



Coates Wildlife Tours

Specialist in nature tours since 1986

Trip Dossier

18 Day Bhutan - The Last Shangri-La

Ex Bangkok - Bangkok

4 - 21 November 2018

Highlights: Dzongs - Chortens - lhakhans - Taktsang Monastery - Yonkala Forest - Thrumshing La National Park.



This comprehensive, 18 day, escorted tour of this relatively isolated country will take you through the prime botanical and wildlife sites in Bhutan. Discover the natural richness of this eastern Himalayan region. The Land of the Dragon, as Bhutan is known to its inhabitants, has always been the most fiercely independent Himalayan kingdom. It's a hidden kingdom, where it seems time has stood still. Bhutan carefully refrains from allowing mass tourism, in order to preserve its unique environment and heritage.

Taxes and royalties to maintain the country's infrastructure and sustain its progress constitutes a large portion of the cost of visiting Bhutan, making it one of the most expensive destinations in the region. We can assure you that the cost is well worth it! A country that few have visited, Bhutan is one of the last strongholds of Tibetan Buddhism, and its peaceful and fun-loving people are proud and elegant, with a timeless culture and dress.

Vast Dzongs (beautiful medieval buildings that incorporate a monastery, village and fort in one) dot the countryside, along with Chortens (shrines) and lhakhans (temples). A highlight of the tour will be a visit to the magnificent Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest) near Paro.

Bhutan has been rated as one of the top ten global hot spots of the world due to its pristine forests, that provide habitats for a diverse range of flora and fauna.

It is estimated that over 600 bird species inhabit the unspoiled forests. The trees are clothed in beautiful epiphytic orchids, lichens, ferns and mosses. The forests also harbour some of the most exotic plant species of the eastern Himalayas, with over 50 species of Rhododendron, Magnolias and an amazing variety of medicinal plants.

Home to snow leopards, blue sheep, red pandas, Asian elephants and tigers, Bhutan's environment is strictly protected. The result will provide you with a rare encounter with a lost kingdom, a unique land and its wonderful people.

It is a remarkable country that offers the opportunity to see not only the exquisite Himalayan scenery but also its rich and ancient traditions in both remote villages and in the capital. Few people have been privileged enough to experience Bhutan, and in this age of superpowers this small but fragile nation of traditional culture is a slice of the old world that may be denied to us in future.

Itinerary

Day 1 Bangkok to Paro

Our very early morning flight to Paro departs Bangkok at 6.30am (meet Martin Curtis for group check in at 4.00am). We arrive in Paro around 10.30 a.m. (Sunday is a great day to arrive as there are always archery matches in progress on the way from the airport – also the weekly Paro vegetable market.) Drive out to our hotel resort for lunch, then 4kms back to Paro to look at the imposing dzong and visit the excellent museum, which has a brilliant natural history section.

Accommodation: Kichu Resort, Paro LD

Day 2 Paro - Tiger's Nest - Paro

Drive 10 kms to the car park below famous Taktshang (Tiger's Nest) monastery. Walk up through the forest to monastery (3 hours). Lunch at the viewpoint restaurant. Descend to bus, drive further 15 minutes to small village of Drugyel Dzong. If time permits, we can drive a short way further up the Paro valley to the end of the road for short walk into the forest (birding opportunities.)

Accommodation: Kichu Resort, Paro BLD

Day 3 Paro to Thimpu

This morning we leave Paro behind as we head to Thimpu, the small capital "city" of Bhutan. We will be there by mid- morning, and can visit the giant seated Buddha which is on the edge of the forest above the town. Optional short walk through the forest before lunch for birds, plants and trees. After lunch, various unique sights to visit in this fascinating city.

Accommodation: Riverview Hotel BLD

Day 4 Thimpu

Spend the whole day in Thimpu. Options include the reserve of Bhutan's national animal the takin, from where we will take another walk (optional) through the forest above the town. Also visits to the traditional paper-making factory, the school of traditional arts (great for paintings & traditional souvenirs) and many other options. Also shopping (especially for bird and flower books, for those who need them.)

