

## THE HIMALAYAN EXPRESS

13 OCTOBER 2024 - 6 NOVEMBER 2024

Tour Cost (\$AUD):\$19,950  
Single Supplement (\$AUD):\$3,600

Tour Duration:25 days



### OVERVIEW

*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 rail and road 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 take a bullet train 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 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

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## TOUR MAP



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### ITINERARY

#### 13/10/2024 Australia – Singapore

Depart Australia from your chosen airport to Singapore.

#### 14/10/2024 Singapore – Xian (L)

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 3203, 17.05**

**Arrive Xian 20.00**

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

#### Grand Mercure Hotel

Xian

#### 15/10/2024 Xian (BLD)

Xian is the eastern gateway to the Silk Road and a fascinating city with more than 3,000 years of history. Today we begin our exploration of this former capital with a visit to the superb Shanxi Provincial Museum and the famous Wild Goose Pagoda. 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.

#### 16/10/2024 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.

#### 17/10/2024 Xian – Xining – Tibet (BD)

This morning we transfer to the train station to catch a bullet train to Xining before boarding 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 Xian Train Station 09.30**

**Arrive Xining 14.34**

**Depart Xining Train Station, 21.10**

**18/10/2024 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 17.04**

On arrival in Lhasa we transfer to our hotel.

#### Lhasa Hotel

Lhasa

#### 19/10/2024 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. Today we embark on a city tour beginning at the fascinating marketplace – often referred to as 'the window of Tibet', as it showcases Tibetan customs and culture. We also visit Norbulinka Park, a

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UNESCO World Heritage site since 1994. From the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century each successive Dalai Lama used the park and palace as a summer residence, and all religious and political affairs were carried out here.

### 20/10/2024 Lhasa (BLD)

Often referred to as 'the bright pearl in the roof of the world', the Potala 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. This morning we explore the palace and its dozens of magnificent chapels, golden stupas and prayer halls. After lunch we drive the short distance 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.

### 21/10/2024 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 Manor Hotel

Gyantse

### 22/10/2024 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.

### Shigatse UrCove Hotel

Shigatse

### 23/10/2024 Shigatse – Tingri (BLD)

This morning we walk to Tashilunpo Monastery – the largest functioning religious institution in Tibet and one of the most important monastic sites. The huge golden statue of the Future Buddha is the largest gilded statue in the world and is a truly impressive sight. After lunch we drive along the Friendship Highway to the remote town of Tingri. This is another day of awe-inspiring scenery, and we make many scenic stops before getting our first glimpse of magnificent Mount Everest. We arrive at Tingri as the sun begins to set behind her northern face.

### Everest Hotel

Tingri

### 24/10/2024 Tingri – Everest Base Camp – Tingri (BLD)

Today is a particularly exciting one as 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.

### 25/10/2024 Tingri – Gyirong (BLD)

After breakfast we begin our journey to the border

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town of Gyirong (sometimes spelt Kyirong or Kerung). We enjoy lunch en route, surrounded by the amazing hills and mountains. Late afternoon we arrive at Gyirong and transfer to our hotel.

### Gyirong Business Hotel

Gyirong

### 26/10/2024 Gyirong – Trishuli (BLD)

Early this morning we set out for the border crossing point – a drive of around one hour. On arrival we complete customs and immigration formalities then walk 150 metres across the bridge into Nepal. After completing immigration procedures on the Nepalese side, we board 4WDs for the journey to Trishuli. This is an area of magnificent natural beauty at the edge of the Langtang Valley, with many prominent mountain peaks including Langtang Lirung (7246m) and Gangchenpo (6388m). This area is one of the most popular trekking destinations in Nepal.

### Water Tower Hotel

Trishuli

### 27/10/2024 Trishuli – Kathmandu (BLD)

After breakfast we begin the drive to Kathmandu stopping en route for photo stops, on this remarkable remote and scenic journey. On arrival in Kathmandu we check into our hotel. The afternoon is at leisure.

### Hotel Radisson

Kathmandu

### 28/10/2024 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. Today we take a leisurely tour of Kathmandu and the remarkable Boudhanath Stupa that dominates the city. In the afternoon we take a walking tour of the vibrant Thamel district.

### 29/10/2024 Kathmandu (BLD)

Today we continue exploring Kathmandu, visiting the Monkey Temple and the famous Durbar Square.

### 30/10/2024 Kathmandu – Thimphu (Bhutan) (BD)

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

**Depart Kathmandu Druk Air KB 401, 09.10**  
**Arrive Paro 10.30**

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 begin our two-hour drive to the capital Thimphu.

### Hotel Druk

Thimphu

### 31/10/2024 Thimphu (BLD)

Today we explore Thimphu, starting with the memorial stupa. Bhutan is world-famous for its textiles and we also visit the Textile Museum. Another very important part of Bhutanese culture and tradition is handmade paper making. Historically paper has been made to provide Buddhist monasteries with paper for woodblock and manuscript books, and for writing prayers and mantras. Today handmade paper making continues



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to preserve and promote this age-old tradition, and this afternoon we visit a factory to observe this fascinating process.

### 01/11/2024 Thimphu – Punakha (BLD)

This morning we drive across the Dochula Pass, which offers spectacular views over the eastern Himalaya as we head to Punakha, the former capital city of Bhutan. En-route we pass through villages and rice fields, where farmers still practise traditional methods. We visit the Temple of the Divine Madman: the 20-minute walk takes us through an untouched Bhutanese village and picturesque countryside before reaching the hill where the temple is located. The views from here are breathtaking. Later we continue to Punakha and check into our hotel.

#### Spirit Lodge

Punakha

### 02/11/2024 Punakha (BLD)

A leisurely start today as we explore the Punakha Valley. 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.

### 03/11/2024 Punakha – Paro (BLD)

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

#### Tiger Nest Resort

Paro

### 04/11/2024 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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.

### 05/11/2024 Paro – Bangkok (BL)

After a leisurely morning we transfer to the airport for our flight to Bangkok.

**Depart Paro Druk Air KB 152, 16.20**  
**Arrive Bangkok 20.30**

On arrival in Bangkok we transfer to our hotel for an overnight stay.

#### Novotel

Bangkok

### 06/11/2024 Bangkok – Singapore – Australia (B)

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

**Depart Bangkok Singapore Airlines SQ 707, 12.05**  
**Arrive Singapore 15.35**

In Singapore we connect with the flight to our chosen destination in Australia.