

## Ancient Kingdoms of Tibet

Visit the kingdoms of Guge and Shangshung in Western Tibet, and the pre-history cave dwelling cities in the Sutlej river valleys beyond Mount Kailash.



### Group departures

See overleaf for departure dates

### Holiday overview

Style	Trek
Accommodation	Hotels, Camping
Grade	Moderate
Duration	22 days from London to London
Trekking / Walking days	On trek: 5 days Walks on: 6 days
Min/Max group size	5 / 12. Guaranteed to run for 5
Trip Leader	Local Leader Tibet
Land only	Joining in Kathmandu, Nepal
Max altitude	5,211m/17,096ft. Drive over Mayum La, Day 18

**Private Departures & Tailor Made itineraries available**



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# Departures

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## Group departures

### 2022 Dates:

Sun 07 Aug - Sun 28 Aug

### Will the trip run?

This trip is guaranteed to run for 5 people and for a maximum of 12. In the rare event that we cancel a holiday, we will refund you in full and give you at least 6 weeks warning. Many trips do fill up quickly - we advise you to book early if you want to secure a place(s) on the dates of your choice.

### Group prices and optional supplements

Please contact us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or visit our website for our land only and flight inclusive prices and single supplement options.

### No Surcharge Guarantee

The flight inclusive or land only price will be confirmed to you at the time you make your booking. There will be no surcharges after your booking has been confirmed.

### Insurance

We offer a travel insurance scheme - please contact us for details.

### Private Departures

We can also offer this trip as a private holiday. A Private Departure follows exactly the same itinerary as the group departure but at dates to suit you (subject to availability) - please contact us with your preferred dates.

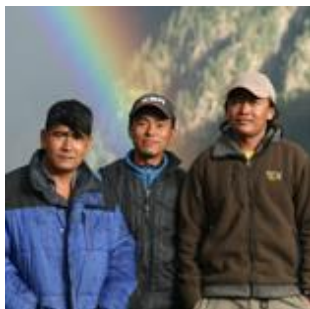
### Tailor Made service

We pride ourselves on the level of quality and choice we provide for our clients who want a fully tailor made holiday. A holiday will be created especially for you by one of our well-travelled experts. They will be able to advise on the accommodation best suited to your needs, the sights you should visit (and those to avoid!) and the best walks and activities matched to your ability. In short, we will work together with you to create your perfect holiday.

If you would like to explore the idea of a Tailor Made holiday with Mountain Kingdoms then please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or see the Tailor Made pages of our website for further inspiration.

## Your guides

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### **In Tibet**

This trek in Tibet will be led by an English speaking Tibetan Guide who is highly experienced and knows the areas in the far west of Tibet well. He accompanies the group throughout the time in Tibet.

### **In Nepal**

For the 3 days acclimatisation trek in Nepal, you will have a Sherpa guide

## Your trip highlights

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- Explore the mysterious, ancient kingdoms of Guge and Shangshung
- Take a three day acclimatisation trek in the Himalayan foothills of Nepal
- Enjoy walks to visit cave dwellings, remote monasteries and ruined castles
- Drive past sacred Mount Kailash across the vast Tibetan Plateau
- Tour the fascinating sights of Lhasa and visit the cave hermitage of Drak Yerpa

## At a glance itinerary

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Days 1-2	Fly to Kathmandu. Transfer to hotel in Bhaktapur.
Days 3-5	Circular trek from Bhaktapur via Namu Buddha Ridge, Balthalli Village and Panauti Bazaar.
Day 6	Fly from Kathmandu to Gonggar in Tibet. Drive to Lhasa.
Day 7	Sightseeing in Lhasa including visits to the Potala Palace, Barkhor Market and Sera Monastery.
Days 8-9	Visit Drak Yerpa and Ganden. Return to Lhasa. Day at leisure.
Days 10-11	Fly to Ali. Drive to Tholing. Full day at Tsarparang with walk. Return to Tholing.
Days 12-13	Drive to Xapuk and explore caves. Drive to Dunhang and view monastery. Trek to Chiwang.
Day 14	Visit Shaye Ko Castle and rock formations at Shangze. Return to Tholing.
Day 15	Drive to view Dawa Dzong. Continue to Khyunglung.
Day 16	Explore the Kingdom of Shangshung and walk up the Red Canyon.
Day 17	Drive to Tirthapuri Hot Springs via Guru Gem and walk to ancient hill fort.
Days 18-19	Drive to Drongpa past Mount Kailash, then to Saga and Kyirong.
Days 20-22	Drive to Kathmandu. Overnight flight to London.

## Trip summary

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Beyond the holy mountain of Kailash in the far western corner of remotest Tibet, are a handful of amazing and mysterious kingdoms. Many of them existed long before the days of the Dalai Lamas, including the almost mythical kingdom of Shangshung, which was the centre of the animistic religion of the Bonpo. Around the 9th century AD, after the assassination of the Tibetan anti-Buddhist King Langdarma, part of the Tibetan royal family fled to the western end of Tibet and set up another larger kingdom called Guge, which had its capital at an extraordinary place called Tsaparang.

Our trip starts with a pretty three day trek in the Nepalese Himalayan foothills for acclimatisation, followed by an in-depth exploration of the best sights in Lhasa. We then fly west to the small Tibetan town of Ali and start our trek, exploring Shangshung and Guge, long-abandoned kingdoms with crumbling castles and temples, before finally driving out past Mount Kailash back to Kathmandu.

To create this incredible journey our Managing Director, Steve Berry, followed in footsteps of the Tibetan explorer Peter Van Ham, and this fabulous trek, unique to Mountain Kingdoms, is the result of his summer 2019 reconnaissance.

### The Guge Empire and Tsaparang

The kingdom of Guge in West Tibet was established in the 9th century, after the assassination of the Tibetan anti-Buddhist King Langdarma and the break-up of the Yarlung Empire. One of the king's sons, Wosung, travelled west to the upper Indus and Sulej valleys and founded Guge, establishing Tsaparang as its capital. In the 10th century, King Yeshe O, and the translator, Rinchen Zangpo, reinstated Buddhism in this part of Tibet and over 100 monasteries were built - the most important being Tholing and Tsaparang. A further expansion of the religion occurred in the 11th century when Atisha, the renowned Indian master, came to Tholing to teach. Tibetan Buddhism gained a foothold in the country from that time on.

Antonio de Andrade, a Portuguese man attached to the Jesuit mission in Goa, was the first European to visit the isolated kingdom of Guge in 1624. He was well received by the King and succeeded in setting up the first Christian church in Tibet the following year. Later, a second mission was founded at Rutok, 398 km to the north. Buddhist lamas at Tsaparang, upset by the spread of Christianity, enlisted the help of neighbouring

Ladakh to overthrow the Guge kingdom in 1630. Andrade's church was driven out. Ladakh briefly absorbed Guge but eventually Lhasa took over the territory.

