

Paro Tsechu Monastery Festival | 14 Days



- Witness a colorful and fascinating masked dance festival
- Walk through a remote village with traditional houses
- Enjoy the quiet streets of Bhutan's sleepy cities, Paro and Thimphu
- Excursion to the remote and most beautiful Ura Valley
- Day hike in beautiful Phobjikha valley

Detailed Itinerary

A special highlight awaits us right at the beginning of our journey – the Paro Tsechu Festival. The visit to the most popular monastery festival of Bhutan with its fabulous costumes and mystical dances let us experience the live traditions of the country at first hand. Afterwards, we fly to the spiritual and cultural heartland – Bumthang in central Bhutan. Open valleys and a gently rolling hilly landscape invite you to go on long hikes. The village of Ura, located in the valley of the same name, is one of the most beautiful in Bhutan. Here you will certainly have to chat with the villagers and learn something about their way of life. On our journey from central to western Bhutan, we visit mighty and impressive monastery castles. A jewel of Buddhist architecture from the The Dzong of Trongsa is considered a jewel of Buddhist architecture of the Middle Ages, the construction of which began in 1543. Tibetan Buddhism is a religious backbone of the country and it links all aspects of cultural life of Bhutan.

In addition to the cultural part of the tour, we will go on some easy hikes through enchanting landscapes, valleys and villages. Towards the end of our trip, the ascent through a fairytale forest to the legendary Tiger's Nest will be a breathtaking experience. This important pilgrimage site built high above the Paro Valley on a short rocky outcrop. The view of this fascinating monastery complex remains unforgettable. Enter the land of the thunder dragon and let yourself be enchanted!

Trip Highlights

- Hike to famous and the iconic Tiger's Nest Monastery

Day 1: Arrive in Delhi

Upon arrival at Delhi International airport, meet by *travel-to-nature Asia* representative and transfer to your hotel. Please look out for your name-card once you exit out of arrival area.

Delhi is a metropolis that has to be seen and experienced to be fully understood. Rich and poor, old and new are closer together here than anywhere else. You could walk around Delhi for weeks and still not have explored every corner of the city.

Depending upon your arrival time in Delhi we can visit (optional) Humayun's Tomb, India Gate, Raj Ghat, Jama Masjid, Chandni Chowk, drive past Government buildings including President's Palace.

Accommodation: The Surya New Delhi

Day 2: Fly Delhi - Paro (2,250 m | 1.83 hrs)

Transfer to airport and fly to Paro. Weather permitting, you will have a breathtaking view of the fascinating Eastern Himalayan mountains.

Welcome to Bhutan! Upon arrival in Paro a *travel-to-nature Asia* guide/representative will be at the airport to greet and take us to our hotel. Please look out for your name-card once you exit out of arrival area.

After lunch we visit the Buddhist monastery fortress of Paro-Rinpung Dzong. We cross a beautiful wooden

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bridge covered with shingles, flanked on each side by a guard house and walk up to Rinpung Dzong. This impressive fortress was built in 1645 and is still both a religious centre (home to a monastic school) and the seat of the district administration. The central watchtower is one of the most beautiful in Bhutan with its magnificent woodwork. Overnight in Paro.

Accommodation: Tashi Namgay Resort

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 3: Visit to Paro Tsechu Monastery Festival

A very special event today will be a visit to the Buddhist monastery festival, Paro Tshechu in Paro. It is the most popular religious festival in Bhutan. You will be able to admire colourful costumes and fascinating masks at the numerous dances. It is the best way to experience the ancient culture of Bhutan that is still alive today. Overnight in Paro.

Paro Tshechu (festival): It is held in Paro for a period of four to five days and falls in spring (Mar-Apr) every year. Like any other festivals in Bhutan, the Paro Tshechu revolves around the life story of Guru Padmasambava. However, one unique aspect of the festival is the portrayal and worship of other important Buddhist deities.

Tsechus are celebrated for several days, between three and five according to the location, and are the occasion for dances that are clearly defined in religious content. The dances are performed by monks, laymen or gomchens and the repertory is the same practically everywhere.

