Mercury Holidays

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Kathmandu, Thimphu, Punakha Valley & Paro

Nestled between China and India, Bhutan is largely isolated from the outside world and has remained virtually unchanged for centuries. Boasting stunning natural scenery and quiet townships, the country is dotted with ancient Buddhist temples, welcoming smiles and crimson-robed monks. Ascend to Bhutan's breathtaking cliff-top Tiger's Nest monastery, explore the wonderful capital of Thimphu and become one of the privileged few to say they have experienced this beautiful yet mysterious mountain kingdom.

This document aims to give you all the information that you require for a smooth and comfortable trip to Bhutan. Please take the time to read this dossier to familiarise yourself with all the aspects of our tour. It includes important information such as flight details, visa requirements and travel insurance.

Your included meal guide:
B = Breakfast, L = Lunch, D = Dinner

DAY 1: UK to Kathmandu, Nepal
Depart London on your scheduled overnight flight to Kathmandu in Nepal.

DAY 2: Kathmandu
On arrival in Kathmandu, you will be met by your guide and transferred to your hotel.

DAY 3: Kathmandu to Thimphu B/L/D
Following breakfast fly to Paro in Bhutan where your guide will welcome you into the fresh Himalayan air. After lunch, commence a short tour of the nearby Rimpung Dzong to learn about the painting of the great Saint Milarepa. Tracing the Pachu River, your group will arrive in the city of Thimphu in the early evening.

DAY 4: Thimphu B/L/D
Once a rustic village sitting in a low lying broad, Thimphu is the nation's bustling capital and the only city in the world that does not use traffic lights. Today enjoy a full day tour, beginning with the Memorial Chorten where locals gather to spin their prayer wheels and murmur Buddhist mantras. Next visit the 12th century Changangkha temple and Drubthob Nunnery before continuing to the National library to see some of the most ancient Buddhist texts. After lunch a trip to the Painting School reveals where students undergo a six year training course in Bhutan's traditional arts. Before dinner, make a short drive to the large golden Buddha known as Kuensel Phodrang, situated on a hill with views over the capital.
Please note that for trips between mid-November and mid-March, the visit to the Painting School will be replaced with a visit to the traditional paper making factory in Thimphu.

DAY 5: Thimphu to Punakha B/L/D
After an early breakfast take a scenic drive to Punakha across the Dochula pass, which on a clear day affords stunning vistas of the snow-capped Himalayan peaks. On arrival in Punakha visit the Punakha Dzong, also known as the Palace of Happiness, the winter headquarters for hundreds of monks who migrate from Thimphu to enjoy its warmer climate.

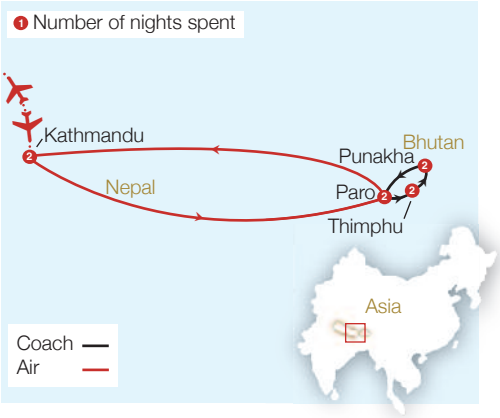
DAY 6: Punakha B/L/D
This morning drive to Yabesa village to begin a gentle yet beautiful hike to Khamsum Vuelley Namgyal Chorten, a monument perched high on a hill of the Punakha Valley built to bring peace, stability and harmony to the world. Later visit Chimi Lhakhang, the temple of the Drukpa Kuenly who famously revolted against orthodox Buddhism in the 14th century.

DAY 7: Punakha to Paro B/L/D
Departing Punakha after breakfast begin the journey to Paro, stopping en route to visit Simtokha Dzong, the oldest in all the Kingdom. Arriving into Paro, you will have some time to look around the local handicraft shops in the town before dinner.

DAY 8: Paro B/L/D
Today includes one of the highlights of any trip to Bhutan: a horseback ride up to the famed Tiger's Nest Monastery clinging to a granite cliff more than 3,000m above sea level. Local lore claims that it is here that Guru Padmasambaya arrived on the back of a tigress in the 8th century and then proceeded to meditate for three months.

DAY 9: Paro to Kathmandu B
After a morning flight to Kathmandu begin your foray into Nepal's capital city visiting Boudhanath and the ancient religious complex of Swayambhunath. Finally return to Patan to explore the enchanting melange of temples and former royal palaces of Durbar square before concluding your day with a trip in Thamel for a chance to barter for souvenirs.

