Treasures of Tibet with Touring in Nepal

Post-Tour to our Bhutan Tour or join as stand-alone tour

October 7-19, 2023

The Chinese Embassy and visa consulate will be closed to celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival and Chinese National Day from Sept 29 – Oct 8, 2023. Hence we cannot apply for the Chinese Visa or Tibet Travel Permit during these periods. You need to be in Kathmandu a min of 4 nights as the team in Nepal need a full 3 working days to complete the visa process.

Oct 7 Day 1 Arrival into Kathmandu / Hotel Nepali Gar
If coming from Bhutan tour: Fly to Kathmandu Druk Air KB 400, dep 7:10 am, arr 8:10 am.
If coming from outside Asia the arrival may be in evening.

You will be met by our representative on arrival and transferred to the hotel. Check-in time is 2 pm. You will complete the Chinese Visa application with assistance from our representative in the hotel lobby. He will then submit it online to the Embassy server. Rest of the day is independent to rest. The area around the hotel has restaurants and shops easy walking distance.

Oct 8 Day 2 Kathmandu Durbar Square - Swayambhunath / Hotel Nepali Gar (B, L)

Departing at 9 am, we start with a walking tour of Old Kathmandu including Durbar Square with its array of temples centralized around the Hanuman Dhoka Palace, the ancient residence of the Nepalese Royalty. Visit the Jagannath Temple with its' erotic carvings, the Kal and Seto Bhairav temples, the Temple of the Living Goddess (Kumari Ghar), the big bell and the Kasthamandap Pavilion, said to have been built out of timber of a single celestial tree and from which the city of Kathmandu derives its’ name.

The Kumari Ghar is located near the south entrance of Durbar Square. Kumari Devi is the most important of several living goddesses in Nepal. She acknowledges the greetings of the devotees from the balcony of her temple residence. The best time to see the living goddess is between 9-11 am and 4-6 pm. No photography or video is allowed of Kumari.

Next, we take an exciting rickshaw (tricycle) ride honking your way through narrow alleys to the bustling bazaars of Asan. Sit back and relax as you navigate for a slightly different experience of exploring the city like a local. Asan is a ceremonial, market and residential square in central.
Kathmandu. It is one of the most well-known historical locations in the city and is famed for its bazaar which has been described as one of the fine Newar examples of a traditional Asian bazaar. The Tuladhar, Maharjan, Shrestha, Bajracharya and Shakya castes make up most of the population.

We will have lunch in a local restaurant.

Afterwards drive to Swayambhunath, one of the holiest Buddhist sites in Nepal and the oldest Buddhist stupa, said to be 2000 years old. The stupa that forms the main structure is composed of a solid hemisphere of brick and earth supporting a lofty conical spire capped by a pinnacle of copper gilt. Painted on the four-sided base of the spire are the all-seeing eyes of Lord Buddha. This hill is a mosaic of small Chaityas and Pagoda temples.

The primary approach to the temple is from the eastern side, where 365 ancient steps lead up the steep forested hillside. The base is about a 20-minute walk from the center of Kathmandu. This staircase is the only route pilgrims would consider and is the most memorable way for any visitor to experience the stupa. However, for those with difficulty walking, an alternative is to drive to the west side, where there are only a few steps to climb to the top. Do let our guide know if you wish to do this. The group will all exit at this point.

At the bottom of the eastern stairway is a brightly painted gate containing a huge Tibetan prayer wheel nearly 12 feet tall. It takes two people to turn it and a bell sounds during each revolution. Around the gate are dozens more smaller wheels. Devotees spin prayer wheels to release prayers and mantras to heaven - visitors are welcomed to do so as well. The staircase is presided over by three painted Buddha statues from the 17th century near the base (women perform prostrations before them in the early morning); another group further up are from the early 20th century.

Strewn along the staircase are numerous mani stones, inscribed with the Tibetan mantra Om Mani Padme Hum ("Hail to the jewel in the lotus"). Merchants sell smaller versions of the stones to tourists. The stairs run through a beautiful forest, which is populated with the hundreds of monkeys that give the temple its nickname.

The central buildings and decorations of Swayambhunath are rich with Buddhist symbolism. The whitewashed dome of the main stupa represents the womb of creation, with a phallic complement in the square tower. Rising from the tower is a spire made of 13 golden disks, representing the steps to enlightenment. The umbrella on top symbolizing enlightenment itself; some say it contains a bowl of precious stones.

