

Overseas Adventure Travel[®]

THE LEADER IN CUSTOMIZED SMALL GROUP ADVENTURES SINCE 1978

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



New! Bhutan: Hidden Kingdom of the Himalayas
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.

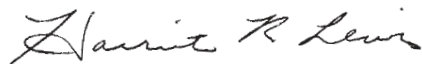
When you join us, you will slip seamlessly into local life as you explore off the beaten path in your small group. Like all our itineraries, this one is designed to give you an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. You will get to know community leaders and try your 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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Buddhist temple, Paro, Bhutan

New! Bhutan: Hidden Kingdom of the Himalayas Small Group Adventure

India: Delhi | **Bhutan:** Thimphu, Phobjikha Valley, Punakha, Paro

Small groups of no more than 16 travelers, guaranteed

16 days starting from \$6,995

including international airfare

Single Supplement: **FREE**

For departure dates & prices, visit www.oattravel.com/sik2026pricing

This spiritual journey of discovery begins in Delhi, where you'll witness the many facets of India's sprawling capital—from the Mughal glory of Old Delhi to the Raj-era splendor of New Delhi. Then, journey to Bhutan, a spiritual oasis nestled in the foothills of the snow-capped Himalayas. Embark on a life-changing journey to Bhutan, home to serene landscapes hidden in the clouds where happiness is woven into the fabric of everyday life.

IT'S INCLUDED

- 15 nights accommodation
- International airfare, airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges unless you choose to make your own air arrangements
- All land transportation and 2 internal flights
- 37 meals—14 breakfasts, 12 lunches, and 11 dinners (including 1 Home-Hosted meal)
- 13 small group activities
- Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- 5% Frequent Traveler Credit toward your next O.A.T. adventure

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

Bhutan: Hidden Kingdom of the Himalayas



ITINERARY SUMMARY

DAYS	DESTINATION
1	Fly to Delhi, India
2-4	Delhi
5-6	Thimphu, Bhutan
7-9	Phobjikha Valley
10-11	Punakha
12-14	Paro
16	Fly to Delhi

CUSTOMIZE YOUR ADVENTURE

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

Oman & Dubai: The Modern Face of Arabia

PRE-TRIP: 7 nights from **\$3,495**

Kathmandu & Chitwan: Traditions and Tropical Jungles

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 **Muscat** before your Oman & Dubai pre-trip extension from **\$110** per room, per night
- Arrive early in **Delhi** before your main adventure from **\$190** per room, per night

WHAT TO EXPECT

①②③④⑤ Moderately Strenuous

Pacing: 5 locations in 16 days

Physical Requirements: You must be able to walk 5 miles unassisted and participate in 2-3 hour treks; activities include a 5.5-hour uphill hike (beginning at an altitude of 10,000 feet up to 11,600 feet) that includes 700 steps on Day 14

Flight Time: Travel time will be 12-25 hours and will most likely have one to two connections

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

BHUTAN: THE O.A.T. DIFFERENCE

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

People-to-People Experiences: Visit an academy in Thimphu that teaches arts like dancing, painting, and sculpting to its disadvantaged students, and talk with monks at a remote Buddhist monastery in Gangtey to learn about the Nyingmapa school of Buddhism that they practice.

O.A.T. Exclusives: Visit a vocational center in Thimphu that offers support to survivors of domestic violence—a **Controversial Topic** in this peaceful country.

Bhutan: Hidden Kingdom of the Himalayas

YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

7 nights in *Oman & Dubai: The Modern Face of Arabia*

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Day 2 Arrive in Muscat, Oman

Day 3 Muscat • Discover Royal Opera House • Visit Sidab Women's Project

Day 4 Overland to Nizwa • Explore Wahiba Sands

Day 5 Nizwa • Visit Jabreen Castle

Day 6 Fly to Khasab

Day 7 Visit Khasab Fort

Day 8 Overland to Dubai, United Arab Emirates • Explore modern Dubai

Day 9 Dubai • Discover Old Dubai • Visit Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding • Fly to Delhi, India

Day 1 Fly to Delhi, India via Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Today, fly to Delhi, India, via Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Depending on your flight schedule, you'll arrive in Delhi late on Day 2 or very early on Day 3.

Day 2 Fly from Dubai, United Arab Emirates to Delhi

- Destination: Delhi

Afternoon: Today, you'll catch a connecting flight from Dubai to Delhi. Travelers who took a pre-trip will arrive in Delhi this afternoon.

Day 3 Explore Old Delhi

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

Early morning: Most travelers will arrive in Delhi very early this morning, where you will be met at the airport by an O.A.T. representative and assisted with your transfer to your hotel.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Following a leisurely start to the morning, our Trip Experience Leader will host a Welcome Briefing. After our briefing, we'll depart the hotel and take a rickshaw ride through Old Delhi.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: The afternoon is at your leisure. Your Trip Experience Leader can offer suggestions of where to spend your time.

Dinner: On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Evening: You are free to relax after your travels, or head back out into the city.

Day 4 Fly to Paro, Bhutan • Overland to Thimphu

- Destination: Paro
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Lhaki Hotel or similar

Early Morning: We'll gather in the lobby very early this morning to catch our flight to Paro, Bhutan. Once we arrive, we'll transfer to Thimphu, where we'll have an early check in at our hotel.

Breakfast: A boxed breakfast with pastry or fruit will be provided at our hotel.

Lunch: On your own.

Afternoon: Today will be spent in transit over land to Thimphu. Thimphu is the capital of the tiny Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan. A deeply Buddhist land, Bhutan places a higher value on its cultural heritage and the well-being of its people than economic progress and material wealth. The first country to embrace a revolutionary philosophy of "Gross National Happiness," Bhutan also wishes to preserve its natural beauty—a law requires that at least 60% of its land remain forested for future generations. After some free time to relax, we'll gather in the hotel lobby and our Trip Experience Leader will lead a briefing.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: You're free to rest or explore.

Day 5 Explore Thimphu • Visit Choki Traditional Art School • Home-Hosted Dinner

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

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Following breakfast, we'll make our way to the Choki Traditional Art School, which trains disadvantaged children in Bhutan's traditional arts of painting, sculpture, and carving. We'll enjoy a tour of the facilities with the school's instructor, and also meet with some of the students (when school is in session). From there, we'll head to a nearby bus stop, where we'll mingle with the local Bhutanese for a while before setting off on a ride around Thimphu to observe the mix of homes and small shops that make up the neighborhoods of Bhutan's biggest city.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: We'll return to our hotel after lunch, and you'll be free to explore on your own. Perhaps you'll visit a handmade paper factory, where artisans keep alive the centuries-old tradition started in Buddhist monasteries. Or go for a nature walk up the hillside known as Sangaygang; ascend until you reach the base of the Bhutan Broadcasting Services tower, and you'll find thrilling views of the valley spread out behind you.

Dinner: We'll depart for a **Home-Hosted Dinner** in smaller groups, which allows us to get to know our new Bhutanese friends even better, as they introduce us to the foods their families enjoy. During our visit, our hosts will offer a window into the Bhutanese way of life.

Evening: Following dinner, we'll return to our hotel for a relaxing evening.

Day 6 Thimphu • Visit Memorial Chorten

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

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Our day begins at 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. Then, we'll drive to the National Memorial Chorten, a shrine built to memorialize Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, the monarch who opened the doors of Bhutan to the outside world. The late "third dragon king" remains greatly revered in Bhutan, and locals and pilgrims alike come here daily to pray and whirl red prayer wheels.

Finally, we'll meet with some local Bhutanese women at RENEW (which stands for Respect, Educate, Nurture, and Empower Women), a vocational center in Thimphu that offers support to survivors of domestic violence—which is surprisingly on the rise in this peaceful country known for its happiness.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Enjoy the freedom to explore this afternoon.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: The remainder of the evening is free before we set off for our next destination in the morning.

Day 7 Overland to Phobjikha Valley • Dochula Pass

- Destination: Phobjikha Valley
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Dewachen Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Our full-day overland transfer to Phobjikha Valley will include more than five hours of driving time, punctuated with multiple discovery stops along the way.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll depart Thimphu for the Phobjikha Valley, a vast glacial valley of scenic splendor with a rich biodiversity of flora and fauna—and winter home of the globally-threatened black-necked crane. En route, we stop at Dochula, a mountain pass dotted with more than 100 *chortens* (Buddhist monuments) and prayer flags, where we witness panoramic views of the Himalayas. From there, we'll make our way to Rinchengang, a village noted for its stone masonry tradition. During our visit, we'll have an opportunity to meet with some of the villagers and we'll also stop in at someone's home to find out what everyday life is like in a village where all of the traditional-styled houses are clustered so closely together.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: We will continue on to our hotel, driving over Lawa La, a mountain pass elevated at approximately 11,300 feet and known for its stunning views.