Lama Govinda (a German) and his wife, Li Gotama, prepared ten years for a two-year pilgrimage to West Tibet. Determined to see the remains of Tibet's magnificent religious art, they reached Tsaparang in the autumn of 1948. Lama Govinda later wrote in 'The Way of the White Clouds':- "After the Valley of the Moon Castle and the awe-inspiring canyons on the way to Tholing, we feared that Tsaparang would perhaps come as an anti-climax or at least something that could not compete with the natural wonders through which we had passed. But when, on the last lap of our journey - while emerging from a gorge and turning the spur of a mountain - we suddenly beheld the lofty castles of the ancient city of Tsaparang, which seemed to be carved out of the solid rock of an isolated, monolithic mountain peak, we gasped with wonder and could hardly believe our eyes."

Tsaparang sprawls all over the slopes and the top of a ridge bounded to the north by the Sutlej River. Mountains surround it to the east, south and west, providing a natural and impregnable fortification. The entire ridge is covered with temples, chortens, houses, cave dwellings, all in varying degrees of ruin. Remains of the royal castle and its temples stand at the top, 170m/550ft above the valley floor, and can only be reached by a secret tunnel dug within the innards of the mountain.

Tsaparang is one of the most important art-historic centres in Tibet, the repository of stunning West Tibet-style murals and statues. Within the Lhakhang Karpo and Lhakhang Marpo (White and Red chapels) are resplendent Kashmiri-inspired works of art, interpreted in the local artistic idiom. Concurrently, the foundation of this uncommon genre was provided by the Nepalese tradition, which derived from the Sakya dominance of Central Tibet during the 14th-15th centuries. In the Lhakhang Karpo are life-sized terracotta statues crafted in the unique Kashmiri style. Although badly damaged, they represent some of Tibet's most visually-striking images.

Tsaparang was spared annihilation during the Cultural Revolution perhaps because of its advanced state of decay from the 17th century, onwards. Its artistic treasures thus stand as a remarkable anomaly of modern Tibet; they are relics of an astonishing museum that contains some of Asia's most beautiful murals.

### **Guge - Ages of Gold**

Well known art historian and explorer, Peter van Ham, published a fantastic book 'Guge - Ages of Gold - the Western Tibetan Masterpieces' in 2016. It is a fabulous book cataloguing all his finds in a whole collection of sites in Western Tibet. It is a wonderful photographic record, but also has interesting pieces of text detailing some of the history of this remote region. Steve Berry has contributed photos to other books by Peter van Ham, who has now checked our itinerary and said, 'Your itinerary looks fabulous! My co-author on my latest book about Alchi, Amy Heller, just took the flight to Ali and said it was reliable. I wish I could join you!!'. One of the main purposes of this trek/tour is to be amongst the very first westerners ever to see the places that Peter van Ham has uncovered.

### **Shangshung**

The ancient kingdom of Shangshung once occupied a large area including Western and Northern Tibet with Mount Kailash at its centre. Shangshung culture is associated with the Bon religion and pre-dates Tibetan Buddhism. The capital, Khyunglung, meaning the 'Silver Palace of Garuda' is located to the south-west of Mount Kailash, and nearby is an astonishing ancient cave-city containing the remains of the three-storey Palace of Khyunglung and more than 200 caves. These were probably the dwellings of ministers and the king's dignitaries, later used by Buddhist practitioners for personal retreats, and more recently frequented by nomads as shelters.

### **Mount Kailash**

Without doubt the holiest mountain in the Himalaya, Mount Kailash, 6,714m/22,028ft, is situated to the north of the Himalayan barrier, wholly within Tibet. It is the perfect mountain shape, with four great faces; the eastern face is believed to be crystal, the western ruby, the southern sapphire and the northern gold. It is the spiritual centre for four great religions: Tibetan Buddhism, Hinduism, the Jain religion and the pre-Buddhist animistic religion Bonpo. To Tibetans it is known as Khang Rinpoche (Precious Jewel of Snow) and they see it as the navel of the world. It is said that a stream from the mountain pours into a nearby lake and from here rivers flow in the four cardinal directions. The River of the Lion Mouth to the north, the River of the Horse Mouth to the east, the River of the Peacock Mouth to the south, and the River of the Elephant Mouth to the west. Strangely enough, four major rivers do indeed originate near Kailash - the Indus, the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra), the Karnali and the Sutlej. Tibetans believe that it is the residence of Demchog, a fierce-looking tantric deity, who lives there with his consort, Dorje Phagmo. For the Tibetans also it is a particularly special place in that their poet saint, Milarepa, spent several years here meditating in a cave.



For the Hindus Mount Kailash is the earthly manifestation of Mount Meru, the spiritual centre of their universe, described as a fantastic 'world pillar' 84,000 miles high, around which all else revolves, its roots in the lowest hell and its summit kissing the heavens. On top live their most revered god, Shiva, and his consort, Parvati.

For the Jains, an Indian religious group, Kailash is the site where their first prophet achieved enlightenment. For the older, more ancient religion of Bon, it is the site where its founder, Shanrab, is said to have descended from heaven. It was formerly the spiritual centre of Zhang Zung, the ancient Bon Empire that once included all of western Tibet. Bon people walk around the mountain in a counter clockwise manner, unlike the other religions.

Over the centuries pilgrims have constantly journeyed immense distances to achieve enlightenment or cleanse themselves of sin, braving harsh weather and bandit attacks.

Although the object is not to make the strenuous trek around Mount Kailash on this trip, nevertheless, we will drive past close to the mountain, and fly past it.

#### **What our MD, Steve Berry, says about this trip:**

In 1996 I led the first British tour group to visit the Kingdom of Guge, Tholing, Tirthapuri and Guru Gem. Guge is a region of amazing canyons to the north of the Indian peak, Nanda Devi, and the city of Tsaparang defies imagination. As a human achievement it ought to rank alongside Machu Picchu, the Pyramids, Angkor Wat or the Potala. Yet hardly anyone has ever heard of it, let alone set eyes on it.

When I went there in 1996, I remember thinking, "there must be so much more to discover here...". Then in 2016 Peter van Ham produced a fantastic book 'Guge, Ages of Gold' and it re-ignited my desire to explore there again. It documents Peter's finding of a whole cluster of new sites, some of which have more than a thousand cave dwellings each, long abandoned.

Finally in June 2019, I went with my wife and a group of friends to explore many of the amazing sites written about by Peter Van Ham. We had incredible adventures and this itinerary is the result. You will be among the very first westerners to ever see these places!

#### **Special notes**

##### **Drive Times**

The roads in Tibet have improved enormously over the last 10-15 years but please be aware there are still sections that are bumpy, dusty and unpaved. Delays are not uncommon and can be caused by landslide, diversions to avoid roadworks or breakdown. Our times are a guide only and should be taken with a large pinch of Tibetan salt! Also, be aware that where you stop for the night on the return drive seems to vary from one year to the next. Do not expect an itinerary cast in stone!

# Your trip itinerary

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## Day 1: Depart London.

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Depart London on your overnight flight to Kathmandu.

**Overnight: In flight**

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## Day 2: Arrive Kathmandu. Group transfer to the hotel.

