

## **Bhutan & Assam Spring Tour - 21 days**

**Tour JTT-ASBH-01:** Delhi - Dibrugarh - Majuli Island - Kaziranga - Guwahati – Samdrup Jongkhar – Trashigang – Gom Kora – Bumthang – Trongsa - Phobjika – Punakha – Thimpu – Paro - Delhi

**On this unique tour you travel along the shores of one of the world's most majestic rivers, the Brahmaputra, visiting the tea gardens and wildlife parks of Assam (India). Then you'll climb up through orchid-covered forests to the high valleys of Bhutan. Traversing the country from the utmost East to the West you'll get an exceptionally good and complete impression of the country. You'll witness a *tsechu* (traditional Buddhist festival) and visit parts of the country that rarely see foreign visitors.**

*Group tour*

*Fixed dates: March 18 – April 08, 2015*

### ***Itinerary***

#### **Dag 01: Arrival in Delhi**

On arrival at Delhi International Airport our representative will meet you and take you to a comfortable guesthouse, situated not far from the airport in a quiet neighbourhood.

#### **Day 02: Flight Delhi - Dibrugarh**

After breakfast you'll be driven to the airport for the morning flight to Dibrugarh, the easternmost city of India. There, you'll check in to Mancotta Tea Bungalow, about 5 km away from town amidst lush tea gardens. Afternoon walk through the tea gardens surrounding the lodge.

The Mancotta Tea Bungalow is a so-called *chang*-bungalow, a stately, rustic building of massive wooden bars and cottage-style masonry on stilts. Its well-kept appearance belies an impressive 160 years of age. Once upon a time the manager of the Mancotta Tea Estate lived here. Now it is a hotel. Its owners have taken utmost care to preserve the erstwhile style and atmosphere. It is considered one of the top-five accommodations of the Northeast. Overnight at Mancotta Tea Bungalow.





### Day 03: Dibrugarh

Day at leisure. Visit the tea gardens, see how tea is being processed in the tea factory or visit a local village. Optional horse riding on English thoroughbreds among the tea gardens and over the banks of the Brahmaputra, or a boat trip on the Brahmaputra. Overnight at Mancotta Tea

Bungalow.

### Day 04, 05: Majuli Island

After an early breakfast drive to Neamati Ghat (on the banks of the Brahmaputra (140 km / 3 hr). On the way we stop at the famous Hindu temples of Sibsagar (Lake of Shiva). Among these is the largest Siv mandir, a bea hive-shaped temple dome, of India. It is quite an experience to see the stream of worshippers going in and out of the temple to pay homage to Shiva, the Hindu god that is seen as the mightiest god of the Hindu trinity.



We cross the mighty river Brahmaputra by ferry (2 hr) to Majuli Island. Majuli is the biggest fresh water island in India, and until recently of the world. It is a place of great rural beauty where due to the relative absence of asphalt and cars Assamese traditional life can be experienced better than anywhere else.

Majuli is the main seat for Vaishnavite monasteries. Here Hindu monks (a rare phenoma in itself) practice a life based on the premise 'work is worship'. They also practice an elegant dance form, a unique phenomena found only on Majuli Island. After arrival we visit the monastery, where we will enjoy a dance performance by the monks. Packed lunch will be served. After lunch we visit a Mishing tribal village, one of the largest community in Assam. Morning of day 05 you can go for a leasurely bicycle ride over the small foot paths and dikes of Majuli's northern parts. In the afternoon we cross the river again to Jorhat for dinner and overnight in a local hotel.

### Day 06, 07: Kaziranga

After an early breakfast we set out for Kaziranga National Park, where we will reach around lunch time.





In the afternoon we make a guided tour through the forest near the lodge or along the river bank. We'll see local villagers growing rice and tapping rubber trees, and on a clear day we'll be treated to good views of the park.