For the Bhutanese, religious festivals offer an opportunity to become immersed in the meaning of their religion and to gain merit. They are also occasions for seeing people, and for being seen; for social exchanges, and for flaunting success. People bring out their finest clothes, their most beautiful jewels; they take out picnics rich with meat and abundant alcohol. Men and women joke and flirt. An atmosphere of convivial, slightly ribald good humor prevails. The details and the meaning of the each dance performed will be explained to you by your guide.

Accommodation: Tashi Namgay Resort

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4: Fly Paro - Bumthang (35 min) | The spiritual heartland of Bhutan

After breakfast, a morning transfer to the nearby airport. A domestic flight with a fantastic view of the sacred mountains of Bhutan takes us to the religious centre of the kingdom - Bumthang. Around noon we arrive at our hotel in Jakar, where we also have lunch.

In the afternoon we visit the Dzong, which stands on a small hill above the town. From here we walk down to the village of Jakar. There are a few cafés and local handicrafts shops. We spend three nights in Bumthang and explore local places of interest. Overnight in Bumthang.

Accommodation: The Mountain Resort

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5: Bumthang | Explore/hike Choekhor Valley to Tangbi

Bumthang district is divided into four valleys surrounded by gently sloping mountains - an ideal terrain for hiking.

We start with a visit to the important Tamshing Monastery, founded by Pema Lingpa in 1501 AD and walk across a small bridge to the temples of the Kurje Lhakhang. This is the holiest place in Bhutan. After the Kurje Lhakhang visit, a path leads us into the

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beautiful upper Choekhor Valley to the Thangbi Temple, which is set in an idyllic atmosphere on an alluvial terrace. Not far from the temple there are two villages at an altitude of about 2,700 m, which we can also try to explore.

In the afternoon we return to Jakar which takes us approximately 2 hrs.

Accommodation: The Mountain Resort
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6: Bumthang | Hike through the Ura Valley

Today we go on an excursion to the remote Ura Valley. The road leads us through forests of blue pine trees, which offer a view of the beautiful valleys of Choekhor and Thang. We reach the Shelthang La Pass, from where we have a fantastic view of Bhutan's highest mountain, Gangkar Puensum. The following landscape of the Ura Valley with its softly curved slopes, lush pastures and sprawling fields fields, is quite different from the valleys we have seen before.

Arriving in Ura, the village of the same name, we visit the main temple, which gives you an insight into the way of life of the people in central Bhutan. A walk along the traditional houses of the village will certainly give you the opportunity to chat with the villagers. This way you will learn more about the daily life of these people. Ura is one of the most beautiful and interesting villages in Bhutan. Its large and closely spaced houses are connected by cobblestone pathways. We visit a large monastery complex with its towering Lhakhang, dedicated to the great teacher Guru Rinpoche, dominates the face of this place, a rare sight in Bhutan. The annual mask festival is held on the second weekend in May or in June, depending on the Bhutanese lunar calendar.

The Thimshingla National Park starts just behind the village and can be visited. A visitor centre, which is open outside the holidays from Monday to Friday, is located just after the turnoff to Ura. We drive back to Jakar. Overnight in Bumthang.

Accommodation: The Mountain Resort
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 7: Drive Bumthang - Trongsa (80 km | 2.5 hrs)

After breakfast we leave Bumthang passing through the Chhume Valley. On our way we have the opportunity to see the Yatha, the special weaving art of the region. We continue over the 3,400 m high Yotang-La pass towards Trongsa.

In the afternoon we visit the impressive Trongsa Dzong, a jewel of medieval Buddhist architecture. Construction began in 1543, when the first temple was built. The last phase of construction can be dated between 1640 to 1648. This mighty monastery castle is perched on a rocky outcrop above the Mangdu-Chu River. This mighty monastery castle, one of the largest and most important in Bhutan. Due to its exposed location between eastern and western Bhutan, the governor of Trongsa was able to control the entire western and central Bhutan from this point. Overnight in Trongsa.