Dinner: At our hotel.

Evening: You have the freedom to explore or rest after our day of traveling.

Day 8 Nature hike in Phobjikha Valley • Meet monks at Gangtey Goenpa

- Destination: Phobjikha Valley
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Dewachen Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At our hotel.

Morning: Our day begins at the Phobjikha Nature Trail, where we will enjoy the scenery and watch for birds and other creatures during a relatively easy trek. We'll venture through forests of blue pine trees covered in lichen (known locally as "old man's beard"), before making our way to Gangtey Goenpa, a remote 17th-century Buddhist monastery set on a forested hill overlooking Phobjikha Valley. Here, we'll get to meet and interact with the local monks and learn about the Nyingmapa school of Buddhism. Bhutan's famous winged winter visitors—black-necked cranes—are said to circle the monastery three times when they arrive from the Tibetan plateau and three times when they return again to Tibet in the spring.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in the valley.

Afternoon: We'll return to our hotel after lunch. The rest of the afternoon is on your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Dinner: At our hotel.

Evening: Wind down after the day at the hotel. Rest or visit with your fellow travelers to exchange stories.

Day 9 Phobjikha Valley • A Day in the Life of a Bhutanese village • Community-Hosted Lunch

- Destination: Phobjikha Valley
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Dewachen Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: After breakfast, we'll depart our hotel to experience *A Day in the Life* of Tafu, a small agricultural Bhutanese village located in a southern stretch of the Phobjikha Valley. Upon arrival, we'll meet with the young students of this **Grand Circle Foundation**-supported village school and enjoy a stroll through the village. Then, after meeting with a local farmer to learn about farming life in Bhutan, we'll sit down to a community-hosted lunch in a village home.

Lunch: Enjoy a community-hosted lunch in Tafu.

Afternoon: Afterward, we'll drive to Khewang Lhakhang, a Buddhist temple in the area where we'll interact with the head monk and his students. Then, to top off our discoveries, we'll visit a local hospital in the valley to meet and interact with members of the hospital staff before returning to our camp.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: You have the evening on your own to explore or rest.

Day 10 Phobjikha Valley • Overland to Punakha • Visit Chimi Lhakhang

- Destination: Punakha
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: The Four Boutique Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At our hotel.

Morning: We'll bid farewell to our hotel and begin our overland transfer to Punakha, which served as Bhutan's capital for more than three centuries.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we'll make our way to Chimi Lhakhang. Nicknamed "the Fertility Temple," Chimi Lhakhang was built

in 1499 to honor Drukpa Kunley, a rogue Buddhist known as the Divine Madman who is still considered one of Bhutan's favorite saints. Kunley, who is also credited with bringing Buddhism to Bhutan, claimed to spread enlightenment through an active sex life and is responsible for the phallic imagery we find here and throughout the country. During our visit, we will not only visit the temple but walk through the surrounding village, past wooden homes adorned with huge phalluses; while this may cause giggles from outsiders, they are taken seriously by Bhutanese as a sign of good fortune by warding off bad spirits.

From there, we'll continue on to our hotel overlooking Khuru Town. You may use your free time to unwind or stroll the grounds, taking in views of the river and valley far below.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: Spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 11 Punakha • Mo Chhu River rafting excursion • Punakha Dzong

- Destination: Punakha
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: The Four Boutique Hotel or similar

Activity Note: During our early afternoon raft trip, you will likely get wet, so we recommend bringing a change of clothes.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: You might choose to begin your day with an elective nature hike to enjoy the mountain views and lush green meadows of the Punakha Valley.

Those who did not opt for the hike will depart later this morning for a rafting excursion, meeting up with the elective hikers on the banks of the scenic Mo Chhu (Mother) River. Our raft float will follow the curves of the gently-flowing river that eventually links up with the Pho Chhu (Father) River at the Punakha Dzong. At the end of our raft trip, you'll have time to change into dry clothing.

Lunch: Lunch will be enjoyed picnic-style on the scenic riverbank.

Afternoon: We'll visit Punakha Dzong, widely hailed as the most splendid example of the fortress-like monasteries that dot Bhutan's landscapes. The Palace of Great Happiness is Bhutan's second oldest and second largest administrative building, rising six stories and organized around three courtyards. Impressively situated at the confluence of the Mo and Pho rivers, Punakha Dzong is filled with ornate murals, chambers like the Chapel of the Queen of the Nagas, and halls where all of Bhutan's kings have been crowned. It is so beautiful that it was also selected as the site of Bhutan's 2011 Royal Wedding.

Having enjoyed such an active day, you may wish to unwind in your room before dinner.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: On your own. You may choose to relax in our hotel this evening as we prepare for our journey to Paro in the morning.

Day 12 Punakha • Overland to Paro

- Destination: Paro
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Kaachi Grand or similar

Activity Note: During our full-day transfer to Paro, there will be about 4.5 hours of driving time, broken up with stops.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll depart Punakha and travel to Paro. Our journey takes us back through the Dochula mountain pass. Prior to our arrival, we'll make a stop at Tamchoe to see an iron-chain hanging bridge that crosses the Paro River and leads to a small hilltop temple.

Lunch: At a restaurant in Paro.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we'll head to our hotel. After we check in to our rooms, you can enjoy free time until dinner.

Paro is home to old and new, from 15th-century temples to the modern airport. You might head back to Paro's main square to get a feel for the city, or perhaps stroll along the Paro Chhu river, interacting with the local farmers as you go.

Dinner: At a local farmhouse, where we'll have an opportunity to interact with our host family and talk to them about farming and village life before sitting down for a dinner of authentic Bhutanese cooking.

Evening: You might relax in your room this evening, or perhaps sip a locally-inspired cocktail from the hotel bar.

Day 13 Paro • Explore Tiger's Nest Monastery

- Destination: Paro
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Kaachi Grand or similar

Activity Note: This morning's Tiger's Nest excursion will include a steep hike that will last about five hours round-trip.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll journey outside Paro today for a true high point of your Bhutan adventure—Tiger's Nest Monastery. Perched on the face of a sheer cliff some 3,000 feet above the Paro Valley, Tiger's Nest Monastery (also known as Taktsang) is considered the holiest site in Bhutan. It's a rather steep climb of more than two hours to reach the world-renowned shrine recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, but we'll be well rewarded for our efforts. Along the way, we'll pause to rest, sip tea, and soak in the views, before continuing. Upon arrival at the temple, we'll enjoy ample time to explore. When visitors listen to monks chanting from sacred texts or simply stand in silence among the clouds on the side of a mountain deep in the Himalayas, it is not uncommon to have a deeply moving spiritual experience.

Lunch: We'll enjoy an included lunch once we reach the base of the hiking trail.

Afternoon: We'll return to our hotel where you are free to explore.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: Spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 14 Paro • Visit Kyichu Lhakhang Temple

- Destination: Paro
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Kaachi Grand or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Our day begins at Kyichu Lhakhang, one of Bhutan's oldest temples. The seventh-century Tibetan Buddhist temple was restored in the 16th and 19th centuries, and in 1971 the Queen of Bhutan ordered a new temple

be built by the side of the original. Annual rituals are held here to pray for the well-being of Bhutan. When you visit, you may see for yourself whether it is true that the temple's orange tree magically bears fruit all year long.

From there, we'll head to the farmer's market and look at the fresh produce and even grab a snack or two while we explore the local vendors.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: We'll return to our hotel after lunch, and you are free to explore on your own.

Dinner: Enjoy a festive Farewell Dinner at the hotel to cap our memorable journey together.

Evening: You may wish to finish up your packing for your flight home, or soak in views of the valley from our hotel one last time.

Day 15 Fly to Delhi

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

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll transfer to the airport for our flight to Delhi. Upon arrival in Delhi, we'll make our way to our hotel.

Lunch: On your own in Delhi.

Afternoon: The afternoon is free for explorations on your own.

Dinner: On your own in Delhi.

Evening: You are free to explore, or relax for tomorrow morning's early flight.

Day 16 Return to U.S. or begin post-trip extension

- Destination: Delhi
- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Transfer to the airport for your return home, or continue your discoveries with our optional *Kathmandu & Chitwan: Traditions and Tropical Jungles* post-trip extension.

END YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

5 nights in *Kathmandu & Chitwan: Traditions and Tropical Jungles*

Day 1 Arrive Kathmandu, Nepal

Day 2 Explore Bhaktapur • Optional tour Mount Everest flight

Day 3 Chitwan • Jeef safari • Tharu tribal dance lesson and performance

Day 4 Chitwan • Jungle safari • Canoe ride

Day 5 Fly to Kathmandu • Discover Pashupatinath

Day 6 Return to U.S.

