

THE HIMALAYAN EXPRESS – 6 OCTOBER 2018

OVERVIEW

Tour Date: 6 October 2018 – 30 October 2018

Tour Duration: 25 days

Tour Cost (\$AUD): \$16,550

Single Supplement (\$AUD): \$3,250

In 2006 Travel Directors became the first western company in the world to escort groups on the Himalayan Express and today this trip is one of our most popular. Our 25-day itinerary is a spectacular journey by train and 4WD across the roof of the world.

Our journey begins in the eastern gateway of the Silk Road, Xian, where we visit the famous Terracotta Warriors, discovered by farmers in 1974. We then fly to Xining where we board the unique oxygenated train, 'The Himalayan Express', for the historic journey to the capital of one of the world's most mysterious countries, Tibet. En-route we pass through extraordinary mountain landscapes as the train rolls on to Lhasa. The next leg of our journey takes us by 4WD into the very heart of the Himalaya as far as Rongbuk, the Everest base supply camp on the remote north face, then on to neighbouring Nepal, another fantastic Himalayan kingdom. Finally we venture to an even less-visited and completely unspoilt nation, the ancient Kingdom of Bhutan – the world's last Shangri-La!

Tour Fitness Level: Active

HIMALAYAN EXPRESS - OCT ~~2017~~2018

TOUR ITINERARY

~~07~~06/10/~~2017~~2018 Australia - Singapore

Depart Australia from your chosen airport to Singapore.

~~08~~07/10/~~2017~~2018 Singapore – Xian (D)

On arrival in Singapore we connect with our flight to Xian via Guangzhou.

Depart Singapore SQ 850, 08.20

Arrive Guangzhou 12.20

Depart Guangzhou China Southern CZ 3219, 18.30

Arrive Xian 21.10

After completing customs and immigration formalities we transfer to our hotel.

Grand Mercure Hotel

Xian

~~09~~08/10/~~2017~~2018 Xian (BLD)

Today we visit the extraordinary site of Qin Shihuang's Terracotta Warriors, known as the eighth Wonder of the World. This incredible 'army' consists of 6,000 life-size terracotta figures, which were discovered by farmers digging a well in 1974. The visit is an unforgettable experience. After lunch we visit the Huaqing hot springs that were first recorded during the Zhou Dynasty, more than 3,000 years ago. In the evening we have the chance to experience a cultural show dating back to the Tang Dynasty of more than 1,000 years ago.

~~10~~09/10/~~2017~~2018 Xian (BLD)

Today we continue our tour of Xian with a visit to the superb Shanxi Provincial Museum and the famous Wild Goose Pagoda.

~~11~~10/10/~~2017~~2018 Xian – Xining – Tibet (BL)

This morning we transfer to the airport for our short flight to Xining.

Depart Xian China Eastern Airlines MU 2313, 07.35

Arrive Xining 09.00

On arrival in Xining we explore the city before transferring to the railway station where we board the Himalayan Express for our thrilling journey to Lhasa. The oxygenated train is the first to link China and Tibet and the 1,200-km journey is a truly memorable experience. The track is built largely on permafrost, with four-fifths laid at an altitude of more than 4,000m. The highest point, between Qinghai and Lhasa, reaches 5,072m.

Depart Xining Train Station, 14.05

~~12~~11/10/~~2017~~2018 Onboard train – Lhasa (D)

Early morning we arrive in Golmud where two enormous locomotives are attached to the front of the train to haul us up to the Himalayan Plateau and on to Lhasa.

Treeless plains give way to snow-capped mountains and we pass by the world's highest lake and through the world's highest tunnel as our incredible journey continues. Finally, late afternoon, the train pulls into the Tibetan capital at the conclusion of its epic trip.

Arrive Lhasa 12.00

On arrival in Lhasa we transfer to our hotel.

