Tour Code
HH2

ADVENTURESABROAD

HIMALAYAN SPLENDOUR

Ladakh, Bhutan & Nepal

15 days

Created on: 17 Nov, 2026

Day 1 Arrive in Delhi

Welcome to India! Despite its recent transformation into a cosmopolitan hub for global business and technology, Delhi remains surprisingly green, with extensive gardens, parks, and protected woodlands softening the urban sprawl. This vast metropolis serves as both the nation's capital and a living monument to millennia of history, where Mughal fortresses stand beside modern infrastructure and ancient bazaars pulse with contemporary commerce.

This evening we gather with fellow travellers for our first meal together, preparing for an extraordinary journey across the Himalayan kingdoms.

Overnight in Delhi (airport area hotel).

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Delhi - Fly to Leh, Ladakh: Arrival & Acclimatisation

Early this morning we fly to Leh at 3524 m/11,562 ft elevation, one of the world's most spectacular commercial flights. The aircraft climbs over the Greater Himalaya before descending into the small mountain-ringed airport serving Ladakh's capital.

Leh reveals its Tibetan character immediately: residents wear traditional dress including distinctive stove-pipe hats and felt boots with turned-up toes. The Royal Palace dominates the townscape, its tiered structure deliberately echoing Lhasa's Potala Palace. Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, large chortens, prayer flags snapping in the wind, and mud-brick houses with flat roofs create a dramatic cultural contrast to the heat and chaos we left behind in Delhi. The architecture deliberately echoes forms we'll encounter repeatedly as we climb higher into the Himalaya: prayer flags, chortens, gompas clinging to mountainsides.

The remainder of the day allows for essential acclimatisation to the dramatic altitude change. Your Tour Leader will likely suggest an easy orientation walk through Leh's colourful markets and central hub, keeping exertion minimal while bodies adjust to the thin air.

Overnight in Leh.

NOTE: The order of Leh area sightseeing may vary due to weather and logistical considerations. Your Tour Leader will space activities strategically to account for the sudden elevation change.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Leh: Likir Gompa & Alchi Monastery

Today we drive across Ladakh's arid high plateau, beginning at Likir Gompa, magnificently set on an isolated ridge overlooking Likir village. Founded in the 14th century, this monastery belongs to the Yellow Hat Sect and holds special significance: the head lama here is the younger brother of the Dalai Lama. Likir ranks among Ladakh's oldest and best-maintained monasteries.

On the way we stop at the confluence where the grey Indus River meets the blue waters of the Zanskar River, flowing from the remote Greater Himalaya.

After lunch we continue to Alchi, one of the region's largest ancient monastic complexes and an important Buddhist centre. Founded in the 11th century by Rinchen Zhangpo, an early Tibetan preacher who spread Lamaistic Buddhism throughout this region, Alchi currently undergoes major restoration work under UN sponsorship. The 1,000-year-old paintings inside the main temple rank among the oldest surviving examples of their kind, distinctly different from murals in later-built gompas.

We return to Leh in the afternoon.

Overnight in Leh.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Leh: Thiksey, Hemis Gompa & Stok Palace

This morning we head east along the Indus Valley to Thiksey Monastery. Rising in tiers up a hillside above the river, this Yellow Hat complex recalls Lhasa's Potala Palace and houses a monumental statue of Maitreya, the Buddha of the future.

We continue to Hemis Gompa, dramatically hidden in a mountain cleft approximately 50 km/31 mi from Leh on the Indus River's west bank. Hemis ranks as Ladakh's wealthiest and largest monastery and houses a gigantic thangka, one of the world's largest and one of Ladakh's most important religious artifacts. Founded approximately 350 years ago by Stagtshang Rinchen, who came to Ladakh at King Singe Namgyal's invitation, it remains an active centre of Buddhist practice.

Lunch is at leisure near Hemis. We then return toward Leh along the opposite bank of the Indus to Stok, where we visit Stok Palace, the residence of Ladakh's former royal family, whose small museum displays thangkas, ceremonial dress and royal heirlooms.

In the village, Stok Gompa dates to the 14th century and sits hidden behind a screen of trees, its veranda decorated with bright frescoes of the Guardians of the Four Directions. The monastery's library houses a complete set of the Kangyur, the 108 volumes containing the Buddha's teachings, while a new gilded Buddha rises 200 m/656 ft above the village. We reach Leh in the late afternoon.

