TOUR CODE

H10

ADVENTURESABROAD

KINGDOMS OF THE HIMALAYA

Nepal & Tibet

11 days

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Day 1 *Arrive in Kathmandu*

Today we arrive in Nepal, a country with spectacular geography and a rich cultural diversity. Within its narrow borders we will find a complete climatic range, from tropical to temperate, alpine to Arctic. As many as 30 different languages and dialects are spoken among the many ethnic groups. Transfer the short distance to Bhaktapur in the Kathmandu Valley.

NOTE: Due to variables such as festival dates, internal flights, and ever-changing entry (visa) requirements, our published tour dates and / or itinerary can shift right up to departure. As such, we will not accept any LAND ONLY bookings for this tour. Booking your air with Adventures Abroad offers you protection from the possible costs and complications associated with tour changes. Exceptions to this rule will only be granted to those passengers who are willing to fully accept the risks of booking their own air tickets given the above circumstances.

Overnight in Kathmandu. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Kathmandu: City Tour*

This morning we travel to Kathmandu's central meeting area, Durbar Square, a profusion of temples reflecting the different architectural styles dating from the eleventh century. The area also includes the Royal Palace with its gilded gates and elaborate statues. The square is alive with a multitude of nationalities, intermingled with stalls displaying a wide variety of Nepalese and Tibetan handicrafts. We will also see "Freak Street" -- a famous hippie meeting place from the 60's.

We then proceed to Swayambhunath Temple, Nepal's most significant centre of Buddhist worship. There has been a temple on this site since at least the 5th century. Swayambhunath is also known as the "Monkey Temple" due to the large population of monkeys that make the grounds their home. The temple buildings are set atop a hill and offer an excellent view of Kathmandu and its valley.

This afternoon we visit Patan, the second largest town in the Kathmandu valley. Patan’s Durbar Square contains some of the finest examples of Newari Architecture in Nepal.

Overnight in Kathmandu. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Kathmandu, Nepal - Lhasa, Tibet*

Today we transfer to Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport for our flight to Tibet.

This remarkable trans-Himalayan flight takes us directly past the Everest group of peaks. In a little over one hour, the Kathmandu-Lhasa flight covers rugged terrain that once took trade caravans months to cross. On a clear day as many as eight of the world's fourteen 8000+ m (26,000+ feet) peaks can be seen. The landscape changes dramatically as we

cross the great barrier of the Himalaya, from Nepal's green terraced hillsides to the high and dry, barren plateau typical of Tibet. We fly over deep-blue Yamdrok Lake to land at Gonggar Airport, 85 km (53 miles) south of Lhasa.

We will be met by our Tibetan guide on arrival and drive along the flat valley of the Tsangpo River to our comfortable hotel in Lhasa (3650 m / 12,045 feet). Balance of the day at leisure to acclimatize to the altitude.

Overnight in Lhasa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Lhasa: Jokhang Temple*

We have an easy morning to acclimatize followed by a visit to the Jokhang, the religious and geographical centre of Lhasa, and the most important temple in the world for all sects of Tibetan Buddhism. Pilgrims from across Tibet, many of whom have walked hundreds of kilometres to see the Jokhang once in their lives, queue for hours to enter the temple and perform a ritual circuit in prostration of its many sacred shrines. It is a moving experience to join them in the dark hallways, filled with the sound of low chanting, lit only by butter lamps. The main image worshipped here is Jowo Rinpoche, a gilded statue of Buddha Sakyamuni said to have been modeled during his lifetime.

The Jokhang is encircled by the Barkhor, an 800m (2,645 feet) flagstone pathway that is both a sacred circumambulation route and the biggest bazaar in all of Tibet. Night and day, Tibetans walk clockwise around it, earning religious merit as they shop, people-watch and chat with friends. Here you find people from all corners of Tibet: striking, tall Khampa men from the east with big knives and red tassels wrapped about their heads; Golok women with their hair plaited in 108 tiny braids; nomad families bundled in sheepskins. The Barkhor is the real heart of Tibet, you can spend hours watching the passing parade or bargain for the trinkets and souvenirs, displayed in street stands, everything from prayer flags to silver jewelry to yak butter.

Overnight in Lhasa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Lhasa - Potala - Sera - Lhasa*

This morning we visit the fabled Potala Palace that rises above the city like a fairytale castle set atop its rocky pedestal. The Potala has been the home of successive Dalai Lamas. It was also the seat of the Tibetan government, and with chapels, cells, religious schools, and even tombs for the Dalai Lamas it was virtually a self-contained world. Begun in the 7th century, but not reaching its full glory until the 17th century reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama, the 13 storey Potala rises 117m (383 feet) high and is made entirely of wood, earth and stone. It has over 1000 rooms.

We proceed to Sera, one of the two most important Gelugpa (Yellow Hat sect) monasteries. The monastery is the location of the famous ‘monk's debate' on some afternoons every week. During this ritual 'question and answer' session, a senior monk quizzes a junior and there is much grimacing, clapping and mock threatening. The important part of this ritual is the passing on of knowledge of the theosophical questions of the Tibetan lamaistic Buddhist faith.

Overnight in Lhasa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Lhasa - Drepung - Norbulingka - Lhasa*

This morning we visit Drepung, a monastery which, during its peak, had 7,700 monks in residence and a single kitchen where food for them was cooked in enormous urns. It and Sera suffered damage in varying degrees during the turbulent days of the Red Guards and their Cultural Revolution but have now been restored and the monks have returned.

During our time in Lhasa we will also visit the Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama's summer palace and currently the site of a simple museum.

Overnight in Lhasa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Lhasa - Shigatse*

An early departure takes us from the high Tibetan plateau to Shigatse.

We pass colourful rock carvings of Buddha as we approach the outskirts of Lhasa at the start of a long road journey. We leave the city limits and follow the course of the Tsangpo River which, entering India, becomes the Bramahputra. From the Kamba La (4794 m 15,728 ft) there is a spectacular view of the blue waters of Yamdrok Tso, one of Tibet's sacred lakes. Now we travel the zigzag road to cross the mighty Yarlung Tsangpo River on our way to Lhasautra. The road then drops down to Yamdrok Tso Lake and follows the twisting northern bank for hours, prior to climbing up to the Karo La Pass. On either side are gigantic peaks including 7260 m (23,958 foot) high Nazin Kang Sa.

On our way to Shigatse, we stop and visit Gyantse, famous for its multi-tiered stupa known as the Kumbum.

Overnight in Shigatse (3900 m / 12,870 feet). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Shigatse Area*

We visit the main site of interest in Shigatse, the Tashilhunpo Monastery.

Tashilhunpo, the principal monastery of Tsang Province, is one of the Great Six centers of the Gelugpa sect. The others are Sera, Drepung, and Ganden, all in or near Lhasa, and Labrang and Kumbum in Amdo (southern Gansu / Qinghai provinces). Tashilhunpo is the largest, most vibrant monastery in Tibet, the only one that does justice to the term 'monastic city'. Founded in 1447 by Tsongkhapa's nephew and disciple, Gedundrub, the First Dalai Lama, it was substantially enlarged under the Fourth Panchen Lama, Lobsang Chokyi Gyaltsen (1570-1662).

This afternoon is free to explore Shigatse town and the market.

Overnights in Shigatse (3900m / 12,870 feet). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Shigatse - Lhasa*

Today we follow the path of the often turbulent east-flowing Yarlung Tsampo River as it winds it's way towards Lhasa. You will see the new Lhasa-Shigatse railway in various stages of construction on either side of the river and through the Yarlung Valley's mountain walls (scheduled for completion in 2014). We will hop back and forth across the river that cuts through the rugged canyon and witness the clash between Tibet's past and it's future.

Overnight in Lhasa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Lhasa, Tibet - Kathmandu, Nepal - Bhaktapur*

Today we drive back to Lhasa'a Gonggar Airport and fly to Kathmandu. On arrival, we will drive to historic suburb on Bhaktapur now designated as a World Heritage Site. Walking tour of Bhaktapur.

Overnight in Bhaktapur. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Kathmandu Valley - Depart*

Today we have a tour of the fascinating Kathmandu Valley. This morning we will visit Changu Narayan, a Hindu temple set on a hilltop a few kilometers from Bhaktapur. On the way to Changu Narayan, we pass through terraced rice fields and enjoy a glimpse of the rural life of Nepal.

Our next stop is Pashupatinath Hindu Temple, a very interesting place located on the sacred Bagmati River where there may be cremations taking place on the ghats. We also visit Boudhanath Stupa, one of the holiest Buddhist sites in Kathmandu and one of the largest spherical stupas in Nepal.

We then transfer to Kathmandu Airport for our flights homeward.

BON VOYAGE!