Accommodation: The Yangkhil Resort
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



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Day 8: Drive Trongsa - Gangtey (77 km | 2.25 hrs)

Today we leave central Bhutan and continue to the west of the country. We reach the Pele-La Pass. With its altitude 3,300 m, it is considered a landmark and separates western from central Bhutan. Numerous colourful prayer flags and a central chorten mark the crossing. We continue to follow the road downhill and immerse ourselves in a dreamlike landscape past Black Mountain National Park. We reach the village of Gangtey, which lies in the Phobjikha Valley. This valley is one of Bhutan's the most beautiful - dense forests, small farms, fields and the mountains create a unique panorama. We visit Gangtey Goempa Monastery, which stands on a hilltop with a beautiful view of the surrounding fields, farms and forests. The monastery was founded in 1613 by Pema Trinley, the son of Pema Lingpa, a great saint from Bumthang in the 16th century. At the end of the 17th century, the monastery was expanded. Today Gangtey Tulku administers the monastery. Around the impressive building are the residences of the families of the Gomchens, the lay priests who look after the monastery. Overnight in Gangtey.

Accommodation: Dawachen Hotel & Spa
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 9: Hike to Phobjikha Valley

After breakfast, we will go for an extended walk through the Phobjikha valley today. In this area the endangered black-necked cranes settle in every winter. The harmonious coexistence of man and nature is the reason why the valley is still in its

natural state and why the demanding black-necked cranes prefer to roam here from mid-November to early April. Overnight in Gangtey.

Accommodation: Dawachen Hotel & Spa
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 10: Drive Gangtey - Punakha (74 km | 2.25 hrs)

In about 4 hours we reach Punakha. For more than 300 years until the time of the second king, Punakha was the winter capital of Bhutan. The climate is subtropical due to its relatively low altitude (1,400 m).

Lunch at the hotel. In the afternoon we drive to the Punakha Dzong. It is considered the "jewel" of Bhutanese monastic architecture. The Punakha Dzong, built in 1637 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, dominates the whole area with its size. Today it is still the winter residence of Je Khenpo (the highest abbot) and the main monastic community of Bhutan. In contrast to other dzongs in Bhutan, the Punakha Dzong is situated in a valley at the confluence of the Pho-Chu and Mo-Chu rivers. As a result, this complex can only be reached via a bridge. Due to the mild climate, cactus, papaya trees and citrus fruits grow in the Punakha region. Overnight in Punakha.

Accommodation: Meri Puensum Resort
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 11: Drive Punakha - Paro via Thimphu (125 km | 3.5 hrs)

After breakfast, before our onward journey to Paro, we take a short hike to the nearby temple of Chime Lhakhang, which lies in the middle of rice terraces. We pass through a small village with murals that indicate the importance of the temple.

Afterward we drive to Paro. On the way we pass another pass, the Dochu La. We are on the only road that connects the west of Bhutan with the east of the country. A constant up and down over high passes and deep valleys, along blue pines, Himalayan

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cypresses and rhododendron trees. The top of the pass of the Dochu La is 3,150 m. Colourful prayer flags, 108 Druk Wangyal Chörten and the Druk Wangyal Lhakhang await you at the highest point of the crossing. On a clear day, this vantage point offers a breathtaking 360-degree panoramic view of the Himalayan mountain range of Bhutan.

We continue to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. Here we visit the school of School of Arts and Crafts and the Royal Palace (Dzong). At the School of Arts and Crafts you will get an insight into the art education of Bhutan and watch the students sewing, weaving and carpentry and clay works. Traditional thangkas are also painted here. Towards evening we reach our hotel in Paro. Overnight in Paro.

