

NEPAL & BHUTAN

THE ROOF OF THE WORLD



VISION GROUP

LUXURY EXPERIENCES



Nepal boasts eight of the world's tallest mountains and the world's oldest Hindu and Buddhist sites. While Kathmandu Valley is made of three ancient cities filled with enchanting medieval palaces, pagodas, temples, statues and stupas, the rest of the kingdom offers unparalleled adventure options with abundance in flora and fauna. As for its people - From the Tharus that share their land with the splendid Asian tuskers in the plains to the brave Yak herders of Dolpo, they are as amazing as the land itself. Here in its tropical jungles the Royal Bengal Tiger prowls, higher up the legend of the Yeti lives on. Although modernization has set in, the quintessence of ancient Nepal remains amongst its people.

Bhutan or the "Land of the Peaceful Dragon" is a country of sprawling forests, venerated monasteries, overpowering fortresses, lush green valleys fed by bountiful rivers and age-old practices. Cultivated fields surrounded by pitched roof houses with their typical trefoil-shape windows and Dzongs (fortresses) dominate the scenery with their sheer size. Its people are hardworking, vibrantly attired and deeply religious while the land is immaculate. Bhutan's alpine pastures, peaks, forests, lakes and flowers make it a paradise. Bhutan is arguably the world's happiest country, and also one of the greenest. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck developed his signature Gross National Happiness index based on four pillars: sustainable development, environmental protection, cultural preservation, and good governance.



NEPAL



EXPLORE

- Visiting the city of Bhaktapur, literally the 'City of Devotees' is a jump back in time. Bhaktapur is still untouched by rapid urbanization and has managed to retain its brick paved roads, charming red brick houses and a way of life that goes back to medieval times. This ancient city is also famous for pottery and woodcarving amply displayed on the squares and windows respectively. The extraordinary Bhaktapur Durbar Square is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and its monuments reflect the glory days of the Malla Dynasty when art and architecture thrived in the three cities of the valley.
- With your personal guide visit Dhulikhel, which has always been an important trade center, is a place of exhilarating beauty and unparalleled serenity. Also popular for the remarkable view of the sunrise and sunset, Dhulikhel is famous for its vantage location in viewing the Himalayan ranges from Cho Oyu in the east to Himalchuli in the west. The Old Town of Dhulikhel is a close traditional Newari settlement with an assembly of fine old Newari houses with beautifully carved windows and doors. There are numerous temples in the town depicting an example of traditional and old Newari craftsmanship of Dhulikhel. These are important places of worship for local people. The core area of Dhulikhel has interesting narrow cobbled streets and lanes embedded with number of Hindu Shrines and a few Buddhist Stupas.

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EXPLORE

- Visit Kathmandu Durbar Square. 'Durbar' means 'palace' and takes its name from the old Royal Palace. This is the center of the old city, and there are a number of interesting temples. The Kathmandu Durbar Square is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Kathmandu is blessed by a living goddess. The Kumari Devi is the most important of several living goddesses in Nepal, she is seen on the temple's balcony regularly.
- With a heritage conservation official visit the city of Patan, also known as Lalitpur, the city of artisans is a paradise of fine arts and best known for its rich cultural heritage. It is home to the valley's finest craftsmen who have preserved such ancient techniques as the repoussé and lost wax process used to produce exquisite sculptures. The city retains much of its old charm with its narrow streets, brick houses and multitude of well-preserved Hindu temples, Buddhist monasteries (vihars) and monuments. In the heart of Patan is the main Square, an area filled with ancient palaces, pagoda temples, stone baths, Hindu and Buddhist statues, engravings and bronze carvings. The Palace of the Malla Kings is one of the highlights of Patan. Patan Durbar Square is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