Kaziranga N.P. is one of India's most famous parks, and, according to many, its most scenic. Due to very stringent protection measures the Indian one-horned rhino has been saved here from extinction from India (a small population lives in Nepal). In 1908 there were no more than 15 rhinos left in India, today Kaziranga boasts of 2045 rhinos. If we're lucky, we'll see herds of wild elephants, four kinds of deer, and lots of birds. For birds, Kaziranga is a garden of Eden. It counts more bird species than the whole of the Netherlands. But it is also home to more than half of the total population of Asian wild buffaloes, and it has the highest density of tigers in Asia. The tiger is a master of stealth and not easily seen. Chances of seeing a tiger in Kaziranga are ca 10% so we'll keep our fingers crossed.

Today and tomorrow you'll be taken into different parts of the park on elephant back, in jeeps, and, for the good walkers among us, on foot. Well-trained and very knowledgeable naturalists of Diphlu River Lodge will accompany you on all your outings.

The first morning we go out into the park on elephant back. Being carried through the tall grass while the morning mists slowly lift is an experience that one won't forget easily! Because the wild animals are not afraid of the elephants it is possible to observe them up-close. Deers, rhinos and buffaloes just gaze up groggily as our elephants pass them by at very close quarters.

In the afternoon and on the next day as well, we do further exploration of the park in jeeps. As the park is 1000 square kilometers, there are several different parts to it, each with its own charm and wildlife. On the second day we'll visit a traditional village, home to one of the original tribes of Assam.



### **Day 08: Kaziranga N.P. - Guwahati**

In the morning we'll make a leisure walk either through tea gardens behind the lodge or along some local rubber plantations. Both walks are excellent for observing forest birds.

After lunch we drive to Guwahati, the capital of Assam.

### **Day 09: Guwahati – Samdrup Jongkhar (BHUTAN)**

In the morning we visit the famous 'shakti' temple Kamakhya. Do a round of the temple and proceed to the river front to take a short ferry ride to Peacock Island to visit Umananda temple. This is one of the smallest islands on the River Brahmaputra with the temple sitting on the top. There is a pathway round the temple and the island – you can spot the very rare and endangered Golden Langur on this island. Return to the city and head to The Paradise restaurant for authentic Assamese cuisine served in brass crockery. (*Assamese cuisine is a little bland then normal Indian food; both veg and non-veg dishes are available*).

After lunch we depart for Samdrup Jongkhar, the Bhutanese border town. There the Assamese guide and drivers will hand you over to the Bhutanese counterpart. They will take you to your hotel in Samdrup Jongkhar. Time permitting, we will visit the Zangdopelri Monastery at Samdrup Jongkhar. Dinner and overnight at hotel in Samdrup Jongkhar.

### **Day 10: Samdrup Jongkhar – Trashigang**

After an early breakfast, we will drive north to Trashigang. As the road ascends, we pass through a variety of vegetation zones in the Himalayan foothills. Looking back we should get a distant view of the Indian plains. Heading further north, the road is so high that we may be above the clouds! The roadside is rich in plants including ferns, rhododendrons and primulas.

Late in the afternoon, we will visit Trashigang Dzong which houses the monastic institute for monks and administrative center for the valley. Dinner and overnight at a basic hotel.

### **Day 11: Trashigang – Gom Kora & back (March 28)**



We drive back down and cross the bridge and follow right bank of the Gamri River. At a point 24 Km from Trashigang, you can see the temple of Gom Kora on the right, set on a small alluvial plateau overlooking the river.

Gom Kora is one of the famous places where Guru Rinpoche meditated in order to subdue a demon who dwelt in the big rock. It was vanquished after Guru Rinpoche turned himself into Garuda, the mythical griffin. The little temple, which was established in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century on orders from Minjur Tenpa.

For the overnight stay we drive back to Trashigang (1150m).

### **Day 12: Trashigang – Bumthang**



We will travel via a series of switchbacks through the Thrimshing La Pass (3600 Ms/12,000 Ft), which is a protected national park for West Bengal tigers! It also hosts a botanical garden for rhododendrons. It will take about 7 hours to reach Bumthang including a short stop in the Ura Valley. Dinner and overnight hotel.

### **Day 13: Bumthang**

This is one of the most spectacular valleys in Bhutan and also the heart of Buddhism. In addition to the beautiful landscape, this area has numerous important monasteries. Guru Rimpoche and his lineage of Tertons (treasure finders) spent much time here and influenced the sprouting of many temples.