The famous Buddha eyes gazing out sleepily from each side of the tower (oriented to the four cardinal directions) are those of the all-seeing Primordial Buddha. Between each of the pairs of eyes is a symbol that looks like a question mark - this is the Nepali number "1" and represents the unity of all things. Gold plaques rising above the eyes like a crown depict the Five Dhyani Buddhas, celestial buddhas who are associated with the five senses, the four cardinal directions plus the center, and many other symbolic groups of five.

The Five Dhyani Buddhas are further honored with special shrines at the base of the stupa. They face the four cardinal directions, plus one slightly left of east to represent the center direction. Between them are shrines to four of the Buddhas’ consorts. Linking all nine shrines together is a chain of prayer wheels and butter lamps. The five main shrines are enclosed in beautiful gilded copper repoussé work, for which the Kathmandu Valley is renowned.

Filling the platform around the main stupa are numerous other shrines and votive structures, most of which have been donated by kings and lamas in the last four centuries. Five of them are associated with the five elements: earth, air, fire, water and sky.

Notable among these is the Harati Devi Temple, dedicated to the Hindu goddess of smallpox and other epidemics, as well as a protectress of children. The small brick pagoda is very popular among
both Hindus and Buddhists, especially mothers seeking blessings for their children.

Petitioners toss flower petals, rice, colored powder and holy water over the Harati image, then receive a tika from the resident priest. Monkeys, stray dogs, and pigeons fight over the rice and the food offerings, contributing to the chaotic atmosphere. The image of the goddess dates only from the 19th century; it replaces the original that was smashed by King Rana Bahadur Shah after his wife died of smallpox.

Food offerings for Harati (typically stew, rice and bread) are cooked in a kitchen on the bottom floor of a gompa (monastery prayer room) on the west side of the complex. Visitors can climb stairs to the gompa roof, which is level with the Buddha eyes. From here there are fine views over the stupa and Kathmandu valley.

Northwest of the main stupa is another important shrine, associated with a fascinating legend. Shantipur is a small, plain, box-shaped temple said to contain a great treasure - a living holy man who has been meditating in there for 1500 years. Legend has it that Shanti Shri, who lived in the 5th century, locked himself in a vault beneath the temple, vowing to remain there until the Kathmandu Valley needed him. Entering a mystic state, he has achieved immortality and remains there to help the local people when needed.

In 1658, King Pratap Mella descended into the chamber alone to seek Shanti Shri’s help with a drought. The king reported making his way through several underground rooms, each more frightening than the last. The first contained large bats and hawks, the second was home to hungry ghosts that clutched at him in agony, and the third was full of snakes that chased him until he pacified them with milk. The king found the saint in the last room, skinny as a skeleton but still alive and meditating. Shanti Shri presented the king with a mandala, which brought the needed rain.

The outer sanctum of the rather ominous temple can be visited. It is decorated with faded frescoes from the Swayambhu Purana, a 17th-century scripture that recounts the creation myths of the Kathmandu Valley. Shantipur is also called Akashpur (Sky Place) and it represents the fifth element.

The two bullet-shape temples (shikra) on each side of the stupa, known as Pratappur and Anantapur, were given by King Pratap Malla to help him earn a victory over Tibet in the 17th century. The story of his success is inscribed on the twin bells in front.

At the northeast corner of the complex is the Shree Karma Raj Mahavihar, an active Tibetan monastery with a big Buddha statue and yak butter candles lit by pilgrims. The resident monks chant around 3 or 4pm daily. The northwest corner is home to Agnipur, a neglected shrine to the ancient Hindu fire god Agni, who relays burnt offerings to heaven. Between these two, north of the main stupa, is Nagpur, a small tank with a snake idol at the bottom. This helps appease the valley’s notorious snake spirits.

At the top of the eastern steps is a great bronze vajra (thunderbolt), a Tantric symbol of power, decorated with the signs of the Tibetan zodiac.

Transfer to hotel for overnight. Rest of evening independent.

Oct 9 Day 3 Pashupatinath - Boudanath

This morning we drive to the Chinese Embassy to have the biometrics done by appointment. The embassy appointments are between 9 am- 12 noon.