Accommodation: Riverview Hotel BLD

Day 5 Thimpu to Wangdue Phrodang

Drive from Thimpu to Wangdue Phrodang (3 hours). On the way, we stop on top of the Dochu La (3400m) for views of the Himalayas and of the 108 chortens. Down the other side we will visit the Royal Botanical gardens which are a haven for bird and animal life, as well as having a great display of native plants and trees. We will lunch here, before dropping down to the Punakha valley for a visit to the famous and magnificent Punakha Dzong. Then drive a short way up the Dang Chhu valley to the idyllic accommodation on the banks of the rushing river (birding and animal opportunities).

Accommodation: Kichu Resort, Chuzomza BLD

Day 6 Wangdue Phrodrang

Using this lovely resort as a base, we drive up the newly constructed (rough) road above the Mo Chhu river, through Tashigang towards the alpine settlement of Gasa deep in the heart of the Jingme Dorji National Park. Hopefully we will get some good views of Himalayan peaks. This is a great birding area. Return to the Kichu resort.

Accommodation: Kichu Resort, Chuzomza BLD

Day 7 Wangdue Phrodrang to Gangtey

We will drive up towards the Pele La pass (3400m) looking for wildlife on the way. Just before the pass we turn off south into the Phobjika valley and to the small village of Gangtey. We will lunch here and check into the newly constructed Kichu Resort Hotel. After lunch we will visit the small information centre set up about the endangered black-necked cranes, which should have arrived here a few days ago. We will do a short walk (optional) through the valley to see the cranes, which we hope have arrived on time.

Accommodation: Kichu Resort, Phobjika BLD

Day 8 Gangtey to Trongsa

Today is the date of the annual tshechu (festival) celebrating the return of the cranes for the winter. Lots of traditional Bhutanese dances and singing in the grounds of the small monastery, with all the local people in their national dress. We will spend several hours here, before we carry on driving East over the Pele La (3400m) and down to the small town of Trongsa, which has the most amazing dzong in Bhutan. Lots of opportunities for looking at birds and plants on the way. If we have time, visit to the dzong (or we can do it on our return.)

Accommodation: Yangkhill resort, Trongsa BLD

Day 9 Trongsa to Tingtinbi

We drive down a minor road above the true left bank of the Mangde Chhu river, which lies at the bottom of a deep gorge, and into a sub-tropical region of the country, close to the Royal Manas National Park, an area rich in birdlife and sub-tropical vegetation. About 5 hours driving in total and the road can be very rough.

Accommodation: Tented camp at Tingtinbi BLD

Day 10 Tingtinbi

Stay a second night at Tingtinbi. Walking, birding and wildlife opportunities abound in this bio-diversity hotspot at the crossroads of the Royal Manas, Black Mountain and Thrumshing La National Parks.

Accommodation: Tented camp at Tingtinbi BLD

Day 11 Tingtinbi to Trongsa

Slow scenic drive back up the deep gorge alongside the Mangde Chhu. About 5 hours driving in total. Reasonably early arrival back at our luxurious hotel at Trongsa.

Accommodation: Yangkhill Resort Hotel, Trongsa BLD

Day 12 Trongsa to Yonkala

Early departure to drive over the Yotang La into the region of Bumthang, past excellent textile factory at Chhumney (good souvenirs) By-pass Jakar and drive the new road over the scenic Shertang La to Ura. On the way we will hopefully get spectacular views of Gangkar Punesum, the world's highest unclimbed mountain (7546m).

We then drive what has been called the most scenic road in Bhutan over two more high Passes (La's) including the Thrumshing La, a hotspot for red pandas and other rare wildlife. We camp below here at Yonkala, in the heart of the Thrumshing La National Park. Lots of time for walking through the forest to look for birds and flowers. The Yonkala Forest area is said to be the best birding region in Bhutan.

Accommodation: Tented camp at Yonkala BLD

Day 13 Yonkala

Today we continue our exploration of Yonkala. We can descend further down the valley towards the sub-tropical area around the small town of Mongar and the spectacular gorge of the Puri Chhu river.

Accommodation: Tented camp at Yonkala BLD

Day 14 Yonkala to Jakar

We begin making our way back across the country to the west of Bhutan. We will do some short walks through the forest on our way, looking for more birds. We then return over the Thrumshing La to the Bumthang region. Stay the night in the chief town of this region, Jakar, where there is a royal palace.

