from India in 1947, opposition toward the Ranas grew. The Shah King Tribhuvan fled to India, and worked with the Nepali Congress Party to form a new government. The next Shah King Mahendra dissolved the cabinet and wrested control of the government in 1960. Corruption continued with Mahendra's son, Birendra, who ushered in the Panchayat system, which allowed for minimal local representation but abolished all political parties, leaving real power with the monarchy. It wasn't until a 1991 election that the Nepali Congress Party and the Communist Party of Nepal shared most of the votes. Still, Nepal's citizens remained unsettled, staging a general strike in 1992. Capitalizing on the unrest, in 1996 the Communist Party of Nepal (also called "the Maoists") declared a "people's war."

In 2001, in a shocking power play that could've been torn from the pages of Shakespeare, nine members of the royal family were massacred at a family party. It was blamed on the popular Crown Prince Dipendra, who supposedly shot himself and lingered in a coma before being declared king, and then dying. But the story has huge gaps and the investigation was minimal. The right-handed Dipendra was shot in the left side of the head—with two bullets—making suicide seem unlikely. More suspicious was the fact that Dipendra's uncle (and the murdered king's brother), Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, was left unharmed, along with his entire family. Gyanendra became king and absolute ruler, dissolving the parliament in 2005.

After a year of mass strikes and demonstrations, he grudgingly restored the parliament, and on December 24th, 2007, Nepal was formally declared a federal republic by the interim government—a seven-party coalition, including the Maoists. In subsequent elections the Maoists

won a majority, giving them the leverage completely abolish the monarchy. On June 11, 2008, the King left the palace, signaling the end of the royal Shah lineage. The first President of Nepal, Ram Baran Yadav, was sworn in on July 23, 2008.

In 2014, a coalition government of Maoist and National Congress Party members was formed, and almost immediately it faced major challenges in the form of multiple natural disasters, and an ensuing humanitarian crisis. The silver lining was that the crisis spurred the swift approval of a new constitution in 2015 which made Nepal a secular, federal-style republic. In 2017, Nepal held its first successful national elections in two decades, a resounding victory for a communist coalition. Today, Nepal is the world's only fully democratic, multi-party nation ruled by a communist party. Bidya Devi Bhandari became Nepal's first female president in 2015. Bidya Devi Bhandari was succeeded by Ram Chandra Poudel in March 2023.

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading

India

The White Tiger, A Novel by Aravind Adiga (2008, Fiction). Adiga explores urban India through the tale of Balram Halwa, a village pauper-turned-driver-turned-entrepreneur. Filled with black humor, it's a murderous and marvelous story of hard-fought success. Winner of the 2008 Booker Prize.

India after Gandhi: the History of the World's Largest Democracy by Ramachandra Guha (2007, History). This scholarly work picks up where many other history books leave off, the rise of post-independence India, but still finds plenty of material to work with (it is over 700 pages long).

Taj Mahal, Passion and Genius at the Heart of the Moghul Empire by Diana and Michael Preston (2007, History/Architecture). A complete, but easy-to-read, telling of the story behind the building of the Taj Mahal. It also offers a useful background on the Moghul Dynasty.

The Little Book of Hindu Deities by Sanjay Patel (2006, Mythology/Region). Get your Hindu gods and goddesses straight with this beguiling "who's who." Filled with bold artwork (the author was an animator for Pixar studios), this book offers the colorful background to much of the art and lore you will encounter on your trip.

Heat and Dust by Ruth Praver-Jhabvala (1975, Fiction). The parallel stories of a young Englishwoman backpacking through India in the 1970s, and her great-aunt Olivia, a bored colonial wife in the 1920s. Consider also the 1983 Merchant-Ivory film version starring Julie Christie and Greta Scaachi.

Bhutan

A Field Guide to Happiness: What I Learned in Bhutan about Living, Loving, and Waking Up by Linda Leaming (2014, Memoir) An American arrives in Bhutan to teach English, promptly loses her luggage, and realizes she has to lose quite a bit more baggage in order to slow down, breathe, fall in love, and embrace a new vision of the good life.

Radio Shangri-La by Lisa Napoli (2011, Memoir) Follows a radio journalist as she uproots her life and moves from glamorous L.A. to serene Bhutan. May be easier to find as an e-book or online.