We’ll have lunch at a local restaurant.
Our afternoon tour takes us to Pashupatinath, with its astonishing architectural beauty situated amidst a lush green natural setting on the bank of the sacred Bagmati River (just 6 km. east of downtown Kathmandu).

The primary temple of this area is the Pashupatinath temple. However, there are hundreds of small temples inside the complex. Guhyeshwari Temple, Vatasala Temple, Ram Temple, Sati’s Gate, and other temples can be found here. Further, there are many small tombs inside the Gorakhnath temple complex.

The Pashupatinath temple, built in pagoda style with a gilded roof and four richly carved triple silver doors, is a unique example of temple architecture of Nepal. The richly ornamented pagoda houses the sacred linga or phallic symbol of Lord Shiva. It is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Dedicated to the Hindu God of Destruction, Lord Shiva, this temple is one of the largest Hindu temple complexes in Southeast Asia with hundreds of Shiva Lingam shrines and icons of Hindu gods and goddesses and is regarded as the most sacred temple of all Lord Shiva temples.

Every year thousands of pilgrims from all over the world come to pay homage to this temple. Non-Hindu visitors are strictly prohibited to enter the temple; however, they are permitted to view the temple from the east banks of the River Bagmati. From here you will be able to watch the cremation tradition as well as see the colorfully dressed sadhus and learn about their customs and beliefs.

There are twelve jyotirlingas throughout the world. According to mythology, Shiva revealed himself as a great pillar of light, piercing the world. Jyotirlingam are the locations where the light has made contact with the earth. Regarded to be an incredibly pure pilgrimage destination, the Pashupatinath temple is one of these twelve sites.

Afterwards, we continue to Boudhanath Stupa, eight kilometers east of Kathmandu City, and remain here for the sunset. Boudhanath (UNESCO World Heritage Site) is one of the most imposing landmarks of Kathmandu and is a center of Tibetan Buddhism. It is one of the world’s largest stupas.

From above, Boudhanath Stupa looks like a giant mandala, or diagram of the Buddhist cosmos. And as in all Tibetan mandalas, four of the Dhyani Buddhas mark the cardinal points, with the fifth, Vairocana, enshrined in the center (in the white hemisphere of the stupa). The five Buddhas also personify the five elements (earth, water, fire, air and ether), which are represented in the stupa’s architecture.

There are other symbolic numbers here as well: the nine levels of Boudhanath Stupa represent the mythical Mt. Meru, center of the cosmos; and the 13 rings from the base to the pinnacle symbolize the path to enlightenment, or "Bodhi" — hence the stupa’s name.

At the bottom, the stupa is surrounded by an irregular 16-sided wall, with frescoes in the niches. In addition to the Five Dhyani Buddhas, Boudhanath Stupa is closely associated with the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Padmapani), whose 108 forms are depicted in sculptures around the base. The mantra of Avalokiteshvara - Om Mani Padme Hum - is carved on the prayer wheels beside the images of Avalokiteshvara around the base of the stupa.

The base of the stupa consists of three large platforms, decreasing in size. These platforms symbolize Earth, and here you can look out at the mountains while listening to the chants of the devout doing kora, walking around the stupa praying. The base is adorned with 108 small images of the Dhyani Amitabha Buddha and inset with prayer wheels.

Next come two circular plinths supporting the hemisphere of the stupa, symbolizing water.

As at Swayambunath, Boudanath is topped with a square tower bearing the omnipresent Buddha eyes on all four sides.
Instead of a nose there is a question-mark-type symbol that is actually the Nepali character for the number 1, symbolizing unity and the one way to reach enlightenment—through the Buddha's teachings. Above this is the third eye, symbolizing the wisdom of the Buddha.

The square tower is topped by a pyramid with 13 steps, representing the ladder to enlightenment. The triangular shape is the abstract form for the element of fire. At the top of the tower is a gilded canopy, the embodiment of air, above it a gilded spire, symbolic of ether and the Buddha Vairocana. Prayer flags tied to the stupa flutter in the wind, carrying mantras and prayers heavenward.

The main entrance to the upper platform of Bodnath Stupa is on the north side. Here Amoghasiddhi, progenitor of the future Buddha, presides. Below Amoghasiddhi is the Buddha Maitreya, the future Buddha.

Thousands of pilgrims circle the stupa in a clockwise direction each day spinning the prayer wheels. It is said that each spin of a prayer wheel is the equivalent of reciting the mantra.