PRE-TRIP

Oman & Dubai: The Modern Face of Arabia

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » Airfare between Dubai and Delhi
- » 7 nights accommodation
- » 16 meals—7 breakfasts, 5 lunches, and 4 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

PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Depart the U.S. for an overnight flight to Muscat, Oman.

Day 2 Arrive in Muscat, Oman

- Destination: Muscat
- Accommodations: Golden Tulip Muscat Hotel or similar

Evening: Depending on your flight schedule, you'll arrive at your hotel in Muscat, Oman, this evening or very early on Day 3. An O.A.T. representative will meet you at the airport and assist with your transfer to your hotel.

Day 3 Muscat • Discover Royal Opera House • Visit Sidab Women's Project

- Destination: Muscat
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Golden Tulip Muscat Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Begin the day with a Welcome Briefing by your Trip Experience Leader. Then, we'll enjoy a visit to the Royal Opera House. Conceptualized by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Arab peninsula's first opera house opened in 2011—and is one of the most beautiful and technically advanced opera venues in the world.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Muscat.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll drive over to the Sidab Women's Project, an organization that promotes women's empowerment and entrepreneurship in their community. After learning about the variety of activities and skills training that take place here that are helping transform the lives of local neighborhood women, we'll return to our hotel for a few hours of free time.

Dinner: On your own. You can ask your Trip Experience Leader for local dining options.

Evening: You're free to retire to your room or continue exploring.

Day 4 Overland to Nizwa • Explore Wahiba Sands

- Destination: Nizwa
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: IntercityHotel Nizwa or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll depart Muscat and drive to Nizwa this morning. Along the way, we'll stop to explore the Wahiba Sands, a vast desert of towering dunes. Some 3,000 of Oman's Bedouin tribes still live a traditional nomadic existence among the ever-shifting sands of the desert (the Arabic word "bedu" means "desert dweller."), and we'll stop to visit one of these Bedouin families during our time here.

Lunch: At a desert camp in the Wahiba Sands.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll drive to our hotel in Nizwa, where you'll have a few hours of free time.

Dinner: At our hotel's restaurant.

Evening: Enjoy the rest of the evening on your own.

Day 5 Nizwa • Visit Jabreen Castle

- Destination: Nizwa
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: IntercityHotel Nizwa or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Nizwa, one of the oldest cities in Oman, was the country's capital in the fifth and sixth centuries. We'll begin today's discoveries by exploring Barkat-Al-Mauz, a traditional village with charming ruins to take you back in time. Our journey will reveal scenic views of terraced farms fed by ancient *falaj* water irrigation systems that are responsible for

the region's abundant produce, including pomegranates, pears, grapes, and onions. We'll also witness a number of abandoned dwellings and mosques in the region.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll visit Jabreen Castle. Set at the foot of the Jebel Akhdar mountains, Jabreen Castle was constructed during a time of peace in the 17th century as a palace and place of learning. A masterpiece of Islamic architecture, the castle features high defensive walls with turreted towers that surround inner courtyards and arcaded halls adorned in rugs and cushions.

Dinner: At the hotel's restaurant.

Evening: Spend the evening as you please, or join your Trip Experience Leader on a tour of Nizwa Souq, one of the oldest marketplaces in the country.

Day 6 Fly to Khasab

- Destination: Khasab
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Atana Khasab Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Depart to the airport for our flight to Khasab.

Lunch: On your own. You may want to pick something up at the airport.

Afternoon: Upon arrival in Khasab, we'll transfer to our hotel in time for dinner.

Dinner: At our hotel's restaurant.

Evening: You can begin exploring or rest up for tomorrow's full day of discoveries.

Day 7 Visit Khasab Fort

- Destination: Khasab
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Atana Khasab Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: This morning, we will go dolphin watching aboard a *dhow*, the traditional wooden vessels that have been navigating the waters of the Arabian Peninsula for centuries. After, we will continue with a visit to Khasab Fort. Khasab is situated at the tip of the Musandam Peninsula by the Strait of Hormuz, near the border with the United Arab Emirates. Built by the Portuguese in the 17th century, the picturesque fortress with its massive central tower offers panoramic views of the sea and surrounding mountains.

Lunch: On your own in Khasab.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll drive to Wadi Qadah, where you'll be surrounded by date palms and enjoy views of the soaring mountains and sparkling waters of the bay. Then, we'll continue to Tawi village, home to ancient rock petroglyphs depicting camels, ships, and more that are thought to be 2,000 years old.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: Free to spend relaxing or exploring.

Day 8 Overland to Dubai, United Arab Emirates • Explore modern Dubai

- Destination: Dubai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: DoubleTree by Hilton Dubai Al Jadaf or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: After breakfast, we'll drive across the Musandam Peninsula over the border into the neighboring country of the United Arab Emirates, where our destination is Dubai. We'll arrive in time for lunch.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Dubai.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll enjoy a panoramic drive through modern Dubai, witnessing iconic sites such as Palm Jumeirah, an artificially created island in the shape of a palm tree within a crescent, and Burj Khalifa—the tallest artificial structure in the world. Then, after checking in to our hotel, the remainder of the day and evening is yours.

Dinner: On your own. Your Trip Extension Leader can recommend some local dining options.

Evening: Spend the evening as you wish.

Day 9 Dubai • Discover Old Dubai • Visit Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding • Fly to Delhi, India

- Destination: Dubai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Enjoy exploring a bit of Old Dubai this morning, including the last surviving section of the Old City Wall, the defenses that surrounded the original town of Bur Dubai. We'll also take a short *abra* (ferry) ride to the gold and spice market. Here, we'll see everything from traditional handcrafted lamps and rugs to dozens of eye-catchingly bright spices used in Middle Eastern cooking.

Then, we'll stop by the Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding (SMCCU), an organization whose mission is the promote cultural awareness and an opportunity for us to learn about everyday life in the UAE.

Lunch: Enjoy a selection of traditional Emirati dishes during our visit to SMCCU.

Afternoon: We'll return to our hotel and check out, then head to the airport for our flight to Delhi, India, to begin the main trip, *Bhutan: Hidden Kingdom of the Himalayas*.

POST-TRIP

Kathmandu & Chitwan: Traditions and Tropical Jungles

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- | | |
|---|---|
| » Airfare between Paro and Kathmandu, and Chitwan and Kathmandu | » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader |
| » 5 nights accommodation | » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters |
| » 13 meals—5 breakfasts, 4 lunches, and 4 dinners | » All transfers |
| » 5 small group activities | |

POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Experience the diversity and the magic of Nepal amid an unforgettable world of profound and ageless beauty. At the ancient crossroads of Asia, an enchanting kingdom gilded in Hindu and Buddhist culture nestles beneath the rugged peaks of eight of the world's ten highest mountains. On this extension, you'll experience two sides of Nepal on a journey that takes you from the modern capital of Kathmandu to the lakeside city of Pokhara.

Day 1 Arrive Kathmandu, Nepal

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

Morning: We fly from Paro to Kathmandu this morning.

Lunch: On your own.

Afternoon: 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.

After, we will receive a Kumari blessing from the Kumari Temple. A young girl lives in the temple and is considered the living embodiment of this Hindu goddess. Patan is a city filled with temples, and we will continue exploring them until dinner.

Dinner: Welcome dinner at a local restaurant.

Evening: Free for you to do as you'd like. You might like to explore Kathmandu during a nighttime stroll.

Day 2 Explore Bhaktapur • Optional tour Mount Everest flight

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

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

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: This morning you will tour Bhaktapur Durbar Square, once a formidable royal palace complex which has since lost many of its beautiful courtyards due to frequent earthquakes. Only 15 of the original 99 remain.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: The group will reconvene at the 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: On your own.

Evening: You are free to explore.

Day 3 Chitwan • Jeep safari • Tharu tribal dance lesson and performance

- Destination: Chitwan
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Kasara Resort or similar

Activity Note: Tharu dance may be moved to another day based on the dancers' schedule.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: This morning you will depart the hotel and fly to Bharatpur. From there you will transfer to your resort, nestled on the border of the Chitwan National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Lunch: At the resort.

Afternoon: Enjoy a jeep safari through the jungle, followed by an exclusive dance lesson and performance by the Tharu, the original tribal inhabitants of the region. Their dances are typically performed during Dashain, a Hindu religious festival celebrating the victory of Rama over Ravana, the triumph of light over darkness.

Dinner: At the resort.

Evening: Free time to relax and enjoy the jungle resort.

Day 4 Chitwan • Jungle safari • Canoe ride

- Destination: Chitwan
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Kasara Resort or similar

Activity Note: During Monsoon season—July through October—the Jeep safari inside the National Park will be substituted for community forest as the national park shuts down. Please note the community forest is smaller, and the closing of the park depends entirely on the park authorities.

Early Morning: This morning you will gather at the resort before departing for a jungle safari by jeep through the national park. Inside you will explore the Gharial Crocodile Breeding Centre.

