

## Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling & Kaziranga NP | 17 Days



### BHUTAN

Bhutan is a country nestled in the eastern Himalayas. It is a land of superlatives, the last surviving example of a Tibetan Buddhist Kingdom that proudly guard and treasures its cultural and natural heritage. Blessed with a tiny population and steep inaccessible valleys and rolling hills and towering crags, with only small patches of cultivation, it holds fabulous pristine forest that are almost entirely untouched and full of wild lives.

Bhutan is not an ordinary place. It has one foot in the past and one in the future. The country has only opened its doors to foreigners quite recently, and although it does so with outstanding hospitality, it is not without some reserve, wishing to avoid the negative side-effects of uncontrolled tourism apparent in other developing nations. Number of visitors is restricted to a strict quota and the government imposes a fixed and very high daily tariff. The visitors will be enlivened by a series of splendid and impressive Dzongs (fortress & monasteries) that usually occupy eagle nest locations of strategic importance. The Bhutanese people still dress in traditional garb and their customs and lifestyles are preserved with enthusiasm and pride. All these factors combine to make this country one of the most rewarding and thrilling culture & nature tour destinations available today.



### DARJEELING | SIKKIM

The north-eastern Indian Himalayan enclave of the state of Sikkim and the district of Darjeeling lie tucked between eastern Nepal and western Bhutan. A one-hour's domestic

flight from Kolkata to Bagdogra will take you close to the eastern border of Nepal & southern border of Bhutan after which a surface transfer between 3 and 4 hours is required to get to Darjeeling.

**Darjeeling** and its district, the Autonomous Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council of West Bengal, has seen its historical development in another unique fashion. Vied by the British conquistadors in the early nineteenth century, it was confiscated from Sikkim and developed as a summer resort for the British rulers of east India. Here one will find relics of the British Raj in quaint English country cottages and bungalows, steeple churches and buildings amidst wafts of cool mountain breeze.

**Sikkim** is unique as being a rare stronghold of the Nyingmapa sect of Tibetan Buddhism for this is where they took shelter and propagated their faith following persecution in Tibet hundreds of years before. Until its official merger with India in 1975, Sikkim was a Buddhist kingdom under a Nyingmapa ruler for over three hundred years. In witness to the fact, more than two hundred monasteries can be found around this tiny Himalayan state.

Till the 17th century, Sikkim was inhabited by the Lepcha, the aborigines of Sikkim, having cultural and linguistic affinities with the tribes of Northern Burma. They lived off the natural produces of the earth and practiced animism. They called their land, "Nye Mayel Lyang," meaning 'the land of fairies,' or paradise. From AD 1642 till 1975, Sikkim became a Buddhist kingdom ruled by the Namgyal dynasty who came from Tibet. Thereafter, a peoples revolution demanded merger with the Indian Union, and Sikkim became the 22nd. state of India.

Adding to the grandeur of this region is the mighty Mt. Khangchendzonga range. Standing aloft on the north-western horizon one is able to gaze into probably the most alluring set of mountains in all of the Himalayas; as viewed from the hill tops of Darjeeling district and Sikkim.

### Assam Kaziranga National Park

Kaziranga the finest of India's national parks in Northeast India. Situated on the Brahmaputra River in Assam. Kaziranga has a superb variety of wildlife and is probably the best place in the world to see the endangered Great Indian One-horned Rhinoceros. Kaziranga is also home to the Asian Elephant, wild Water Buffalo, Swamp Deer and the endangered freshwater Ganges River Dolphin and many more.

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### Trip Highlights

- Black-necked Crane Festival in Bhutan
- Hike to famous and the iconic Tiger's Nest Monastery
- Enjoy the quiet streets of Bhutan's sleepy cities, Paro and Thimphu
- Explore Kaziranga National Park which represents one of the last unmodified natural areas in the north-eastern region of India
- Hog Deer, Swamp Deer, Hoolock Gibbon & the chance of seeing a Tiger
- Picturesque scenery in Darjeeling, including tea estates
- Breathtaking view of the entire Kanchenjunga mountain range from Pelling in Sikkim
- Montane vegetation including Himalayan Rhododendron in Sikkim & Darjeeling

### Detailed Itinerary

#### Day 01: Arrive New Delhi - Fly to Bagdogra – Drive to Darjeeling (2,045 m | 85km | 3.5 hrs)

Upon arrival in Delhi, clear customs and immigration. Meet our representative and driver outside the terminal building and transfer to Domestic Terminal to catch your connecting flight to Bagdogra. In good weather condition one can enjoy the view of Mt. Everest and Mt. Kanchanjunga.

Your Guide & Driver will receive you at Bagdogra airport & drive to Darjeeling in the state of West Bengal, north-east India. The drive is approx. 85 Kms & takes about 3 hours. Upon arrival in Darjeeling, check in at your hotel. Rest of the day at leisure.

**Set at 2,045 m**, Darjeeling is a bit off the beaten path, but worth the effort to visit. This pretty resort built among tea plantations is one of the cool hill stations, where the rulers of the British Raj could escape the heat of the summer. The places now attracts tourist around the world (primarily upper-class Indians) bent on the same advantages of natural air-conditioning. Half of the fun of visiting Darjeeling is getting there. The famous 'toy train' huffs & puffs and climb to more than 2400 m along a narrow-gauge track before reaching the city (you might remember the train from the movie Around the the World in 80 Days). The trip begins in Siliguri and takes about eight hours to climb 80 km. Nevertheless, it is well known for the world famous Darjeeling Tea.

