

Eastern Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh

WITH TWO MASKED DANCE FESTIVALS AND TAWANG MONASTERY



Wilderness Travel

Introduction



TRIP DATES

November 16-December 5, 2025

ABOUT OUR NEW TRIPS

This is a new adventure for 2025 and one that we are particularly excited about offering with one of our most veteran Trip Leaders Roger Williams. However, as with all new departures, flexibility and a spirit of adventure are always appreciated! Activities are described in the itinerary but they can vary, sometimes considerably, depending on weather conditions, the group, and other factors.

Explore the most intriguing regions of Arunachal Pradesh in northeast India and the less-traveled reaches of eastern Bhutan with our veteran WT Trip Leader Roger Williams. Beginning in India, we head into lush hill country of Arunachal Pradesh, then cross Sella Pass (14,000'), the highest motorable road in this northeast region, to reach the landmark Tawang Monastery (10,400'), the largest monastery in India and a major holy site for Tibetan Buddhists. We'll meet the local Monpa people here and learn about their ancient Buddhist culture. The next leg of our journey brings us to the small Himalayan nation of Bhutan, entering from its remote eastern side. Here we explore traditional villages and fortress-like monasteries, including the 17th century Trashigang Dzong, and witness spectacular masked dance festivals. Join us for a unique journey with a vivid blend of natural beauty and fascinating cultural sites—plus serendipitous moments of discovery along the way!

Itinerary



TRIP DETAILS AT-A-GLANCE

Length: 20 days
Arrive: Kolkata, India
Depart: Kolkata, India
Lodging: 19 nights hotels
Meals: All meals included
Activity: Cultural Adventures
Trip Level: 1 2 ③ 4 5 6
Cultural exploration and walking tours, some overland travel

DAY 1, NOVEMBER 16, 2025

KOLKATA, INDIA

Arrive in Kolkata, where you'll be met and transferred to the Taj Bengal Kolkata. In the evening, we gather for a Welcome Cocktail (Indian brand alcoholic drinks) and a buffet dinner at our hotel. Overnight at the Taj Bengal, Kolkata or similar...D

DAY 2, NOVEMBER 17, 2025

FULL-DAY CITY TOUR

We begin our day with a visit to the Flower Market (Mullick Ghat), located below and adjacent to the Howrah Bridge, which spans the sacred Ganges. This age-old market is bustling from the wee hours of the morning and is a feast for the eyes. There are numerous stalls where you can see artists creating a variety of garlands, decorative ornaments, and other items made from flowers and leaves for temples, weddings, and other events. Later, we'll visit Kumartuli, a traditional potters' quarter which produces the clay gods and goddesses worshipped in mansions all around and at community pujas (ceremonies) in the city and beyond. We also visit a century-old Jain Temple built in the Nagar style with ornamental pillars and sculptures, the Victoria Memorial (exterior only since it is closed on Mondays), St. Paul Cathedral, and Mother House, the final resting place of Mother Teresa. Those who want can continue on foot a short distance to visit her orphanage, Sishu Bhawan, where one of the sisters will lead us on a tour. On return to our hotel, we'll walk through the New Market, with its hundreds of shops selling all kinds of goods. Overnight at hotel...BLD

Itinerary

DAY 3, NOVEMBER 18, 2025

TEZPUR / BALIPARA

We transfer to Kolkata airport for a morning flight to the city of Tezpur. From here we drive to the Brahmaputra Valley and the town of Balipara in India's eastern state of Assam, where our hotel is the Wild Mahseer Tea Bungalow or similar...

BLD

Flying Time: 2 hours

Driving Time: 1 hour

DAY 4, NOVEMBER 19, 2025

DIRANG (5,300') / NAG MANDIR

A half-day drive into the serene hills of Arunachal Pradesh brings us to the village of Dirang, with visits en route to the Tipi Orchid Centre, with its collection of orchids, and the 600-year-old hilltop temple called Nag Mandir, dedicated to the snake god. Overnight at the Hotel Rigsel or similar...

BLD
Driving Time: Approximately 4 hours

DAY 5, NOVEMBER 20, 2025

MANDALA TOP / DIRANG DZONG

A curving mountain road brings us up to Mandala Top (10,000'), where 108 Buddhist stupas (structures containing holy relics) are built in a circle. One hundred eight is a sacred number in many religions, notably in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jain traditions. We enjoy the panoramic views, then descend for a visit Dirang Dzong, a 17th century citadel. Many of the people in the Dirang region are from the Monpa culture. Monpas practice a pre-Buddhist religion called Bon while also adhering to traditional Tibetan Buddhism. Overnight in Dirang...BLD

DAY 6, NOVEMBER 21, 2025

SELLA PASS (14,000') / TAWANG (10,400')

A scenic high-altitude drive takes us across the Sella Pass (14,000'), the highest motorable road in northeast India, with a descent to Tawang, a picturesque town famed for its Buddhist monasteries and cultural heritage. Tawang was historically part of Tibet, but in 1914, the Simla Accord defined the McMahon Line as the new boundary between British India and Tibet, causing Tibet to relinquish several hundred square miles of its territory, including Tawang, to the British. Overnight at the Timilo Boutique Hotel or similar...