Overnight in Leh.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Leh: Khardung La Pass & Leh Palace

This morning we take a jeep excursion up the hairpin switchbacks leading to Khardung La Pass at 5470 m/17,946 ft, the world's highest vehicular-accessible pass. The climb provides stunning views of the Zanskar Range and Indus Valley, with frequent yak sightings on high pastures below the pass. Built at tremendous human and financial cost by the Indian Army following Chinese incursions after Tibet's occupation in the late 1950s, this road crosses the Ladakh Range and provides access to the Nubra Valley and Karakoram region.

Later we explore Leh Palace, a striking nine-storey structure perched on a hill overlooking the town. Built in the 17th century by King Sengge Namgyal, this palace served as the royal residence until the 1830s. The design blends Tibetan, Indian, and Mughal influences, with upper floors housing the royal family and lower floors used for stables and storage. The exterior combines sun-dried bricks with wooden frames, reflecting traditional Tibetan-style architecture through sloping walls and narrow windows.

Inside, we wander through deserted halls that once buzzed with royal life. Though faded, the murals offer glimpses into the past, depicting religious motifs and scenes from Ladakhi culture. UNESCO currently undertakes restoration work to preserve the palace's historical authenticity. From the upper floors and balconies, we enjoy panoramic views across Leh and surrounding landscapes, appreciating the town's strategic importance in this high mountain valley.

Overnight in Leh.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Leh - Fly to Delhi

Today we fly from Leh back to Delhi. If time permits, we enjoy some sightseeing in Delhi this afternoon, making the most of our return to lower elevations before tomorrow's onward journey.

Overnight in Delhi (likely an airport area hotel).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Delhi - Paro, Bhutan - Drive to Thimphu

Today we fly to Bhutan, one of the Himalaya's most exclusive destinations. Our descent into Paro ranks among aviation's most thrilling approaches as the aircraft glides into the valley between towering peaks. Red chillies drying on farmhouse roofs come into view as we descend, and crisp mountain air greets us upon landing. Where Ladakh's monasteries stood exposed on barren ridges, Bhutan tucks its dzongs into forested valleys — different landscapes, shared devotion.

We drive approximately one hour to Thimphu at 2320 m/7,612 ft, the nation's capital. En route we see the Iron Bridge Builder Monastery perched on the opposite hillside and cross the Chuzom confluence where stupas in three distinct styles (Bhutanese, Nepalese, and Tibetan) mark the meeting of rivers.

Thimphu presents an engaging mix of traditional and developing: small cafes, bookshops, and handicraft stores line streets where residents wear traditional gho and kira dress. The compact town centre accommodates approximately 100,000 people and lends itself well to exploration on foot. Built along traditional architectural lines and established as capital only in the 1950s, Thimphu serves as Bhutan's administrative centre while maintaining its distinctive character.

Overnight in Thimphu.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Thimphu: Tashichho Dzong & Thimphu Tsechu Festival

This morning we visit the impressive Tashichho Dzong, Bhutan's traditional summer capital and current seat of government. The present building, reconstructed on the site of a dzong erected by Ngawang Namgyal in 1641, retains many features of the original fortress-monastery. This imposing structure houses all government departments and ministries, the King's throne room, the National Assembly chambers, and the nation's largest monastery with over 2,000 monks in residence.

Our departure coincides with the Thimphu Tsechu, an annual festival held at Tashichho Dzong. For three days, masked dancers perform elaborate ceremonies reflecting the deeply rooted religious sentiments of the Bhutanese people. Many dances depict stories of good triumphing over evil, the day of judgement, and moral teachings central to Buddhist philosophy. The pageantry, intricate costumes, and spiritual devotion create an unforgettable spectacle unique to Bhutan's living Buddhist culture.

Overnight in Thimphu.

NOTE: Occasionally we include a festival in another location should announced dates prove suboptimal for our itinerary. The overall experience remains consistent as all tsechus operate on similar concepts with comparable ceremonies, costumes, and customs.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 9 Thimphu - Dochula Pass - Punakha Dzong

This morning we depart Thimphu via the spectacular Dochula Pass at 3031 m/9,944 ft, climbing steeply through forests of pine and cedar with panoramic Himalayan views when weather permits. The drive to Punakha covers 77 km/48 mi and takes approximately three hours.

Today's journey takes us deep into Bhutan's heartland, offering insight into a way of life that has changed remarkably little over centuries. Modern development has brought improved education, healthcare, and electricity to remote areas, yet the small farm-based economy that has sustained local populations for generations remains largely intact. Located at a relatively low 1300 m/4,265 ft elevation in a rain shadow, the Punakha Valley produces most of Bhutan's commercially-grown oranges and fruits. Despite favourable growing conditions, the valley's population remains remarkably sparse. Until recently, Punakha served as Bhutan's winter capital and continues as the winter headquarters of the Je Khenpo (Head Abbot) and his monks.