Breakfast: Inside the park.

Morning: After breakfast you will continue your jeep jungle safari tour, visiting ox bow lakes and watering holes for game viewing. After a tea break, you will return to the resort.

Lunch: At the resort.

Afternoon: After lunch you have the afternoon to rest or explore before you will depart for a canoe tour with a local guide. Keep watch for migrant birds and crocodiles on the river bank.

Dinner: At the resort.

Evening: During your free time, you may see more of the Nepalese rural life at your own pace or retire early to rest.

Day 5 Fly to Kathmandu • Discover Pashupatinath

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

Activity Note: Due to differing flight times, some travelers will fly out late this evening.

OPTIONAL TOUR

Mount Everest Flight

(Day 2 \$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

Early morning: Wake-up call for those interested in seeing the rhino survivor home.

Breakfast: At the resort.

Morning: We fly to Kathmandu this morning, arriving in time for lunch.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: After lunch, we’ll journey just outside Kathmandu’s Ring Road for a visit to Pashupatinath, the most revered Hindu temple in Nepal. Nestled on banks of the Bagmati River, the origins of this sacred Hindu temple complex dedicated to Lord Shiva are shrouded in the mists of time, and it continues to attract pilgrims from around the world.

After our tour concludes, we’ll return to the hotel, and the remainder of the day is yours.

Dinner: Farewell dinner.

Evening: Free to pack and reflect on your adventure.

Day 6 Return to U.S.

Activity Note: Due to differing flight times, some travelers will fly out late this evening. A day room will be provided for use.

Morning: Transfer to the Doha airport for your flight to the U.S.

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.

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 require 5 blank passport pages.
- **Pre-trip extension to Oman and Dubai:** You will need 2 additional blank passport pages.
- **Post-trip extension to Nepal:** You will need an additional blank passport page.

Visas Required

We’ll be sending you a detailed Visa 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.

- **Bhutan: 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. 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.

- **India: Visa required. This visa must be obtained in advance.** It must be at least a double-entry visa, and multiple-entry is even better.
- **Oman (pre-trip extension): Visa required.** We recommended you obtain this in advance, but it is available onsite as well.
- **U.A.E. (pre-trip extension): 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.
- **Nepal (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.

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

- 5 locations in 16 days with one 1-night stay

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Not appropriate for travelers using wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids
- Must be able to walk 5 miles unassisted and participate in 2-3 hour treks
- Our activities include a 5.5-hour uphill hike (beginning at an altitude of 10,000 feet up to 11,600 feet) that includes 700 steps on Day 14
- Must not have health conditions that preclude climbing to high altitudes
- 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

CLIMATE

- Due to the varied geography of the destinations on this adventure, you will experience a wide range of temperatures and weather conditions. For example, winter months (November-March) in places like Paro are below freezing while Punakha is generally in the 40-60 range (°F). Areas like Gangtey may even drop below 0 (°F) during the winter months.
- Northern India experiences poor air quality in November and December, especially in Delhi.

TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- Travel over city streets, and paved and unpaved roads that are bumpy and winding
- Trek through foothills that can be steep and slippery; includes uneven ground and stairs
- Travel overland in an air-conditioned coach and on a river raft in Punakha
- Elevations up to 11,000 feet

ACCOMMODATIONS & FACILITIES

- All accommodations feature private baths and Western-style toilet facilities
- Outside of our accommodations, some public restrooms will be limited to Asian-style squat toilets

- Rooms at some hotels in Bhutan are heated by *bukharis*, Bhutanese wood-fired stoves
- Some lodgings of up to four stories do not have elevators

GROUP SIZE & LEADERSHIP

- 16 travelers and an Indian Trip Experience Leader in Delhi, a Bhutanese Trip Experience Leader in Bhutan

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
- Prescription pain medication in the unlikely event of an injury in a remote location
- Altitude sickness medication
- At time of writing, the CDC did recommend discussing anti-malaria medication with your doctor for India, parts of Bhutan, and parts of Nepal. Check with the CDC and your doctor first because these medications can have strong side effects.
- Motion sickness medication for long transfers on winding roads

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).

At time of writing, the State Department noted that for the U.A.E. there are restrictions on medications, especially anything with codeine, dextromethorphan (like Robitussin), psychotropic drugs like Prozac or Valium, or anything narcotic. Generally, you are allowed to bring a personal supply of these medications as long as you bring a prescription EXCEPT for narcotics, which require special documentation. If you have questions about a specific medication, check the list of controlled medications at www.uaeinteract.com/travel/drug.asp or contact the embassy.

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.
- Bottled water or treated drinking water is readily available. We suggest bringing your own reusable water bottle from home to take advantage of any safe refills when available.

- Bottled drinks and juices, and hot drinks that have been boiled, are safe to drink.

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

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

During this adventure, you will probably feel some effects from the high altitudes. As a reference, Thimphu and Paro in Bhutan are both over 7,000 feet and some mountain passes, like Lawala, can even be as high as 11,300 feet. Locations on the optional extensions are equally high—parts of Dharamshala, India are 7,717 feet above sea level; Kathmandu, Nepal is 4,593 feet.

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

- **Bring a reserve of U.S. cash**—small bills in good condition—because ATMs and places that accept credit cards are far more limited than in the U.S. A cash reserve is especially important for Bhutan and in small towns and villages in Nepal; you should assume that you will not be able to use a credit card or ATM card at all in Bhutan.
- **Traveler's checks are not accepted** in India, Bhutan, and Nepal.
- **U.S. dollars may be accepted in Nepal and Bhutan, but are less frequently accepted in India.** Plan to exchange money into local currency in India.

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.

Bhutan: Bhutanese Ngultrum (Nu.)

India: Indian Rupee (₹)

Nepal: Nepalese rupee (Rs)

Oman: Omani Rial (OMR)

United Arab Emirates: UAE Dirham (Dh)

How to Exchange Money

Since many places in Bhutan and Nepal will accept U.S. dollars, we recommend that you bring a cash reserve of U.S. bills in good condition, preferably in small denominations.

For India, 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. Your other option is to withdraw local currency from an ATM and your bank at home will convert the amount into U.S. dollars. However, ATMs may not be as readily available on this adventure, so we strongly suggest that you plan to exchange 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.

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.

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

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

Oman: ATMs are readily available in cities and large towns but are more limited in small villages.

United Arab Emirates: ATMs are plentiful in Dubai.

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.

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.

India: Credit and debit cards are accepted everywhere 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.

Oman: Credit and debit cards are widely accepted in Oman.

United Arab Emirates: Credit and debit cards are widely accepted for major purchases and in shops associated with the tourist trade, but may not be accepted in smaller shops or restaurants.

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:

- **Housekeeping staff at hotels:** \$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.

Please note: Your tour price includes gratuities on the main trip and extensions for local guides, drivers, camp staff, and luggage porters that may assist you during the scheduled activities on your adventure.

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).

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 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 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

Most hotels will also offer some sort of Internet service, usually in their business center or lobby. Connections in India are usually slow and may involve repeat logging in.

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.

Bhutan: +975

Oman: +968

India: +91

United Arab Emirates: +971

Nepal: +977

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 bags are limited to 50 lbs ; carry-on bags are limited to 15 lbs .
Size Restrictions	Standard airline size: checked luggage should not exceed 62 linear inches (length+ width + depth). Airlines in Bhutan limits carry-on size to 17.5 x 13.5 x 8 inches.
Luggage Type	Duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Please do not bring a hard-sided (clamshell) suitcase.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
Same as the 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. Carry-on size: We recommend that you keep your carry-on within the size limits outlined above. Depending on which plane is being used the day you fly out of 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.	

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. 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. Another option for warm weather is a skirt or dress (it allows for air movement and can be convenient when using squat toilets). Knee-length or longer is best.
- ☐ Shoes and socks: Shoes should be comfortable walking or running shoes; a pair of light hiking boots would also be a good choice. If you are traveling in winter, keep in mind that there will be snow, except in Delhi. 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.
- ☐ Wide-brim sun hat or visor for sun protection
- ☐ Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood/rain gear
- ☐ Underwear and sleepwear. Female travelers should consider sports bras, especially for days with long overland transfers—the roads can be bumpy.
- ☐ Optional: swimsuit, in case a hotel has a whirlpool or pool

Seasonal Clothing Recommendations

For winter (December–March)

In many places, temperatures will be at or below freezing, with snow and ice. The exceptions are Delhi (on the main trip) or Amritsar and Dharamsla (on the pre-trip extension), where daytime temperatures may be in the 50–70 degree range.