In the morning we will hike to visit the Tamshing Monastery and Kurjey Lhakhang. We also visit Jambay Lhakhang and Jakar Dzong.

Dinner and overnight at hotel.

### **Day 14: Bumthang to Trongsa**

After breakfast we drive to Trongsa. The history of Bhutan's Monarch originates at Trongsa. At Trongsa we visit Trongsa Dzong and the Museum of the Monarch which is establish recently.

Dinner and overnight at hotel.



### **Day 15: Trongsa – Phobjikha**

Today after breakfast we will drive to Wangdue via Gangtey and over Pele-la Pass (11,000 Ft). The drive is approximately 6.5 hours, climbing steadily through semi-tropical vegetation with an alpine environment of rhododendrons and dwarf bamboo. This area is known as the most beautiful valley in the Himalayas!

Dinner and overnight at simple hotel in Phobjikha.

## Day 16: Phobjikha – Punakha



After breakfast we'll hike the nature trail in Phobjikha and visit Gangtey Gumpa. This monastery is one of the biggest Nyingmapa Monasteries in western Bhutan. Nearby is the winter home of black-necked cranes that migrate from the arid plains in the Tibet and Ladakh.

On the way visit to Wangdi Dzong. This dzong was built in 1639. After Wangdi Dzong continue the drive to Punakha.

Dinner and o/n at Hotel in Punakha.

## Day 17: Punakha – Halt

After breakfast visit to Punakha, which was the ancient capital of Bhutan from 1637 onwards.

After this drive and hiking to Khamsum Namgyel Chorten. This stupa was built by the Queen mother of the 5<sup>th</sup> King of Bhutan. We walk back to Punakha through Yebasa village to Sonagasa where the car will be waiting.

After lunch visit to the newly built temple above hotel Zangdopelri.

Dinner and overnight at hotel.

## Day 18: Punakha – Thimphu

A 30 minutes one way hike through the rice field will take us to Chimi Lhakang which is situated on the hill top overlooking Lobesa village, Wangdi and Punakha.

Lunch at Lobesa.

After lunch drive to Thimphu the capital of Bhutan, on the way stop at Dochula for tea/coffee and toilet break.

Dinner and overnight at hotel.

## Day 19: Thimphu - Halt

We will have time to visit a number of sites: Institute of Traditional Medicine; the Folk Heritage Museum; the Textile Museum; Tashi Choe Dzong; Zilukha Nunnery; the National Zoo (really more of a preserve for the national animal, the Takin) and the Handicrafts Emporium. Dinner at a local restaurant and overnight at hotel.

Thimphu is the busiest city in Bhutan and as such is also a cultural center with many sights to see and experience. Dinner and overnight at hotel.



## **Day 20: Thimphu – Paro**

We will depart early from Thimphu and drive into the valley of Paro. Here, we will begin our walk up to Takstang Monastery (Tiger's Nest). It takes about 2 hours one way and there is a cafe half way up where there are spectacular views of the monastery perched on the side of the mountain.

We will have time at the monastery to view the many temples there and to enjoy the view. For many, to see the iconic Tiger's Nest in person, might be the pinnacle of the entire trip. Dinner and overnight at hotel.



## **Day 21: Flight Paro – Delhi.**

Drive to the airport for the flight to Delhi. On a clear day we will be rewarded with magnificent views of the Himalayas.

## **Price**

Ask for quotation.

*Price includes:* all accommodation (twin sharing), full board, all transport by comfortable SUV vehicles/4WDs, flights Delhi-Guwahati and Paro-Delhi, English and Dutch speaking international tour guide, local English speaking Assamese/Bhutanese escort throughout, ferry crossings; entry fees, elephant and jeep rides (Kaziranga N.P.); local guides where necessary; village visits.

*Not included:* tips; drinks; laundry; telephone calls; travel/ personal insurance; video fees for Kaziranga N.P.; other expenses of personal nature.

Please ask for quotation for additional services.