The stupa is on the ancient trade route from Tibet that enters the Kathmandu Valley by the village of Sankhu in the northeast corner. Tibetan merchants have rested and offered prayers here for many centuries. When refugees entered Nepal from Tibet in the 1950s, many decided to live around Boudhanath. The stupa is said to entomb the remains of a Buddhist sage, perhaps parts of the Buddha's body (bones, teeth), or sacred texts and other ceremonial objects.

Surrounding Boudhanath Stupa are streets and narrow alleys lined with colorful homes, Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, and street vendors.

Return to hotel. Evening at leisure.

Oct 10 Day 4 Dakshinkali & Village Visits / Hotel Nepali Gar (B, L)

We depart at about 9 am to attend the sacrifice ceremony at Dakshinkali (Tuesday & Saturday only). Located in a small gorge on the bank of a stream 19km/12miles from Kathmandu City, Dakshinkali is dedicated to Goddess Kali, a Hindu goddess of power. A chief center of tantric worship, animal sacrifices (goats, chickens, ducks) are held every Tuesday and Saturday. The sacrifice ritual is performed with much reverence for the animals and they are taken away to their homes to be eaten later. The temple is located in a forested canyon above the sacrifice location.

Afterwards, we shall visit three small villages just outside the city and enjoy spectacular landscapes as well as observe the rural lifestyle and see ancient spiritual sites.

Chovar is a small town on a hilltop, 8 km southwest of the Kathmandu City. It is known for it’s gorge-carved out of a hillside and is the only water outlet in the Kathmandu valley. Legend has it that the Kathmandu valley was once a primordial lake ringed by verdant mountains. In this pristine lake lived giant serpents until one fine day, saint Manjushree, the Bodhisatva, raised a mighty sword and in one slash, cut open the side of a mountain at this very place. The voluminous waters of the lake gushed out, leaving behind a fertile valley. There is a small but picturesque temple of Adinath on the top of the hill with a magnificent view of the snow capped peaks. Just beyond the gorge is a temple of lord Ganesh. The main image of the shrine is a massive rock, naturally carved.

Kirtipur is situated on a ridge 6 km southwest of Kathmandu. The ancient township, homing 35,000 people, is a natural fortress and has a proud and courageous history. Built on a hill overlooking the Kathmandu Valley, Kirtipur was once an independent kingdom. Perhaps as a result to Kirtipur’s legendary stubbornness, the town has been unaffected by the development of Kathmandu and Patan. The Chilamchu stupa and the temple of Bagh Bhairav are major sights here. Kirtipur offers quaint streets lined with artistic houses and temple squares. The people are known for their skill in building and weaving.
Heading south from the Tibetan Handicrafts Center at Jawalakhel will bring us to Bungamati, a town that dates back to the 16th century. It is here that the Rato Machendra statue spends half of every year, and it is to Bungamati that this same statue is pulled in a massive chariot every 12 years. On the way to the Rato Machendranath Temple in Bungamati we shall visit Karya Binayak shrine, one of the Kathmandu valley's most important shrines. The Ganesh of this shrine is actually a natural stone that looks only vaguely like an elephant.

Khokana, a small village on the southern flank of the Kathmandu Valley and around 11km/7miles from Kathmandu City, was established in the seventh century AD by the mighty rulers of Nepal, Licchhavi. It is a unique town in the whole Kathmandu Valley due to its remoteness from modern civilization.

**Oct 11 Day 6  Changu Narayan-Bhaktapur-Patan / Hotel Nepali Gar (B, L)**

We start with a visit to the temple of Changu Narayan, located 14km/9miles from Kathmandu. It is the oldest and the most stately example of Pagoda style in Nepal, dated from early 3rd century AD, and considered to be one of the greatest artistic legacies of the Lichhavian era. Located on a hillock that at one time doubled as a small fort, the courtyard of the temple is a virtual museum of ancient stone carvings.

Our drive continues 7 km to Bhadgaon - also known as Bhaktapur --meaning the city of devotes. Bhaktapur is the home of medieval art and architecture. The city was founded in the 9th century. It is shaped like a conch shell and is at a height of 4600 ft. above see level. Here you will visit the Durbar Square with its’ array of temples overlooked by the Palace of 55 windows with its Golden Gate, built by King Bhupatindra Malla. The Nyatapola Temple, also built by King Bhupatindra Malla, is another excellent example of Pagoda style and stands five terraces high with a pair of figures --two famous strong men, two elephants, two lions, two griffins and two goddesses on each level. The wonderful experience of visiting Bhatapur is that it maintains its small village ambiance and we shall see the residents going about their daily lives.