- ☐ Winter coat
- ☐ A warm layer, like a fleece, sweater, or jacket
- ☐ Hat, gloves, and scarf
- ☐ Warm sleepwear—hotels have very limited heating

For spring or autumn (April–May; October–November)

The weather during these transitional seasons can be hard to predict. Bring layers so you can adjust. If you are taking the pre-trip extension in Northern India, be warned that Amritsar is very hot in spring. You'll still want warm clothes for parts of the main trip, but bring a few lighter outfits for Amritsar.

- ☐ Combination of warmer and lighter clothing
- ☐ A warm layer, like a fleece, sweater, or jacket
- ☐ Hat, gloves, and scarf
- ☐ Warm sleepwear—hotels have very limited heating

For summer and monsoon (June–September)

Even at the height of summer, some places on this trip stay cool. Paro is usually in the 60s or 70s at most. Other places like Delhi (on the main trip) or Amritsar and Dharamsla (on the pre-trip extension) are very hot—90 or 100 degrees. We suggest a base of light clothing with warm pieces you can layer on top. Also keep in mind that this is the rainiest time of year.

- ☐ Walking shorts for hotter locations, long trousers or jeans for cooler climates. Shorts are generally acceptable in India (except in some mosques) but they are not allowed in public places in Bhutan.
- ☐ A warm layer, like a fleece, sweater, or jacket
- ☐ Rain gear (i.e. raincoat, waterproof jacket, poncho), waterproof shoes, and umbrella

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. A flashlight is highly recommended by our Trip Experience Leaders as power outages are common.
- ☐ Electrical converter & plug adapter: see “A Word About Electricity” for more details
- ☐ Camera gear with extra batteries or battery charger
- ☐ Folding walking staff, sold in most camping stores
- ☐ Binoculars for bird and wildlife spotting

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 strong prescription pain medication for rare emergency purposes
- ☐ Optional: Altitude sickness medication
- ☐ Optional: Anti-malarial medication—discuss with your doctor
- ☐ Optional: Motion sickness medication for long transfers on winding roads

Optional Gear

- ☐ Hanging toiletry bag with hook to hang on doorknob, and pockets to organize items
- ☐ Hand-wash laundry soap such as Woolite
- ☐ Travel hair dryer. Some hotels will feature hair dryers, but not all.
- ☐ Ear plugs: Noise pollution (such as barking dogs) is common in Bhutan. Past travelers have suggested bringing ear plugs for sleeping
- ☐ Reading materials
- ☐ Travel journal/note pad
- ☐ Addresses for postcards
- ☐ Photos, small gift for Home-Hosted Visit
- ☐ Phrase book
- ☐ Pocket-size calculator for exchange rates (or use the calculator app on your phone)
- ☐ Inflatable seat cushion for bumpy roads
- ☐ Eye drops, to combat dusty conditions
- ☐ For asthma sufferers (or other breathing complaints) a face mask may be useful, particularly in Delhi where there can be significant air pollution
- ☐ A few snacks to fill the gap between breakfast and lunch
- ☐ Packets of powdered sports drink mix with electrolytes (helps with hydration)

Electricity Abroad

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

Voltage

Electricity in India, Bhutan, U.A.E., Oman, 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.

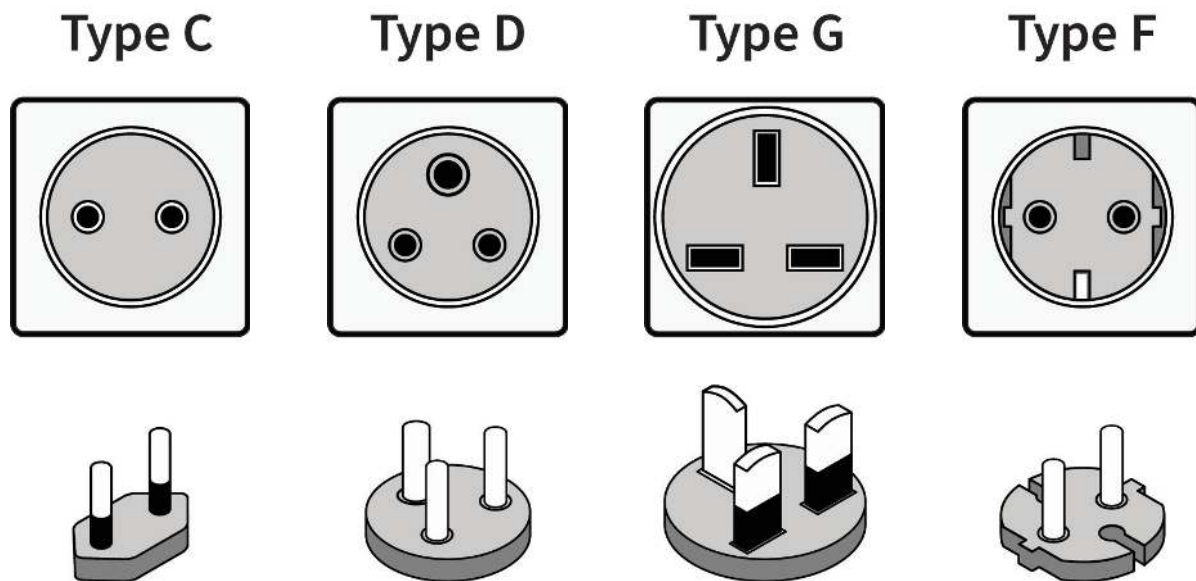
Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. Standard U.S. plugs are Type A and Type B. Here is the list of plugs for the countries on this trip:

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

India: C or D

Nepal: C or D

Oman: G



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

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.

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.*

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.

Oman: Oman experiences a subtropical, dry desert climate, with high temperatures year-round. During the summer months, the temperatures can raise to over 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Summer also comes with monsoons (in the south) and dusty, dry winds called *shamal winds* (in the north). In the capital of Muscat, the average yearly rainfall is only 4 inches, primarily falling between December through April.

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.

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			THIMPHU, BHUTAN		
	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	54 to 27	--	0.6
FEB	75 to 48	78 to 35	0.6	58 to 33	--	1.6
MAR	86 to 57	71 to 30	0.4	62 to 39	--	0.9
APR	98 to 69	55 to 21	1.2	68 to 45	--	2.3
MAY	105 to 77	49 to 24	1.1	73 to 56	--	4.8
JUN	105 to 82	61 to 36	2.1	76 to 59	--	9.6
JUL	96 to 78	82 to 61	8.5	66 to 56	--	14.5
AUG	93 to 78	85 to 64	9.8	77 to 60	--	13.5
SEP	94 to 75	81 to 51	5.3	74 to 59	--	6.0
OCT	92 to 66	76 to 33	0.6	71 to 51	--	1.5
NOV	83 to 55	78 to 31	0.3	64 to 41	--	0.3
DEC	73 to 46	82 to 38	0.6	58 to 30	--	0.1

MONTH	PUNAKHA, BHUTAN			PARO, BHUTAN		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	61 to 40	--	--	35 to 1	--	0.3
FEB	67 to 42	--	--	34 to 5	--	0.6
MAR	70 to 49	--	--	39 to 14	--	1.0
APR	76 to 53	--	--	44 to 22	--	1.3
MAY	81 to 59	--	--	50 to 30	--	1.2
JUN	88 to 67	--	--	54 to 38	--	2.1
JUL	90 to 71	--	--	55 to 41	--	3.9
AUG	89 to 68	--	--	55 to 40	--	4.2
SEP	86 to 69	--	--	53 to 36	--	2.4
OCT	82 to 66	--	--	47 to 23	--	0.9
NOV	72 to 55	--	--	42 to 12	--	0.2
DEC	59 to 46	--	--	38 to 4	--	0.1

MONTH	KATHMANDU, NEPAL			MUSCAT, OMAN		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity	Average Amount of Rainfall (Inches)
JAN	60 to 40	97 to 65	0.7	80 to 63	63	0.5
FEB	63 to 44	96 to 58	0.6	85 to 65	64	0.9
MAR	70 to 50	94 to 50	1.2	90 to 70	58	0.6
APR	77 to 57	90 to 48	1.5	98 to 77	45	0.7
MAY	79 to 63	92 to 59	4.0	110 to 85	42	0.3
JUN	80 to 69	93 to 70	7.9	112 to 88	49	0.1
JUL	79 to 70	96 to 80	14.8	110 to 87	60	0
AUG	79 to 70	95 to 79	12.8	105 to 84	67	0.1
SEP	78 to 67	97 to 78	7.4	105 to 82	63	0
OCT	74 to 59	97 to 73	2.2	97 to 77	55	0.1
NOV	68 to 49	97 to 71	0.1	90 to 70	60	0.3
DEC	61 to 42	98 to 68	0.4	85 to 66	65	0.5

MONTH	DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	73 to 58	76 to 52	0.4
FEB	74 to 59	76 to 54	1.6
MAR	80 to 63	73 to 50	0.4
APR	88 to 69	67 to 46	0.4
MAY	97 to 76	59 to 41	0.4
JUN	100 to 80	66 to 46	0.4
JUL	103 to 85	65 to 49	0.4
AUG	103 to 86	66 to 49	0.4
SEP	100 to 81	72 to 50	0.4
OCT	93 to 74	74 to 50	0.4
NOV	86 to 67	75 to 50	0.4
DEC	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.