Accommodation: Kichu resort, Jakar BLD

Included

- All transfers and transportation;
- 2 crew members - Coates Wildlife Tours escort and a local English speaking guide;
- Return Bhutan Airlines flights from Bangkok to Paro.
- Bhutan visa fees, taxes and permits;
- Bhutan Accommodation with all meals;
- Sightseeing with entrance fees;
- Two person tents for camping;
- Tips and Gratuities for our Bus Driver and Local Bhutanese Guide.

Not Included

- Tips and gratuities to local staff other than our driver and local guide;
- Alcoholic, carbonated & any other beverages in hotels;
- Sleeping bag / Pillow for camping days;
- Travel insurance (very strongly recommended);
- Travel expenses to and from Bangkok;
- Pre and post tour accommodation in Bangkok;
- All other private expenses (e.g. laundry, telephone calls, camera batteries);
- Entrance fees or activity costs other than those included above.



Tour Information

Coates Wildlife Tours Escort:

Martin Curtis along with Dhendup, a local naturalist guide

Your Coates' tour leader, Martin Curtis is an experienced Himalayan trekker and mountaineer, and having previously organised and led six expeditions to Bhutan, he is very familiar with the country. His previous trips have included the classic Chomolhari Laya trek in the west, the Snowman trek (considered to be the most isolated trek in the entire Himalayas) and 2012 to the isolated region below Gangkar Punesum, the world's highest unclimbed mountain. His last tour was a naturalist / culture tour which was very successful and is the basis of this 2018 tour

Vehicle:

Toyota Coaster Bus or similar.

Accommodation:

Hotels, Forest Lodges with private facilities and camping.

Camping:

We will be camping for 4 nights of the tour. Tents and sleeping mats are provided however you will need to take your own sleeping bag, which should be very warm as nights can be cold. A down jacket for evening wear in the camp is also a must. For those who prefer not to take their own sleeping bags and down jackets, these can be hired from the company – but I don't recommend it as they are sometimes a bit the worse for wear. Bottled water will be provided and all meals will be prepared fresh.



Meals:

Meals are included, as per the itinerary. Most special dietary requirements can be catered for with plenty of prior notice.

Trek Grading:

Moderate. Most serious walks such as Takstang (Tiger's Lair) are optional. If you cannot walk, a driver and transport will be on standby to take you around and show you other sites. Other walks are quite easy and only a reasonable level of fitness is required. All the walks can be avoided if you do not feel like participating. Overall, one must be able to walk about 1-2 hours a day to get maximum enjoyment out of the trip.

Weather:

Autumn is the ideal time to explore Bhutan. You can expect clear blue skies and mild temperatures. The days are mainly warm and the nights cool, with maximum temperatures around 23 degrees Celsius, and minimum temperatures around 10 degrees Celsius. Autumn is considered to be the camping and trekking season.

Clothing:

A suggested list of items to bring on tour will be included with our pre-departure information sent to you about one month prior to departure. However in general, due to the wide range of temperature and conditions we recommend that you bring appropriate clothing for the cold and rain.

Clothing made of natural fibres is more comfortable, as it allows the body to breathe. It is considered offensive to the Bhutanese people to wear skimpy or tight-fitting clothes. Although there may be opportunities to wear shorts, we would recommend that women wear skirts or loose trousers. Men should not wear singlets. Trousers, long sleeved shirts or jackets should be worn when visiting religious sites and dzongs. Sturdy and comfortable walking shoes or boots are essential.

Passport & Visas:

A visa is required for Bhutan however this is arranged for the group by our operator in Bhutan. They will send us the visa a couple weeks prior to the start date of the trip.

Please note: As the group is travelling on the same visa the entire group will need to be checked onto the Bangkok to Paro flight at the same time.

Health & Vaccinations:

There are no statutory requirements unless you are arriving from an area designated as infected by cholera or yellow fever. We recommend vaccinations against typhoid, tetanus, polio and hepatitis A. Please consult your doctor or vaccination centre for up-to-date information. If you are on any prescribed medication, ensure that you bring a sufficient supply with you. As Bhutan is a remote country, we advise that all travellers with a pre-existing condition consult their doctor about their travel plans.