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ARCHITECTURE

- In Kathmandu visit Pashupatinath Temple, UNESCO World Heritage Site, with its astonishing architecture of gilded roof and richly carved silver doors, is thronged with devotees and pilgrims from all over the world, one of the holiest Hindu shrines in Nepal. Set on the banks of the sacred Bagmati River, the major purpose of this religious site is cremation of Hindus, whose body is burnt by the eldest son of the family. The ashes from the dead body are swept into the Bagmati River that eventually joins the Holy Ganges.
- Visit Boudhanath Stupa, one of the most imposing landmarks of Kathmandu and a center of Tibetan Buddhism. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, this stupa is built on a massive three level mandala and is one of the largest in the world. Follow the pilgrims in their prayers, light butter lamps as an offering to deities and immerse in the spiritual life of Nepal.
- Visit the remote Barahi Temple, the two-story pagoda is situated in a small island in the Phewa Lake surrounded by marvelous views. This Hindu temple is dedicated to Goddess Ajima in the form of a boar called Barahi to pierce her evil enemies with her pointed tusks. Barahi is pictured with the face of a boar with a cup in one hand and a fish in the other.

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ARTS & CRAFTS

- In Bhaktapur enter the workshop of a local pottery artist and let your imagination flow to create your own pottery on the potter's wheel.
- Have a session at a Painting Atelier to soothe your senses and touch your imagination. Experiment with water colors, acrylics or with simple pencil and paper, let your imagination run free and fill your paper with colors.
- With an art historian immerse in the world of Nepalese woodcarving at Patan; woodcarving is a preeminent Newari art and Patan offers excellent examples of the art dating back to 17-18th century, with its 55 temples and 136 monasteries, Patan is the finest example of traditional wood carvings.
- With a traditional master learn the Thangka Painting (Buddhist Spritual Painting): Thangka is a unique and distinctive Nepalese art form exported to Tibet after Princess Bhrikuti, daughter of King Lichchavi, married Songtsän Gampo, the ruler of Tibet. It serves as an important teaching tool depicting the life of the Buddha, influential lamas and other deities and bodhisattvas. Interact with the artist and learn about Thangka' insights, art form, its types, religious as well as its artistic significances.
- Enter a workshop of a metal sculpture artist, a form of art that has been passed down by generations in the same family, is one the most ancient arts in Nepal that can be dated back to the 7th century. Learn about how the Tamrakar, Shakya and Swarnakars of Nepal used the unique lost wax metal sculpting process to make beautiful metal sculptures. Bronze was initially used to make most statues, but copper has replaced it.



WELLNESS

- Get access to an Himalayan Salt Room, Himalayan rock salt is the purest form of salt on earth. Containing more than 80 important minerals, its nutritional and healing properties are well documented. Walled with 20 tons of Himalayan rock salt crystals, inhaling the air within the salt room is beneficial for the respiratory system, in particular for sufferers of asthma or hay fever. Himalayan rock salt treatment is also known to strengthen the immune system, can cure skin allergies, enhance the tone of the skin and release negative energies from the body.
- Dive into the discovery of the chakras with a consultation with an Ayurvedic doctor that will give you a clear picture of which of your chakra is overactive. Following the consultation, you will start your journey to stabilize the charkas by meditating in a respective chakra chamber located in a lush forest hill facing the Himalayan chain.
- Enter a Hinduist meditation maze; surrounded by 84 Shiva Lingas, the cosmic pillar that represents the infinite nature of Lord Shiva, the meditation maze is a synergy of spiritual power and nature. It is best experienced early morning, right after sunrise. Gently laying their feet on the grass floor within the maze, you can absorb the early morning dew, the healing energies of the earth are transmitted to one's body, leaving the individual feeling revived and fresh.
- Immerse in the world of Yoga, a gentle yet profoundly powerful physical and mental exercise; the physical benefits of yoga are numerous, it is possible to practice yoga at any age or fitness level. Your session can be tailored to the practitioner's abilities, and provides a good introduction to the meditative aspects of yoga. Under the guidance of the yoga master you will exercise peacefully in the middle of nature, in the morning yoga will make you feeling light and refreshed for the day ahead, in the evening will encourage complete relaxation and deep sleep.
- Discover the healing powers of the Tibetan singing bowl by visiting the Golden Temple Singing Bowls & Healing Center in Patan to learn more about this peculiar tool and healing method; experience the spiritual and healing energies of the different frequency bowls according to the date of birth, which is considered to activate positivity, optimum health and wellbeing.