Bhutanese Culture

Surrounded by India to the south and China to the north and bordered by the Himalayas, Bhutan has long practiced a policy of isolationism, culturally and economically, from the rest of the world. It is only in recent years, that foreign visitors have been allowed into Bhutan, with strict limitations. Due to this policy of isolation, Bhutan has successfully preserved its individual culture and independence.

Much of Bhutan's culture centers around Tibetan Buddhism, as most of the recorded history of the region started when Tibetan monks fled to Bhutan following turmoil in Tibet.

Bhutan citizens also follow the *Driglam Namzha*, or "The Rules for Disciplined Behavior", an official behavior and dress code for Bhutan. This code, introduced and enforced in 1990 to combat the invasion of western culture, governs how Bhutanese people should behave in public spaces, what to wear, and how to eat.

Accommodations

Our hotels and lodges are comfortable, but not luxurious. There can be occasional problems with electricity, hot water, and air conditioning. 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. *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.*

International Flights

The international flights on this adventure are demanding. Total travel time is usually between 18–25 hours, and you may have two connections along the way. In addition, international flights to India typically arrive in the very early morning hours (before 7 am local time).

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.

Our Vehicles in Bhutan

Bhutan has a colder mountain climate. Although Bhutan’s local buses are heated, we recommend that you bring a warm sweater or jacket for the months of September through March. The extensive road-building program underway in Bhutan can result in sections of the roads being closed. The roads also tend to be somewhat bumpy near sections of road construction. Your Trip Experience Leader will explain the fascinating development of the roads here in this mountain kingdom, where the very first road was constructed as recently as 1960!

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.

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.

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.

Photography in Dubai

In Dubai, do not take photos of government buildings, bridges, airports, train stations, or oil pipelines. This could result in the confiscation of your camera or arrest. Also please be aware that many locals will not want their photo taken as it is against their religion. It is best to ask for permission before taking a close up or portrait.

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.

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 huentzu:** 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.

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.

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.

Omani Cuisine

Omani cuisine, due its location on the Arabian Peninsula, has heavy influences from Mediterranean, Persian, North African, and Indian cuisine. Many dishes are characterized by a blend of spices, herbs, and marinades, with chicken, lamb, and rice as common staples of a meal. Boarded by the Arabian Sea, seafood is also a common addition to a dish, with shark being a local delicacy. Dishes to try include:

- **Majboos:** Also known as *kabsa*, this is a rice dish with saffron and cardamom. The rice is cooked separately, then mixed with a spicy meat that was cooked with onions and garlic. This dish is often served at weddings or engagements.
- **Shuwa:** Commonly eaten during festive occasions, *shuwa* is a dish with meat (goat, camel, sheep, or cow) that has been marinated in a spicy date paste and roasted in a pit oven. The meat is flavored with spices (coriander, chili, cloves and cumin), then wrapped in sacks of dried date plam leaves, then cooked in the pit oven.
- **Mashuai:** A dish of spit-roasted kingfish, served with a side of lemon rice.
- **Mushaltat:** A flatbread stuffed with cheese, meat, honey, or vegetables.
- **Mishkak:** Similar to kebabs, *mishkak* is a popular Omani street food of meat cubes (beef, mutton, or chicken) that is skewered and grilled, marinated with an array of spices and served with tamarind chutney, chili sauce, or fresh salad.
- **Harees:** Similar to haleem, wheat and salt are boiled together in a pot for hours until the mixture is almost porridge-like. Meat and species (cinnamon, salt, and pepper) are added and the combination is cooked for another couple of hours.
- **Halwa:** A popular desert, *halwa* is a gelatinous treat made from cooking sugar, rose water, saffron, cardamom, and nuts instead a sticky paste. It is often paired with bitter Omani coffee.

Emirati Cuisine

Emirati cuisine part of Eastern Arabia and as such, has similarities to the cuisines of its neighboring countries, Oman and Saudi Arabia, as well as the Middle East and parts of Asia. Dishes are usually simple, cooked in one pot, as stews, with saffron, cardamom, turmeric, and

thyme as the spices of choice to add flavor. Easily grown vegetables like cucumbers and tomatoes, *loomi* (dried lemons), dates, and chicken or small fowl are common ingredients. Less commonly found is camel meat, served rarely, during special occasions. Dishes to try include:

- **Balaleat:** a breakfast dish made of vermicelli and eggs, seasoned with cardamom, cinnamon, saffron, and orange blooms and topped with pistachios.
- **Harees:** similar to haleem, wheat and salt are boiled together in a pot for hours until the mixture is almost porridge-like. Meat and spices (cinnamon, salt, and pepper) are added and the combination is cooked for another couple of hours.
- **Thareed:** a stew of meat (chicken, lamb, or goat) and vegetables served on top of *rigag* (thin flatbread)
- **Machboos:** Meat boiled in stock and spices. Once cooked through, the meat is removed, and the rice is boiled in the stock. Everything is then mixed with vegetables, including tomatoes, peppers, onions, etc. The mixture is all cooked together for another two hours.
- **Luqaimat:** A dessert dish of crunchy dumplings soaked either in honey or *dibbs* (date syrup)

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

Bhutan

Popular Bhutan souvenirs include postage stamps, lovely hand-woven fabrics, carved masks, woven baskets, *thangkas*, 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.

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.

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.

Oman

While traveling through Oman, keep an eye out for these unique souvenirs: *khanjars* (traditional Omani daggers), Bahla pottery, *dishdasha* (a long robe worn by men) or *abaya* (a cloak worn by women), leather goods, hand-woven rugs, Omani dates, *masar* (Omani turbans), *kumma* caps, Frankincense burners, or silverware.

Bargaining: Bargaining is the norm in Oman, 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.

United Arab Emirates

While shopping in Dubai mostly centers on international luxury brands, other popular souvenirs include camel milk chocolate, Persian rugs, *oudh* (a fragrance oil from agarwood resin), *bakhoor* (an incense alternative of burnable agarwood chips), Arabic *attars* (planet-based perfume oil), pashmina shawls, gold jewelry, dates, Arabic coffee pot, spices, hookah or shisha pipes, lanterns, brass lamps, and Khanjar (traditional daggers). Most spices, carpets, and crafts items can be found at the older souks (open-air markets).

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

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:** Ngalo (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.

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.

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.

Oman

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 119,500 square miles
- **Capital:** Muscat
- **Government:** Absolute Monarchy
- **Languages:** Arabic is the official language; English is also spoken.
- **Location:** Oman is on the Arabian Peninsula, bordered by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen, as well as the Persian Gulf.
- **Geography:** Oman consists mostly of gravel desert, with mountains to the north and the southeast.
- **Population:** 4,520,471 (estimate)
- **Religion:** Muslim 88.9%, Hindu 5.5%, Christian 3.6%, other and unspecified 2%
- **Time Zone:** Oman is on Persian Gulf Standard Time and does not observe Daylight Saving Time. As a result, the time in Oman will either be 8 hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Time (in summer) or 9 hours ahead (in winter).

National Holidays: Oman

Oman celebrates a number of national holidays that follow the Islamic lunar calendar, such as the Prophet's Ascension and the Prophet's Birthday. As it is determined by a different calendar, the dates change each year.. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit **www.timeanddate.com/holidays**.

01/11 Ascension Day

February Prophet Ascension Day (moves each year)

March or April Ramadan (moves each year)

June or July Eid al-Adha (moves each year)

11/19 National Day

Oman: A Brief History

Oman, officially the Sultanate of Oman, is located on the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. Its strategic location by the Arabian Sea and the Strait of Hormuz has long made it a significant player in regional trade and politics. The history of Oman stretches back thousands of years, marked by maritime prowess, tribal confederations, and periods of both foreign influence and strong independence. Ancient Oman was known as Magan in Sumerian texts dating as far back as to around 2300 BCE. It was famous for its copper and frankincense resources, which were vital for the bronze-making civilizations of Ancient Mesopotamia. Oman's location also allowed a vast amount of trade with the Indus Valley, Mesopotamia, and later with the Greeks and Romans. Archaeological evidence suggests that early Omani were skilled seafarers and engaged in trade and shipbuilding long before the rise of Islam.