Accommodation: Tashi Namgay Resort
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 12: Paro - Taktshang Monastery, the legendary Tiger's Nest

Today we hike to the famous Tiger's Nest. This monastery was built in 1692 over a cave in which, according to legend, Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) meditated. At 900 metres above the Paro valley, this monastery complex seems like an eagle's nest. Approx. 2-hour ascent through wooded mountain slopes offers a fascinating view of the mystical monastery complex. Those who do not wish to complete this ascent you have the opportunity to rest in a cafeteria halfway up. From here you will be rewarded with a fantastic view of the tiger's nest.

The afternoon is at leisure.

Accommodation: Tashi Namgay Resort
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 13: Fly Paro - Delhi

Transfer to airport and fly to Delhi. Upon arrival, meet and transfer to your hotel.

Remaining of the afternoon is at leisure. Perhaps you would like to buy souvenirs in one of Delhi's many colourful bazaars. Dinner and overnight stay in Delhi.

Accommodation: The Suryaa New Delhi
Meal: Breakfast

Includes

- Airport (pick up/drop off) transfers by private A/C vehicle
- Bhutan visa
- Twin-Sharing accommodation in all Hotel/Resort/Lodge as mentioned
- All meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner), afternoon tea and bottled-water throughout the tour in Bhutan
- All sightseeing as per the itinerary
- English speaking licensed guide throughout the tour
- All sightseeing and long distance transportation in private air-condition vehicle (cars/SUVs or mini/micro-bus etc. depending on group size). This includes all road permit, parking, allowance for driver, outstation overnight charges for the driver
- Monument/museum entrance fees
- Royalty and all internal taxes

Excludes

- International flight tickets
- Visa fee
- Travel insurance
- Meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Personal clothing and equipment

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- Tips for trip leader/guide, driver, hotel staff and porters
- Items of personal nature such as alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, laundry, and other unforeseen expenses
- Items/services not listed in "included"
- Extra expenses/payment for 'Optional' activities/programs if participated

Accommodation

The Suryaa New Delhi

Being set in the very heart of New Delhi, Suryaa Hotel offers a bar, a cable flat-screen and a sunbathing terrace. Featuring 244 rooms with views of the city, this venue is set within a short ride from Tughlakabad Fort. The rooms are air-conditioned with modern comforts like complimentary wireless internet, TV, iron and ironing board.

Tashi Namgay Resort, Paro

The resort is set amidst five acres of lush foliage and green lawns. Located conveniently in the heart of Paro Valley but away from the distractions of the main town, Tashi Namgay Resort offers you a calm and peaceful environment within its compound. Traditional Bhutanese and modern architecture have been uniquely blended, yet offering all the amenities of a modern lifestyle.



The Mountain Resort, Bumthang

The Mountain Resort in Bumthang has come a long way without losing its roots. Our family-run resort was started by a man of exceptional kindness, who dreamed of a place that would be gracious, spacious, and rooted in the genuine traditions of Bhutanese

hospitality - a place brimming with the love of our dearly beloved family elder.

The Yangkhil Resort, Trongsa

The Yangkill Resort is situated not far from the Trongsa offering spectacular views of the deep valleys surrounding it. Resort has 21 spacious rooms of modern design combined with traditional Bhutanese architecture and wooden flooring. All rooms are fully insulated and the bathroom has a bathtub with a shower over. Hot and cold running water is available all day long.



Dewachen Hotel & Spa, Gangtey

Encircled by pine forests in the picturesque valley of Phobjikha, Dewachen hotel features 28 spacious, comfortably furnished rooms, with en suite facilities. All rooms are designed and decorated in traditional Bhutanese style perfectly blended with natural surroundings, for a perfect hideaway relaxation. Rooms are well heated by traditional 'bukhari' (iron stove), so you feel cozy and comfortable during cold winter nights.

Meri Puensum Resort, Punakha

Situated on a hilltop, offering panoramic vistas across the river and the valley, Meri Puensum, established in 1999, is one of the first resorts to come up in the serene and culturally rich valley of Punakha. This family run resort delivers highly personalized services and takes special care to the needs of its guests, in true tradition of Bhutanese hospitality.

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Group/Individual

On this trip you will be traveling privately with your family & friends. Our representative/tour partner will look after your transfers to and from the airport and will be around to answer other questions you may have about your trip.