NATURE & LANDSCAPES

- Explore Dhulikhel, an important trade center in ancient times, a place of exhilarating beauty and unparalleled serenity. Also popular for the remarkable view of the sunrise and sunset, Dhulikhel is famous for its vantage location in viewing the Himalayan ranges from Cho Oyu in the east to Himalchuli in the west. The Old Town of Dhulikhel is a close traditional Newari settlement with an assembly of fine old Newari houses with beautifully carved windows and doors, the core area of Dhulikhel has interesting narrow cobbled streets and lanes embedded with number of Hindu Shrines and a few Buddhist Stupas.
- Private helicopter tour on the Himalayas: take a rare and fascinating opportunity to embrace the legendary Himalayas and discover the ineffable beauty that is guaranteed to be one of the most mesmerizing landscapes ever. This is one of the most thrilling rides ever. Hovering up the valleys of the Khumbu region surrounded by the snowcapped Himalayan peaks along with some of the highest mountains in the world, the view from the vantage point of a helicopter is exhilarating. Enjoy a stop on a snow capped peak for a memorable sight within the highest mountain chain in the world.
- Access the area of Pokhara, its bewitching beauty has been the subject of many travel writers, its pristine air, spectacular backdrop of snowy peaks, serene lakes and surrounding greenery make it ‘the jewel in the Himalaya’, a place of remarkable natural beauty.
- Reach the Chitwan National Park, with its reservoir status, animal numbers have grown to the extent that it now offers one of the finest wildlife experiences in Asia. The park contains approximately 400 rhinos and 80 tigers, plus 50 other species of mammal and over 400 types of birds. Renowned for its diverse and dense wildlife as well as its award-winning eco-lodge that affords the opportunity to observe animals in their natural habitat. Chitwan means “heart of the jungle”, is among the last surviving examples of continuous forests and grasslands habitats, which once extended from the Indus River in Pakistan to the Burmese border.



TRADITIONS

- Nepalese cuisine is a blend of Indian and Tibetan influences which is simple, subtle and satisfying. Enjoy a traditional Nepali themed dinner with locals performing folk songs and dances.
- Take a culinary journey through the fascinating terrains and cuisines of Nepal by joining a private cooking class; savor the exquisite and authentic Nepali flavors, learn the art of preparing momo or dumpling, the most loved delicacy of the Nepalese. Enjoy the prepared lunch while interacting with an ex-Kumari, the living goddess: young fearless prepubescent girls of the Newari community are selected and worshipped as a manifestation of the divine Goddess Taleju for their purity and chastity. Learn about the selection process and the lifestyle and duties of the living goddess.
- Light butter lamps as an offering of light to the deities. Lighting butter lamps is considered one of the most common means of making merits and one of the most powerful offerings. The light from the flame symbolizes the wisdom of the awakened mind, dispels the darkness of delusion and mental obscuration. Praying 108 times is regarded as particularly meritorious because it “disturbs passions” of “mankind’s delusions” cited in Buddhist scripture.

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BHUTAN



ARCHITECTURE

- Visit the Memorial stupa of the 3rd King of Bhutan, it's a prominent landmark in the city of Thimphu with its golden spires and bells. Here you will see many people walking around the stupa for good health and also accumulating good karma.
- Get access to the Tashichho Dzong. This impressive fortress/monastery originally built in 13th century houses Secretariat building, the throne room of His Majesty, the King and various government offices. It is also the summer residence of Chief Abbot and central monk body.
- After a short walk enter the Chimi Lhakhang, situated on a hillock in the centre of the valley, this temple is dedicated to Lama Drukpa Kuenley. This temple is also known as the temple of fertility. The trail to the temple leads across rice fields to the tiny settlement of Pana. It then follows a tiny stream downhill to Yoaka and across more fields before making a short climb to Chimi Lhakhang.
- Visit Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhang nunnery, perched on a ridge amid pine trees and overlooking valleys of Punakha. Its magnificent structure houses a 14-foot main bronze statue of Avalokiteshvara, one of the biggest in the country, the handiwork of skilled Bhutanese artisans. The temple complex also houses a permanent higher learning and meditation center for nuns where, apart from religious trainings, it provides life skill training such as tailoring, embroidery, statue making and thangka painting.
- Hike to Taktsang Monastery, where Guru Rimpoche did his meditation for 3 months. The hike takes about 3 – 4 hrs and offers amazing sceneries; the monastery is adorned with prayer flags and stands in a cave of granite rocks 300m above the valley floor.
- Enter the Simtokha Dzong, officially known as 'Sangkak Zabdhon Phodrang' or the Palace of the Profound Meaning of Secret Mantras. Built in 1629 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, it is often said to be the first Dzong built in Bhutan and is a gateway to Thimphu Valley.
- Get access to Paro Dzong, also known as Ringpung Dzong means 'Fortress on a heap of jewels'. This impressive Dzong is the finest example of Bhutanese architecture and is one of the most popular and well known Dzongs in Bhutan. It is the administrative seat of the district of Paro, built in the 16th century on the foundation of a monastery built by Guru Rinpoche. In the past, this Dzong was used on numerous occasions to defend the Paro Valley from invasions by Tibet.



NATURE & LANDSCAPES

- Drive through the Dochu-la pass, located at a height of 3,088m/ 10,130 ft is a scenic location with buddist shrines and prayer flags decorating the scenic points of the road. Amazing view over the Himalayan chain is possible from Dochu-la, a table mountain that dominates the isolated region with the highest peaks in Bhutan.
- Enchant yourself at the Khotakha Valley, also known as the hidden valley, a large glacial valley with sacred sites, monasteries and hermitages, and very few inhabitants. The untouched beauty of deep pine forests offers possibilities for trekking to sacred sites and remote villages bound by scenic beauty. There are many holy water springs, believed to have healing powers.
- Enter the Gangtey/Phobjikha glacial valley (3,000 m) on the western slopes of the Black Mountains, a designated conservation area bordering the Black Mountain National Park where large flocks of black-necked cranes come in winter. It is one of the most important wildlife reservoir in the country and described as “the most beautiful spot in in the Himalayas”.
- Explore the beauty of Punakha Valley, the summer residence of the Bhutanese royal family. It’s easy to see why they choose this location. Welcome to an idyllic, temperate haven, where rice paddies and jacaranda trees flourish, and two mighty rivers converge.

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ARTS & CRAFTS

- Reach the Rinpung Dzong, which has a long and fascinating history. Along the wooden galleries lining the inner courtyard are fine wall paintings illustrating Buddhist lore and cosmic Mandala.
- With its director visit Ta Dzong National Museum, originally built as Watchtower. The extensive collection includes antique thangka paintings, textiles, weapons & armors, household objects and a rich assortment of natural and historic artifacts.
- Get access to the Institute for Zorig Chusum. Commonly known as Arts & Crafts School or Painting School, the Institute offers a six-year course on the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. Meet the school director and the students, experience their learning of the various skills and traditional arts.
- Together with an official representative visit the Textile Museum, operated by the National Commission for Cultural Affairs of Bhutan. The Museum was established in 2001 and has a good collection of exclusive and antique Bhutanese textile artifacts. The museum has the objective of promoting and encouraging weavers to continue the traditional Bhutanese textile, promoting Bhutan in the field of textile art and preserving the traditions.
- With its curator visit the National Museum of Bhutan; a unique circular building also known as Ta-Dzong which is an ancient watchtower above the Paro Dzong. The National Museum has in its possession over 3,000 works of Bhutanese art, rich holdings of various creative traditions and disciplines that represent a remarkable blend of the past with the present.

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TRADITIONS

- Receive long life blessings from a senior monk and offer butter lamps at the Monastery. This is the most powerful offering because the light from the flame symbolizes the wisdom of the awakened mind, dispels the darkness of delusion and mental obscuration.
- Enjoy an outdoor catered lunch with traditional Bhutanese live folk music and dances in a tranquil and lush setting.
- Visit to the Pangri Zampa astrology school and meet a Bhutanese Astrologer who will do a reading of an astrological chart based on your date and place of birth, using the ancient traditional knowledge.

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