**Accommodation:** Mayfair Hill Resort

**Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner



#### Day 02: In Darjeeling

With a backdrop of mighty snow-clad Himalayan peaks, Darjeeling is the most important hill resort in eastern India. The mighty Kanchenjunga peak overlooks the town and, with luck, we will also see the world's highest peak, Mount Everest, from near the town.

We will also be exploring Darjeeling on foot, enjoying the colonial style buildings of the British Raj and visiting some of the town's attractive locations, such as Observatory Hill (known as 'The Mall') and the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI). The Mall is a hill near the main square in Darjeeling, Chowrasta. There are wonderful views of the Himalayas from The Mall. Situated at an elevation of 2,100 meters, the HMI was founded in 1954 after the historic conquest of Everest on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 1953 by Tenzing Norgay (a Sherpa) from Darjeeling and Sir Edmund Hillary from New Zealand.

Darjeeling Himalayan Railway or the 'Toy Train'- The Toy Train is one of the most famous narrow gauge trains in the world. Highlights of a trip on this train include the Batasia



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Loop with its spectacular views down into Darjeeling and of the surrounding high peaks, Tiger Hill – the highest station on the line and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Gurkha War Memorial and the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute.

Narrow gauge steam engine trains still operate with their original steam engines and the loops and the zigzags along the route are remarkable feats of engineering. We will take a short ride from Darjeeling town to Ghoom, the nearest station. It is a joy ride in itself. The Toy Train is considered an engineering marvel and railway enthusiasts regard it as one of the wonders of the world, worth preserving forever.

Darjeeling Zoo: This is a 67.56 acre (27.3 ha) zoo in the town of Darjeeling. The zoo was opened in 1958, and an average elevation of 2,134 m, is the largest high altitude zoo in India. It specializes in breeding animals adapted to alpine conditions, and has successful captive breeding programs



for the snow leopard, the critically endangered Himalayan wolf and the red panda.

Himalayan Mountaineering Institute: This was founded in 1954 after the historic conquest of Everest on the 29th May 1953, when two people reached its summit. They were the Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, from Darjeeling and Sir Edmund Hillary, from New Zealand. As an honor to the great Sherpa this institute was formed with the aim of imparting mountaineering skills to enthusiasts. Tenzing Norgay was one of the founding members of HMI and also served as field director of the Institute. HMI also houses a museum which holds a rare collection of mementoes from various Everest expeditions.

**Accommodation:** Mayfair Hill Resort

**Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

**Day 03: Drive Darjeeling – Pelling (2,150 m | 73 km | 3.**

Today we leave Darjeeling and proceed to Pelling where we will settle into the resort "The Elgin Mount Pandim". It offers a unique and personal tryst with the Himalayas and revokes the old world charm created by its first owners - the royal family of Sikkim and offers a peaceful retreat. Pelling is about 73 km away from Darjeeling and 115 km



from Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim.

The placid town pulls most of the visitors for its representative status in history, nature and culture of the state of Sikkim. More precisely Pelling is famous for magnificent views of the snow-capped Kanchenjunga (8,586 m) range, the third highest peak in the world.

For bird lovers the resort offers an excellent vantage point for watching rare birds including the Green-tailed sunbirds, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatchers, Scimiter Babblers and Laughing thrushes and many more.

**Accommodation:** The Elgin Mount Pandim

**Meal:** Breakfast, Dinner



**Day 04: In Pelling**

Sun, cloud or fog? This is the key question in the morning when we wake up directly in front of the 8,686m third-highest mountain in the world, Kanchenchunga. Situated at

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an altitude of 2150 m, Pelling offers breathtaking view of the entire Kanchenjunga mountain range including Koktang, Kumbhakaran (Jannu), Rathong, Kabru, Kabru Dome, Kanchenjunga, Pandim, Siniolchu and others. This is as close as you can get to the Kanchenjunga range without leaving the material comfort of good hotels. There is a great deal to interest visitors here.

We will spend our two full days here exploring by jeep and hiking around. We will take time to explore the town, meet the local people and get an insider's perspective on the local culture. We will visit many places of interest that fit the best to all of us.

**Pemayangtse Monastery:** Pemayangtse literally means 'Perfect Sublime Lotus'. This is one of the oldest and most



important monasteries of Sikkim. Founded in 1705, this monastery belongs to the Nyingma-pa sect. The three-storied building of the monastery houses a good collection of wall paintings and sculptures. On the third floor of the monastery, there is a seven-tiered painted wooden model of the abode of Guru Rimpoche, complete with rainbows, angels and the whole panoply of Buddha and bodhisattva. In January/ February every year, a religious dance called 'Cham' is performed in Pemayangtse. Sanga Choeling Monastery is located on the top of the mountain behind the town of Pelling. The distance to the monastery from town is about 3 km. The road is not motorable and one needs to take a 45 minute walk through a quite path to reach the monastery. As a result a visit to Sanga Choeling Monastery is not part of any of the regular itinerary. But if you have time and energy, the effort of the uphill walk is well rewarded with great views of Pelling and surrounding hills including great views of Mount Kanchenjunga that can be seen from the monastery compound.

