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**\$12,481** NZD

Single Room  
 \$13,995 NZD

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Prices valid until  
 30th December 2023

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14 days  
 Duration

Bhutan, India  
 Destination

Level 2 - Moderate  
 Activity

# Tour of Darjeeling, Sikkim, and Bhutan

Nov 06 2023 to Nov 19 2023

## Tour of Darjeeling, Sikkim, and Bhutan

Join Odyssey Traveller on this small group tour in the Indian subcontinent, an incredible journey taking us from the verdant tea gardens of Darjeeling nestled in the Himalayan mountain range, to the hilltop monasteries of the former independent kingdom of Sikkim, and finally to the pristine and beautifully isolated mountain landscape of Bhutan



Tour of Darjeeling, Sikkim, and Bhutan

<https://www.odysseytraveller.com.au>

27-Sep-2023

This 14-day tour of Darjeeling and Sikkim in India and the country of Bhutan will show you the interaction of old and new cultures, and how the people preserve years-old traditions and untouched landscapes while embracing modernity. This is a region of immense historical and cultural importance. We will visit a number of important destinations that will give us insight about the effects of the British Empire and the history of the Kingdom of Sikkim that flourished in the Indian subcontinent prior to colonisation. We will also have a chance to enter the isolated enclave of Bhutan to learn about its festivals and cultural practices. This is a small group tour for a group of up to 16 mature and senior travellers joining with their partner or as a solo traveller that will enrich the senses with its magical scenery, but will also enrich the mind by teaching us about the unique places to which the rest of the world have had no or limited prior access. This group tour requires a reasonable level of fitness.

India has 38 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, one of which we will see on this tour. The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway is one of the three railways listed as the UNESCO World Heritage Site "Mountain Railways of India". Opened in 1881, UNESCO describes it as "the first, and is still the most outstanding, example of a hill passenger railway." Bhutan has eight sites on the UNESCO Tentative List, and we will visit the Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest Monastery), an iconic cultural landmark located in the Paro Valley. This monastery is associated with Guru Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rinpoche or "second Buddha", who is believed to have introduced Buddhism into the Indian subcontinent in the 8th century. We will also explore the sights and the beautiful dzong architecture of the capital of Bhutan, Thimpu.

This small group tour is perfect for the active mature-aged and senior travellers who are after a diversity of scenery and experiences, but also want convenience and comfort. Nearly all of the daily meals are provided on this tour, especially during the Bhutan leg of the trip, giving

you a chance to try each destination's unique cuisine.

Odyssey Traveller has been serving global travellers since 1983. As always, couples and solo travellers are welcome, and similar to other Odyssey Traveller tours, you will be accompanied at all times by a Program Leader and local guides who will share their knowledge of the places visited.

## History of Darjeeling, Sikkim, and Bhutan

The histories of Darjeeling, Sikkim, and Bhutan are intertwined. Darjeeling, noted for its tea industry, is located within the state of West Bengal in northeastern India. Until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Darjeeling was ruled by the Kingdom of Sikkim. The kingdom, situated between modern-day Nepal and Bhutan, was established in 1642 and fought a series of territorial wars with its two neighbours.

In the war between British troops and Nepal that broke out in 1814, Sikkim sided with the British; the kingdom later became a de facto protectorate of the British Empire. The British East India Company, which had taken over most of the Indian subcontinent, took over the formerly Sikkim-ruled Darjeeling in 1835, and built a sanatorium and extensive tea plantations in the region.

Though Bhutan was never colonised, it was forced to cede control of its foreign relations to the British in 1910, a role that was inherited by India in 1949 following that country's independence from British rule. Sikkim became a protectorate of India in 1950 and later joined the country as its 22<sup>nd</sup> state. Bhutan began to develop its own foreign relations, joining the United Nations in 1971. In 2008, Bhutan transitioned from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy.

## Tour Itinerary Highlights

Tour of Darjeeling, Sikkim, and Bhutan

<https://www.odysseytraveller.com.au>

## Darjeeling

We will travel to India, to Delhi for our first night, and fly from Delhi to Darjeeling.

Darjeeling lies 490 kilometres north of Calcutta at an elevation of about 2,100 metres above sea level, on the narrow mountain ridge of the Sikkim Himalayas. Here we will experience an early morning drive to Tiger Hill (2,573 metres) in order to see the dawn light breaking over the snow peaks of the Himalayan mountain range.