Brahmaputra Hotel

Lhasa

4312/10/20172018 Lhasa (BLD)

Above the banks of the Lhasa River at an altitude of 3,760m and surrounded by beautiful landscapes, lies the mysterious city of Lhasa which is dominated by the extraordinary architectural wonder, the Potala Palace. Often referred to as 'the bright pearl in the roof of the world', the palace is the traditional winter home of the Dalai Lama. It stands 117m tall, with walls more than three metres thick, and has more than 1,000 rooms. After lunch we visit the old city of Lhasa. This fascinating marketplace is often referred to as 'the window of Tibet', as it showcases Tibetan customs and culture.

4413/10/20172018 Lhasa (BLD)

Today we visit Norbulinka Park. From the mid-18th century each successive Dalai Lama used the park and palace as a summer residence. All religious and political affairs were carried out here and in 1994 UNESCO granted it World Heritage status. In the afternoon we visit the Lhasa Hospital of Tibetan Medicine where we learn about the use of herbs, plants and root vegetables in this ancient science.

4514/10/20172018 Lhasa (BLD)

After breakfast we continue to explore this fascinating city. One of today's highlights is a visit to the extraordinary Sera Monastery. As a part of their study, lamas here must participate in debates to further their comprehension and proceed to more advanced levels of study. The debating traditions in the Sera Monastery are unique and provide an amazing spectacle. In a battle of words, the lamas supplement their efforts by using a variety of gestures including clapping their hands, pushing their partners for an answer, or plucking their prayer beads to win the virtue of the Buddha.

4615/10/20172018 Lhasa – Gyantse (BLD)

Today we begin our amazing journey across the Himalayan Plateau, driving 280 km through magnificent countryside to the ancient city of Gyantse. En-route we picnic by the beautiful turquoise waters of Yamdruk Lake and in the afternoon, pass the 5000m Kanola Glacier, before reaching Gyantse early evening.

Gyantse Hotel

Gyantse

4716/10/20172018 Gyantse – Shigatse (BLD)

The ancient walled town of Gyantse is set in a pretty and fertile valley. This morning we visit the Kunbon Stupa and Pecho Monastery, which embraces all sects of Buddhism in Tibet. We then drive 90 km to Tibet's second-largest city, Shigatse. Meaning 'fertile land', Shigatse is more than 600 years old and sits at the confluence of the Yarlong Tsangpo and Nyangchu rivers. It is the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama and is an important stop for pilgrims travelling between Lhasa and western Tibet.

Tashi Choe Ta Hotel

Shigatse

4817/10/20172018 Shigatse – Tingri (BLD)

After breakfast we drive along the Friendship Highway to the remote town of Tingri. En-route we visit the Sakya Monastery, which resembles a castle in typical Yuan Dynasty style. It contains more than 10,000 volumes of Tibetan books on astronomy, medicine, calligraphy and history. This is another day of awe-inspiring scenery, and we make many scenic stops before getting our first glimpse of magnificent Mount Everest.

Everest Hotel

Tingri

~~19~~18/10/2017~~2018~~ **Tingri – Everest Base Camp – Tingri (BLD)**

After breakfast we drive 100 km to Everest Rongbuk Base Camp. The mountain stands before us, soaring 8,848m into the heavens. There are few sights on earth that challenge the imagination in quite the same way. In the afternoon we visit Rongbuk, which was once the largest monastic centre in the region. It is a settlement that all mountaineers must pass through when attempting the treacherous north face of Everest.

~~20~~19/10/2017~~2018~~ **Tingri – Zhangmu (BLD)**

This morning we leave Tingri and drive across the high Tibetan Plateau to the trade-post town of Nyalam. We then continue to Zhangmu, the border town. En-route we visit the Milarepa Cave, where Tibet's greatest yogi of the 11th century, meditated.

Zhangmu Hotel

Zhangmu

~~21~~20/10/2017~~2018~~ **Zhangmu – Kathmandu (BLD)**

An early morning start today as we descend to the Friendship Bridge that divides Tibet and Nepal. After clearing Chinese border formalities, we walk across the bridge to the Nepalese border town of Kodari from where it is a short drive to the capital, Kathmandu.