DAY 10: Kathmandu to the UK or Extension B
Transfer to the airport for your flight back to the UK, or continue on to your chosen extension.



Your hotels

Kathmandu (2 nights): 4★ Hotel Himalaya - Sahid Shukra Marg, Kathmandu, Nepal 44700, Nepal. Contact number: 00977 1-5523900

Thimphu (2 nights): 3★ Gyelsa Boutique - Jungchub lam, 11001 Thimphu, Bhutan. Contact number: 00975-17111939

Punakha (2 nights): 3★ Drubchhu Resort - P.O Box No. : 777, Punakha, Bhutan. Contact number: 00975 (02) 376237

Paro (2 nights): 3★ Tenzinling Resort - Lango, Paro, Bhutan. Contact number: 00975 8 272773

All accommodation is 4★ in Nepal and 4★ in Bhutan and features an en-suite bathroom, air-conditioning/heating, TV and tea/coffee making facilities. Mercury Holidays has visited and inspected all of the hotels to ensure that they meet the high standards of service which we require for our clients. If the hotels detailed are not available, alternatives will be used of a similar standard. Final confirmation of your hotels will be sent in a document approximately two weeks before you travel.

Meals

Breakfast is always western style and served in the hotel each morning. Lunch and dinner, where included, will either be taken at local restaurants or at your hotel. Depending on the size of the group, meals will either be buffet style or a selection of dishes served at your table. Options generally include Bhutanese, Indian, vegetarian and, in larger towns, Western and Chinese cuisine. Sometimes, meal options for western travellers can be a little on the bland side as local Bhutanese food is heavily seasoned with red chilies. If you have a good sense of adventure, feel free to tell your guide you would like to try the local dishes – the most popular is 'Ema Datse', a vegetarian dish made of cheese and chili. A typical local meal features red rice served with Ema Datse, some local seasonal vegetables and a little dried meat cooked with very hot chilies.

On your arrival

On your arrival you will be met by a representative from our local agent, Bhutan Travel Bureau, holding a sign displaying: "Mercury Holidays". The Mercury Holidays/Bhutan representative will show you to your transfer vehicle. Your guide will be on hand 24 hours a day should you have any queries.

However, if you need to contact Bhutan Travel Bureau during your stay the details are:
Chorten Namgay
Bhutan Travel Bureau (BTB)
PO Box 959, Thimphu, Bhutan
Contact: 00975 2 332760
chorten@btb.com.bt

Emergency contact information

Please find below the **emergency** contact details for **Bhutan Travel Bureau**
Telephone number
Mobile: 00975 17 11 4 22

Travelling Times

Paro – Thimphu = 65kms (approximately 1 hour). Thimphu – Punakha = 77 kms (approximately 4 hours). Please note that the road from Paro to Thimphu is of good standard, however, the road from Thimphu to Punakha is currently under construction. There are frequent road blocks (which your guide will know the times of and work your itinerary around the timings) and the surface can be bumpy in parts.

Visas - IMPORTANT

British passport holders do not need to obtain a visa for Nepal prior to departure. A Nepalese visa can be purchased on arrival into Kathmandu; you will need to download a form from the Nepal Embassy website and present this completed form on arrival at immigration together with a passport sized photograph (we recommend taking a couple spare) and payment (currently USD $25). When applying for the visa on arrival you will need to ensure you apply for a multiple entry visa. We recommend you check the following website before travelling for all the most up to date advice, requirements and any changes www.nepembassy.org.uk/visa.

British passport holders do need to obtain a visa for Bhutan prior to travel. We have included this in the cost of your tour and will apply for this on your behalf but for us to do this it is essential that you supply us with a colour photocopy of the photo page of your passport you will be travelling on at least 30 days before you leave the UK. You can either scan or email this to us or put a copy in the post. It is essential that you travel on the passport that you have provided us a copy of and that your passport has at least 6 months validity after your trip ends.We strongly advise you to check with your destinations' Tourist Board or Embassy for the most up-to-date guidelines regarding required passport validity.

Insurance

You must obtain suitable travel insurance prior to departure. Mercury Holidays is partnered with Holiday Extras which offer insurance at the following prices: Worldwide insurance, excluding the USA.