Travel Insurance:

We strongly recommend that you have cancellation, medical and personal accident insurance covering repatriation costs, air ambulance and helicopter rescue services. You should be aware that some policies restrict coverage for Bhutan, and activities such as trekking and mountain biking. Please ensure that your policy provides a sufficient level of protection and covers you for your entire trip to Bhutan and the activities involved on the tour.

To make a booking or further information please contact

Tom or Sylvia Grove at Coates Wildlife Tours

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**Email: coates@iinet.net.au
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Terms and Conditions

Adina Nominees Pty Ltd (ACN 075 427 324) as trustee for the Grove Family Trust trading as Coates Wildlife Tours (hereinafter referred to as the tour operator) shall not be liable for any accident injury sickness delay irregularity or damage however caused or arising during any tour under its management or otherwise. Tours are often safari trips to isolated areas, they may include off road driving, bushwalking, snorkeling, swimming and other activities. These along with wildlife interactions planned or otherwise involve a certain degree of risk. All travel involves some measure of personal risk that each passenger has to determine and accept.

Tour participants should be in reasonable health and fitness and be carrying all required medications in ample quantities. A medical clearance from a registered medical practitioner may be required for participants wishing to join some tours. Scenic flights, boat cruises, helicopter flights etc. These activities are not operated by the tour operator, nor by persons or companies associated with the tour operator. These activities involve inherent risk of injury, death, accident and loss. Passengers assume all risks with regard to any misadventure death, injury or loss, which occurs during or as a result of any such activity.

Should the tour operator deem it desirable for climatic or other reasons whatsoever to amend or vary any itinerary it may do so by shortening or varying the trip in which case the participant will make no objection or claim for compensation.

The tour operator and its employees are unable to guarantee exact arrival and departure times, and are not liable for any failure to make connections with any other services.

The tour operator does not own or operate any third party suppliers of air transportation, hotels, restaurants, cruise craft or local sightseeing companies. The tour operator is not responsible for any loss or expense due to overbooking of flights, accommodations, default of any third parties or any other cause beyond its control. The tour operator takes all reasonable care in selecting these operators; it cannot accept responsibility for the operator's conduct or the conduct of their employees or agents or for any ramifications of that conduct.

Whilst all care is taken, The tour operator do not accept liability for loss or damage to baggage, sickness or injury, or additional expenses caused by factors beyond their control.

All care has been taken to ensure this brochure is correct at the time of printing. Prices and services as shown in this brochure are however subject to change or withdrawal without notice.

BOOKING DETAILS

NON REFUNDABLE DEPOSIT: \$1500.00 per person is required to confirm the reservation.

FINAL PAYMENT: Is Required on or before 90 days before the commencement of the tour.

CANCELLATIONS

Coates Wildlife Tours reserves the right to cancel any tour in the event of minimum numbers not being reached, in which case all moneys will be refunded in full.

In respect of cancellations by a passenger, The following levies plus any costs charged by other parties involved with the tour will apply: -

Where written notice is received

Deposit is non refundable

Tour balance is non refundable less than 90 days before the tour start date

No refunds are considered from the day the tour starts.

INSURANCE

We strongly recommend that travel insurance against imposition of cancellation fees, loss or damage to baggage and extra costs arising from injury or illness be effected.

GENERAL INFORMATION

EQUIPMENT: - Transport by an air-conditioned our coach or mini bus which ever is appropriate for the tour. Vehicles used in the national parks are non air- conditioned 4Wd's. In the case of breakdown or other unforeseen circumstances affecting the vehicle or guide, the operator reserves the right to substitute vehicles and guides other than those specified, to ensure the operation of a tour.

SEAT ALLOCATION: - Seats on tour vehicle are not pre allocated. To ensure all participants get to enjoy forward positioned and window seats we have incorporated a daily seat rotation system.

WILDLIFE:- Sighting of birds, or animals mentioned in the itineraries cannot be guaranteed as they are wild and therefore free to come and go as they please.

WILDFLOWER DISPLAYS:- Can not be guaranteed as they are dependent on seasonal rains.

MEAL SYMBOLS:- B = Breakfast, L = Lunch, D = Dinner