We'll stop for lunch at a local restaurant and continue to Patan.

Originally known as Lalitpur, Patan is situated on the southern bank of the Bagmati River and is 5 Km southeast of Kathmandu. Its’ Durbar Square is an enchanting melange of palace buildings, artistic courtyards and graceful pagoda temples. Listed as a World Heritage Site, the former royal palace complex is the center of Patan's religious and social life, and houses a museum containing an array of bronze statues and religious objects.

One remarkable monument here is a 17th-century temple dedicated to the Hindu god Krishna, built entirely of stone instead of the usual brick and wood used for temples in Nepal. We'll also visit the Golden Temple, the Mahaboudha Temple (also known as the temple of the thousand Buddhas due to the carving of Buddha on each brick), Uku and Kwa Bahal.

Afterwards, we enjoy visiting the Patan Museum. The Patan Museum is located in a beautiful renovated Malla Palace Garden. The Museum displays the traditional sacred art of Nepal in an outstanding architectural setting. Its’ home is an old residential court of Patan Durbar, one of the royal palaces of the former Malla kings of the Kathmandu Valley. The gilded door and windows face one of the most beautiful squares in the world. The museum’s exhibits cover a long span of Nepal’s cultural history and some rare objects are among its treasures. Their meaning and context within the living traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism are all clearly explained. Most of the objects are cast bronzes and gilt copper repoussé work, traditional crafts for which Patan is famous.

The restaurant in the Patan Museum is open from 10am - 530 pm and offers an excellent variety of Nepalese, and continental snacks and meals with organic vegetables and salads grown in the Museum gardens. You can have refreshments at the museum café if you like (pay directly).
Also located nearby are some of the best woodwork and handicraft shops in the valley. The Tibetan Refugee Camp has a wide selection of hand woven natural and vegetable dye carpets.

Return to your hotel. The evening is independent.

Oct 12 Day 7 Fly to Lhasa - Drive to Tsedang /Yarlung Hotel (B,L,D)

*During our tour of Tibet, we shall have breakfast at the hotel; lunch and dinner will be at selected local restaurants.*

This is one of the most spectacular aerial views of the Himalayan range and includes Mount Everest. Upon arrival at the airport in Lhasa you will submit one original China paper visa to Lhasa immigration. Save the other one as you need to submit it when you depart Tibet.

Once the entry procedure is completed, we drive 96km/60 miles, approx 2.5 hours to Tsedang, known as the cradle of Tibetan Civilization. The ancient town offers a number of sites that illustrate Tibet's early history of the Valley of the Kings (ancient capital of the Yarlung Kings who established the Tibetan Nation).

(Packed lunch during the drive; no restaurants along the way).

Rest of the day is free to acclimatize to the altitude.

Oct 13 Day 8 Tsedang-Samye-Lhasa / Kyichu Hotel (B,L,D)/Kyichu Hotel (B,L,D)

Tsetang has had many “firsts.” For instance, the first king Nyatri Tsenpo, the first palace Yumbu Lhakang, the first temple Tradruk, the first cropland Syarisotang, the first Tibetan Opera Pakhapu and the first Buddhist scripture Pangkong Chagya are all credited to Shannan.
Here is also the place where King Songtsan Gampo united Tibet and once lived with Princess Wencheng. The Tangka made and embroidered by Princess Wencheng herself is still kept in Tradruk Temple, which is a great treasure house of culture and art.

We visit Yambu Lakhang, the oldest known dwelling in Tibet, dramatically situated above the valley. The castle was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution, but has since been rebuilt. Visit Tibetan King's Tombs (Chongye Burial Mounds). The Yarlung valley contains many of Tibetan histories and legends, tombs of the greatest kings of Yarlung Dynasty. It has almost 20 different tombs that belong to the honorable kings of Tibet. Later visit Tradruk Temple.

Afterwards, a one hour drive to Samye Monastery. A unique monastery and village rolled into one, Samye is a highlight of a visit to Tibet.

Situated amidst breathtaking scenery, built in the 8th century, Samye Monastery was the first Buddhist monastery to be founded in Tibet by King Trisong Detsen of Tibet who sought to revitalize Buddhism, which had declined in the 7th century. It is the first formal Buddhist Monastery for the monks in Tibet. The magnificent and unique Central Hall is three-stories high. The first floor is of the Tibetan architectural style, the second the Han style and the third the Indian style. The halls in the monastery house many statues and murals. The monastery has bronze bells, carved marble lions and tablets marking the development of Buddhism. All these are valuable cultural relics. As described in historical books, this monastery is considered "an unimaginable construction and incomparable monastery."

We continue approx. 2 hours drive to Lhasa, the political, religious and cultural center of Tibet.

Kyichu Hotel is in the Old City, on the main street just minutes walking distance to Barkhor Square, Jokhang Temple, bazaars and many restaurants. The courtyard at the back of the hotel offers a serene garden. They also have an espresso machine! We shall try to confirm rooms overlooking the courtyard, no guarantees.

Oct 14 Day 9 Potala Palace, Kangyur Stupa, Norbulingka, Jokhang Temple / Kyichu Hotel (B,L,D)

Potala Palace is the cardinal landmark and a structure of massive proportion. This symbol of Tibet, an architectural gem built in the colossal monastic style of Central Tibet by Gyalwa Ngapa, the fifth Dalai Lama, in the 17th century, stands 300m above the valley atop the hill called Marpo Ri. The thousand rooms in Potala date from 1645 when the fifth Dalai Lama began erecting a palace that would serve as a sacred and administrative center. It served many succeeding Dalai Lamas and as one of Tibet’s most impressive and enduring monuments, the Chinese Army of Red Guards protected it during the Cultural Revolution. As a result many of its chapels and treasures are intact, virtually unchanged since the 17th century Norbulingka Palace.

Kangyur Stupa: This unique site is a favorite pilgrimage site for Tibetans today. The entire Kangyur (Translated Buddhist Cannon) is carved onto slate rocks, and the slates then used to build the stupa Norbulingka is the summer palace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The 8th Dalai Lama designated it as a summer retreat but the majority of the buildings were not erected until the reigns of 13th and 14th Dalai Lamas. Every year as the chill air warmed, the Dalai Lama would leave Potala in a grand procession for six months residence in the Norbulingkha. It is worth a visit and the park is a great place to be at festival times and public Holidays.

Jokhang Temple in the heart of old Lhasa, established in 7th century by King Songtsan Gampo, the King who brought Buddhism to Tibet.

Oct 15 Day 10 Tour of Drepung & Sera Monastery / Kyichu Hotel (B,L,D)
About 8 km to the west of central Lhasa, Drepung, one of the world’s largest monastery was built in
1416 by Jamyang Choje a pupil of Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelugpa Sect. Drepung literally means “Rice Mountain,” after the famous and very large Danayakataka Stupa in South India where Buddha originally taught the Kalachakra Tantra. Prior to 1959 Drepung ranked as Tibet's largest monastery, sometimes with a population exceeding 10,000 monks. It also served as the residence of the early Dalai Lamas, until the Potala Palace was constructed in 1645. The second and third and the fourth Dalai Lama lived and were entombed here. Suffering only minor damage during the Cultural Revolution Drepung has plenty of historical relics, Buddhist scriptures and arts.

We can visit the Potala Carpet Factory, located below Drepung Monastery and observe the weavers. Tibetan carpets have a history of over 600 years. Hundreds of experienced weavers use old-styled vertical looms to weave carpets of incredible complexity. Learn about the process of natural dying, preparation of wool, technique of weaving and symbolism in patterns.

We will walk down to Nechung Monastery and drive to Lhasa for lunch.

In the afternoon, drive to Sera Monastery, 5 km north of Lhasa. The Sera Monastery's setting is one of the prettiest in Lhasa, hugging the ridge that forms the northern wall of the Kyi Chu Valley. Founded in 1419, Sera Monastery is one of the "great three" Gelukpa university monasteries in Tibet. The other two are Ganden Monastery and Drepung Monastery. The origin of the name ‘Sera’ is not certain, but it may have come from the wild roses (se ra in Tibetan) surrounding the original site.