BLD

Driving Time: Approximately 5 hours

DAY 7, NOVEMBER 22, 2025

TAWANG MONASTERY / ANI GOMPA / CHAKZAM BRIDGE

Tawang Monastery, set on a ridge above Tawang, is beautiful and enormous. It is the largest monastery in India and second largest in the world after the Potala Palace in Lhasa. Himalayan mountains make a stunning backdrop for this huge complex. It was founded in 1681 in what was once a Monpa royal palace and was the birthplace of the 6th Dalai Lama. It's a fascinating place to visit, with its hundreds of monks as well as many pilgrims, and an ancient library. Arunachal Pradesh has a long tradition of nunneries and we'll visit the nearby Ani Gompa, a Buddhist nunnery northwest of Tawang. Our last visit brings us over winding mountain roads to the stunning Chakzam Bridge, strung with prayer flags and made of bamboo, cane, and straw. It's a charming example of creative engineering and natural beauty. Overnight in Dirang...BLD

DAY 8, NOVEMBER 23, 2025

DAY TRIP TO ZEMITHANG (6,960') AND GORSAM CHORTEN

On a day trip down to the Zemithang Valley, we'll pass typical Monpa villages and numerous waterfalls. The valley lies on the Nyamjang Chu River, which originates in Tibet. It was to the Zemithang Valley in 1959 that the young 14th Dalai Lama fled when the Chinese occupied Tibet. He settled at Tawang Monastery, then later moved south to Uttarakhand. In the Monpa village of Zemithang, we visit the 10-story-high Gorsham Chorten, one of the largest stupas in Arunachal Pradesh. Local legend has it that Lama Sangye Pradhar (a Monpa) had it built sometime between the 12th and 14th centuries after having traveled to Kathmandu to see the famed Bodhnath Stupa. He returned to make his chorten a virtual replica of the Nepalese landmark. It is a giant hemispherical dome resting on a square, three-tiered base, with four enormous eyes of the "all-seeing Buddha" painted on the pyramidal crown, just as in Bodhnath. We return to Tawang for overnight in Dirang...BLD

Driving Time: Approximately 6 hours round trip

DAY 9, NOVEMBER 24, 2025

BOMDILA (7,923')

We drive to the small town of Bomdila today, famed for its apple orchards. Here we visit the Gentse Gaden Rabgyel Ling Monastery Monastery, built in 1965 for the education

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of young monks and today a focus point for many pilgrims in great numbers. Overnight at the Hotel Tsepal Yangjom or similar...BLD

Driving Time: Approximately 6 hours

DAY 10, NOVEMBER 25, 2025 **GUWAHATI**

Today's drive brings us down to the sprawling city of Guwahati, set beside the Brahmaputra River. Guwahati is the largest city in Assam. Overnight at the Radisson Blu or similar near the Guwahati Airport...BLD

Driving Time: Approximately 7 hours

DAY 11, NOVEMBER 26, 2025 **SAMDRUP JONKHAR, BHUTAN**

We'll drive to Samdrup Jonkhar on the India-Bhutan border this morning, pass through Bhutanese border formalities, and spend night at the TLT Hotel or similar in Samdrup Jonkhar, Bhutan...BLD

Driving Time: Approximately 3 hours

DAY 12, NOVEMBER 27, 2025 **TRASHIGANG (3,852')**

Driving into eastern Bhutan, we visit the first of many charming Bhutanese temples, including Zangto Pelri Lhakhang, with its detailed mural paintings. In the village of Khaling, we stop in at the National Handloom Development

Project, which maintains Bhutan's rich tradition of weaving. We'll drive past Karma Thegsum Dechenling Goemba, a monastic school, and Sherubtse College, the first Bhutanese university, established in 1978. Our overnight is in remote Trashigang, once a bustling trade center with Tibet. The semi-nomadic Merak and Sakteng people, traditional herders, are often seen here as they trade yak butter for other goods. The Trashigang Dzong, or "Fortress of the Auspicious Hill," was built in 1659 to defend against Tibetan invasions. It is strategically set high atop a spur overlooking the Dangmechu River. Overnight at the Druk Deothjung Hotel or similar... BLD