Oman was one of the first regions outside of modern-day Saudi Arabia to accept Islam, during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime in the 7th century. The people of Oman adopted the Ibadi sect of Islam, which is distinct from Sunni and Shia branches. It remains the dominant form of Islam in the country today, and it is currently the only country with a majority Ibadi population. One distinguishing feature of Ibadism is the choice of ruler by communal consensus and consent. By the 8th century, Oman had established its own Islamic imamate, a form of theocratic government led by an elected imam. This system allowed for relatively decentralized rule and gave Oman a strong sense of religious and political identity. From the 9th to the 15th centuries, Oman developed into a powerful maritime nation. Omani sailors and traders were renowned across the Indian Ocean, reaching as far as East Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. In 1507, the Portuguese arrived in Muscat and took control of several key ports along Oman's coast, aiming to dominate trade over a century but faced consistent resistance from local forces.

In the mid-17th century, the Yaruba dynasty led a successful campaign to expel the Portuguese. Under their rule, Oman once again became a major regional power. The Omani fleet expanded its influence along the east African coast, capturing Zanzibar and Mombasa, and controlling parts of present-day Iran and Pakistan. This marked the peak of the Omani Empire, with Zanzibar even becoming a second capital in the 19th century under the Al Busaid dynasty. This family still rules Oman today, making it one of the oldest dynasties in the Arab world.

By the late 19th century, Oman's power began to decline due to the many internal conflicts plaguing itself, British colonial influence, and the loss of its overseas territories. In 1891, Oman became a British protectorate, though it was never formally colonized. In 1970, Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said overthrew his father in a bloodless coup and began modernizing the country. His rule marked a transformation from isolation to development, with improvements in healthcare, infrastructure, and education. One of the new sultan's first measures was to abolish many of his father's harsh restrictions, which had caused thousands of Omanis to leave the country, and to offer amnesty to opponents of the previous regime, many of whom returned to Oman.

Oil was first discovered in Oman at the Yibal field in 1962. This marked a major turning point for the country and its entry into the global oil market. By 1967, they had exported their first shipment of crude oil made possible through the construction of pipelines and the Mina al Fahal terminal near Muscat, the capital city. The development of the oil industry in Oman coincided with the Sultan Qaboos bin Said's rise to power. The revenue from oil became the foundation for all his successful modernizing efforts. However, by the 2000s, Oman faced declining production from aging oil fields. The government began investing heavily in enhanced oil recovery techniques, making them a regional leader in this area, and boosting their overall economy. In recent decades, Oman has recognized the need to diversify its economy. While oil remains a key pillar, national strategies aim to reduce dependence on hydrocarbons.

Today, Oman is a peaceful and stable country known for its neutral foreign policy and preservation of its cultural heritage. Sultan Qaboos ruled until his death in 2020, after which Sultan Haitham bin Tariq assumed power. Oman continues to balance tradition with modernization, maintaining its unique identity in a rapidly changing region. It has become a popular tourist destination, as people particularly enjoy the sweeping landscapes and breathtaking sand dunes.

United Arab Emirates

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 32,278 square miles
- **Capital:** Abu Dhabi
- **Languages:** Arabic (official), Persian, English, Hindi, Urdu
- **Ethnicity:** Emirati 19%, other Arab and Iranian 23%, South Asian 50%, other expatriates (includes Westerners and East Asians) 8%
- **Location:** Middle East, bordering the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf, between Oman and Saudi Arabia

- **Geography:** Made up of seven districts known as emirates, the United Arab Emirates (or U.A.E.) is primarily desert or semi-desert, except along the coastline. On the Persian Gulf side of the coast are salt pans and few natural harbors, like the port at Abu Dhabi. On the Gulf of Oman side, the Western Al Hajar Mountains form a crescent between the coast and the inland desert sands.
- **Population:** 5,779,760
- **Religions:** Muslim (Islam; official) 76%, Christian 9%, other 15% (primarily Hindu and Buddhist; less than 5% of the population consists of Parsi, Baha'i, Druze, Sikh, Ahmadi, Ismaili, Dawoodi Bohra Muslim, and Jewish)
- **Time Zone:** UAE is on Gulf Standard Time and does not observe Daylight Saving Time. As a result, the time in UAE will either be 8 hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Time (in summer) or 9 hours ahead (in winter).

National Holidays: United Arab Emirates

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

May or June Eid al-Fitr (moves each year; see note)

July or Aug Arafat Hajj Day (moves each year)

July or Aug Feast of the Sacrifice (moves each year)

01/01 New Year's Day

12/01 Commemoration Day

12/02 National Day

United Arab Emirates: A Brief History

Proof of human habitation in the Arabian Peninsula is estimated to have started as early as the Paleolithic Age, with the Bedouin communities, who survived the area through fishing and gathering. Habitation progressed into the Bronze Age, around 5,000 to 3,100 BCE, with the Hafit period. Not much is known of the people who lived in the Arabian Peninsula, but archeological finds of stone arrows, axe heads, and beehive shaped burial tombs showcase a distinct culture developing.

From 2,600 to 2,000 BCE, the Umm al-Nar civilization reigned, with evidence of trade with Sumerian kingdoms and Indus Valley civilization. Following the Umm al-Nar civilization came the Wadi Suq civilization, dated from 2,000 to 1,300 BCE, which also showed evidence of trade. It is theorized that it was during this civilization, as their technology advanced, that animals were domesticated, allowing their settlements to move inland.

The civilization in the Arabian Peninsula continued to grow and develop, with little notable change until Islam arrived in 630 AD. As prophets brought the Prophet Muhammad's message throughout the Arabian Peninsula and the surrounding areas of South East Asia and Western

Africa, trade routes followed. The solidification of trade routes across such a region attracted the attention of the Europeans, who pin-pointed the Arabian Peninsula as the perfect trade location, due to its position between Europe and the Far East (India and China in particular).

The Portuguese arrived first in 1498, after successfully travelling around the Cape of Good Hope. In 1515, the Portuguese had forcibly established control in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Oman and by 1560 had taken over most of the trading ports as well as the pepper and spice trade from the indigenous peoples.

In retaliation, the Ya'rubid dynasty, rulers of Oman from 1624 to 1724, rose up in 1633 and forced the Portuguese from Julfar, Dibba, Sohar, and Muscat by 1650. The removal of the Portuguese only opened the way for other European countries, as the Dutch and the British slipped in.

The Dutch built themselves up into a dominant naval power in thanks to their silk trade deal with Abbas I of Persia, also known as Abbas the Great, the 5th King of Iran. However, due to battle with the British and the French, by 1750, Dutch power in the region had dwindled.

Meanwhile, the British locked down on their trade in the Arabian Peninsula, interested in protecting their connection to India and keeping other European countries from interfering. This led them into conflict with Al Qawasim, an Arab dynasty with control over Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah, in the late 1700s and early 1800s. An attempt at peace was made between the British and Al Qawasim, only for the signed peace treaty to break down in 1815. It wasn't until after the British defeated the Qawasims and signed exclusive peace agreements with the individual emirates (or land owned by an Arab ruler called an emir) of the Arabian Peninsula that everything started looking up for the British. While the peace agreements didn't stop fighting between the tribes of the Trucial States (as the British had taken to calling the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula), the signed agreements made it so the Trucial States could not give land or have relations with other countries without the consent of the British. In return, the British would protect the Trucial States from outside interference.

This agreement remained for over a century, until 1968, when the British announced their withdrawal from the area by 1971 due to their domestic economic crisis and political pressure.

The rulers of six of the Emirates (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Umm al-Quwain, Fujairah, and Ajman) came to an agreement and on December 2nd 1971, the country known today as the United Arab Emirates was formed. The seventh Emirate, Ra's al-Khaimah, joined the union in February 1972. Ever since, the constitutional monarchy of United Arab Emirates has been a site of trade, travel, tourism, and finance, sitting high as with the seventh-highest GDP per capita thanks to their abundance of natural resources.

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading

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.

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.

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.

Oman

A History of Modern Oman by Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout (2015, History) A history of modern Oman from the eighteenth century to the present, this book combines the most recent scholarship on Omani history with insights drawn from a close analysis of the politics and international relations of contemporary Oman.

Earth Weeps, Saturn Laughs by Abdulaziz Al Farsi (2013, Fiction) A government employee, Khalid Bakhit returns to his hometown in Oman after a painful love affair ends tragically. He meets a certain "Saturnine poet" who, in the course of chasing after an elusive ode, has stumbled upon this unnamed village and becomes Khalid's closest companion. Each chapter in the book is told from a different villager's point of view and explores topics ranging from racial prejudice to religious bigotry, and rigid patterns of leadership.

Monsoon Revolution by Abdel Razzaq Takriti (2013, History) Contextualizing Omani revolution and absolutism, this book illustrates how the events that unfolded in Oman during the years 1965–1976 were embedded in broader Arab and international currents. It provides a good sketch of Oman's history in the twentieth century, especially regarding their tumultuous history with the British Empire.