Built in 1697 the Sanga Choeling is one of the oldest monasteries in Sikkim. Sanga Choeling means 'the island of esoteric teaching'. This Gompa is another of Lhasa Chenpo's creations, and is highly venerated among the

Nyingmapa. Gutted by fire, it has been rebuilt and houses some of the original clay statues. This monastery is the second oldest in Sikkim. Since the place can only be reached on foot, even during high tourist season, the monastery is not crowded. One can still enjoy the great views among tranquillity.

**Khecheopalri Lake:** Khecheopalri Lake is considered one of the most sacred lakes of Sikkim. The lake remains hidden under rich forest cover. It is believed that birds do not permit even a single leaf to float on the lake surface. Our visit to Pelling would be incomplete without a tour to this lake.

**Rabdentse Ruins:** This was the second capital of the erstwhile kingdom of Sikkim after Yuksom and till the year 1814 A.D., the king of Sikkim ruled the state from this place. Today, Rabdentse ruins lie hidden from the main road at a walking distance from Pelling and the Pemayangtse monastery. It can be approached by following a footpath which branches off the main road. The scenic view from the top of the ruin scanning across deep valley to the mystic heights of Kangchenjunga ranges is something to be cherished and etched in memory.



**Accommodation:** The Elgin Mount Pandim

**Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

**Day 05: Drive Pelling - Kalimpong (1,250 m | 91 km | 4 hrs)**

Getting up early is rewarded by a beautiful sunrise, as if the Himalayas opening its unique light theater. Around the Hills sky and earth suddenly seem to melt. Glowing, the sun awakens the mountain gods of the highest Himalayan summits.

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After our leisurely breakfast we are set for a beautiful and scenic journey to Kalimpong (1,250 m) for overnight stay at The Elgin Silver Oaks, Kalimpong. The Elgin Silver Oaks Kalimpong, was the home of a famous Jute magnate. It is now converted into a luxury Elgin boutique hotel in the Himalayas. Rest of the day is free for individual activities.

**Accommodation:** The Elgin Silver Oaks

**Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

### BHUTAN

**Day 06: Drive Kalimpong - Phuntsholing, Bhutan (293 m | 5 hrs | 174 km)**

The drive through the plains of West Bengal will be a different experience. The slow experience to the travellers. Phuntsholing, as a frontier town, provides a entry/exit point for Bhutanese and foreign visitors. At an elevation of around 293 m above sea level, it is one of the commercial hubs in Bhutan and quite close to the Indian town Jaigaon.

On arrival at Phuntsholing, you will be received by your Bhutanese guide and driver and escorted to hotel for check-in. In the evening, if time permits stroll around the town.

**Accommodation:** Alem Hotel & Resort

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**Day 07: Drive Phuntsholing - Thimphu (2,320 m | 5 hrs | 152 km)**

After breakfast process visa formalities and proceed to Thimphu. The road further climbs steeply and winds in innumerable bends, upwards to an altitude of approx. 2,300m. Five kms ahead of Phuntsholing, visit Kharbandi Gumpa built in a garden of tropical plants and flowers. From the monastery garden, there is a beautiful view over the plains and the town of Phuntsholing. After two hours drive through mountain jungle, displaying lianas and orchids, the first ridge has been passed and the road descends slightly. The scenery and vegetation changes and en route you pass Chukha Hydel Project and the small town of Chimakothi. Near Chapcha the road reaches its highest point approx. 2,800m and from here it goes steeply down and along the Wang Chu (river) till the Chuzom (confluence). From Chuzom, the road passes via scattered villages set in the midst of apple orchards to Thimphu. On arrival in Thimphu, check into your hotel.

### Thimphu

Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan is situated on west bank of the river Thimphu, (Thimphu Chhu) in a wooded valley at an elevation of 2,320m. Prior to 1961, Thimphu was only an insignificant village. The massive Tashicho Dzong, about 700 years old, was carefully revamped in the 1960s by the late King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk to house the royal and main government offices. Since the country emerged from isolation its importance has grown and it has many official buildings. The Secretariat, King's offices and some ministries are housed in the Tashichho Dzong, next to which one of the world's highest golf courses (9 hole) has been made. With a population of no more than 130,000. Even today, it still has a few streets and no traffic lights. Thimphu is an easy place to wander around, and will enable the visitor to appreciate the detail of Bhutanese architecture.

A few miles south of the capital is Simtokha, one of the oldest complete Dzongs in the country, dating from the early 1600's, a period when Shabdrungs, the line of religious rulers originally from Tibet, ruled the country.

**Accommodation:** Pedling Hotel & Spa

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



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### Day 08: In Thimphu

Today, we will visit some of the well-known landmarks in the city. In the city centre, you will find the traffic policeman directing the traffic flow instead of traffic signals. It is said that Thimphu is the only capital in the world without traffic signals.

Across the town the Zorig Chusum Institute, which literally translates as the thirteen (chusum) arts and crafts (zorig) of Bhutan. We will meet the talented artists and students at work. Just a short walk away is the National Institute for Traditional Medicine. The Institute produces indigenous medical products from herbs, minerals, gemstones and animal products. Some of the herbs are rare plants collected high in the Himalayas. Drive past the only public golf course in the country, on our way to the **Trashichho Dzong** – the 17th Century Dzong houses the offices of the Central Government and the Monastic Body and also the Throne Room of His Majesty. If time permits we will also visit other places of interest.

**Memorial Chorten:** This landmark of Thimphu was built in 1974 in the memory of third King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, who is popularly regarded as Father of Modern Bhutan. It is a four-storey tall white building, containing statues and iconography of deities from complex tantric teachings and serves as an important place of worship for Thimphu residents, as well as from other parts of the country.

**Takin Sanctuary:** Takin (*Budorcas taxicolor*) has been chosen as the national animal of Bhutan is based both on its uniqueness and its association with country's history and mythology. It is said that Devine Madman, a popular saint is said to have created it with his magical power at a large congregation of devotees. It resembles like a cow from back and goat in the front and continues to befuddle taxonomists, who cannot quite relate to other animal.

**Buddha Point:** This is a new monument and main highlight of Thimphu valley. It has 165 meter high Buddha Statue

**Paper Factory:** Traditional papers were made from the daphne plant, using simple methods.

**Weekend Market:** The colorful weekend market of Thimphu is held from Friday-Sunday. Residents of Thimphu and country sides come to shop for food and clothes. There are some handicrafts and gifts shop as well, and provide a great photography scene.

**Accommodation:** Pedling Hotel & Spa

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### Day 09: Drive Thimpu - Punakha (1,200 m | 3 hrs | 75 km)

The drive from Thimphu takes about 3 hours. The road climbs from Thimphu to Dochula pass and descends through ever changing forests into the semi-tropical valley of Punakha and Wangdi at around 1200m. En-route stop at Dochula pass (3050m) where you can view the eastern Himalayas, including Bhutan's highest mountain, Gangkar



Punsum (7,550m). In the afternoon, we will visit historical Punakha Dzong.

Punakha was the old capital of Bhutan and the dzong was the second one to be built in Bhutan. This remarkable fortress position at the confluence of the Mo and Pho Chhu is quite spectacular and it has survived many fires, an earthquake and a glacial flood. Over the years it has been repaired and added to and has several interesting features to protect it against invasion. In April the front of this majestic building is highlighted by the blossoming of the Jacaranda trees; their purple flowers softening the giant walls, encouraging your eye to the intricate hand-carved and painted windows. Punakha was the old capital of Bhutan and the dzong was the second one to be built in Bhutan. This remarkable fortress position at the confluence of the Mo and Pho Chhu is quite spectacular and it has survived many fires, an earthquake and a glacial flood. Over the years it has been repaired and added to and has several interesting features to protect it against invasion. In April the front of this majestic building is highlighted by the blossoming of the Jacaranda trees; their purple flowers softening the giant walls, encouraging your eye to the intricate hand-carved and painted windows.

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**Accommodation:** Spirit Village Lodge

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**Day 10: Punakha – Phobjikha (3,000 m | 2 hrs | 60 km)**



After breakfast, we take an easy hike to the Fertility Temple (Chimi Lhakhang) across the paddy field. Later drive to Phobjikha. Enroute stop briefly at old Wangdi to visit historical Wanduephodrang Dzong.

**Fertility Temple (Chimi Lhakhang):** a monastery and fertility temple dedicated to Lama Drukpa Kuenley, a Tibetan Buddhist saint known popularly as “the divine madman” and considered a folk hero in Bhutan for his unconventional ways. Drukpa Kuenley originally built a chorten on the site in the 14th century, on which a temple was later built in 15th century. The temple, flanked by nearly 100 tall prayer flags, sits atop a picturesque hill. It has long been a pilgrimage site for childless couples. This easy walk takes about 20 minutes each way. **Drive from Punakha to Phobjikha:** Drive to Phobjikha takes about 2 hours covering distance of 60 km. The road climbs from Wandue, drive uphill almost reaches Pele La pass 3400m. Before, reaching the pass, the road diverges and we take the road least traveled by. This eventually leads into the 'hidden valley' containing the stunningly beautiful monastery of Gangtey Gompa.

Phobjikha (3000m) is a wide-glacial and beautiful valley, designated as conservation zone within the Black Mountains National Park, a natural habitat for wildlife, including nesting black-necked cranes from Central Asia (mid autumn till early spring). Because of the conservation measures, there is no electricity in the valley. The lodges use solar powered cells or generator to light which is turned off after dinner. Hot water is provided in the bucket and rooms are heated with wood stoves.

Upon arrival in Phobjikha we will check-in our hotel. Rest of the day we will explore the important sites within the valley.

**Accommodation:** Dewachen Hotel & Spa

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**Day 11: Phobjikha Valley – The Highlight of the Trip, Black-necked Crane Festival!!**

Phobjikha is one of the most beautiful place in Bhutan and designated as conservation zone. This valley is also considered sacred due to the presence of endangered Black Necked Crane in the winter season.

We will Spend our day visting Gangtey Gonpa witnessing the Blacked-Naked Crane Festival and explore the flat beautiful valley and traditional village untouched by modernity.

The Annual Black-necked Crane Festival is a one-day event celebrated at Gangtey Gonpa, Phobjikha valley on **11th November**. Phobjikha valley is the largest winter habitat of Black-necked Cranes in Bhutan. The Black-necked Crane



Festival is organized by the Environment Management Committee composed of several local stakeholders. During the winter months, the Black-necked Cranes become part of the local people's daily lives. The festival is an occasion for the locals to rejoice and celebrate the arrival of Black-necked Cranes, revered as the heavenly birds. The festival is organized to generate awareness, provide economic incentives for local communities and form an avenue for the locals to renew their commitment to conserve the cranes. It also offers communities an opportunity to showcase their cultural heritage and skills. The festival generally includes cultural programs such as folk songs, environment related songs and mask dances performed by the local people, school children and monks. The highlight of the festival is usually the locally choreographed crane dance performed by school children. The festival was initiated by Royal Society for Protection of Nature, a national NGO, as a part of



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Integrated Conservation and Development Program (ICDP). The first festival was held in November 1998 in the middle of the valley near the old school.

**Gangtey Gumpa:** Gantey Gumpa monastery sits atop a hillock that overlooks the Phobjikha valley. It is headed by the ninth Gangtey Trulku and is the largest Nyingma reincarnation of influential treasure finder Pema Lingpa. Incarnate line of Pema Thinlay, representing the body aspects of Pema Lingpa, contrasted with mind and speech emanations. The monastery has been recently built and surrounding the monastery are village homes and hermitages.

### Endangered Black-Necked Crane Information Centre

: The centre displays about the cranes and the valley environment. You can use the centre's powerful spotting scopes and check what you see against its pamphlet 'Field Guide to Crane Behaviour'. If the weather isn't good, you can browse the library and handicraft shop, and watch videos of the endangered birds, its habit and habitat. This valley is also one of the pioneer centre ecotourism in the country.

**Black-necked Crane:** 'Thrung Trung Karmo' as this bird is passionately called in Bhutan is subject of many Bhutanese



songs and folklore. They are seen among the painting on the walls of temples and Thankga. These endangered species of cranes migrate from Tibet in late autumn and typically stay till the mid march. About 3-400 cranes reside in the wetland in the center of the valley. The Observation & Education Centre has informative display about the cranes and conservation effort in the valley.

monastery in western Bhutan. It was founded in 1613 by Gyalse Pema Thinlay, a grandson and

**Accommodation:** Dewachen Hotel & Spa

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### Day 12: Drive Phobjikha - Paro (2,280 m | 6 hrs | 170 km)

Today, we try to leave early to Paro with stop at places of scenic beauty. The drive to Paro takes about 5 -6 hours covering distance of approx. 170 km. The road climbs again to Pele La pass (3400m) where we make stop for views of the snow clad peaks, including that of Bhutan's sacred peak Mt. Chomolhari. After crossing Pelela pass, descend until you reach Wangdue. From Wangdue, drive west and climb up to Dochula pass (3,050m), where you have another opportunity to view the peaks of the eastern Himalayas. Descend to Thimphu from Dochula takes about 40 minutes. The western branch of lateral highway from Thimphu, runs close to the Wangchu river in the valley floor, through the suburbs and villages of Thimphu to arrive at the river confluence of Chuzom, which is also the hub of road network going to Paro, Ha, Thimphu and Phuntsholing. From Chuzom, it is north-west for about ½ hour, following Pa Chu river upstream, passing Tachogang temple on the other side of the river, then through relatively straight road, into the villages and farm houses of Paro valley.

Time permits, we will explore down town Paro. Paro is one of the most beautiful valleys in the country with Bhutan's only airport located here, among the terraced fields, and elegant farm houses. Willow trees line many of the roads, contrasting with bright colors of the fields and the most popular and important sites also found within Paro district. Paro town (2,280m) is still a small with one main street and less than one hundred small family-run shops.

**Accommodation:** Bhutan Mandala Resort

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### Day 13: Hike to Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest) (3,120 m)

Today, we will make our way to the base of the mountain to begin our hike to visit the magnificent Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest) that clings dramatically on a huge rock cliff, 900 m above the valley. According to the legend, Guru Rinpoche or Padmasambhava, who spread Buddhism across the entire Himalayas is said to have flown here in the Eighth Century on the back of a Tigress, and meditated for three years in a small cave where the main shrine of the monastery stands today.



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It is a steep uphill walk through woods, of about 1½-2hrs, to reach a tea house an ascent of 340 m. After a welcome refreshment at the tea house, one of the principle viewpoints of the monastery we will climb the further half hour's ascent, which brings us to another viewpoint directly across from the monastery. The final section of the walk takes us from this viewpoint steeply down 100m into the gorge that separates us from the monastery and then climbs back up again to reach the monastery gate – the monastery was designed to be isolated! We then descend back to the valley floor by our outward route back to where our vehicle will be waiting. The full walk to the monastery and back involves approximately 740 m ascent.



The Paro valley lies beneath Jhomolhari one of the highest of Bhutan's Himalayan peaks. Later if time permits will visit the impressive ruins of Drugyel Dzong, named to commemorate a victory over the Tibetan invasion of 1644. This picturesque ruin stands on a hillside above the lovely village of Drugyel with imposing views of Jhomolhari from the approach roads.