In its heyday, Sera hosted a huge monastic population and five colleges. Like Drepung, the colleges in Sera specialized in: Sera Me instruction in fundamental precepts of Buddhism, Sera Je instruction of itinerant monks and Sera Ngagpa in Tantric studies.

The monastery is magnificent, featuring a unique style quite different from other famous monasteries in Lhasa and covering an area of 114,946 square meters (28 acres). Its main buildings are the Coqen Hall, Zhacang (college) and Kamcun (dormitory). Buddhist Scriptures written in gold powder, fine statues, scent cloths and unparalleled murals can be found in these halls. The monastery is a Buddhist think-tank and lively debates on Buddhist doctrines are held here.

Sera was hard hit during the cultural revolution owing to its resident's active participation in the 1959 uprising. The highlight of the visit to Sera would be to witness the monks debating out in the courtyard.

Oct 16 Day 11 Yamdrok Lake; Yamdrok (Kamoa La)/Gyantse (41/2 hr)/Yeti Hotel (B,L,D)
Today we will drive to Gyantse, the third most important city, is one of the least Chinese influenced towns in Tibet and is worth a visit for this reason alone.

This morning we climb (approx 3 hrs) to Kampa La Pass 4793m to view Yamdrok Tso (lake), also known as Turquoise Lake. At elevation of 4441M and 72 km (45 miles) long, it is one of the three largest sacred lakes in Tibet. The lake is surrounded by many snow-capped mountains and is fed by numerous small streams. The lake does have an outlet stream at its far western end. The lake with an area of 621 square kilometers and the unknown depth is fan-shaped, spreading to the South but narrowing up to the North. The mountainous lake has a dozen of islands, the largest of which is about 3,000 square kilometers. The lake freezes up in winter. Like mountains, lakes are considered sacred by the Tibetan people, the principle being that they are the dwelling places of protective deities and therefore invested with special spiritual powers. According to local mythology, Yamdok Yumtso Lake is the transformation of a goddess. Enjoy the beautiful views of the lake; time for photo opportunity and short walk.

We'll stop for lunch at Nankartse; then continue drive to Gyantse (90 km).

Upon arrival, we'll visit Kumbum Stupa. The spectacular Bodhi stupa, or Kumbum in Tibetan was built in 1412 and completed 10 years later. Deemed as the symbol of the monastery, the spectacular “stupa” consists of hundreds of chapels in layers, housing about a hundred thousand images of
various icons. The elegant structure is worth visiting. The famous Kumbum pagoda, built in collaboration with Newari artists from Nepal and Tibetan artists, also stands in the same courtyard with nine stories, 108 doors and 77 chapels containing clay sculptures and various murals. The Stupa rises over four symmetrical floors and is surmounted by a gold dome. The dome rises like a crown over four sets of eyes that gaze serenely out in the cardinal directions of the compass. Kumbum means 10,000 images. The pagoda is said to have 100,000 images, either sculptured or painted, this is the reason for its name "100,000 Image Pagoda." It is one the unique stupas in Tibet.

Oct 17 Day 12 Gyantse to Shigatse - Pelkor Choede, & Shalu Monastery /Hotel Gesar (B,L,D)

We start the day with a visit Pelkor Choede Monastery, a 5 minute drive from our hotel. Its' remarkable feature is that it accommodates the three sects of Tibetan Buddhism in one monastery coexisting in peace with each other. The three sects are: the Sakya, the Kagyu and the Gelug. The full name of the Palcho Monastery is "The Auspicious Wheel Joy Monastery." According to the historical records, this monastery was built in 14th or 15th century. It consists of the Assembly Hall, the 100000-Buddha pagoda, dratsangs and an enclosure wall as its construction units.

After lunch, we drive 110 kms to Shigatse, an ancient city on the Plateau. Its history can be traced back to more than 500 years. With its altitude of 3800m, Shigatse covers a total area of 182000sq. km in 18 counties and is the second largest city after Lhasa. With population of 635200 under its jurisdiction, Shigatse is historically named Nyangme, or 'lower reaches of the Nyangchu River' in Tibetan.

Just before reaching Shigast we detour 10 kms off the main road to visit Shalu Monastery. Shalu is the only monastery in Tibet known to possess a significant collection of 14th century Newari style murals, moderated and enhanced by the artistic sensibilities of the Yuan Dynasty of China. Arniko, master painter from Kathmandu valley, pioneered this unique art that later came to full flower in the Chinese capital. The architecture of Shalu is a rare combination of Chinese and traditional Tibetan elements.