Celestial Bodies by Jokha Alharthi (2010, Fiction) Winner of the 2019 International Booker prize, the novel follows three sisters and their families as they witness Oman evolve from a traditional, slave-owning society slowly redefining itself after the colonial era, to the crossroads of its complex present. It is the first novel translated from Arabic to win the prize.

The Turtle of Oman by Naomi Shihab Nye (2009, Fiction) Aref Al-Amri does not want to leave Oman, but when his parents announce their plans to move to the U.S., his grandfather — Siddi — takes a series of adventures. This is a beautiful story of a child learning to appreciate his home country's beauty one last time before moving to Ann Arbor, Michigan.

United Arab Emirates

Temporary People by Deepak Unnikrishnan (2017, Fiction). Unnikrishnan explores magical realism in twenty-eight short stories on the lives of “guest workers” in the United Arab Emirates. Guest workers, or migrant workers, are peoples, usually from developing countries, with temporary work visas. In the United Arab Emirates, guest workers make up an estimated 80% of the population and 90% of the workforce. It wasn't until June 2017 that the United Arab Emirates adopted a bill to allow guest workers the same rights as domestic workers under the country's labor laws.

Keepers of the Golden Shore: A History of the United Arab Emirates by Michael Quentin Morton (2016, History). Starting with the ancient days as desert tribes, *Keepers of the Golden Shore* highlights how the United Arab Emirates became one of the richest countries in the world.

Dubai: Gilded Cages by Syed Ameer Ali (2010, Nonfiction). *Dubai: Gilded Cages* analyses the history of Dubai, from a solitary emirate to a global hub, deep diving into the socio-economic disparity for Western ex-patriots, native Emirates, and “guest workers”.

The Sand Fish by Maha Gargash (2009, Fiction) The story of Noora, a young woman in an arranged marriage as she struggles with the cultural expectations set on her as a woman in the United Arab Emirates. Set in the 1950s, before the country was united, and written by an Emirati writer.

City of Gold: Dubai and the Dream of Capitalism by Jim Krane (2009, History). The rise of the city from a historical and economic viewpoint, focusing on the history from founding to the modern era, the accomplishments of the ruling leader of Dubai, and the cultural-economic differences.

Suggested Films & Videos

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.

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.

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.

Oman

Sultana's Journey (2024, Documentary) A documentary that retells the journey of Ahmad bin Na'aman Al Ka'abi, the first Arab emissary in history to the United States. The film delves into the events surrounding his voyage aboard the Sultanah ship in 1840 and vividly portrays the mission and highlights its impact on shaping international relations.

The Falconer (2021, Drama) Following two best friends—Tariq and Cai—who work together at a zoo, when their friendship is forever challenged after Tariq plans to steal animals from the zoo and sell them to save her sister from an abusive marriage. The film shows the cultural and ritualistic differences between the western and the Arabic culture.

Zayana (2019, Drama) After a traumatic event left unaddressed in her conservative society, an Omani woman flees to India under the guise of pursuing postgraduate studies to escape scandal and begin healing. Her husband, wracked with guilt for not supporting her, follows her journey, leading to a path of symbolism, soul-searching, and a confrontation with ingrained cultural taboos.

The Hour of Liberation Has Arrived (1974, Documentary) Chronicling the Dhofar uprising in the late-1960s Oman, the People's Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG) fight against the British-backed Sultanate. It highlights the movement's democratic, feminist, and socialist aspirations, and includes rare footage of women's active participation, life in liberated zones, and the broader political struggle against colonialism and neocolonial oil interests.

United Arab Emirates

Bilal: A New Breed of Hero (2015, Action/Adventure). A computer-animated movie about Bilal, a follower of the Islamic prophet, Muhammad. The movie follows Bilal from his childhood as a slave in Mecca to an inspirational hero, fighting for equality and inclusiveness. The story is based off of real events and follows multiple heroes from Arabian history. Due to the depictions of violence, while animated, this is movie is not recommended for children.

From A to B (2015, Adventure/Comedy). Days before the birth of his first child, Omar reaches out to his childhood friends, Jay and Ramy, wanting to drive from Abu Dhabi to Beirut, in memory of their fourth friend, Hadi's twenty-fifth birthday. Along the way, the trio run into many obstacles as they traverse through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria.

City of Life (2009, Drama/Romance). Follow the individual stories of a privileged young Arab man and his street-smart friend, an Indian taxi driver, and a Romanian flight attendant as they struggle through hardships and experience joy in the city of Dubai.

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

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

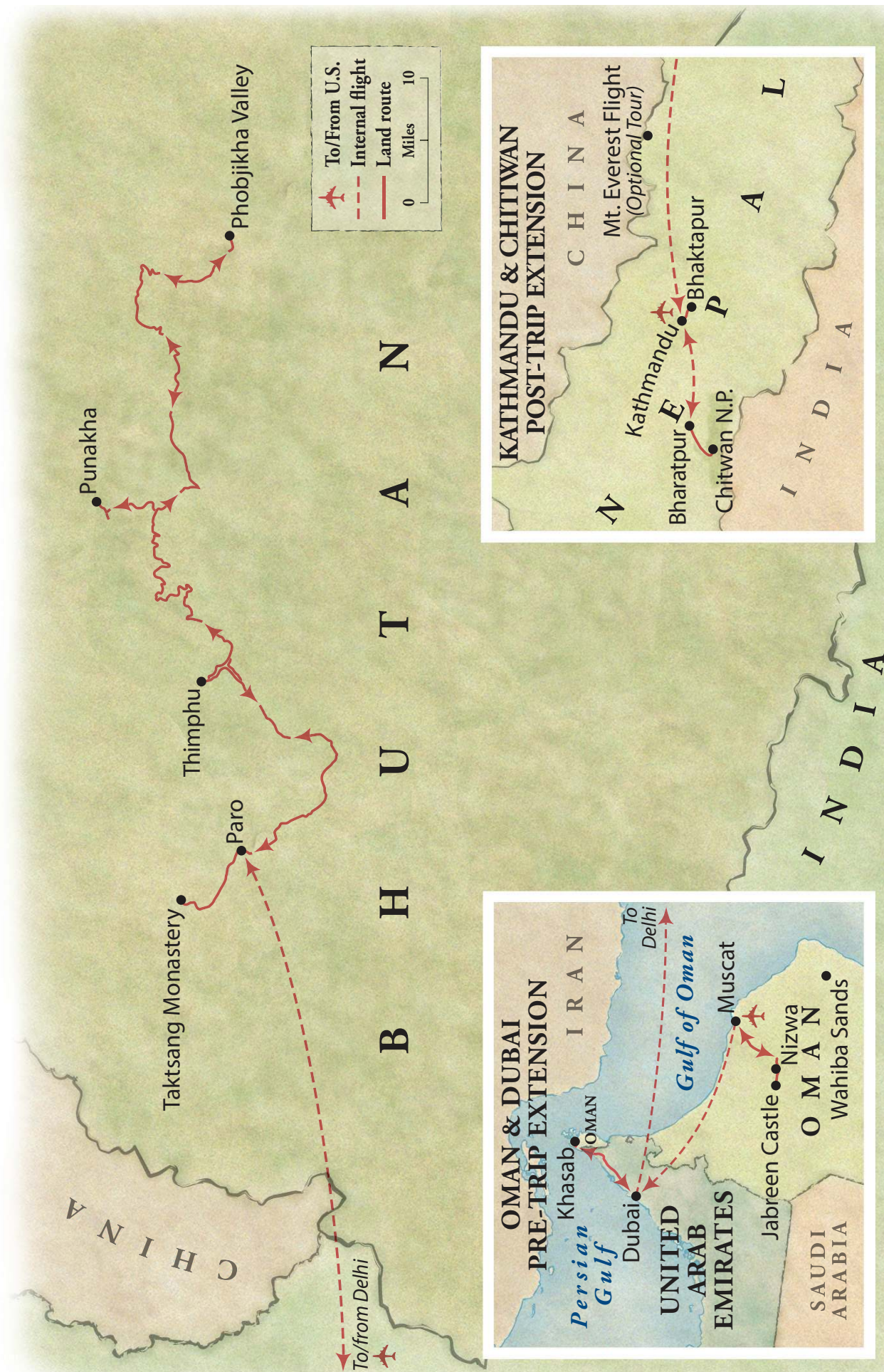
Maps your location and provides emergency numbers for police, medics, and more

GeoSure

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

Chirpey

For women only, connect with other women, find out what's safe, meet up, and more



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Submitted by Joy and Don Janke,
8-time travelers from Stevensville, MI



Submitted by Julia Schneider,
5-time traveler from Pinellas Park, FL



Submitted by Martin Schwartzman,
30-time traveler from Woodbury, NY



Submitted by Paul Stark, 17-time traveler
from Edina, MN



Submitted by David Fong, 16-time traveler
from Foster City, CA



Submitted by Steven dos Remedios,
23-time traveler from Oakland, CA



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