Treasures of the Thunder Dragon: A Portrait of Bhutan by Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck (2006, Memoir) A personal memoir written by Her Majesty the Queen Mother that weaves her own story with the history, folklore, and religious traditions of Bhutan. Recently updated with a new edition.

The Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa by Sarah Harding (2003, Religion). A translation of the teachings of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521), an important figure in Bhutanese religious history. The book is also full of historical information about Bhutan and the court of King Trisong Detsen.

Buddhist Scriptures edited by Edward Conze and Thomas Wyatt (1959, Religion). A collection of Buddhist texts that reflect the Hinayana and the Mahayana traditions, as well as other developments in Buddhism. Includes several brief selections from one of the most famous biographies of the Buddha, the *Buddhacharita*.

Nepal

The Soul of the Rhino (2008) and ***Bones of the Tiger*** (2010) by Hemanta Mishra (Memoir/Nature). Mishra tells of his work to save two of Royal Chitwan National Park's most endangered animals—the Asian rhino and the tiger.

Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy by Manjushree Thapa (2005, History) A clear first-person account of the political turmoil that rocked Nepal in the early 2000s—helpful as background reading on Nepal's recent history.

High Adventure by Sir Edmund Hillary (2003, Exploration). A classic of 20th-century mountaineering from the adventurer himself. Originally written after the famous climb, when the details and the danger were still fresh. Look for the 50th anniversary edition, which includes a new preface by the author.

Touching My Father's Soul by Jamling Tenzing Norgay (2001, Adventure/Memoir) A touching and thoughtful biography written by the son of Tenzing Norgay, the Sherpa guide who reached the summit of Everest with Sir Edmund Hillary.

The Violet Shyness of Their Eyes by Bavara J. Scott (1993, Travel Narrative). A sudden mid-life crisis in 1990 prompted high school social studies teacher Scott to leave Portland, Oregon, for a stint teaching English in Nepal. The brief entries in this diary interweave her experiences in Nepalese society, including the inferior status of Nepali women.

Suggested Films & Videos

India

A Suitable Boy (2020, Comedy/Drama) Based on the classic novel by Vikram Seth, this miniseries is the first BBC period drama to feature a nonwhite cast. It concerns the efforts of Mrs. Rupa Mehra to find a husband for her daughter, Lata. With more than 100 colorful characters, the story is often compared to a Charles Dickens novel. Available on streaming services such as Acorn.

Lion (2016, Drama) A young man living with his adopted parents in Australia travels back to India to find a long lost family, and himself.

Slumdog Millionaire (2008, Comedy/Drama). Jamal, who grew up in the slums of Mumbai, is close to winning the Indian version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. But how does a young man from such a background know the answers to questions that stumped more educated contestants? At turns sad, funny, romantic, and gritty, *Slumdog* won 8 Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

A Passage to India (1984, Drama). An Indian doctor is accused of a shocking crime by an Englishwoman in 1920s India. Will he be found guilty or acquitted? Directed by David Lean with an all-star cast.

Gandhi (1982, Biopic). A biopic about India's famous leader that won numerous awards, including the Oscars for Best Actor (Ben Kingsley) and Best Director (Richard Attenborough). This film begins with his early years in South Africa, and traces his development as a leader.

Bhutan

Travellers and Magicians (2003, Fantasy) The first feature film shot entirely in Bhutan, this movie features an unusual story-within-a-story plot about a young man on a journey from his village to Bhutan's capital in the company of a monk. While traveling, the monk recounts a folk tale that ultimately reflects back on the young man's life. In Dzongkha with English subtitles.

The Cup (1999, Comedy) An endearing story about World Cup soccer fever in a remote Himalayan monastery, and a young monk's secret plots to see the finals.

Little Buddha (1994, Drama) Shot in the U.S., Nepal, and Bhutan by the director of *The Last Emperor*, Bernardo Bertolucci, this film follows the story of an American child who just might be the reincarnation of a learned Buddhist monk.

Nepal

Even When I Fall (2017, Documentary) Exposes the child trafficking that lands up to 10,000 children a year in traveling Indian circuses.

The Sari Soldiers (2017, Documentary) The lives of six women are explored, revealing their important roles in Nepal's civil war.

Sherpa (2015, Documentary) This award-winning film explores the hardships and dangers faced by the Sherpa guides whose work is crucial to so many Himalayan mountaineering expeditions.

Living Goddess (2007, Documentary). A well-received documentary about the lives of three Kumaris (girls believed to be living goddesses by the Nepalese).