Darjeeling is a town located in the foothills of the Himalayas, so this promises to be a scenic drive along a country road dotted with tea gardens, agricultural fields, and small villages. Visible from Tiger Hill are Mt Everest and Mt Kanchenjunga (world's third highest peak), an unforgettable sight.

We will also take a narrow gauge train ride on the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, a UNESCO World Heritage Site which has the highest railway station in India sitting at 2,258 metres.

## Sikkim

In Sikkim, we will explore the capital of Gangtok. Gangtok is the capital of the mountainous Indian state of Sikkim, a former Himalayan Kingdom.

We will see several monuments related to Tibetan Buddhism, such as the Rumtek Dharma Chakra Centre (Rumtek Monastery). Originally built in the 18th century, it was rebuilt in 1960 by the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa (Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, 1924–1981) after he fled Tibet. The Gyalwa Karmapa is the spiritual leader of the Karma Kagyu, one of the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. It is a replica of the Kagyurpa Monastery in Tsurphu, Tibet.

We will travel through the lush green tea gardens and forests and visit Gorumara, a popular wilderness retreat and a national park. This a true wildlife sanctuary, a reserve forest since the 1890s and untouched by

human habitation.

## Bhutan

From Sikkim, we drive to the border of Bhutan. Here we will be met by our Bhutanese guide and driver.

A highlight of any visit to Bhutan typically includes watching and participating in one of the many festivals held throughout the year and the temples of Bhutan.

The most famous is the iconic Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest Monastery) in the Paro Valley. This involves a hike of 3-4 hours to reach the site, on a 900-metre ascent up to the monastery at 3,120 meters. This monastery is associated with Guru Rinpoche, who is venerated as a "second Buddha" by adherents of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Himalayan states of India. Even if you decide not to reach the monastery itself, there is a tea shop around the halfway mark, which provides excellent views of the monastery.

Another highlight is the National Textile Museum. The Bhutan Textile Museum was opened in 2001 at the instruction of Queen Ashi Sangay Choden, one of the four wives of the old Bhutanese King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. The national museum was established to preserve and showcase the rich cultural heritage that has been preserved between Bhutan's mountainous ridges. The building itself was constructed to replicate a traditional Bhutanese house. Visitors really get a full taste of the country's cultural heritage, and the lingering influence of tradition on the present.

These are only a few of the places we will visit in Darjeeling, Sikkim, and Bhutan. For more details and to read about all of our destinations on this wonderful tour, click the 'Top 5' or 'Itinerary' buttons above! If you're keen to experience this tour, please call or send an email. Or, to book, simply fill in the form on the right hand side of this page.

## Articles about India published by Odyssey Traveller

- [India's Mughal Empire](#)
- [Clash of the Mughals and the Marathas](#)
- [History of British Rule in India](#)
- [Discovering India](#)
- [Top 20 World Heritage Sites You Must Visit](#)

For all the articles Odyssey Traveller has published for mature aged and senior travellers, click through [on this link](#).

## External articles to assist you on your visit to India

- [7 Wonders of India](#) (World Atlas)
- [New Seven Wonders of the World](#) (Travel Channel)
- [7 Things You Didn't Know About the Qutub Minar](#) (National Geographic Traveller India)
- [Incredible India](#)

## Articles about Bhutan published by Odyssey Traveller

- [Bhutan: A Journey Into the Hidden Kingdom.](#)
- [Festivals of Bhutan.](#)

For all the articles Odyssey Traveller has published for mature aged and senior travellers, click through [on this link](#).

## External articles to assist you on your visit to Bhutan

Tour of Darjeeling, Sikkim, and Bhutan

<https://www.odysseytraveller.com.au>

- [Visit the world's only carbon-neutral country.](#)
- [Traveling in Bhutan: What you need to know before you go.](#)
- [23 facts about Asia's most mysterious country.](#)
- [Climate & Weather \(Bhutan's Tourism Council\)](#)

## Highlights

1. See the unforgettable Mt Everest and Mt Kanchenjunga (world's third highest peak) from the top of Darjeeling's Tiger Hill.
2. Take a toy train ride on the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, a UNESCO World Heritage Site which has the highest railway station in India.
3. Travel through the lush green tea gardens and forests of Dooars in northeastern India.
4. Explore several monuments related to Tibetan Buddhism in Sikkim.
5. Walk up to the Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest Monastery), an iconic Bhutanese cultural landmark nestled in the Paro Valley.

## Itinerary

### Day 1

**Locations:** Delhi, India

**Overview:**

Upon arrival in Delhi make your own way to our hotel. In the evening, we meet as a group for an introductory briefing and our welcome dinner.

(D)

**Accommodation:**

Lemon Tree or similar

## Day 2

**Locations:** Darjeeling

### Overview:

In the morning, we will fly from Delhi to Bagdogra in the Indian state of West Bengal (2 hours). From Bagdogra, we will be driven to Darjeeling (3 hours). Darjeeling is a town located in the foothills of the Himalayas, so this promises to be a scenic drive along a country road dotted with tea gardens, agricultural fields, and small villages.

We will check in at our Darjeeling hotel and have the afternoon and evening free.

In the late afternoon you could take a stroll in the Darjeeling Mall in the heart of Darjeeling town. It is also known as Chowrasta. “Chow” means four and “rasta” means road—the place where four roads meet. It is a must visit place for all tourists who want to get a feel of the city. The place has many old book and curio shops, some more than 100 years old. Walk around the shady wooded pedestrian road and enjoy the mist and sunshine.

(B, D)

### Accommodation:

Mayfair Resort or similar

## Day 3

**Locations:** Darjeeling - Ghoom - Darjeeling

### Overview:

We will take an early morning drive to **Tiger Hill** (2,573 metres) in order to see the dawn light breaking over the snow peaks before sunlight even reaches the lowlands. Visible from Tiger Hill are Mt Everest and Mt Kanchenjunga (world’s third highest peak), an unforgettable sight. The summit at Tiger Hill also commands a fine view of the vast plains of North Bengal.

Tiger Hill is also the summit of Ghoom (also spelled Ghum), a small locality that is home to the highest railway station in India, the **Darjeeling Himalayan Railway** (or Toy Train) sitting at 2,258 metres. We will take a toy train ride to Ghoom. The steam locomotive snakes its



way through the zigzag trails and loops. It makes a round at the picturesque Batasia Loop with Kanchenjunga as the constant backdrop. At Ghoom, we will visit the **Himalayan Railway Museum** before returning to Darjeeling.

We will visit:

- **Tibetan refugee Self Help Centre** – established on 1st October 1959 to rehabilitate displaced Tibetans who had followed His Holiness, The Dalai Lama to India in early 1959. The Tibetan craftsmen can be seen at work at the centre. We will drive along the road to the Lepong race course area for a stunning countryside view over the rolling slopes of lush green tea gardens.
- **Himalayan Mountaineering Institute Museum** – which boasts a rich and rare collection of exhibits; the HMI was built to commemorate the success of sherpa Tenzing Norgay, who accompanied British Edmund Hillary to the summit of Mt Everest in 1953, the first to ever do so
- **Himalayan Zoo** – a high altitude wildlife park and a home for the Siberian Tiger, Himalayan Black Bear, Red Panda, Snow Leopard and many Himalayan species endemic to the region.

Back in the town centre, we will visit the local market of fashionable handicrafts and jewellery. Laze away in the Mall – the hub of the town. Have a cup of coffee at Caventer's open air restaurant and watch a glorious sunset. (B, D)

**Accommodation:**

Mayfair Resort or similar

**Day 4**

**Locations:** Darjeeling - Gangtok

**Overview:**

Today we drive to Gangtok via Peshok road (4 hours). The view of the fascinating tea gardens at Peshok with the Kanchenjunga snow range and Rangit River Valley will demand you to stop for a while for a

refreshing break.

From the road junction of Tista Bazar, we follow the winding road along the emerald River Tista. To break up the drive, we can spend time in some scenic spots on the way to enjoy the landscape.

We reach **Gangtok** by afternoon. Gangtok is the capital of the mountainous Indian state of Sikkim, a former Himalayan Kingdom. This is a buzzing town showing a fusion of modern and traditional culture. Established as a Buddhist pilgrimage site in the 1840s, the city became capital of an independent monarchy after British rule ended, but joined India in 1975 as its 22nd state.