Upon arrival we visit Punakha Dzong, arguably Bhutan's most beautiful fortress-monastery. This magnificent structure straddles an island at the confluence of the Pho Chu and Mo Chu rivers (male and female tributaries). We've seen monasteries guard mountain passes in Ladakh; here in Bhutan, they guard river valleys. The architectural vocabulary changes, but the principle holds: devotion expressed through placement, not just construction. Built as Bhutan's second dzong, it served as the capital and seat of government until the mid-1950s. All of Bhutan's kings have been crowned here, and the dzong remains the winter residence of the monastic body. Recent magnificent restoration befits its status in Bhutanese history.

Overnight in Punakha.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 10 Punakha - Paro: Paro Dzong & Valley Touring

Today we travel by road to Paro at 2280 m/7,480 ft, set in what many consider the most beautiful of Bhutan's main valleys. Paro Dzong dominates the landscape, perched above the glacial Paro Chu River. This particularly important and historic fortress-monastery has played a central role in Bhutanese history since its initial construction.

Paro thrives as an agricultural valley and hosts some of Bhutan's holiest Buddhist sites. Before roads were built, most of Bhutan's trade flowed through Paro, either from Tibet via Tremo La or from the south via Haa. The valley extends from Jumolhari on the Tibetan border to Chuzom, where the Thimphu and Punakha rivers meet.

The town presents an engaging mix of traditional architecture interspersed with handicraft stores, cafes, and galleries. Situated below the dzong, the town centre is accessible via a traditional cantilever bridge. Chortens (prayer shrines) stand alongside the bridge near Ugyen Pelri Palace. We visit the local monastery at one end of town and, if fortunate, may observe an archery match at the field near Ugyen Pelri Palace, as archery remains Bhutan's national sport and a common community activity.

Overnight in Paro.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Paro: Kyichu Lhakhang, National Museum & Tiger's Nest Viewpoint

This morning we visit Kyichu Lhakhang, one of Bhutan's oldest and most beautiful temples, situated among paddy fields a short drive from town. This temple is venerated as being as holy as the monastery in Lhasa. Nearby, the small Dumtse Lhakhang was built in Tibetan style, and legend claims it flew here from Tibet.

We visit the Paro National Museum, housed in a 17th-century watchtower above the dzong (currently, exhibits are viewed in an adjoining building while the tower undergoes repairs). Opened in 1968, the museum features a renowned collection of fine arts, paintings, and bronzes. Displays include textiles, jewellery, handicrafts, and a chapel on the top floor containing a "tree" depicting main figures from the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Beautiful panoramic views extend across Paro Valley from this elevated position.

We also visit Rinpung Dzong, which serves as headquarters for both local government and the monastic body. At some point during our Paro visit, we drive up the valley to view the famed Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) monastery from a viewpoint. Originally built in the 8th century and reconstructed after a devastating 1998 fire, this iconic monastery clings impossibly to a sheer cliff face 900 m/2,953 ft above the valley floor. Built where devotion met altitude, Tiger's Nest makes literal what we've felt abstractly since Leh: the Himalaya pulls the sacred upward.

Overnight in Paro.

NOTE: Those interested in hiking to Tiger's Nest monastery should consult with your Tour Leader upon arrival. The excursion requires a bus ride followed by a 6-7 hour hike over steep terrain at approximately 2700 m/8,858 ft elevation. Your Tour Leader can provide details and assist with arrangements, including the required special permit.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Paro, Bhutan - Kathmandu, Nepal: Durbar Square & Swayambhunath

Today we fly from Paro to Kathmandu at 1,310 m/4,297 ft, Nepal's capital city.

Wedged between the high Himalaya and the steamy Indian plains, Nepal serves as Asia's very watershed. The country's cultural landscape equals its physical diversity, with peoples belonging to numerous distinctive ethnic groups speaking a host of languages. Massive mountains, golden temples, fluttering prayer flags, Buddhist stupas, and extraordinarily welcoming people make Nepal unforgettable.

Kathmandu reveals itself as an eminently liveable city where pagodas dominate open squares and narrow alleys wind between wooden buildings with intricate fretwork screens. Thousands of years of culture unfold through historic temples and monasteries belonging to both Hindus and Buddhists.