Return 10 kms back to main road and continue 12 kms to Shigatse for overnight. (total drive time today approx. 2 hours)

Oct 18 Day 13 Shigatse-Tashilunpo Monastery-Lhasa /Kyichu Hotel (B,L,D)

After breakfast, we visit the great Tashilunpo Monastery, located on the south slope of the Nyimari hill in the west of the city of Xigatse. The Tashilunpo Monastery is one of the six major monasteries of the Gelug Sect. It is the seat of the Panchen Lama, second only in importance to the Dalai Lama.

Founded by the First Dalai Lama in 1447, the monastery is the traditional seat of successive Panchen Lamas, the second highest-ranking tulku lineage in the Gelukpa tradition. Tashilunpo in its prime had over 4,000 monks, but after the Tibetan national uprising that took place in 1959, a handful of Tashi Lhunpo Monastery monks along with many thousands of Tibetans escaped into India.

Its numerous halls contain a 21.6-meter wooden statue of Maitreya, the future Buddha and elaborate, jewel encrusted reliquary chorten. The monastery was expanded and renovated by the 4th, 5th and 6th Panchens. Since the early 1980s parts of the Tashilunpo monastery have been open to the public and it is an important cultural attraction in Tibet today.

Drive to Lhasa, approx. 4 hours.

This evening explore Barkhor Bazaar, the market place where everything is available, also good for people watching. Tibetans spin prayer wheels and shop as they circumambulate. Good for shopping everything from trinkets to tantric ritual objects. Open until 8:30 pm.

Oct 19 Day 14 Morning flight to Kathmandu or Bangkok

Remain at the airport for flight home.
PRICE: $4625 per person based on min 4 people; Single room: $575
$200 discount when joined with Bhutan Tour.

Extra night Kathmandu: $55 per person twin share; single room supplement: $32.

Includes:
Meet and assistance at the airport by our representative.
Accommodations with breakfast based on availability:

5 nights Kathmandu: Nepali Gar, heritage deluxe room, in Thamel neighborhood
https://nepaligharhotel.com/

7 nights-8 days in Tibet:
4 nights Lhasa at Kyichu Hotel, deluxe room http://lhasakyichuhotel.com/index.htm
1 night at Tsedang Hotel, standard room https://www.tibettravel.org/tibet-hotels/tsedang-hotel.html
or Yarlung River Hotel https://www.tibettravel.org/tibet-hotels/yarlung-river-hotel.html
1 night Gyantse at Yeti Hotel standard room, http://www.yetihoteltibet.com/
1 night Shigatse at Gasar hotel, standard room http://www.gasarhotel.com/

Meals: Breakfast and lunch in Nepal. All meals in Tibet.
Airport arrival/departure transfers on tour dates
All sightseeing tours as per the program with professional guide.
Entrance fees at the monuments as indicated in the program.
Bottled water during touring: in Nepal a refillable bottle will be given and refilled daily; in Tibet (2 litres per day per person)
Tibet Travel Permit

Does Not Include:
Nepal entry visa fee, China visa fee
International airfare and all applicable taxes
Airfares Kathmandu-Lhasa-Kathmandu (Quoted Separately Subject to change)
Photography charges in the monasteries and monuments
Dinners in Nepal
Refreshments, bottled drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary.
Tips to your guide and driver
Insurance and rescue of any form
Cost arising out of flight cancellation/road blockades/landslides/riots and events beyond our control
Expenses of personal nature and any other expenses not mentioned in the above cost

Notes: All information in this itinerary is accurate to the best of our knowledge but please note that changes to our trips can and do occur. This may be due to our effort to improve our program or logistical reasons such as changes in flight schedules, traffic conditions, weather conditions, or government policies. Original World and our partners at Dharma Adventures will make every effort to keep you informed of any changes but cannot be held liable for any alterations made to the published itinerary.

Many of the heritage sites in Nepal have been damaged by the April 2015 earthquake. These include: Kathmandu Durbar Square, temples Kasthamanadap and Hanumandhoka. Now the palace and Kasthamandap are already being rebuilt but some of the temples are still under restoration process.

At times China decides to close entry to Tibet without much advanced warning. Please check with the travel insurance you purchase to be sure you are covered for the full cost of the tour, if this occurs.