DAY 13, NOVEMBER 28, 2025 **MONGAR / MASKED DANCE FESTIVAL**

A morning drive brings us across Korila Pass (8,038') to the village of Mongar to witness the annual tsechu (Tibetan Buddhist festival) at the Mongar Dzong courtyard, with spectacular masked dances performed by costumed monks. Tonight we'll take an evening walk around Mongar town. Overnight at the Wangchuk Hotel or similar...BLD

Driving Time: Approximately 3 hours

DAY 14, NOVEMBER 29, 2025 **TRASHI YANGTSE**

We witness more festival activities this morning, then drive to Trashi Yangtse, a district with a wealth of natural and

Itinerary

historical resources. En route, we'll visit the sacred Gom Kora Monastery, where Guru Padma Sambhava, one of the founding fathers of Tibetan Buddhism, is said to have mediated. In the evening, we can take a walk around its famous chorten, built in the 18th century. Overnight at Karmling Lodge or similar...BLD

DAY 15, NOVEMBER 30, 2025

TRASHIGANG

Our visits today include the College of Zorig Chusum, where we can see students making Bhutan's traditional wooden cups and bowls using water-driven lathes and treadle lathes. Traditional Bhutanese paper is made here as well.

We return to Trashigang for overnight at the Deothjung Hotel or similar...BLD

Driving Time: Approximately 4 hours

DAY 16, DECEMBER 1, 2025

TRASHIGANG FESTIVAL

We witness the annual Buddhist festival at Trashigang Dzong this morning, watching the traditional mask dances performed inside the courtyard, then drive to Rangjung to visit Woesel Choeling, a thriving monastic community with four retreat centers and about 300 monks. Nearby, we visit the Khardung Anim Dratshang nunnery and see a weaving/dyeing demonstration by one of the noted female weavers in the area.

Overnight in Trashigang...BLD

Driving Time: Approximately 1 hour

DAY 17, DECEMBER 2, 2025

BARTSHAM / SAMDRUP JONKHAR

We head to the village of Bartsham to visit the Chador Lhakhang, one of the oldest and most sacred monasteries in eastern Bhutan. We can watch the daily activities and visit nearby Bidung village, with its beautiful traditional houses. We continue our drive back to Samdrup Jonkhar near the border with India. Overnight at the TLT Hotel or similar...BLD

Driving Time: Approximately 5 hours

DAY 18, DECEMBER 3, 2025

GUWAHATI

A return drive brings us back to Guwahati for overnight at Radisson Blu Guwahati or similar. We'll enjoy our Farewell Cocktail and buffet dinner at the hotel tonight...BLD

Driving Time: Approximately 3 hours

DAY 19, DECEMBER 4, 2025

GUWAHATI / FLY TO KOLKATA

Fly to Kolkata, arriving at 10:30 am. Transfer to the Taj City Centre New Town Kolkata near the airport. Day rooms are held for you at the hotel until 10:00 pm...B

Pricing

TRIP COST

Prices are for 2025

\$9,495 (12-15 members)

\$9,995 (9-11 members)

\$10,495 (5-8members)

Single supplement: \$1,165

Internal airfare: \$195 (subject to change)

To offer the lowest possible cost, our trips are priced according to the number of participants on the trip. All costs are per person, based on double occupancy. If you wish to have a single room, you must pay the single supplement fee. Please note that Wilderness Travel staff, or guests of Wilderness Travel such as travel writers, photographers, or leaders-in-training, are not included in the tier pricing count.

PAYMENT SCHEDULE

At time of reservation: \$600

90 days prior to departure: Balance

CANCELLATION & TRANSFER FEE SCHEDULE

Up to 151 days prior to departure: No charge!

91-150 days prior to departure: \$600 per person

90 days or less: 100% of trip cost

*Please note that this differs from our regular catalog departures.

MANDATORY EMERGENCY EVACUATION INSURANCE

Please note: Insurance for emergency evacuation is required for this trip. Call for more details.

TRIP COST INCLUDES

- Expert leadership of a Wilderness Travel Trip Leader and local guides
- Accommodations in hotels
- All meals
- All activities as indicated in Detailed Itinerary
- All ground transportation and baggage handling from meeting until departure

TRIP COST DOES NOT INCLUDE

- Travel to and from the arrival and departure location as indicated in Detailed Itinerary
- Additional hotel nights outside the trip's scheduled dates
- Optional gratuities to Trip Leaders or staff
- Emergency medical evacuation insurance (required)
- Other expenses of a personal nature (some alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.)
- Visa fees

CURRENCY EXCHANGE RATE

Because the prices published for our program are set so far in advance of the trip dates, we are occasionally faced with exceptional cost increases and/or currency fluctuations that affect the actual cost of running the trip. In most years, no price changes are necessary. However, we do reserve the right to raise or lower the trip price if there is a significant change in costs or exchange rates. If this is the case, your final invoice will reflect the difference in trip cost.

Arrival & Departure

ARRIVAL & MEETING PLACE

Kolkata, India

Suggested Airport: Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport (CCU)

Suggested Date & Time: By 2:00 pm on Day 1

Meeting Place: a complimentary transfer is provided from the airport to the Taj Bengal, Kolkata. An orientation meeting will take place on the evening of Day 1. Please note that check-in at the hotel begins at 2:00 pm.

DEPARTURE

Kolkata, India

Suggested Airport: Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport (CCU)

Suggested Date & Time: Day 19, after 8:00 pm

We are scheduled to arrive in Kolkata in the afternoon of Day 19. Day rooms are held for us at the Taj City Centre New Town Kolkata Hotel (near the airport) until 10:00 pm on this day. An airport transfer is provided from the hotel, to the airport. If you would like to remain in your room past 10:00 pm, you can extend your stay to a full overnight (at additional cost—please see the Extra Services Request Form for more information). Wilderness Travel will provide your transfer to the airport, no matter when you depart.

INTERNATIONAL AIR TRAVEL

You are responsible for making your own arrangements for flights to and from India.

There are many online consolidators for booking travel, but for more personal help arranging air transport, you can contact Exitto Travel at 970-818-8459 in the US or Canada. They are very adept at putting flight itineraries together, to even the most far-flung places. More information can be found at www.exitotravel.com.

Depending on your routing, it is necessary to depart from the US one or possibly two days prior to Day 1 of the trip itinerary. The name on your airline ticket must match the name on your passport exactly, and your passport must be valid for at least six months after your date of return to the US.

Please do not purchase your tickets until you are confirmed on the trip. Once tickets are purchased, please forward a copy of your email flight confirmation from the airline. It is your responsibility to ensure your flight times coordinate with the arrival and departure logistics for this trip.

Trip Leaders

Wilderness Travel Trip Leaders have a passion and a joy for creating an unforgettable journey. We are extremely proud of them and the incredible travel experiences they make possible.



ROGER WILLIAMS

Roger Williams has been one of our most versatile guides since 1986, and he shows no sign of stopping. He spent eight years studying Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhist iconography, Himalayan languages, and woodblock art in Nepal, and another two years studying Japanese woodblock art, Japanese language, and Shingon Shu, an esoteric sect of Japanese Buddhism in Japan. If it isn't the surplus of knowledge Roger brings when he leads a trip that makes him so unique, then it may be his awareness for cultural preservation that keep trip members so loyal to his new adventures. Each year, Roger works with WT to design new trips in fascinating areas. He has led in such far-flung locations as Iran, Pakistan, northern Afghanistan, Kamchatka, Burma, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Madagascar. When he's not leading, you can find Roger in Berkeley, California, where he is the director of Snow Lion Graphics/SLG Books, a publishing house specializing in Asian cultures. "There should be a rating higher than excellent for Roger," one trip member wrote after her journey with Roger. "His knowledge, energy, planning, and attentiveness are superlative."

What to Expect

WHAT THE TRIP IS LIKE This trip is rated a Level 3, Moderate, according to our trip grading system. The most important requirements for this off-the-beaten-path journey are a spirit of adventure and the understanding that you are visiting a remote and fascinating region of the Himalayas. There will be long drives on most days, using minivans or small buses (depending upon the size of our group). Travel conditions can be very basic, and trip members should be prepared for rugged mountain roads. We will have several days at moderate to high altitudes, getting as high as 14,000' with overnights at 10,400'. That said, this part of the Himalayas is a hidden gem with some of the most stunning monasteries and temples in the entire region. It is a rich repository of traditional Tibetan and Bhutanese culture.

TERRAIN There is a significant amount of road travel on this journey, some of it on winding mountain roads or gravel tracks. On some of our explorations, there may be some rough off-trail footing, so this trip is best suited for people who have a good sense of balance. The highest altitudes are in the Arunachal Pradesh portion of the trip, with the crossing of the Sella Pass (14,000') on Day 6, and we have three overnights in the town of Tawang at 10,400 feet.