Hotel Radisson

Kathmandu

~~22~~21/10/2017~~2018~~ **Kathmandu (BLD)**

The fertile Kathmandu Valley lies at an altitude of 1,200-1,500m. Although small in size, no fewer than seven UNESCO World Heritage sites are to be found within the valley. These architectural wonders are monuments to Nepal's past prosperity and artistry, which essentially make the whole area a living museum. This morning we take a leisurely tour of Kathmandu and the afternoon is free to continue exploring this extraordinary city.

~~23~~22/10/2017~~2018~~ **Kathmandu (BLD)**

Today is extremely special as we immerse ourselves in Nepalese culture, meeting the Kathmandu locals and attending an extraordinary festival.

~~24~~310/2017~~2018~~ **Kathmandu – Thimphu (Bhutan) (BD)**

This morning we transfer to the airport for our flight to Bhutan.

Depart Kathmandu Druk Air KB 401, 15.2508.45

Arrive Paro ~~16.40~~10.05

Our flight across the Himalaya to Bhutan is dramatic, to say the least. The views are simply astonishing as we soar above the highest mountains on earth. Often referred to as 'the last Shangri-La', Bhutan's isolation has protected it from western influences, leaving the country blissfully untouched. The sparsely populated kingdom has a rich cultural heritage that is unique in the Himalaya and a visit here is a step into a timeless and magical world. On arrival in Paro we make the beautiful two-hour drive to the capital, Thimphu.

Hotel Druk

Thimphu

~~25~~24/10/2017~~2018~~ **Thimphu (BLD)**

Today we explore Thimphu, starting with the Folk and Heritage Museum that displays the lives of typical Bhutanese farmers in the medieval period. Bhutan is world-famous for its textiles and later today we visit the Textile Museum. The afternoon is free to explore the downtown area of this charming and relaxing capital.

26/25/10/2017-2018 Thimphu – Punakha (BLD)

This morning we drive across the Dochula Pass, which offers spectacular views over the eastern Himalaya. En-route we pass through fascinating villages and rice fields, where farmers still practise traditional methods, before arriving in Punakha, the former capital city of Bhutan.

Hotel Zangtho Pelri

Punakha

27/26/10/2017-2018 Punakha (BLD)

After breakfast we visit the Temple of the Divine Madman. The 20-minute walk takes us through a fascinating Bhutanese village and picturesque countryside before reaching the hill where the temple is located. The views from here are beautiful.

Afterwards we explore the Punakha Dzong, a stunning fortress located on the confluence of the Mo Chuu and Pho Chuu rivers. Originally this fortress housed 600 monks; today it is the winter home of the central monk body.

28/27/10/2017-2018 Punakha – Paro (BLD)

We leave beautiful Punakha this morning and drive north, returning to the magnificent Paro Valley.

Tiger Nest Resort

Paro

29/28/10/2017-2018 Paro (BLD)

Our final day in Bhutan is an extra-special one: we visit the breathtaking Taktsang Monastery, more commonly known as the 'Tiger's Nest'. Clinging to a mountain ledge, this world-famous monastery is steeped in myths and legends. It is said that in the 7th century, Guru Rinpoche flew from Tibet on the back of a flying tigress and established Buddhism in Bhutan here. It is a 90-minute trek up to the monastery with spectacular views all the way. If you wish you can hire a horse to make the ascent, or you can simply stay put and admire this extraordinary construction from the valley below.

30/29/10/2017-2018 Paro – Bangkok – Singapore (B)

This morning we transfer to the airport for our flight to Singapore via Bangkok.

Depart Paro Druk Air KB 140, 11.45

Arrive Bangkok 17.15

Depart Bangkok Singapore Airlines SQ 981, 21.00

31/30/10/2017-2018 Singapore – Australia

Arrive Singapore 00.25

Arrive Australia and connect to our home port.