In the afternoon, if Day 4 of our tour falls on a weekday, we will visit the **Government Institute of Cottage Industry** where beautiful souvenirs like carpets, handcarved tables (choktses), traditional handicrafts, furniture, woven carpets and other products, are produced and exhibited for sale.

Nearby you can also visit the **Tibetology Institute and museum** which holds the world's largest collection of books and rare manuscripts on the subject of Mahayana Buddhism. There are also many religious works of art and thangka, Tibetan scroll paintings typically constructed from silk brocade.

Just beside the institute is the **Dodurl Chorten** encircled by 108 prayer wheels built by late Trulsi Rimpoche in 1945-46. This is one of the most important and biggest stupas found in Sikkim.

After checking in at the hotel, consider going for a short visit to the market or walk on the MG Marg (or Mahatma Gandhi road), the most popular area in Gangtok town. (B, D)

#### **Accommodation:**

Norkhil Hotel or similar

### **Day 5**

**Locations:** Gangtok - Rumtek - Gangtok

#### **Overview:**

From Gangtok, we will take a half day excursion to the **Rumtek Dharma Chakra Centre**. Originally built in the 18th century, it was rebuilt in 1960 by the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa (Rangjung Rigpe Dorje,

1924–1981) after he fled Tibet. (The Gyalwa Karmapa is the spiritual leader of the Karma Kagyu, one of the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism). It is a replica of the Kagyurpa Monastery in Tsurphu, Tibet.

We will walk and visit the nearby **Shri Nalanda Institute for Higher Buddhist Studies**, just adjacent to the Monastery Building. (B, D)

**Accommodation:**

Norkhil Hotel or similar

**Day 6**

**Locations:** Gorumara National Park

**Overview:**

Today after breakfast we set out for a journey to **Gorumara National Park** in the foothills of the Himalayas (5 hours). The first phase of our journey runs through the hills dotted with beautiful forests and villages. From here the road goes down to the vast plains of Dooars, lying in the outer foothills of the Himalayas. We travel through the lush green tea gardens and forests—the unique features of **Dooars**.

We continue to Gorumara – a popular wilderness retreat in the Dooars plains and a national park. This a true wildlife sanctuary, a reserve forest since the 1890s and untouched by human habitation.

In the afternoon, we will go on an exclusive car safari to Gorumara National Park. The journey passes through the deep natural grasslands of Gorumara, the natural habitat for rhinoceros, elephants, leopard, bison and many other species of birds and reptiles. We will also visit the watch tower in the core area of the national park. From here we can get a vast panoramic view of the Gorumara grassland. There is a salt pit just at the base of the tower, where the animals regularly come to taste the salt.

After some thrilling excitement, we return to our accommodation in Gorumara. Here we will also have the opportunity to see the different rural life of the plains of Bengal. In the evening, we will arrange a bonfire with a cultural show. (B, D)

**Accommodation:**

Sinclairs Retreat or similar

## Day 7

**Locations:** Gorumbara - Thimpu, Bhutan

### Overview:

In the morning, we drive about 2.5 hours to the Bhutan border. Here we will be met by our Bhutanese guide and driver.

After lunch, we drive from the border town of Phuentsholing to Thimphu (5 hours), moving from the warmer climate of the south up to the foothills of the Himalayas. Thimphu is the capital and largest city of Bhutan.

Take an early evening stroll around town and soak in the atmosphere of this magical capital.

(B, L, D)

### Accommodation:

Hotel Galingkha or similar

## Day 8

**Locations:** Thimphu

### Overview:

Today we will enjoy a full-day sightseeing tour of the capital.

Among the places we will visit is the National Textile Museum. The Bhutan Textile Museum was opened in 2001 at the instruction of Queen Ashi Sangay Choden, one of the four wives of the old Bhutanese King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. The national museum was established to preserve and showcase the rich cultural heritage that has been preserved between Bhutan's mountainous ridges. The building itself was constructed to replicate a traditional Bhutanese house. Visitors really get a full taste of the country's cultural heritage, and the lingering influence of tradition on the present.

We also visit the Thimphu Chorten, the Golden Buddha (Buddha Dordenma). We explore the postal museum, showcasing Bhutan's interesting stamps, as well as the Changangkha temple. (B, L, D)

### Accommodation:

Hotel Galingkha or similar

## Day 9

**Locations:** Thimphu - Punakha

**Overview:**

In the morning, we drive east to the Dochu-la (*la* means “pass”), where, weather permitting, there are panoramic views of the Himalayan snow-peaks. The drive takes approximately 3-4 hours. We will visit the modern Victory Temple at Dochu-la, which was built to commemorate Bhutan’s victory over Indian insurgents in the early 1980’s.

In the afternoon, we visit Punakha Dzong, perhaps the most photogenic of Bhutan’s Dzongs, situated at the confluence of two fast-flowing turquoise rivers. (B, L, D)

**Accommodation:**

Hotel Zhingkhram or similar

## Day 10

**Locations:** Punakha - Paro

**Overview:**

This morning we walk to Khamsum Yulley Namgyel Chorten, a chorten (Buddhist shrine) commissioned by the Queen of Bhutan in 2004. This uphill walk offers a beautiful view of the Punakha Valley.

In the afternoon, we drive to Paro (4 hours) where we will have time to visit some handicraft shops for souvenirs of the trip. (B, L, D)

**Accommodation:**

Olathang Resort or similar

## Day 11

**Locations:** Paro

**Overview:**

This morning we enjoy some more sightseeing together in Paro, visiting the Paro Rinpung Dzong, a large monastery and fortress and one of the finest examples of Bhutanese architecture. It houses the district Monastic Body and government administrative offices of Paro

Dzongkhag.

We also visit the National Museum housed in the Ta Dzong (watch tower) which was built on top of the hill above Rinpung Dzong to defend Rinpung Dzong and the Paro valley during times of war, in an unusual circular construction resembling a conch shell. The Ta Dzong was badly damaged by an earthquake in September 2011, but has now been renovated. Here we see a magnificent collection of Bhutanese artefacts – costumes, religious paintings, arms, textiles and a fascinating collection of Bhutan stamps.

Near the museum we may also be able to see a demonstration of traditional wood turning skills by local artisans who make traditional wooden bowls and cups – and members of the group may try their hand in wood turning as well!

In the afternoon we will see the Drukgyel Dzong (fortress of victory), constructed to commemorate the victory over Tibetan invaders in 1644, and destroyed by a butter lamp fire in 1951. Nearby is the 7th century Kyichu Lhakhang, a temple of historical significance and one of the most sacred shrines in Bhutan. (B, L, D)

**Accommodation:**

Olathang Resort or similar

**Day 12**

**Locations:** Paro

**Overview:**

We rise early to visit the spectacularly situated Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest Monastery), a highlight of any visit to Bhutan. This involves a hike of 3-4 hours to reach the site, on a 900-metre ascent up to the monastery at 3,120 meters. This monastery is associated with Guru Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rinpoche, who is believed to have introduced Buddhism into the Indian subcontinent in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. He is venerated as a "second Buddha" by adherents of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Himalayan states of India.

There is a tea shop around the halfway mark, which provides excellent views of the monastery, and some visitors are content with reaching this site. We return in time for lunch, and the rest of the afternoon is

free.

(B, L, D)

**Accommodation:**

Olathang Resort or similar

**Day 13**

**Locations:** Paro - Delhi

**Overview:**

We take our flight to Delhi and transfer to our hotel.

In the evening we meet again for a farewell dinner.

(B, D)

**Accommodation:**

Lemon Tree or similar

**Day 14**

**Locations:** Delhi

**Overview:**

The tour concludes after breakfast.

(B)

## Inclusions / Exclusions

**What's included in our Tour**

- Two domestic airfares in economy class
- 13 nights of hotel accommodation.
- 13 dinners, 10 lunches, and 13 breakfasts.
- Services of an Odyssey Tour Leader.
- Local guide throughout the tour.

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- All sightseeing and entrance fees.
- Tipping and gratuities.
- Detailed preparatory booklet.

#### **What's not included in our Tour**

- International flights.
- Comprehensive travel insurance.
- Meals not specified in the itinerary.
- Items of a personal nature such as drinks, alcohol and laundry.

#### **Level 2 - Moderate**

Participants must be able to carry their own luggage, climb and descend stairs, be in good health, mobile and able to participate in 3-5 hours of physical activity per day, the equivalent of walking/hiking up to 8 kilometres on uneven ground.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any requests for further information about this tour or any others offered by Odyssey Travel.