GETTING IN SHAPE We strongly urge you to train for your trip, as your enjoyment will be highly dependent on your level of fitness. The best training for a hike is to hike, especially over hills or rough terrain. Next best are running, swimming, bicycling, or other cardiovascular exercises. Stair-climbing machines are excellent preparation for hiking uphill. Your feet should also be well prepared—make sure your hiking boots are sturdy, comfortable, and thoroughly broken-in. Some people experience a few problems when they first reach high altitude—slight headaches and sleeplessness are the most common symptoms.

WEATHER We will experience a wide range of weather as we travel through Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan, from the humid, subtropical climate of lower altitudes to chilly alpine conditions at high altitudes, such as our overnights in the town of Tawang at 10,400 feet.

ACCOMMODATIONS This is a less traveled region of the Himalayas and the hotels are somewhat basic, as is the cuisine. We use a varied range of hotels on this trip and they are the best available in the local regions. Guest rooms have en suite bathrooms.

CUISINE Please be aware that many hotels/lodges in Bhutan provide simple buffets at lunch and dinner. The cuisine in Bhutan is generally based on basic rice with stir-fry and stew options. If you have any dietary restrictions, be sure to advise us on your application form.

AVERAGE DAILY MAX/MIN °F												
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Tawang, India	49/32	51/33	54/36	58/41	63/48	68/55	70/57	70/57	69/54	64/47	58/40	53/35
Trashigang, Bhutan	60/45	62/46	66/49	69/53	73/60	77/66	79/68	80/68	79/66	75/60	69/53	64/48
RAINFALL - INCHES												
Tawang, India	.02	.09	.16	.52	.73	1.1	2.0	1.7	1.0	.17	.03	.07
Trashigang, Bhutan	.23	.57	.67	3.0	7.3	13.4	18.0	13.0	10.2	.28	3.1	.22

Additional Information

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TRIP

Adventure travel often involves exotic destinations, unusual levels of physical exertion, or activities you may not have participated in previously. We work hard to help you choose the right trip for you, paying attention to your individual interests, abilities, and needs. If you have questions about the level of comfort or any of the activities described in this itinerary, please call Wilderness Travel at 1-800-368-2794 and ask for the Asia Manager or email us at asia@wildernesstravel.com.

LIMITED EDITION ADVENTURES

This is a Limited Edition adventure—which means a unique trip we've never run before or offer only every few years. Led by our most experienced Trip Leaders, these journeys often take place in remote destinations with only the most basic infrastructure for tourism. If you see a Limited Edition trip scheduled for this year, now is the time to sign up, as

spaces fill very early and the trip may not be back for a while! Planned daily activities and actual timings may vary due to local conditions or the discretion of your Trip Leader—it is important to bring your spirit of adventure for these special exploratory journeys!

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

At www.wildernesstravel.com, you can book your trip online or find out about added departures, last-minute deals, and one-time Limited Edition adventures that aren't listed in our catalog. You can also access our complete library of detailed itineraries filled with enticing photos and videos, read bios of our Trip Leaders, find descriptions of trip accommodations, and check real-time availability of any trips that interest you





WILDERNESS TRAVEL HAS BEEN AWARDED:

Best Travel Specialists in the World: *Conde Nast Traveler*, 2024, 4-time winner

World's Best Tour Operators: *Travel + Leisure*, 11-time winner

Best Wildlife, Hiking & Walking Trips: *AFAR Magazine*, 3 years in a row

Best Adventure Travel Companies: *USA Today*

Trip of the Year: *Outside Magazine*, 9-time winner

50 Tours of a Lifetime: *National Geographic Traveler*, 9 years in a row

Best Adventure Travel Companies: *National Geographic Adventure*, 3-time winner

Please be advised that California has established a Travel Consumer Restitution Fund under the California Seller of Travel Law that took effect January 1, 1996. This fund is designed to protect consumers from unscrupulous practices by discount airfare ticket sellers or air charter operators. Unfortunately, this law does not cover non-California residents and, even in the case of California residents, it does not cover any foreign travel where the foreign "providers of transportation or travel services" are not in compliance with the Sellers of Travel Law (compliance being defined as registered as a Seller of Travel in California and a participant in the Travel Consumer Restitution Fund). Thus none of Wilderness Travel's tours qualify and we are required by law to advise each client that they are not covered by the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires sellers of travel to maintain a trust account or bond. This business has a trust account. California Seller of Travel #100769640

While as accurate as possible at the time of printing, this itinerary should be considered an approximate indication of the schedule and scope of activities and trip routing, rather than an inflexible schedule of events; it is subject to change due to circumstances beyond our control. This trip is subject to the Limitation of Liability and all the terms and conditions as detailed in the General Information section of the Wilderness Travel Catalog.

Revised: November 13, 2024 6:51 AM