There may also be time for further sightseeing to visit the ancient temple of KyichuLhakhang, one of 108 temples built by Songtsen Goenbo an important early Tibetan king, to pin down the Bon demon who was thought to hover over the whole of Tibet. We may also see some of the treasures from Bhutan's National Museum. The Museum itself is closed, apparently until 2015 following the earthquake in 2011, but many of its artifacts and displays may be temporarily housed in a nearby building. In the evening we will head out for dinner on one of Paro's excellent restaurants.

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**Accommodation:** Bhutan Mandala Resort

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### Day 14: Fly Paro - Kolkata - Jorhat | Drive Kaziranga National Park (80 m | 112 km | 2.5 hrs)

After breakfast drive to the Paro airport to catch the outgoing flight to Kolkata. Upon arrival in Kolkata, clear customs and immigration. Meet our representative and driver outside the terminal building and transfer to Domestic Terminal to catch your connecting flight to Jorhat in Asaam.

## Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling & Kaziranga NP | 17 Days

Arriving at Jorhat Airport, we will board our minibus and drive to Kaziranga National Park (about a 2-hour drive), where we will settle into the Infinity Lodge. This is comfortable Resort which offers en suite rooms with showers and is set in a pleasant garden. It is surrounded by open garen and some wooded areas, both of which are good for watching birds.

Kaziranga, with an area of 430 square kilometers, is one of the world's most beautiful national parks. It lies on the south bank of the great Brahmaputra River and is one of the last haunts of the Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros. The area was first given protection as a forest reserve in the early years of this century, but it was not opened to visitors until 1938, and it was not until 1954 that the Great Indian One-Horned Rhinoceros was given complete statutory protection, allowing Kaziranga to become one of the most important refuges for this endangered mammal. The wildlife sanctuary was given National Park status in 1974 and today there are over 1,100 rhinos in the park, a figure which represents over 70% of the world total. Kaziranga is also home to the Asian Elephant, wild Water Buffalo, Swamp Deer and the endangered freshwater Ganges River Dolphin.



**Accommodation:** Infinity Resort

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### Day 15: Explore Kaziranga National Park

We will spend our two full days in Kaziranga exploring the reserve by Jeep. There will be ample time for birdwatching and photography as well as opportunities to learn about the work of the reserve patrols.

Kaziranga is a vast area of swamps interspersed with broad tracts of tall elephant grass, open forests, watercourses (known as 'jheels') and reedbeds. To the south the ground rises to 1,200 metres to form the Mikir Hills, an important



refuge for the reserve's wildlife when the lowlands flood during the annual monsoon.

In addition to seeing the endangered Greater One-horned Rhinoceros, we also hope to see Kaziranga's important population of Water Buffalo, (one of the last remaining wild populations), and a variety of other mammal species, such as Rhesus Macaque, Common and Capped Langurs, Sambar, plus Swamp, Barking and Hog Deer, Common and Clawless Otters, and Wild Boar. We will make every effort to locate other more elusive inhabitants of the Reserve such as Asian Elephant and Hoolock Gibbon. Birdlife is equally diverse and among the bird species found here is an exceptional range of waterbirds – cormorants, herons, egrets, storks, geese, ducks, waders, terns and birds of prey. Other regional specialities include Swamp Partridge, Bengal Florican, Abbott's Babbler, Sultan Tit, Black-breasted Thrush, Bristled Grass Warbler, Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker and Little Spiderhunter. It really is a wonderful place to visit.

**Accommodation:** Infinity Resort

**Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### Day 16: Fly Jorhat - Kolkata

Today after breakfast drive to Jorhat airport to catch the outgoing flight to Kolkata.

travel-to-nature Asia representative will meet and assist us at the airport and trafer to Kolkata city Centre. On arrival check into Hotel Oberoi Grand. Oberoi Grand, Kolkata is a Luxury five star property providing the right blend of luxury, attentive and warm service. It is known for its excellence and is acknowledged for offering quality and value. Located centrally it offers its guests the freedom to explore Kolkata's local markets.

## Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling & Kaziranga NP | 17 Days



**Accommodation:** Oberoi Grand Kolkata

**Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

### Day 17: Fly Kolkata – Europe

Today after breakfast drive to the airport to catch the outgoing flight to Europe. Depends up your flight schedule you will arrive back to Germany on the same day or the following day in the morning.

End Of Your Journey !