Himalaya (1999, Drama/Adventure). Also released under the title *Caravan*. A scenic film that combines an age-old story with an obstacle that is very Nepalese: the Himalayan Mountains. Should the villagers wait to start their all-important caravan until the auspicious day, as is their tradition? Or should they set off early to take advantage of the weather? Shot in Nepal by a former National Geographic photographer.

Useful Websites

Overseas Adventure Travel Frequently Asked Questions

www.oattravel.com/faq

International Health Information/CDC (Centers for Disease Control)

www.cdc.gov/travel

Electricity & Plugs

[www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/
plugs-and-sockets](http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets)

Foreign Exchange Rates

www.xe.com/currencyconverter
www.oanda.com/converter/classic

ATM Locators

www.mastercard.com/atm
www.visa.com/atmlocator

World Weather

www.intellicast.com
www.weather.com
www.wunderground.com

Basic Travel Phrases (80 languages)

www.travlang.com/languages

Packing Tips

www.travelite.org

U.S. Customs & Border Protection

www.cbp.gov/travel

Transportation Security Administration (TSA)

www.tsa.gov

National Passport Information Center

www.travel.state.gov

Holidays Worldwide

www.timeanddate.com/holidays

Useful Apps

Flight Stats

Track departures, arrivals, and flight status

LoungeBuddy

Get access to premium airport lounges around the world

Timeshifter

Personalized tips for avoiding jetlag, based on neuroscience and your own data

GoogleMaps or Maps.me

Maps and directions anywhere in the world

Triposo

City guides, walking maps, and more – and it works offline

Rome2rio

Where to go, what to see, and what to do in more than 160 countries

Flush or Sit or Squat

Find a clean toilet anywhere

Uber or Bolt or Grab

Ride sharing around the world

Visa Plus and Mastercard Cirrus

ATM locations

Shows the location of the nearest ATM in your network

TunnelBear

Provides a secure VPN (virtual private network) that will encrypt your browsing data when you use a public WiFi network

What's App or Skype or Signal

WiFi calling anywhere in the world

Duolingo or FLuentU or Babbel

Learn dozens of foreign languages

Google Translate

Fast and simple translations

XE

Currency conversions

SizeGuide

Clothing and shoe sizes in all countries

Best Units Converter

Converts currency, mileage, weights, and many other units of measurement

Tourlina

For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

Happy Cow

Locate vegan and vegetarian eateries in 195 countries

Eatwith

Dine with locals all over the world

Meetup

Connects you with locals who share your interests

Skyview

Identifies constellations and heavenly bodies

Travello

Find travel friends on the road

ALIX for One

Created by and for women, it identifies solo-friendly dining spots in major international cities

TripWhistle

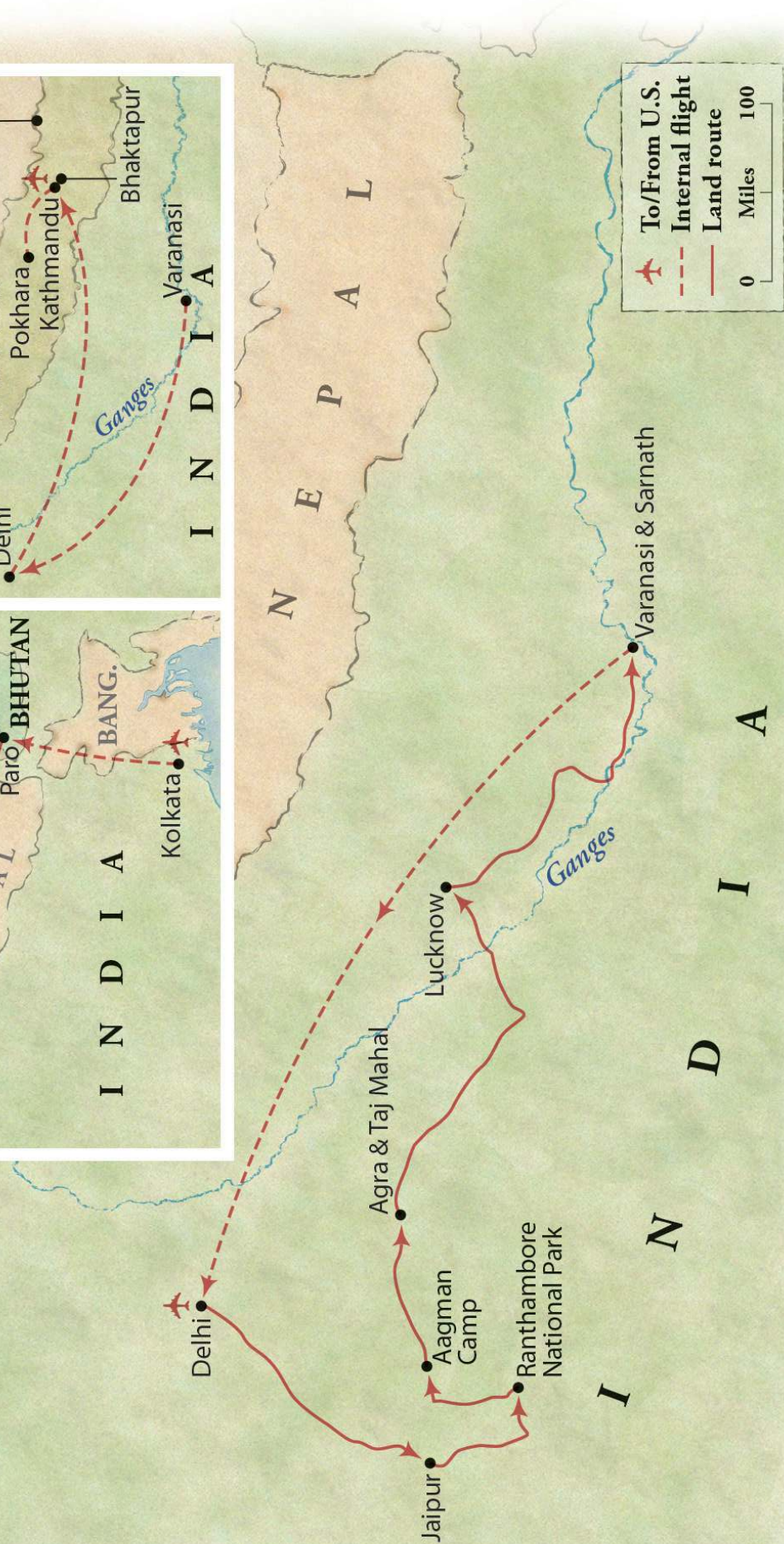
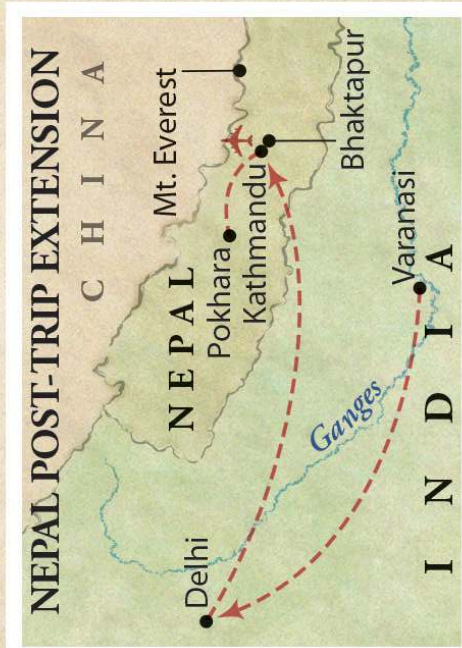
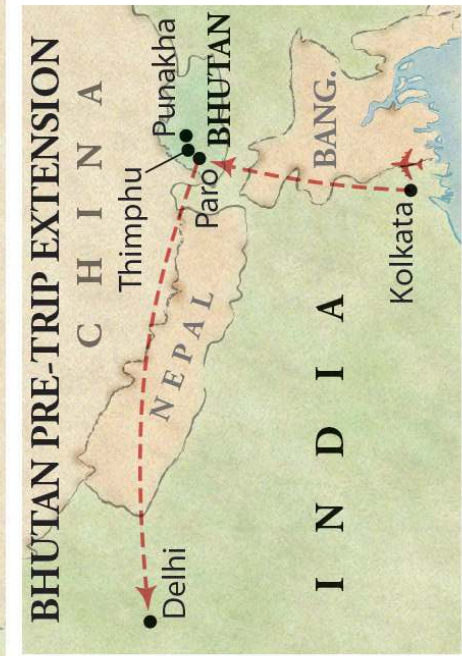
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