After settling into our hotel, we visit Durbar Square, Kathmandu's central meeting area and a profusion of temples reflecting architectural styles dating from the 11th century onward. This UNESCO World Heritage site was where kings were crowned and ruled. The area comprises three loosely linked squares including the Royal Palace with its gilded gates and elaborate statues. The square throngs with visitors mingling among stalls displaying Nepalese and Tibetan handicrafts.

We continue to Swayambhunath Temple at approximately 1400 m/4,593 ft, Nepal's most significant centre of Buddhist worship. This UNESCO World Heritage site, also known as the Monkey Temple due to its large resident monkey population, has occupied this hilltop location since at least the 5th century. The temple buildings offer excellent views across Kathmandu and its valley.

This afternoon we visit Patan, located just 5 km/3 mi from Kathmandu. Despite such proximity, Patan's preserved character distinguishes it as distinctly different. Patan's Durbar Square contains some of Nepal's finest examples of Newari architecture.

Overnight in Kathmandu.

NOTE: During our Nepal stay, travellers booked on tour code HH1 with Tibet will complete bureaucratic requirements for our Tibet permits through the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu. This process requires at least three days, so we'll explore Nepal's cultural treasures while permits are finalised.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Bhaktapur, Pashupatinath & Boudhanath - Drive to Nagarkot

Today we explore historic Bhaktapur at approximately 1400 m/4,593 ft, a UNESCO World Heritage Site founded in the 12th century. This ancient city contains remarkable Hindu and Buddhist religious sites and art, though the tragic 2015 earthquake caused terrible devastation. Whole streets of traditional houses were lost, and while only a few temples were completely destroyed, the disaster's scars remain clearly visible. Full recovery will require years of dedicated restoration work.

Beyond Bhaktapur, we explore additional Kathmandu Valley sites. Pashupatinath at 1330 m/4,364 ft ranks as perhaps Nepal's most important Hindu temple and one of the subcontinent's most significant Shiva temples, drawing numerous devotees from across India annually. Boudhanath at 1350 m/4,429 ft, among South Asia's largest stupas, has become Tibetan Buddhism's focal point in Nepal. The white mound looms 36 m/118 ft overhead. Located on the ancient trade route to Tibet, this stupa provided a resting place where Tibetan merchants offered prayers for centuries. When refugees fled Tibet in the 1950s, many settled around Boudhanath, establishing numerous gompas and creating Nepal's "Little Tibet." This remains the valley's best location for observing Tibetan lifestyle: monks in maroon robes, prayer wheels spinning, and devotees performing ritual prostrations as they circumambulate the stupa.

Our destination today is Nagarkot at 2195 m/7,201 ft, positioning us perfectly for tomorrow's sunrise viewing.

Overnight in Nagarkot.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Nagarkot Sunrise & Chandragiri Hill Panorama

Before dawn we rise to witness sunrise over the Himalaya from Nagarkot, a popular hill station east of Kathmandu. The viewpoint tower sits

at 2195 m/7,201 ft elevation, providing one of the region's best panoramic views encompassing eight mountain ranges stretching from Annapurna in the west to Makalu in the east. On exceptionally clear days, Mount Everest becomes visible. Weather permitting, we hope to view the Central Himalayan ranges, including the Langtang and Rolwaling ranges.

On our return drive to Kathmandu this afternoon, we ascend Nepal's newest cable car up Chandragiri Hill to approximately 2550 m/8,366 ft for more impressive Himalayan vistas. Opened in 2016, this exciting 10-minute journey carries us to the summit where panoramic views of the snow-capped Himalaya unfold before us. We spend time enjoying this spectacular setting before descending. From these viewpoints, the peaks that separate Nepal from the Tibetan plateau stand impossibly close and impossibly distant — visible, yet beyond reach for most who've come here across the centuries.

This afternoon provides free time in Kathmandu for independent exploration or relaxation.

Overnight in Kathmandu at 1310 m/4,297 ft.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Departure

This morning we depart Kathmandu, our journey through the Himalayan kingdoms complete.

From Delhi's plains to Ladakh's high desert monasteries, from Bhutan's fortress valleys to Nepal's sacred temples and mountain viewpoints — we've traced a vertical arc across the Himalaya. Not just altitude gained and lost, but a journey through landscapes where devotion and geography intertwine. The prayer flags we saw in Leh, the dzongs of Paro, the stupas of Kathmandu — each expressed the same impulse in different valleys, at different elevations. The mountains we viewed from Nagarkot remain beyond our reach, which is honest: some peaks are meant to be seen, not summited. We return changed by what we've witnessed, humbled by what remains.

Bon Voyage! Namaste! Tashi Delek!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast