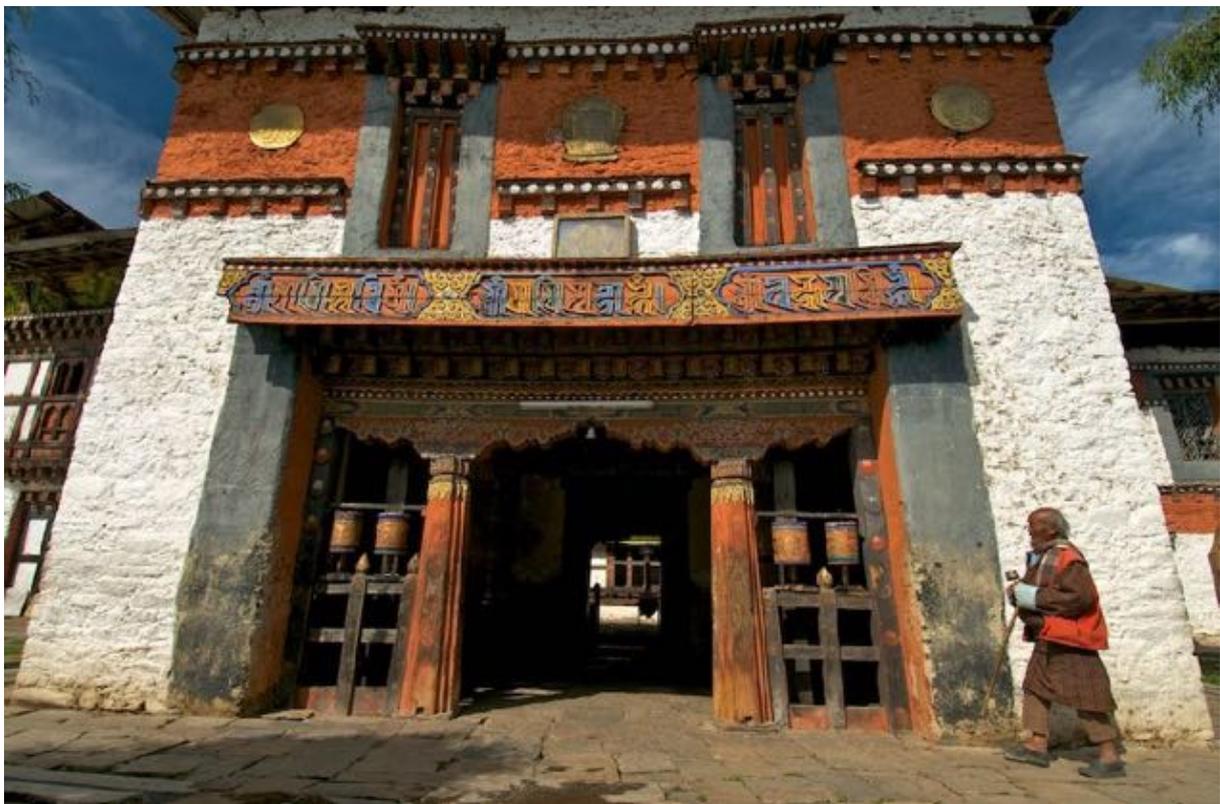


## Bhutan & Assam Spring or Autumn Tour - 21 days

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



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

Remark: there are several *tsechus* that take place in the months of November – May. If you tell us your approximate travel dates, we will try to make sure you can witness one of these festivals.

**Best time:** November and February - March

## ***Itinerary***

### **Day 01: Arrival in Delhi**

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



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

After breakfast, you'll be driven to the airport for the morning flight to Dibrugarh, the easternmost city of India. There, you'll check into Mancotta Tea Bungalow, about 5 km away from town amidst lush tea gardens. In the afternoon, you will walk through the tea gardens surrounding the lodge. Overnight stay is at the bungalow.

### **Day 03: Dibrugarh**

This day will be spent at your leisure. If you like, you can visit the tea gardens, see how tea is being processed in the tea factory or visit a local village. Other options include horse riding on English thoroughbreds among the tea gardens and over the banks of the Brahmaputra, or a boat trip on the Brahmaputra. Overnight stay is again at the bungalow.

### **Day 04, 05: Majuli Island**

After an early breakfast, we check out of Mancotta Tea Bungalow and drive to Neemati Ghat (on the banks of the Brahmaputra (140 km / 3 hr). On the way, we stop at the famous Hindu temples of Sibsagar (Lake of Shiva). Among these is the largest Shiv mandir (dome-shaped temple dedicated to Shiva), of India. We cross the mighty river Brahmaputra by ferry (2 hrs) to Majuli Island, the biggest fresh water island in India, and until recently of the world.

After arrival on the island, we'll visit one of the so-called *satras*, unique Hindu monasteries that Majuli is known for, and enjoy a dance performance by the monks. After lunch at the *satra*, we'll visit a Mishing tribal village, one of the largest communities in Assam. On the morning of day 5, you can go for a leisurely bicycle ride over the small footpaths and dikes of





Majuli's northern parts.

### **Day 06, 07: Kaziranga**

After an early breakfast, we set out for Kaziranga National Park, where we will reach around lunchtime. Kaziranga is known for its one-horned Indian rhinoceroses. But it is also home to large herds of wild elephants, the endangered swamp deer and more than a hundred tigers. In the afternoon, we'll do our first jeep drive in the park.



Today and tomorrow you'll be taken into different parts of the park under the guidance of well-trained and very knowledgeable naturalists who will accompany you on all your outings.

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

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

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



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



In the morning we visit the famous 'shakti' temple Kamakhya. After that, we take a short ferry ride to Peacock Island to visit the tiny Umananda Temple as well see the rare and endemic golden langurs (monkeys) that live here.

After lunch, we depart for Samdrup Jongkhar, the Bhutanese border town. There the Assamese guide and drivers will hand you over to their Bhutanese colleagues.

**BHUTAN**

**Day 10: Samdrup Jongkar – Trashigang**

After an early breakfast, we will drive up through the mountains to Trashigang, the capital of Bhutan's most easterly province. Late in the afternoon, we'll visit our first *dzong*. This is a uniquely Bhutanese phenomena. A dzong is a fortified monastery that also serves as an administrative centre. In the past the army would be housed here as well. Trashigang Dzong is dramatically situated on a mountain spur. It was badly damaged in the earthquake of 2009 but restoration is almost finished.

**Day 11: Trashigang – Gom Kora & back**

We drive northward along the Gamri River to the small but picturesque temple of Gom Kora, set on a small alluvial plateau overlooking the river. In November a local festival is held here that stands out for its authenticity. For the overnight stay, we drive back to Trashigang (1150m).



### **Day 12: Trashigang – Mongar**

We will travel via a series of switchbacks through forests of blue pine and over the Kori La (pass of 2400m). It will take about 4 hours to reach the small town of Monggar. On the way you can make a side-trip to the interesting Drametse Gumpa (monastery). This monastery was founded in 1511. It is famous as the origin of the Dramtse Nga Cham (the drum dance of Drametse), which has been classified by UNESCO as a world cultural heritage.



### **Day 13: Mongar - Bumthang**

We continue further to the west, passing the Thrumshing La Pass (3780 m), situated amidst a protected national park. Among other rare species, tigers live here as well. Descending, we pass the very picturesque village of Ura, situated in a high meadow. After that we reach Jakar in the Bumthang Valley.



### **Day 14: At Bumthang**

Bumthang is one of the most spectacular valleys in Bhutan and also the 'heartland' of Bhutanese culture. In addition to the beautiful landscape, this area has numerous important monasteries. Today, we'll visit many of the temples on foot and by car, notably the Jambay Lhakhang (Bhutan's oldest temple) and the Kurjey Lhakhang.

### **Day 15: Bumthang to Phobjikha**

After breakfast, we drive to Trongsa. The history of Bhutan's Monarchs originates at Trongsa. At Trongsa, we visit the remarkable, elongated Trongsa Dzong and the Museum of the Monarch, which is a recent development.

Continuing westward through beautifully forested valleys and mount slopes we'll cross the 3350m high Pele La Pass. After descending through forests of cedars, birch and rododendrons (that will bloom magnificently in April). This area is known as one of the most beautiful valleys in the Himalayas.



### **Day 16: At Phobjikha**

After breakfast, we'll hike the nature trail to see one of Phobjikha's main USP's: hundreds of black-necked cranes that spend the winters here after migrating from the arid plains in Tibet and Ladakh. The black-necked crane is revered by the Bhutanese and it is the national bird of the country. The trail ends near Gangtey Gompa, the largest gompa in Bhutan belonging to the Nyingmapa Sect. This old sect is quite 'rare' in Bhutan as most monasteries and dzongs adhere to the Drukpa Sect.

### **Day 17: Phobjikha – Punakha**

Today we drive to Punakha. On the way, we visit the Wangdi Dzong, built in 1639. The dzong burnt down a few years ago but reconstruction is underway and it is very interesting to see how the Bhutanese manage to restore such an old building with the same ancient construction techniques.

Punakha was the ancient capital of Bhutan from 1637 until 1955. Punakha Dzong is arguably the most beautiful dzong of Bhutan. It has three courtyards and the beautiful 'Hundred Pillars temple' where important occasions such as royal marriages take place.



### **Day 18: Punakha – Thimphu**

In the morning, we drive and hike to Khamsum Namgyel Chorten. This stupa was built by the Queen mother of the 5<sup>th</sup> King of Bhutan. After this, we visit a newly built nunnery and

do another short walk through the rice field to the Chimi Lhakang, also known as the Fertility Temple.

After lunch we drive to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, stopping on the way at the Dochu La Pass (3100m) for tea or coffee and a short walk in the magnificent coniferous forest that clads the pass area.

### **Day 19: Thimphu - Halt**

Thimphu is the busiest city in Bhutan and also a cultural center with many sights to see and experience. Today you'll have the whole day to visit some of these many sights, such as: Institute of Traditional Medicine, the Folk Heritage Museum, the Textile Museum, Tashi Choe Dzong (the largest dzong in Bhutan, which houses the national parliament), Zilukha Nunnery, the National Zoo (where you can see the strange national animal of Bhutan, the *takin*) and the Handicrafts Emporium.



### **Day 20: Thimphu – Paro**

We will depart early from Thimphu and drive into the valley of Paro. Here, we will begin our walk up to iconic Taksang Monastery (Tiger's Nest). To many Bhutanese, this is the most significant temple in the country. It is built on a rock ledge high above the valley, at the place where the Buddhist apostle Padmasambhava is supposed to have landed after a flight on the back of a tigress in the eighth century.

It takes about 2.5 hours one way and there is a cafe half way up where there are spectacular views of the monastery perched on the side of the mountain.

For many, to see the iconic Tiger's Nest in person, will be the pinnacle of the entire trip. Dinner and overnight stay is at Paro.



### **Day 21: Flight Paro – Delhi.**

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

## **Price**

Ask for quotation.

*Price includes:* all accommo-dation (twin sharing; starting with very good guesthouse near Delhi Airport), full board, all transport by comfortable SUV vehicle or minibus, flights Delhi-Guwahati and Paro-Delhi, local English speaking Assamese / Bhutanese escort throughout, ferry crossings, village visits, local guides where necessary, at Kaziranga N.P. entry fees, camera fees, wildlife guide and jeep rides.

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