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On arrival in Kathmandu you will be met and transferred to the Heritage Hotel, Bhaktapur.

Your Tibet permit will be finalised while you are in Kathmandu, so our local agents will ask you for your passport and Tibet Visa payment.

**Overnight: Heritage Hotel, Bhaktapur**

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## Day 3: Drive to Dhulikhel - approximately 1 hour. Walk up to Namobuddha, 1,985m/6,512ft, - approximately 3-4 hours.

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You will leave this morning by vehicle to Dhulikhel and it will then take about 4 hours to hike to the ancient Namu Buddha Monastery, 1,750m/5,751ft. For centuries this has been a famous Buddhist pilgrimage site where the reincarnated Buddha offered his body to a hungry tigress in order to allow her to feed her cubs. Along the way you will see fantastic mountain vistas with the many Buddhist stupas on the hilltops. There are also beautiful views throughout the walk of terraced fields of rice, mustard and millet. You will also be surprised by the number of temples, the variation in landscapes and diversity of people living in harmony.

**Overnight: Namu Buddha Resort or Similar, Namu Buddha (Meals: BLD)**

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## Day 4: Walk to Balthali village, 1,730m/5,676ft - approximately 5 hours.

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After breakfast, you will start your walk to reach Balthali village, offering excellent mountain views along the way at an altitude of 1,730m/5,676ft. We then visit a typical Tamang village called Dada Gaun, a very traditional Buddhist Community untouched by the modern world, with people and animals still living side by side. You will then walk to Pada Gaun (2,100m/6,889ft), taking in extremely good views of the whole Himalayan range to the north and the beautiful green forest of Mahabharat. You will then walk on to Karnali, and follow the banks of the Ladku River back to the Balthali Village.

**Overnight: Balthali Resort or Similar, Balthali Village (Meals: BLD)**

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## Day 5: Walk to Khopasi - approximately 1½ hours and to Panauti Bazaar, 1,400m/4,593ft - approximately 1 hour. Drive to Bhaktapur - approximately 1 hour. Afternoon tour of Bhaktapur.

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After breakfast you will walk down to Khopasi (approximately 3km) where you will be picked by private vehicle for the return trip to Bhaktapur.

On the return journey, you will stop at Panauti to take a leisurely walk to the thriving Newari village which is rich in culture. You will also visit the Indreshwor Mahadev Temple, which some authorities believe is the original structure that was built in 1294 AD. You will then continue your journey back to Bhaktapur, where you will have a tour of the town centre.



**Overnight: Heritage Hotel, Bhaktapur (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 6: Fly from Kathmandu to Gonggar, Tibet, 3,600m/11,811ft - 1½ hours. Drive to Lhasa - 60km, 1½ hours.**

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You will transfer to the airport for the flight to Gonggar in Tibet. In Gonggar (the airport for Lhasa) you will be met and will drive to Lhasa. Nowadays the road passes through three short road tunnels through the mountains so the drive takes just one and a half hours. Lhasa is today a very modern looking city but your first sight of the Potala Palace as you drive into town will still take your breath away. On arrival in Lhasa you will check in to your hotel which is situated in the centre of town. On arrival remember that you are now at altitude - 3,600m/11,811ft - so it is best to take it very easy for the afternoon.

**Overnight: Kyichu Hotel or Similar, Lhasa (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 7: Morning sightseeing at the Potala Palace, and afternoon Sera Monastery.**

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Please note that the schedule for the next two days' visits may be adjusted depending on events and ticket availability for the Potala, as bookings can only be made with your passports once you arrive in Lhasa, and sometimes it can be pretty busy.

However, the plan is that in the morning you will visit the Potala Palace. Luckily the Potala remained largely undamaged throughout the years of the Cultural Revolution. Songtsen Gampo was the first Tibetan ruler to establish a palace on this outcrop, the 'Red Hill', but construction of the grand palace that you see today began in 1645 during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama. The palace is named after Mount Potala, a sacred mountain in South India, and has served as the home of successive Dalai Lamas and their monastic staff. You will start your tour by climbing up the steps at the south side of the building, take your time doing so. There is even an oxygen station half way up for those who are struggling with the altitude! You then work your way up through successive storeys and through a maze of rooms - through the living quarters of the Dalai Lama and through numerous highly decorated chapels and colourful assembly halls. Walls are decorated with intricate murals and hung with painted thangkas. One of the most awesome rooms in the Potala is the Chapel of the Dalai Lamas' Tombs, which contains the massive golden stupa of the Fifth Dalai Lama and smaller stupas containing the relics of other Dalai Lamas. When you have completed your tour you will come out at the roof level where the views are stunning, and will walk down on the northern side, where you will join the Kora path, and as there will be many Tibetan pilgrims making their Kora (circuit) right around the building, you may like to do the same. Please note that although photography is not permitted inside the Potala, you may take photos on the approach up the steps, and once you emerge at the rear.



In the afternoon you will drive 40 minutes to Sera Monastery, one of the three great Gelukpa monasteries near Lhasa. This monastery dates back to the 15th century and was formerly a monastic township housing over 5,000 monks. Although many of the outlying buildings have been destroyed the principal buildings were left relatively intact and nowadays the monastic population is again over 300 monks. Sera is particularly famous for its great monastic debates and monks can still be seen debating in the debating courtyard. More prosaic but equally fascinating are the large monastic kitchens where monks prepare industrial quantities of food in huge copper cauldrons. It is quite a sight to see Tibetan tea being blended with a mixer the size of a road drill! Please note that cameras are not allowed to be used in the debating courtyard itself, but bizarrely taking photos with cell phones is perfectly acceptable! So we highly recommend you bring a phone with you to photograph this interesting experience. Please also note that imitating a monk is also strictly forbidden, so please watch them but don't copy!

**Overnight: Kyichu Hotel or Similar, Lhasa (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 8: Drive to Drak Yerpa Hermitage, 4,885m/15,929ft - 16 miles/26 km, approximately 2 hours. Drive to Ganden Monastery - 1 hour drive. Return to Lhasa.**

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Today you drive from Lhasa to Drak Yerpa Hermitage, 4,800m/15,750ft located in a wonderful site with great views. There are meditation caves built in the mountainside. These shrines and hermitages in the cliffs are some of the earliest known meditation sites in Tibet, some dating back to pre-Buddhist times. Anybody who was anybody in Tibet meditated here! So for instance, Songtsen Gampo, and his two queens meditated here as did Padmasambhava (Guru Rimpoche). Also the very famous legendary hero, Gesar of Ling, is said to have visited the valley. The holes his arrows left in the cliffs are believed to be evidence of his presence. After the visit, you continue driving for another hour to Ganden Monastery, 4,300m/14,100ft, which is another of the three most important monasteries in Lhasa (along with Sera and Drepung). Ganden sits high on a mountain



ridge. You explore the monastery prayer halls, then hike around the ruins at the base of the mountain and do a kora (circumambulation) around the monastery. Ganden has extremely delicate and fine murals and sculptures. The most important and valuable arts here are the paintings of Buddha.

**Overnight: Kyichu Hotel or Similar, Lhasa (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 9: At leisure in Lhasa, 3,597m/11,800ft.**

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We have included a day here for you to 'do your own thing'. We believe a good tour should be a mixture of free time and guided sightseeing. There is so much to see and do in Lhasa. We suggest, perhaps, an early morning kora of the Barkhor Market. There is also a very nice walk that can be done all around the old quarter of Lhasa, or you might like to hike up the Medicine Hill for grand views of the Potala Palace. This is all excellent acclimatisation before you fly tomorrow to the far western end of Tibet.

**Overnight: Kyichu Hotel or Similar, Lhasa (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 10: Fly to Ali, 4,411m/14,471ft - 2 hours. Drive to Tholing, 3,723m/12,214ft - 200km, 5-6 hours.**

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There are now daily flights from Lhasa to Ali (also known as Ngari Gunsai) which take about two hours. In this age of flying anywhere in the world at the drop of a hat, we rarely look out of the window. However, this is one flight where you may be glued to it! It is not often you get the opportunity to look out over the Tibetan plateau and get an idea of its vast expanse. As you get closer to Ali, you will see Mount Kailash on the left hand side. The scenery on this flight is otherworldly.

You then drive from Ali to Zanda Xian (Tholing) through grand scenery on a bumpy road, especially at the end when you enter the grand canyons near Tsarparang. Tholing was west Tibet's most important monastery. It was built c.1020 by Rinchen Zangpo, who, together with Atisha from India, led the revival of Buddhism in Tibet. Badly damaged in the Cultural Revolution but worth visiting, Tholing Monastery is 13km from Tsarparang.

**Overnight: Zanda Castle Hotel or Similar, Tholing (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 11: Visit Tsarparang, 3,800m/12,467ft - 13 km, ½-1 hour. Return to Tholing.**

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You drive to the ancient city of Tsarparang, which takes about an hour. Tsarparang sprawls all over the slopes and the top of a ridge bounded to the north by the Sutlej River. Mountains surround it to the east, south, and west, providing a natural and impregnable fortification. The entire ridge is covered with temples, chortens, houses, cave dwellings, all in varying degrees of ruin. Remains of the royal castle and its temples stand at the top, 170m above the valley floor, and can only be reached by a secret tunnel dug within the innards of the mountain. Tsarparang is one of the most important art-historic centres in Tibet, the repository of stunning West Tibetan-style murals and statues. Within the Lhakhang Karpo and Lhakhang Marpo (White and Red chapels) are resplendent Kashmiri-inspired works of art, interpreted in the local artistic idiom. At the end of your day at Tsarparang you drive back to Tholing.



**Overnight: Zanda Castle Hotel or Similar, Tholing (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 12: Drive to Pedongpo, 4,300m/14,107ft - 30km, 2 hours. Trek to Barko - 15km, approximately 4 hours.**

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Drive to Pedongpo. It is about an hour's drive to reach a pass of 4,670m/15,321ft where you may well see wild antelopes and have the most fantastic views over the Tibetan plateau and mountains. You then drop down into canyon land to reach Pedongpo. The oldest West Tibetan wall paintings surviving in present-day Tibet date from the middle of the eleventh century and can be found in numerous mountainside caves in this area. In this little explored part of Tibet, you will have a rare opportunity to immerse yourself in the original Shangshung culture. Pedongpo has a decorated cave known to date from the Chidar era and is located south-east of Dungkar in another side valley of the Langcheng Tsangpo. The name Pedongpo means 'stalk of the lotus'. It is an east facing cliff with a considerable number of caves. The main painted cave probably dates to the first half of the 12th Century. If the keyholder can be found, it is worth visiting the Gompa at the village which has a small lump of rock in the shape of Mount Kailash as well as original statues saved from the Chinese Cultural

Revolution and hidden away at that time in the mountains. At the time of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama there was a monk here who cured the people of the village of leprosy. His funeral chorten is kept in the Gompa.

You then start your trek to Barko (or Xapuk). From the village you trek up a gorge for nearly 4 hours which gets more and more interesting the further you go. A stream runs in the bottom and you frequently need to bolder hop. You might well see blue sheep on the cliffs. Finally you arrive at a beautiful campsite enclosed by hills. Above the campsite are two caves dating back to the 1100s. Again these are worth visiting if the man with the key can be found. The approach is across quite steep hillsides.

**Overnight: Overnight Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 13: Trek to meet vehicles on road. Drive to Dunhang - 2 hours, and view monastery. Visit Dunhang Caves. Trek to Chiwang.**

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The small village of Dunkar (Bliss) is approximately 4,100m/13,450ft backing onto a ravine encrusted cliff face that houses scores of manmade caves. Four of the caves date from the early period of the Guge kingdom with wall paintings of exceptional quality and luckily they escaped the destructions of the 1960s and 70s. From camp it is an easy 1 to 1½ hour walk from the campsite up on to the plateau where there should be full views of Nanda Devi and the other string of Himalayan peaks to the south. You may now follow the road to a junction where your vehicles should pick you up. There is then a 2 hour drive to Dunhang. The monastery on the hill is well worth a look before driving a very short distance to visit the Dunhang caves. These are bigger than the Pedongpo caves, with 11th Century murals. It is then less than 2 hours walk through more magnificent scenery to finally arrive at Chiwang. In 2019 the group saw what they thought was either an Argali or Marco Polo sheep (also a type of Argali) with huge curly horns, both species are endangered.

Chiwang is about 5 miles west of Dunkar where the ancient roads divide into those leading north via Ladakh to central Asia, and south via Gartok to India. Behind the small village is an enormous cliff with the ruins of a Sakya Temple in its upper reaches. It is estimated there are over 1000 manmade caves here. Chiwang was probably a minor kingdoms in its own right in ancient times, possibly the largest on the upper reaches of the Sulej. The campsite is in lovely fields below the village.

**Overnight: Overnight Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 14: Day visit to Shaye Ko Cliffs and Castle at Shangze. Return to Tholing - 40km.**

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It is worth getting up early for the dawn light on the Chiwang cliffs. It is a great drive across what the Ladakhi people would refer to as the Changtang plateau. On and on with the Himalaya in the background, the plateau is broken occasionally by small inset valleys, lots of great rock formations, mountains and fluffy clouds. It is very beautiful. Reaching the village of Shangze, people direct you onwards to the weird valley containing extraordinary rock formations. In 2019 the group walked for 2 hours in this area to just explore and look at the huge eroded pinnacles. Returning to Shangze, they walked up to the ancient castle which is a 60m ascent with 769 steps to a despoiled cave and castle at 4,345m/14,255ft. Return drive back to Chiwang and then on for another 1¼ hours to reach Tholing.



**Overnight: Zanda Castle Hotel or Similar, Tholing (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 15: Drive to Dawa Dzong - 2½ hours. View monastery and castle. Drive to Khyunglung - 3 hours.**

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With great sadness you are leaving now to drive the long way back to Kathmandu, but before leaving the west there are still several ancient places to see. The first of these is Dawa Dzong which is about 2½-3 hours' drive from Tholing.

Leaving Tholing, you start on the road as though you are going towards Tsarparang but turning left you climb up in a huge valley to the Tibetan plateau and after 45 minutes' drive, there is a fine viewpoint. There are two police checkpoints before reaching Dawa Dzong, which in fact, is quite a large town and sitting up high above it is a castle and some sets of ancient caves. It is a very nice walk up to take a look around. This place must have been massive in its heyday and you may well have a picnic lunch up near the fortress. From Dawa Dzong, it is a further 210 km to Khyunglung. Some of this drive is on an old rough road, but much of it is on new blacktop.

You may well see several herds of wild ass in this area. There is one point on the road where you reach a height of 4,955m/16,256ft. There is also a point where you can see Mount Kailash way off in the distance. You spend tonight at an excellent campsite near the extremely important centre of pre-Buddhist Bonpo religion.

**Overnight: Overnight Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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### **Day 16: Explore the kingdom of Shangshung and walk up the Red Canyon.**

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Until recent times, Kyhunglung was a completely restricted area. It is not far from the hot springs of Tirthapuri and was the capital of the former ancient kingdom of Shangshung. In its day Shangshung would have been a very powerful and large kingdom with a vast array of fortresses controlling the trade routes to India, Kashmir, Gandhara and the Tarim Basin and beyond. Again there are a great many caves and a castle dating back at least from the 11th Century, although probably long before that as well.



From camp it's about half an hour to a bridge. In 2019 there were 3 dead yaks hanging from this bridge, head down. This is an ancient traditional practice done when a yak has died accidentally. There are in fact two bridges, a very ancient bridge and a newer version next to it. Ahead of you now is a cliff of layered colours and furrowed erosion channels. Caves, old buildings and forts pepper the landscape. You can climb up and look at many of these caves. Some with piles of old bones as well as scraps from old prayer books. Some are totally blackened and tarred inside with rudimentary hearths. In 2019 the group found a small chapel cave with ancient paintings of Buddhas and later they found a hermit's cave which had extremely fine paintings. Really the essence of mysticism. Having explored to your heart's content you come back down towards the Sutlej River below, and it is worth exploring a side valley which the 2019 group called 'The Red Canyon'. Go up as far as you dare and have a picnic. You may possibly see wild geese here honking loudly, possibly jack rabbits and herds of yaks. You can spend hours exploring this fascinating area.

**Overnight: Overnight Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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### **Day 17: Drive to Tirthapuri Hot Springs via Guru Gem. Walk up to ancient hill fort.**

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Tirthapuri is the third most important pilgrimage site in Western Tibet. The hot water just wells out of the ground here, leaving white deposits. Steam, colourful Tibetans, chortens, prayer flags, various holy caves, all painted ochre and white - all these sights add up to a truly beautiful place, next to the Sutlej River. Watch for huge jackrabbits and wild asses (kiang) along the route.

Only half an hour from the hot springs is the amazing cliff monastery of Guru Gem. It is a Bonpo Gumpa and, according to a re-incarnate head lama whom Steve met in 1996, it has stood there for 2,800 years! When Steve's group visited in 1996 the lama told them that he was young at 75 years - his previous incarnation lived to be 250 years old. It may be possible to visit the cliff temple, but certainly the monastery at its foot.

These days permission is needed to actually go up and visit the cliff temple, but the temple at the foot is a very lavish affair, probably built with Chinese money to impress.

Leaving Guru Gem behind, you begin the drive to Tirthapuri and look out for a path on your left shortly after leaving Guru Gem that leads you up to the bare remains of an ancient hillfort. This is well worth the hike as the views from the top are excellent. This minor detour takes about 2 hours walking with a picnic lunch perhaps. From here it is a further half hour drive to arrive at the hot springs of Tirthapuri.

**Overnight: Overnight Camp (Meals: BLD)**

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### **Day 18: Drive past Mount Kailash. Stop for lunch at Hor County. Drive to Drongpa, 500km, 7½-8 hours.**

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From Tirthapuri, it is about an hour's drive to the junction that leads east to the town of Darchan. About a quarter of an hour before this junction is a very good photo stop place for pictures of Mount Kailash. The plan is not to visit Darchan as you need a specific permit for this, and there is very little to see there. Therefore, you will carry on for another hour to the end of Lake Manasarovar. Travelling on for another 50 minutes you come to yet another large lake with mountains to its north. This is Toktso Lake, a salt lake where black-necked cranes are migratory inhabitants, flying south in the winter. The road now climbs to cross the Mayum La

5,211m/17,096ft - the highest point on your trip, but by now you will be well acclimatised. Dropping down from here it's about an hour to the bottom of the pass where there is a checkpoint. It is amazing scenery every step of the way.

### **Mount Kailash**

Mount Kailash, 6,714m/22,028ft, Asia's most sacred mountain, is said to be at the heart of the ancient Shangshung kingdom, the supposed land of origin of the pre-Buddhist Bonpos. Mount Kailash is their soul-mountain (lari), which they also call Yungdrung Gu Tse, the Nine-story Swastika Mountain. This is the very place where the sect's legendary founder, Tonpa Shenrab, descended from heaven to earth. In the 11th Century, with the revival and ascendancy of Buddhism in Tibet, Milarepa, the poet-saint and patriarch of the Kagyupa sect, was the dominant influence in the area. This came to pass when he defeated his Bonpo arch rival, Naro Bonchung, in a series of magical contests.



**Overnight: Yajiangyuan Hotel or Similar, Drongpa (Meals: BLD)**

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### **Day 19: Drive to Kyirong, via Saga - 350km, 6-7 hours.**

Ever onwards and the next big place on the road is the town of Saga. You drop down into this town from the mountains and cross the Yarlung Tsangpo River on the newly built bridge. Saga is a 2½ hour drive from Drongpa. It is here at Saga that you leave the main road leading to Lhasa and turn south on the 'new road' to stop the night at Kyirong.

**Overnight: Kyirong Hotel (Gyirong), Kyirong (Meals: BLD)**

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### **Day 20: Drive to border and cross into Nepal. Drive to Kathmandu.**

After the earthquake in 2015, the road that was used previously to go into Tibet from Kathmandu, the Friendship Highway, was closed due to landslide damage. However, this 'new road' provides a much better and more direct route to Kathmandu. It crosses the border just west of Langtang and then from the border it is only a few hours into Kathmandu. No doubt you will be very keen to enjoy hot baths, Nepalese food and perhaps a beer or two to celebrate your huge adventure.

**Overnight: Nepali Ghar Hotel, Kathmandu (Meals: BLD)**

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### **Day 21: At leisure. Late afternoon transfer to airport for overnight flight to London.**

This day has been left free for you to do your own thing, and a late checkout from the hotel will be arranged as the flight home takes off in the evening. Your transfer to the airport will be in the late afternoon.

**Overnight: In flight (Meals: B)**

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### **Day 22: Arrive London**

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## Our grading system

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Ancient Kingdoms of Tibet is graded as a Moderate trekking holiday, as described below.

### **Moderate**

Holidays in this grade typically involve 5 to 10 days of walking or trekking. They will often venture into more remote country and can cross mountain passes. Altitudes though are still relatively low, going no higher than around 4,300m/14,000ft. Accommodation can include simple hotels, tea houses, lodges and camping.

## Trip altitude

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**Important** - please be aware that this trip involves travel at altitude. Whilst all our itineraries are carefully designed to optimise acclimatisation to high altitudes, participants on this trip are likely to experience some symptoms of being at altitude. The Dossier pack we provide when you book your holiday includes comprehensive advice on safe travel at altitude. If you require further information or advice on travel at altitude prior to booking please contact the office to speak to an experienced member of our team. Alternatively we recommend [www.medex.org.uk](http://www.medex.org.uk) as a good source of information.



## What the price includes

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**Mountain Kingdoms** aims to offer the best value for money. We do not charge extra for meal packages or apply local charges and try to ensure that all the key elements of your holiday are included.

### What's included:

- ✓ Local, English-speaking leader in Nepal and Tibet
- ✓ Free hire of a down jacket, 4 season sleeping bag and fleece liner (supplied in-country)
- ✓ Economy class return air fares from the UK & UK Departure Tax (flight inclusive only)
- ✓ Single, timed group airport transfers for international flights on arrival and departure
- ✓ Flights between Kathmandu-Lhasa and Lhasa-Ali, and airport transfers for those flights.
- ✓ Good standard hotel accommodation (4 star) in Kathmandu, bed and breakfast basis
- ✓ Hotel/lodge accommodation in Tibet
- ✓ All camping facilities and all meals on trek
- ✓ Camp staff to carry out all camp work
- ✓ Costs of all porterage
- ✓ All road transport by private vehicles
- ✓ Sightseeing where specified
- ✓ The opportunity to attend a pre-trip meet in the Cotswolds
- ✓ Carbon offsetting with the Ecoan Tree Planting Project (for clients taking our flight inclusive option)
- ✓ A free high-quality Mountain Kingdoms kit bag

### Airport transfers

The cost of a transfer to/from the airport is included in the price of your holiday. This is a single group transfer which is arranged to coincide with the timings of the group flights. If you book your own flights which arrive/depart at different times to this, or we book flights at your request that have different timings, we will be happy to provide a quote for a separate transfer. Please contact us should you require any further information.

### What's not included:

- ✗ Travel insurance
- ✗ Nepal visa fees
- ✗ Tibet permit
- ✗ China visa fees (valid for Tibet)
- ✗ Tips
- ✗ Airport departure taxes, except UK

### Water-to-Go Reusable Bottle Campaign

We have joined the campaign to help cut down on the use of plastics and, in particular, single-use water bottles. To do this we have teamed up with the revolutionary company, Water-to-Go who have developed a multi-use drinking bottle with a reusable filter that eliminates over 99.9% of all microbiological contaminants. This makes water from virtually any source safe to drink and significantly reduces the need for travellers to buy bottles of water wherever they are in the world.

Our clients who are not given a free Mountain Kingdoms kit bag for their holiday (these are required for certain treks), will instead receive a free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle. These unique Water-to-Go bottles can also be purchased from us at a discounted rate. For further information about our campaign visit

<https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign>.

## Your accommodation

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### Heritage Hotel, Bhaktapur

Situated just a few minutes walk from the historic heart of the once royal city of Bhaktapur, the handsome Heritage hotel reflects the rich artistic traditions of the Kathmandu Valley. Built from reclaimed materials from ancient palaces and residences, and fitted out with antiques and hand-carved furnishings, it offers an authentic taste of Nepali culture, but without sacrificing modern-day comforts. Well-appointed rooms come with big bathrooms, Wi-Fi and lots of homely touches and the hotel has its own bar, fine dining restaurant and al fresco eatery.



### Namo Buddha Resort or Similar, Namo Buddha

This is a lovely resort in peaceful, woodland surroundings offering superb hospitality and organic vegetarian food. Rooms are individual cottages, all unique and with bags of character and charm. Food is sourced locally with dairy produce coming from their own cows, and fresh spring water from the hotel's spring, bottled for you to drink in the rooms.



### Balthalli Resort or Similar, Balthalli Village

The Balthalli Village Resort sits atop a hill giving delightful views of the surrounding terraced fields, villages and the distant outline of Himalayan peaks. This cosy retreat has a restaurant, bar and garden and the good-sized rooms come complete with private bathrooms and kettles.



### Kyichu Hotel or Similar, Lhasa

The Kyichu Hotel is a busy and popular Tibetan hotel located just a 5 minute walk from the Jokhang Temple. It has a central courtyard and comfortable rooms. As it is situated in the old part of town the Kyichu allows more freedom for your own sightseeing.



### Zanda Castle Hotel or Similar, Tholing

Zanda Castle Hotel in Tholing is a favourite of western tourists due to its unusual architectural design, scenic surroundings and modern facilities. The hotel has its own restaurant and Wi-Fi is available in the public areas.



### Overnight Camp

We offer full service camping on this trek. In addition to porters to carry camping equipment and kit bags we will provide sleeping tents, a dining shelter, table and stools/chairs and a toilet tent. Our preference on this trip is to camp whilst in Tibet, due to the very basic accommodation and multi-share rooms offered by guesthouses. However, local restrictions mean on some nights guesthouses may be used.



### Yajiangyuan Hotel or Similar, Drongpa

Built in 2013, the Yajiangyuan Hotel offers comfortable, modern accommodation with large rooms that have private facilities, a bar, a restaurant serving both Chinese and Western-style meals and a tea garden.



### **Kyirong Hotel (Gyirong), Kyirong**

The recently renovated Kyirong Hotel (also known as the Gyirong Hotel) is located in the town of Kyirong, around 25 kilometers from the Nepalese border. It has comfortable rooms with private facilities, and is considered to be the best accommodation in the town.



### **Nepali Ghar Hotel, Kathmandu**

Traditional Nepali craftsmanship is showcased in this attractive hotel that boasts first-rate service with homely touches. Large rooms have hi speed Wi-Fi and chic coffee makers, and are styled with tiled floors, beamed ceilings and warm tones. The hotel has an excellent restaurant and garden terrace providing a welcome retreat from the tourist hustle and bustle of Thamel, just outside the door.

## Meal arrangements

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All meals included from breakfast on day 3 to breakfast on day 21, departure day.

## Flight arrangements

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### Flight inclusive from price

Our 'Flight inclusive from' price is based on the best fare available at the time of printing. As airfares change on a constant basis, this should be used only as a guide price. Rest assured that, at the time of booking, we will endeavour to get the best possible price for the flights you need. Remember, the earlier you book the greater your chances of securing the best fare.

Flight inclusive packages booked through Mountain Kingdoms are protected through our ATOL bonding scheme.

### Flight upgrades and regional Airports

Please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 for flight options from regional UK airports, Business Class upgrades, alternative airlines and stopovers. Please also check our website for the most up to date flight inclusive 'from' prices.

## Further information

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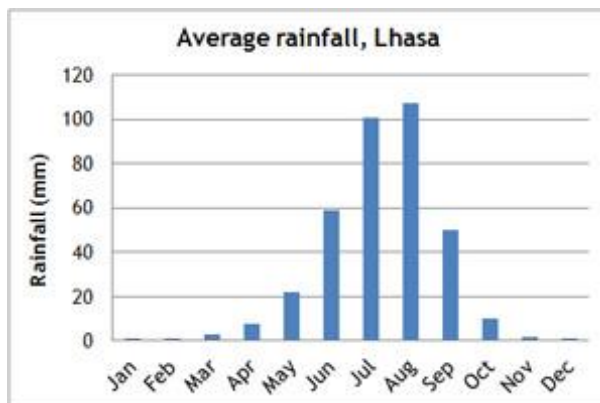
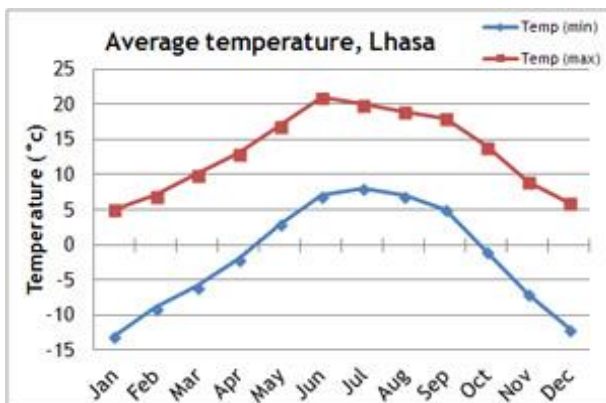
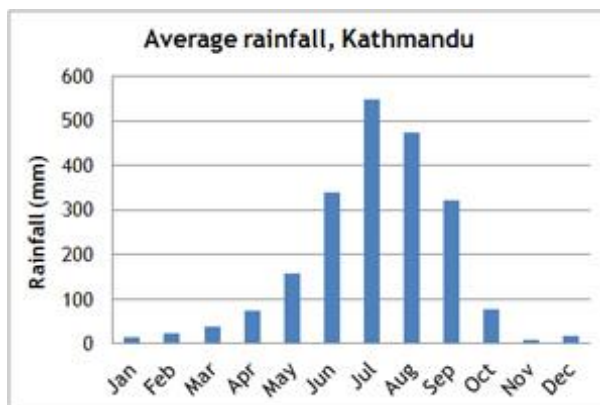
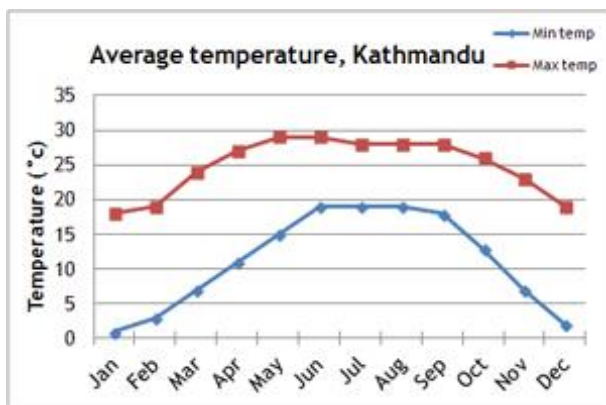
When we receive your booking, we send you a full Trip Dossier which contains details of any visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. If you do have queries at this initial stage do call us on 01453 844400 and we will be pleased to offer advice.

## The nature of adventure travel

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Every effort will be made to keep to this itinerary but we cannot guarantee that things may not change, either before you travel or while you are away. By its very nature, adventure travel involves an element of the unexpected, particularly in more remote areas. A variety of factors such as adverse weather conditions, changes to local schedules and difficulties with transportation can all contribute to the need to make changes to the itinerary, often at the very last minute. Our Operations Manager and your Trip Leader will make every effort to maintain the integrity of the original itinerary and minimise the impact of any changes, but an easy-going and flexible nature is a real asset! Please note that all timings and distances given are approximate.

# Climate information





# Extensions

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## Extending your holiday

If you would like additional inspiration on how or where to extend your holiday please call us on 01453 844400. Alternatively, you can download a range of extension information sheets on our website, at [www.mountainkingdoms.com](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com).



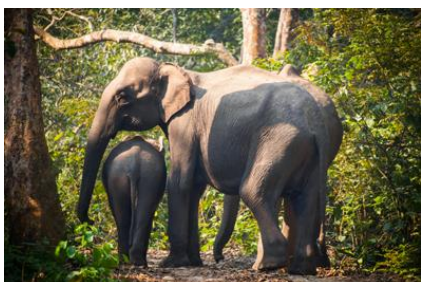
### Extra nights in Nepal

If you would like to extend your stay in Nepal, you can add extra nights at your group tour accommodation or choose from our range of distinctive properties in Pokhara and the Kathmandu area. We can offer luxury resorts, heritage hotels, tranquil lodges and characterful cottages. Our selection includes Dwarika's hotel in Kathmandu and its sister property - Dwarika's Resort at Dhulikhel, Pavilions Himalaya at Pokhara, Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge and Shivapuri Heights Cottage. Individual extension leaflets for all these options can be downloaded from our website or requested from our office.



### Kathmandu Valley sightseeing excursions

We can arrange half day or full day sightseeing tours taking you to the key cultural attractions of central Kathmandu or the Kathmandu Valley including the World Heritage Sites of Bhaktapur and Patan. Your tour will be led by an English-speaking guide and you will have a private vehicle and driver.



### Wildlife extensions in Nepal - Chitwan, Bardia & Koshi Tappu

Visit Chitwan or Bardia National Parks home to a rich variety of birds and animals including elephant, rhinos, leopard and Bengal tiger. Stay in a comfortable lodge and enjoy a range of wildlife viewing activities. Alternatively visit the renowned Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve - one of the finest birdwatching and wildlife areas in all Asia.



### Lumbini

Enjoy a three day extension to the birthplace of Buddha, one of the most important Buddhist pilgrimage sites in the world. Take the short flight from Kathmandu, and spend two nights in a comfortable 3\* hotel, just steps from the Lumbini temple complex, with a full day to explore the fascinating UNESCO World Heritage Site in the company of your expert local guide.

## Why book this holiday with Mountain Kingdoms?

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- This unique trekking adventure is unique to Mountain Kingdoms taking you to the remote ancient kingdoms of Guge and Shangshung, and many other sites of cultural and historical significance
- There is also time to explore the many cultural sights of Lhasa and the surrounding area
- We include a three day trek in the picturesque hills around the Kathmandu Valley to aid with acclimatisation before travelling to Tibet.
- We use excellent, knowledgeable, English-speaking local guides.
- Whilst driving in Tibet we use comfortable, modern mini buses.
- We include free hire of a down jacket, four-season sleeping bag and fleece liner that will be supplied to you in Kathmandu.
- You will receive a free high quality kitbag for you to use and keep.
- Our maximum group size is 12 for this trip. This provides for a genuine small group travel experience and helps reduce the negative aspects often associated with larger trekking groups.
- We have a wealth of Himalayan experience in the company, most of our staff have visited Nepal and love the Himalayas and many have also been to Tibet and visited the areas covered by this trip. If you have any questions about any aspect of this holiday please don't hesitate to give us a call on 01453 844400. Steve and Seraphina Berry have both been to Kailash recently.
- We offer a flexible service and can extend your holiday with extra hotel nights, upgrades and exciting activities.
- As part of our commitment to 'Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency', we will be carbon-offsetting all international flights booked through us by donating funds to the Ecoan Tree Planting Project in Peru.
- We are an IATA accredited agent and work directly with some of the world's major airlines. If you wish to fly with a specific airline, from a regional UK airport or on alternative dates to the main group we would be happy to arrange this for you. Please contact our Flights Manager, April, for flight options, quotes and further information.

If we've tempted you to take your next holiday with us, we advise you to check availability and you can do this via our website: [www.mountainkingdoms.com](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com) or by calling the team on +44 (0)1453 844400. Bookings can be made online, by phone or by completing a booking form and returning it to us. We can also provisionally hold places if you need time to consider your options.

## What we say

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*I returned to the region with friends in June 2019 and we explored so many amazing places. Very few westerners have seen this area as yet, but now it is made all the more possible as there is a daily flight from Lhasa to Ali in the far west. This enables relatively easy access which would otherwise have taken almost a week's driving from Lhasa, and the new road back out to Nepal provides a convenient exit. Be among the very first outsiders to see these wonderful long abandoned cave based civilizations.*

*-Steve Berry, MD, Mountain Kingdoms*

# Mountain Kingdoms - distinctly different

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## **Truly independent**

In an age where many so-called 'independent' travel companies have in fact been bought out by multi-national giants, we remain fiercely independent with all the benefits this offers our clients.

## **Value for money prices with an emphasis on quality**

We are not in the business of cutting our itineraries and services to the bone to offer eye-catching cheap prices. We use some of the best airlines, and typically 3 or 4 star hotels in cities. We include the majority of meals and private transport for road travel. We use excellent equipment and appoint well-trained staff and leaders. Last year, over 98% of our clients rated their Mountain Kingdoms holiday as 'excellent' or 'good'. We are members of AITO and bound by their quality charter.

## **Complete financial security**

You can book with us confident that your holiday has full financial protection. Flight inclusive holidays are financially protected by the Civil Aviation Authority under ATOL licence number 2973 and 'Land Only' holidays are covered by a bond secured with ABTOT.

## **No Surcharge Guarantee**

Your peace of mind is important to us so we have a No Surcharge Guarantee on all Land Only and Flight Inclusive bookings. This means that there will be no change to the price of your holiday once we have confirmed your booking, regardless of fluctuations in exchange rates or fuel prices.

## **Award winning Responsible Tourism**

We feel strongly that all our holidays should benefit local communities, protect the environment and respect local traditions, religion and heritage. You can read more about the charities we support and our Responsible Tourism commitments and initiatives on the following page or at [www.mountainkingdoms.com](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com).

## **Genuine small group travel**

Almost all of our holidays have a maximum group size of just 12, plus leader. This provides more contact with your leader, readier access to off-the-beaten-path areas, greater interaction with local communities and a reduced environmental impact.

## **Loyalty Discount**

If you have previously travelled with us we recognise your loyalty with a discount on future trips.

## **Booking your holiday - it couldn't be easier**

Once you've chosen your Mountain Kingdoms holiday you can book online, call the office or complete and post a booking form which can be found in our brochure or downloaded from our website. If you would like to hold a place on one of our trips, whilst you make up your mind, please give us a call to make a provisional booking. This is a no-obligation, no-cost booking and we will hold your place until space comes under pressure or we need your decision.

## **Comprehensive information**

When we receive your booking we send you a full trip dossier which contains details of visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. In fact, everything you need to know to give you peace of mind and allow you to prepare for your trip of a lifetime.



## RESPONSIBLE TOURISM STATEMENT CLIMATE EMERGENCY PLAN



For over 33 years, Mountain Kingdoms has been offering people the chance to visit amazing places on this extraordinary planet. We now offer trips to all corners of the world, but we are conscious that inevitably our holidays have a detrimental impact on the world around us, and we want to do all we can to reduce our carbon emissions. We are a signatory to Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency, along with a growing number of like-minded, reputable tour operators. For more information, please visit [www.tourismdeclares.com](http://www.tourismdeclares.com)

From 2020 onwards, we will be focusing on how we can reduce the carbon emissions that our holidays produce, and how to counterbalance this carbon by supporting carbon offset measures. Here are some of our current and future plans to minimise the impact of our business as a whole:

### **Carbon Offsetting**

#### **Already doing:**

- ✓ We have been offsetting carbon since 2007, but will be increasing our donations to the [Ecoan tree planting project](#) in Peru this year. This is with a trusted partner where the funds go directly to a project where the community plants trees on its own land.

#### **Will do:**

- ✓ We are working on making our carbon offsetting more accurate and targeted.
- ✓ In future, we will add to that a further estimate for carbon produced by hotels, local road travel, trains and internal flights to arrive at a carbon offset sum for each trip we operate.
- ✓ Carbon offsetting will be included in our holiday prices. For our Flight Inclusive holidays it will include the international flight and any emissions produced by inland travel and accommodation. Our Land Only prices will include the cost of offsetting emissions caused by inland travel and accommodation.

### **Reducing Carbon Emissions**

#### **Already doing:**

- ✓ We already offer the majority of our customers a free filtered water bottle which means they can instantly cut down on their single-use plastic consumption. This will be an ongoing project.
- ✓ We already predominantly use locally owned hotels, but will continue to ensure that, where possible, we use these rather than multinational chains.
- ✓ We have joined the Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency initiative to stand alongside like-minded travel companies, to work together to initiate best practices to make tourism as sustainable as possible.

#### **Will do:**

- ✓ We will re-evaluate our flights to make sure we are using the most fuel efficient airlines with the youngest fleets and, where possible, direct flights for each trip.
- ✓ We will stop offering unnecessary optional flights – for example our Everest sightseeing trip.
- ✓ We will eliminate unnecessary staff flights wherever possible.
- ✓ We will look at minimising internal flights.
- ✓ We will be asking all our worldwide agents and suppliers to look at their own carbon footprint and encourage them to reduce it.
- ✓ We will promote our more low impact trips to give customers an informed choice.

As part of our wider commitment to Responsible Tourism, we will continue to support a number of charities with whom we have had a long standing relationship over many years. These include: Shiva Charity in Nepal (Ginette Harrison School), Simien Mountains Mobile Medical Service and Porter Welfare, as well as setting aside a sum for emergency disaster relief should the need arise.