### Includes

#### In India

- Twin Room sharing accommodation at 4\*-5\* Heritage Hotels & Resort mentioned in the programme or similar. (Hotels mentioned above are subject to availability)
- Transport services by a very Good Chauffeur driven A/C Large Car/Cars {4 Persons in each car} for the transfers & long drives as per program, except in Kolkata where transport shall be by Mini Bus.
- Mineral water throughout the tour
- English speaking licensed guide throughout the tour
- Entry tickets to the monuments / National Parks
- 03 Entry tickets into Kaziranga National Park for wildlife watching on Jeep Safari
- Nature walk with local nature guides
- Daily breakfast & dinner at the hotels where the group shall be staying except in Kaziranga where all 3 meals are included.
- Airfare Delhi/Bagdogra

- Pick up and to the airports drop off services by our local handling Agents

#### In Bhutan

- Bhutan Visa & Visa Processing Fees
- 7 night Accommodation in twin sharing Bhutan in 3-\*-4\*comfort hotels
- All meals, afternoon tea and mineral water throughout the tour in Bhutan
- English speaking licensed guide throughout the tour
- Private Vehicle with a driver and long road permit
- Farmhouse visit and a meals & Archery
- Return Flight from Paro/ Kolkata
- Pick up and to the airports drop off services
- Private Vehicle for all transportation
- Daily SDF/Royalty and all Government taxes
- All entrance fees to the mentioned monument, museum visits
- Crane Festival Entry Ticket
- All sightseeing programme as per the itinerary
- All meals

### Excludes

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

#### Mayfair Hill Resort, Darjeeling

Mayfair Hill Resort is a heritage resort in Darjeeling perched on a hilltop opposite Raj Bhawan. The hotel offers 53 rooms overlooking panoramic views of the surroundings, a restaurant, a capacious banquet hall and a wellness spa. The resort also flaunts a tea boutique where you can explore the different kind of tea leaves that are grown.



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### The Elgin Mount Pandim, Pelling

The Elgin Mount Pandim Hotel in Pelling offers a unique and personal tryst with the Himalayas. Set in eight acres of virgin forest and landscaped gardens, it revokes the old world charm created by its first owners – the royal family of Sikkim and offers a peaceful retreat about one hundred and fifty kilometers from Siliguri, with a glorious view of the Singalila range.

### The Elgin Silver Oaks, Kalimpong

Lounging in the landscaped gardens in a profusion of colors, one is treated to breath-taking view at The Elgin Silver Oaks, Kalimpong. The natural décor is characteristic in the imposing Kanchenjunga which can be seen on a clear day, blooming petunias and asters, the serrated violet edges of iris, iridescent butterflies flitting through colourful azaleas, drooping geraniums, proud orchids and heaven, temporarily descends on earth.



### Alem Hotel & Resort, Phuentsholing

Alem Hotel & Resort is situated a heartbeat away from Phuentsholing. Alem Hotel & Resort has everything you'd expect in a premium establishment from superb comfort, great attention to detail and amazing customer service all at great value prices.

### Pedling Hotel & Spa, Thimphu

Pedling Hotel & Spa is a great choice for travelers looking for a 3 star hotel in Thimphu. It is located in Thimphu City Center. Among all the 3 Star hotels in Thimphu, Pedling Hotel & Spa is very much popular among the tourists. A smooth check-in/check-out process, flexible policies and friendly management garner great customer satisfaction for this property.

### Spirit Village Lodge, Punakha

Four kilometers from the bustling town of Khuruthang, and taking the countryside road towards Dzomi Gewog, Spirit Village Lodge stands spectacularly on a ridge facing Punakha Higher Secondary School, offering its traditional architectural grandeur in the serene natural setting with

strategic view point. The eight roomed lodge is a perfect place to spend family holiday time with ultimate peace and tranquility.

### Dewachen Hotel & Spa, Phobjika

Encircled by pine forests in the hidden valley of Phobjikha – Gantey Gompa, home to the very rare Black Necked cranes, the Dewachen Hotel features sixteen double rooms, modern bathroom fittings, heavenly bedding comforts, and a restaurant with a magnificent view and the finest cuisine prepared by a professional chef.

### Bhutan Mandala Resort, Paro

Located on a forested hill, Bhutan Mandala Resort provides a spectacular panoramic view of the Paro valley, and the lush rice fields surrounding it. Combining Bhutanese cultural traditions and hospitality with contemporary needs, guests will be able to explore the serenity and uniqueness of rural Bhutan while still enjoying the modern luxuries Bhutan Mandala Resort provides.

### Infinity Resort, Kaziranga

Our guests are drawn to the magic of nature, to the slow pace of life, closeness to the natural world and to the relief from the pressures of modern living. The ethos of Infinity Resort is founded on super luxury, afforded by an exceptionally great location which is harmoniously blended with its natural environment. A completely a zen experience for our guests!



### The Oberoi Grand, Kolkata

Fondly referred to as the Grand Dame of Chowringhee, our 5 star hotel: The Oberoi Grand has been an icon on the landscape of Kolkata for more than a century; with a reputation for taking care of its guests that befits the best hotel in Kolkata. The sense of calm that pervades the outdoor space is carried into the classically appointed rooms and suites that encircle the courtyard.

# Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling & Kaziranga NP | 17 Days

### 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. While camping you will be staying in a two-person camping tent.

### Single Accommodation

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

### Food & Transport

All breakfast, 11 lunches and 18 dinners are included.

Generally, you can eat out very cheaply in India. Where food is not included, you should allow at least 1,800 rupees (approximately Euro 20 & US\$22) per day for lunch and dinner. However, if you choose to dine in fine/expensive restaurants please allocate more than our suggested amount.

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 best time to visit India is from December to February, when it is warm during daytime and cool at night in most areas of India. December marks the beginning of the peak travel season with higher-priced accommodation and flights.

It starts to get hot from March and the temperature reaches its average high point of 45°C (113°F) in May. If you can bear the heat, traveling India from April to May, you can expect the benefits of smaller crowds as well as big promotions from hotels and airlines (usually 50% off).

India's rainy season starts from June and lasts until September. North India is less affected by downpours than central and southern parts. You could still enjoy a good experience if you visit north Indian destinations like Delhi, Agra, Jaipur and other Rajasthan areas. Many national parks are closed because of floods and landslides. Goa becomes a "ghost city", with few travelers and many beach resorts closed. Ladakh, located in the far north is cool, and little affected by the rainy season, and it starts to welcome its high travel time from June to August.

Rain starts to ease from the middle of September. In October, most areas of India have dry weather. Though it is still hot, it feels much more comfortable than in May. Traveling in October and November, you'll not be drenched, while enjoying better deals than in December-February.

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 on Qatar Airways 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.

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## ESSENTIAL/PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Passport & Visas

All nationalities require a full 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.

**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. Also, please make sure to obtain **double entry** visa for India.

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

Follow the link below if you intend to apply e-visa:  
<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/tvoa.html>

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

**Please note:** Visa regulations may change without notice, therefore please make sure to check the most current/updated 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.

There are no mandatory vaccination requirements for this trip. Recommended vaccinations for this trip are: Polio, Tetanus, Diphtheria, Typhoid, Hepatitis A. The risk of malaria on this trip is slight, but you may wish to consult your GP/Family Doctor or travel health clinic for further advice. Dengue fever and/or Chikungunya are known risks in places visited on this trip. Both are tropical viral diseases spread by daytime biting mosquitoes. There is currently no vaccine or prophylaxis available for either, and therefore the best form of prevention is to avoid being bitten. We recommend you take the usual precautions to avoid mosquito bites. The above information can change at short notice; as we are not qualified to answer all your questions about travel health we strongly recommend you contact your Medical Professional or a Travel Health Clinic prior to departure for up-to-date information.

### Local Time

UTC/GMT: + 5 hours and 30 minutes (INDIA)  
UTC/GMT: + 6 hours (BHUTAN)

### Electricity

**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.

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.

### Money

**INDIA:** The national currency of India is the Indian Rupee (INR), with an exchange rate at the time of publication of approximately 91 to the Euro and 88 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 denomination notes of 100, 200 or 500 Rupees as 2000 Rupee notes.

**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 (Feb 2025) the approximate exchange rates are 91 Euro and 88 US\$.



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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.

### ATM | Credit Cards

There are ATMs in Delhi, Kolkata and other major cities. We recommend you change most of the money you need for the trip before leaving Delhi. 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 in Delhi and other major cities.

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\$250 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.

India has very good opportunities for shopping, especially for locally made goods, and in Delhi local guides may well offer to take you to emporiums as well as workshops where these goods are made. Many people find this a great opportunity to buy local handicrafts, silk, jewelry, carpets etc. Guides will often assume that visitors will want to go shopping, it is very much part of the culture, however if you

do not wish to go, please make this clear to your local guide at the time.

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, but it is customary in India. Tipping can be an awkward affair especially when you are not familiar with the country. Your leader will help with tipping and will provide a list of suggested tips. This will include tips for drivers, hotel porters and other hotel staff, local sightseeing guides, and if trekking will include camp staff such as guide, assistants, cooks and pony men. Sometimes your leader will collect a kitty during the trip and sometimes they will collect the tips towards the end of the trip (occasionally for very small groups the leader may need to collect a little more than the suggested amount). We suggest you allow Rs 6,000 (approx. €60 -70 / \$65-75) for this trip. Please try to tip in local currency.

Tipping of the local leader is not included in the above and is at your discretion. However, we suggest around Rs1000-2000 (approx.€11- 25 /US \$12- 25) per person for the leader depend upon the group size.

### 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

# Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling & Kaziranga NP | 17 Days

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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.

### Public Holidays

During major Indian public holidays such as India's Republic Day 26<sup>th</sup> Jan, the Holi (Colors) Festival (generally falls around March), Diwali (sometime in Oct-Nov) etc. some business will be closed and air and ground transportation may be affected. Tourist attractions sites may get overly crowded. But it's a good trade off as you will get to experience India more intimately.

### Dress Code

Though modern-day Indian have become more liberal to dresses they wear, however, as a tourist we advise you to follow dress codes specially while visiting temples or mosques. Just dressing modestly and wearing non-revealing cloths should be fine. Women might also consider carrying a shawl in their daypack (this could be a sarong or light scarf) which you can wear over your shoulders and heads as a courtesy or just show respects. Religious sites and homes throughout India – for Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Muslims or Buddhists to name a few – require all visitors to remove their shoes to enter.

Bhutan is a relatively conservative Buddhist country. The Bhutanese opt for a formal approach to dress, typically wearing the traditional dress ("Kho" for men and "Kira" for women on a daily basis).

The traditional dress consists of long skirts down to the ankle, long sleeves, and high necklines. It's advisable that you exhibit similar modesty while travelling in Bhutan.

A lot of the temples, dzongs and religious sites that you visit during your journey around the country will require you to cover up your arms and legs anyway so it's better to be dressed appropriately at all times.

**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.

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Updated: Feb 2025