Age in years	Up to 64	65-74	75-85
Up to 17 days cover	£42	£79	£135

For all persons 86 years and over, please contact us for insurance prices. If you have an existing policy with another company, please ensure you provide us with the name of your insurer, policy number and their 24 hour emergency contact number as soon as possible. Mercury Holidays will not be liable for any costs incurred by you due to your failure to take out suitable travel insurance from the date of booking.

Tour Guides

This is a fully escorted tour, meaning that you will be met on arrival in Kathmandu and will be accompanied by a guide throughout your stay ensuring that you have first-hand knowledge at all times. Please note that you will not be accompanied on the return flight from Kathmandu to Paro – there will be a different guide in Nepal and Bhutan.

Tipping

Tipping is not compulsory and is at your discretion. Should you wish to tip, we recommend to tip your guide approx. USD $5 per person per day and your driver approx. USD $3 per person per day. You can give the tips to the driver/guide at the end of the tour. Tips are accepted in the local currency, US dollars, Euros and British pounds.

Health and Vaccinations

We recommend that you consult your local GP for advice on vaccinations and travel health before departure. As tap water is not safe to drink in the Himalayas, only drink bottled mineral water which is readily available in hotels, shops and restaurants. You should also avoid salads which may be washed in unhygienic water.

Physical Accessibility

This tour is accessible to most people with a good level of fitness and mobility. It involves full days of sightseeing, often on foot and includes some climbing of stairs and getting on and off coaches. This tour is not suitable for anyone with walking difficulties.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

The tour also includes a full day hike to the Tiger's Nest Monastery in Paro, Bhutan. Whilst a horse ride to the top is included, they can only take you so far and towards the end of the trek, to get to the very top of the Monastery, there are around 800 steps that must be walked on foot. You will also need to descend the entire way from the monastery as horses cannot take passengers down as the path is steep and uneven. It is important that you make us aware of any health issues before you travel. Please note that it may not be recommended for you to participate in the Tiger's Nest Monastery excursion if you are not in good physical health.

Group Size

The minimum number of travellers in your group will be 3, and the maximum will be 40. If in the unlikely event there are less than 3 people booked on your tour date then you may be asked to change to a different date or will have the choice to pay a supplement to have a private tour. A full refund will be made available to you should this alternative not be suitable.

Currency Exchange - IMPORTANT

The currency in Nepal is the Nepalese Rupee (NPR) and the currency in Bhutan is the Bhutanese Ngultrum (BTN). The Bhutanese Ngultrum is officially pegged to the Indian Rupee and Indian currency is accepted all over Bhutan. You will be able to exchange cash (but not travellers cheques) at the foreign exchange desk at Paro Airport and Bank of Bhutan branches in major towns such as Paro and Thimphu. Credit cards have limited acceptability in Bhutan, particularly in local shops and for smaller payments. There are ATMs in Thimphu and Paro but they generally only accept local cards, therefore, it is important that you take sufficient cash to exchange with you.

Sale of Tobacco products in Bhutan

Selling or buying of tobacco and tobacco products is banned in Bhutan. However, bringing in products for personal consumption is allowed. If bringing in tobacco products to Bhutan you may need to pay a tobacco tax upon arrival. Any tobacco products will be subject to a total of 200% tax on the value of the product.

Personal Expenses

You will need to take money with you to cover any personal purchases such as souvenirs, laundry and extra drinks and snacks. Approximately £300 per person will be sufficient for the durations of the tour, depending on how much of a bargain-hunter you are!

Itinerary Changes

The order of events and sightseeing may vary according to local conditions or for operational purposes. For this reason, we have indicated approximate times only. Your local guide will inform you of any schedule changes as they are informed of them. Some road construction and/or weather conditions may lengthen the driving times. Our intention is to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however order of events and sightseeing may vary according to local conditions.

What to Pack

- Sunscreen, insect repellent and hat
- Waterproof lightweight jacket
- Comfortable walking shoes
- Flip flops or sandals (shoes that are easy to remove when going into religious buildings)
- Long, lightweight skirts or trousers and long sleeved tops (you will need to have your legs and arms covered when going into religious buildings)
- Earplugs (there are quite a few stray dogs, particularly in the larger towns, whilst these do not pose a threat they can be quite noisy at night!)
- Camera and charger
- A plug adaptor - three different plug sockets are used, so it is best to bring a multi adapter
- Small supply of toilet paper to carry with you during the days as not all public toilets will have readily available paper at all times. In cities where there are flush toilets you will usually find a wastebasket next to the toilet as most sewage systems cannot handle paper
- Leave plenty of space in your case for shopping

Flight and Airport Information

Your flight is to Kathmandu International Airport with Jet Airways (9W), departing from London Heathrow Terminal 4 and flying via Delhi.

Route	Depart	Arrive	Flight Duration	Flight Number
Heathrow - Delhi	20:50	10:40	8 hours 30 minutes	9W121
Delhi - Kathmandu	13:40	15:30	1 hour 45 minutes	9W262
Kathmandu - Paro	09:05	10:35	45 minutes	B3772
Paro - Kathmandu	07:30	08:25	40 minutes	B3771
Kathmandu - Delhi	08:40	10:20	1 hour 45 minutes	9W263
Delhi - Heathrow	13:30	17:40	9 hours 15 minutes	9W122

IMPORTANT: Please note that all flight times are subject to change. Final flight details will be confirmed on your e-ticket and final documentation which will be sent to you approximately 10 days before departure.

Baggage Allowance

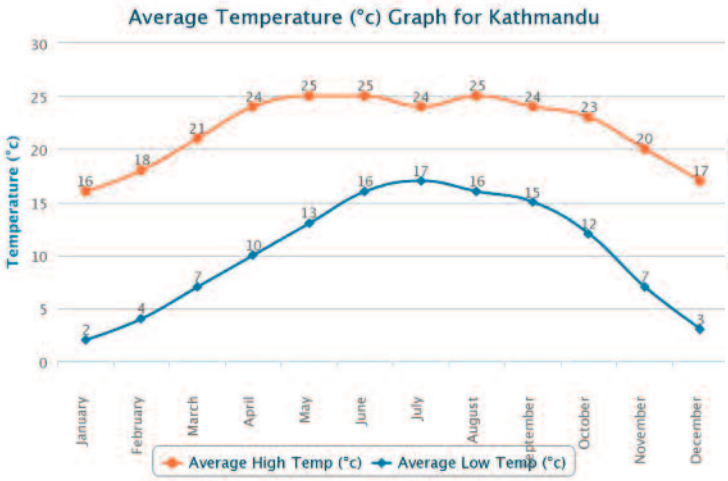
Baggage allowance (per person): Each passenger is entitled to 23kg of hold luggage and hand luggage of 7kg not exceeding 55 cm x 35 cm x 25 cm in size. Weight restrictions will be finalized on E-ticket receipt. Should you wish to take additional luggage you will need to pay extra at check-in. Check-in should be at least 3 hours before departure. Your return flight from Kathmandu to Paro will be with Bhutan Airlines (in some cases this may be with Druk Air). Each passenger is entitled to 20kg of hold luggage and hand luggage of 7kg not exceeding 55cm x 40 cm x 20 cm and a maximum weight of 7kg.

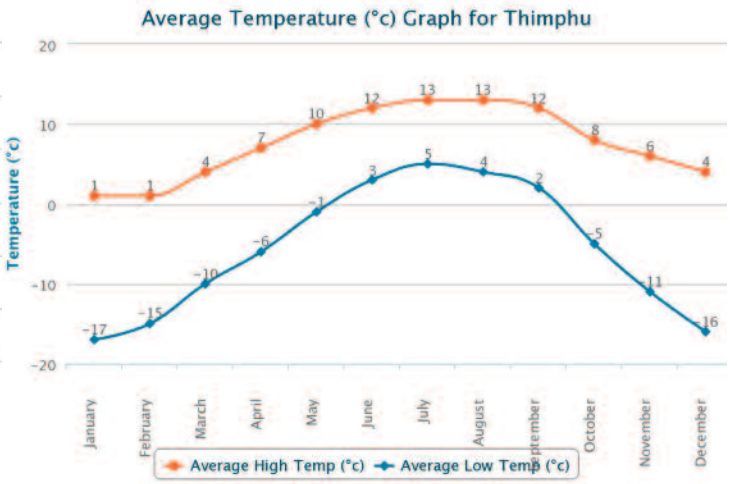
Airport Extras

If you wish to arrange Airport car parking, lounges or accommodation at preferential rates, we recommend you book this in advance with Holiday Extras - Tel. 0871 360 2000, quoting HX313.

Weather and Climate

Weather can vary quite considerably throughout the year, so please familiarise yourself with the climate charts below.





MercuryHolidays

A TASTE OF INDIA
Extension

Travelling from Delhi to Agra, this 3 night extension takes you on a tour through India's capital as well as the magnificent Taj Mahal.

This document aims to give you all the information which you will require during your extension to India.

Your included meal guide:
B = Breakfast, L = Lunch, D = Dinner

DAY 10: Kathmandu to Delhi B/L/D
Transfer to Kathmandu airport for your flight to Delhi. On arrival you will be met and transferred to your hotel in time for lunch. After this, a short tour of the beautifully planned city of New Delhi will follow. Offering you a taste of its imperial glory, you'll drive past the India Gate, President's House, Parliament Building and visit the Birla Temple, made purely out of 2,000 tons of Rajasthani white marble. Continue on to the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial and the 12th century Qutab Minar, the tallest stone tower in India.

DAY 11: Delhi to Agra B/L/D
After breakfast, you will be driven to Agra, arriving at your hotel in time for lunch. Despite being a small city, Agra was once the capital of the mighty Mughal dynasty whose strength manifested itself in the huge forts and buildings built to maintain its power. During the afternoon, you will visit one of The Seven Wonders of the World, the Taj Mahal. Words do not do this remarkable palace justice; it really must be seen to be appreciate its stupendous beauty. Taking 17 years to build, the heartbroken Mughal Emperor Shahjahan dedicated this monument of love to his deceased wife to enshrine her mortal remains.

DAY 12: Agra to Delhi B/L/D
This magical day starts after breakfast with a visit to Agra Fort, which was built in 1565 and boasts grand palaces, gigantic pavilions and spectacular courtyards. After lunch return to Delhi to spend the evening.

DAY 13: Delhi to the UK B
Transfer to the airport for your flight back to London.

Hotel Information

Delhi (2 nights): 5★ The Park Hotel - 15 Parliament Street, New Delhi, Delhi 110001, India. Contact number: 0091 11 2374 3000
Agra (1 night): 4★ Mansingh Palace - Fatehabad Road, Vibhav Nagar, Tajganj, Agra, Uttar, Pradesh 282001, India. Contact number: 0091 562 233 1771.

Meals
Breakfast is always western style and served in the hotel each morning. Lunch and dinner will generally be taken in local restaurants or at your hotel.
A variety of restaurants are visited giving you the chance to experience a range of dishes and flavours.

Currency Exchange
The currency in India is the Rupee or Rs. The Rupee is a closed currency, meaning you cannot buy currency before you travel and officially you are not allowed to take any cash out of India. US Dollars and GBP are also widely accepted in India should you wish to keep an alternative currency on you.

Tour Guides
This is a fully escorted tour, meaning that you will be met on arrival by your national guide who will remain with you for the duration of your trip. You will also be joined by a local guide in each of the cities which you visit, ensuring that you have first-hand knowledge at all times.

Tipping
Tipping is not compulsory & is at your discretion. Should you wish to tip, this will be collected by your guide at the end of your tour for your convenience. It is asked that if you do not tip in the local currency, please do not give coins as these are difficult to exchange.

Travel Plug Adaptor
The voltage in India is 220 Volts with plugs and sockets having either grounded 3 pin connections or ungrounded 2 pin connections. Should you plan to use your own hairdryer, travel iron, video camera, battery charger, electric shaver etc, it is advisable to bring a multi-adaptor.

Visas
A visa is required for entry into India. British Citizen Passport Holders will need to obtain an e-Tourist Visa (eTV) for travel to India. We work closely with The Travel Visa Company who will be able to arrange your visa on your behalf. Please call them on 01270 250 590 and quote "Mercury Holidays". The cost of the visa is approximately £72 per person. The Travel Visa Company can only apply for this 30 days before your proposed travel date and takes around 10 working days to issue. It is only valid for a 30 day single entry stay from the date of arrival. When calling the Travel Visa Company they will advise you of any changes to the fees or the procedure, they will also advise you of all information they will require in order to apply for the visa.

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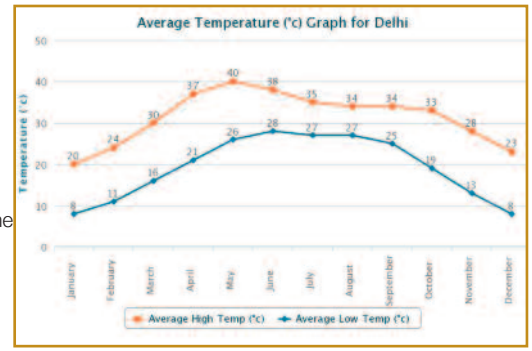

Flight Information

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