Accommodation - Hotel, Resort

Your accommodation has been selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a fine heritage hotel in another or a family-run guesthouse or lodges in a smaller town. Accommodation in remote areas tend to be basic and may not have western amenities.

Single Accommodation

Single (room) supplement is provided on request (single supplement charge applies) and are subject to availability.

Food & Transport

All breakfasts and 11 lunches and 11 dinners are included.

Bhutanese cuisine is influenced by Chinese, Tibetan and Indian culture and generally in spicy side. However, don't be too worried if you aren't able to eat food that is too spicy. A majority of Bhutan's professional chefs/cooks take into account the foreigners' less spicy taste. The hotel/restaurant meals in Bhutan are usually buffet style and include Bhutanese and Western food.

For airport, sightseeing transfers, and for long drives we use a private air-con car, jeep, van depending upon group size. Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines.

Weather

Generally, the ideal time to visit Bhutan is either in autumn from September to November or in spring between March and May. Himalayan views tend to be

best between October to December, as the weather is generally clear with sunny skies. From March to May the valleys are awash with colour when the famous rhododendrons bloom (particularly in May); the country has over 45 wild species. You will experience a range of temperatures during the trip depending on the altitude. During the day temperatures will be approx. 10°C-20°C. At night temperatures will drop in autumn to about 3°C-4°C.

Baggage Allowance

At time of writing the standard weight limit is one checked baggage is 25kg (55lb) and hand baggage 7kg (15lbs). We recommend packing only one piece of checked baggage. Luggage allowances for both hand and checked luggage are subject to change, we suggest you check the airline's website for the latest information prior to your departure.

Please note there is no direct flight to Paro (Bhutan) from Europe or America. You can fly to Paro either via Kathmandu (Nepal) or Delhi (India).

ESSENTIAL/PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Passport & Visas

All nationalities require a passport that must be valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information below is primarily for EU passport holders, and other nationalities should check with the relevant embassies. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

BHUTAN: Visa is required to enter Bhutan and as per government rules Bhutan visa should be processed through a travel agency. Hence, we will

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arrange/process visa for you. You will need to send us a clear copy of your passport at the time of booking; as we have to arrange/process in advance. It can either be sent by post or scanned; it should be very clear and in colour. If you need to get a new passport for the journey, please apply for this immediately, and send us the copy/scan as soon as you receive your new passport. It is important the information you give us is correct, and that the passport copy you send us is the one on which you will be travelling to Bhutan.

INDIA: Visas are required if you are German and for most other nationalities. Visa information changes regularly for India; for the latest information on applying for a visa please follow these links for more information.

<https://indianembassyberlin.gov.in/pages?id=Mg,,&su bid=MTQ>,

Please note: Visa regulations can change without notice, therefore please check the current regulations or contact us.

Vaccination & Health

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad.

BHUTAN/INDIA: There are no mandatory vaccination requirements for Bhutan. However, recommended vaccinations for this trip are: Polio, Tetanus, Diphtheria, Typhoid, Hepatitis A, hepatitis B, cholera, rabies, and tuberculosis.

You will also need a yellow fever vaccination certificate if you're arriving from a country with risk of yellow fever transmission or transiting for more than 12 hours through a country with risk of yellow fever transmission. Please confirm your vaccine recommendations and requirements with your doctor or travel clinic.

Dengue (a tropical viral disease spread by daytime biting mosquitoes) risk is present throughout the country at elevations below 2300 m. There is

currently no vaccine or prophylaxis available, so take the usual precautions to avoid mosquito bites.

Local Time

UTC/GMT + 6 hours.

Electricity

Bhutan operates on 230V and 50 Hz. There are three plug types in Bhutan - C, D & G. Plug type C has two round pins, whereas type D also has round pins but three. Plug G has three rectangular pins in a triangular pattern.

INDIA: 230V & 50Mz. India uses three plug types - C, D & M. Plug type C has two round pins, whereas type D also has round pins but three. Type M plugs are often used alongside type D for heavier/larger appliances.

Money

BHUTAN: The Bhutanese unit of currency is the Ngultrum and 1Nu = 100 Chetrum. The Ngultrum is pegged to the value of the Indian Rupee and at the time of this publication (May 2023) the approximate exchange rates are 92 Euro and 82 US\$.

It is illegal to import or export Ngultrum. You are advised to bring most of your money in cash as you may have difficulty changing travellers cheques outside Thimphu/Paro. It makes no difference whether you bring Euro or US Dollars. You should change your money on arrival at Paro either at the airport or hotel (please note that the hotel often gives a better rate than the airport).

To get the best exchange rates for Ngultrum, bigger denominations Euro/US\$ that are in pristine conditions (no fold, no mark, no tear, no stain) are required.

INDIA: The national currency of India is the Indian Rupee (INR), with an exchange rate at the time of publication of approximately 89 to the Euro and 82 to the US\$. It is illegal to import or export rupees. Do not accept torn or (very) dirty Indian banknotes from banks or in change as they will almost certainly not be accepted as legal tender in India. Please ask for low

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denomination notes of 100, 200 or 500 Rupees as 2000 Rupee notes can sometimes be difficult to use out of Delhi. You can change money back from Rupees into Euro or Dollars at Delhi airport (before going through security), but you must produce an exchange receipt showing that you changed money in India. You are advised to bring most of your money in cash as you may have difficulty changing travellers cheques outside Delhi. It makes no difference whether you bring Euro or US Dollars. You should change your money on arrival at Delhi either at the hotel or airport (please note that the hotel often gives a better rate than the airport).

ATM | Credit Cards

Throughout the major towns of Bhutan, you will find ATM kiosks of the major Bhutanese banks like the Bank of Bhutan, Druk PNB Bank and Bhutan National Bank. Money can be withdrawn from these ATM kiosks using some major credit cards such as Visa and MasterCard. We recommend you change most of the money you need for the trip before leaving Thimphu. Please do not rely wholly on ATM machines as often they are broken or run out of cash. Credit cards are accepted in larger shops, handicraft stores and hotels in Thimphu other major towns.

Extra Expenses & Spending Money

You will need to bring some extra money to cover drinks, laundry, souvenirs and any other personal expense, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Though it totally depends on individual but generally an approximate amount of US\$150 per person, per week should be sufficient (more if you enjoy a few beers); however, for those that can't resist a bargain or may wish to participate in all of the optional excursions, consider allocating a higher amount. Or if you are the one frugal with money probably allocating less would also be suffice.

Optional Tours may be offered in some city you visit during your tour. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits and if seats are available. Please ensure you have additional funds available if you feel you may

wish to participate in any extra activities. Each optional tour/activity will be arranged locally by our local partner/guide, participation and tipping for optional excursions is completely at your discretion.

Tipping

Tipping is of course entirely at your discretion and it is not customary and compulsory in Bhutan but always appreciated. Tips should be given individually and at the end of their service.

Itinerary Change

In case of some unusual events/incidents the order of programs (sightseeing, excursions etc.) might have to change in order to accommodate the local situations. In these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements while maintaining the overall integrity of your trip.

The domestic airlines may change their schedule frequently and, in such cases, our local partner/guide will inform you about the changes.

Travel Insurance

We highly recommend to choose/get an insurance plan/policy that covers your needs. And please make sure to keep/carry a hard-copy of your travel insurance documents on your person while on tour. It's prudent to check thoroughly the inclusions and procedure to file claims prior to purchasing insurance coverage. *travel-to-nature Asia* will not be responsible for any costs incurred by you due to your failure to purchase appropriate travel insurance from the date of booking.

Important Information

On all guided trips although our leaders/guides are well trained to deal with different capabilities, if they have any concerns about someone's ability to safely partake in an activity, or their impact on other people's enjoyment, we authorize them to take necessary action which, in some circumstances, may involve asking someone to miss that activity.