Travel with The Met

Buddhism & the Himalayas: Ladakh, Nepal & Bhutan
with Christopher Noey, Lecturer

September 7–21, 2023
Dear Members and Friends of The Metropolitan Museum of Art,

Join me in September 2023 for an unforgettable two-week adventure, discovering vibrant cultures and ancient religious traditions in the heavenly heights of the Himalayas. As a passionate scholar of Asian art, I am delighted to lead you through three spellbinding lands—mystical Ladakh, colorful Nepal, and peaceful Bhutan—in one trip. Together, we will delve into the region’s rich artistic traditions and spectacular natural landscapes. We will also delight in exclusive meetings with thought leaders who are shaping these devout societies in a modern era.

From Delhi, we will fly to Ladakh, an Indian territory bordering Tibet, with its white stupas (dome-shaped shrines) and fluttering prayer flags amid a breathtaking mountainous terrain. In the capital of Leh, many treasures await our appreciation, including a colossal 17th-century palace and Tibetan Buddhist monasteries adorned with exquisite ancient murals and golden Buddha statues.

Our next stop is Kathmandu, capital of Nepal, where Hindu and Buddhist temples, shrines, and stupas housing relics are extraordinary highlights. As we venture through this city nestled in a sacred valley, we will explore its monuments—from an enormous “floating” statue of Vishnu at a revered shrine to a 1,500-year-old hilltop stupa displaying four sets of “all-seeing” painted eyes—and discover Nepal’s preservation of this legacy through cutting-edge conservation work.

Finally, we will be among the few travelers admitted each year to tiny Bhutan, where leaders measure national success in GNH (“Gross National Happiness”), not GDP. We will make our way to an astonishing 17th-century mountain fortress, tour an 18th-century monastery housing 105 monks, and roam a 15th-century temple with exceptional murals. Those who opt for a half-day hike will be richly rewarded with a visit to the legendary cliffside Tiger’s Nest, one of the holiest sites in the Himalayas.

I hope you will join me on an awe-inspiring journey steeped in artistic and spiritual traditions dating back millennia.

Sincerely,
Christopher Noey
Lecturer
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

**Trip Highlights**

— Gain special access to the kingdom of Bhutan, which offers entry to a limited number of travelers each year, and stand atop the spectacular fortress of Punakha, the former capital

— Venture on an optional scenic hike to the 17th-century Tiger’s Nest monastery, one of the world’s most sacred Buddhist sites, perched impressively on a steep, rocky cliff and accessible only by foot

— Delight in private tours and discussions with the conservators and artisans keeping the artistic traditions of Nepal alive

— Take a curator-led tour of the traditional sacred art in Kathmandu’s Patan Museum, with a special lunch there with Anil Chitrakar, a pioneering social entrepreneur named one of 100 “Global Leaders for Tomorrow” by the World Economic Forum

— Discover the little-known Indian territory of Ladakh, exploring its magnificent monasteries and otherworldly landscapes, and enjoy an audience with the village oracle in the Tibetan settlement of Choglamsar (pending confirmation)

— Admire Nepal’s exquisite stupas, temples, and monasteries, including Swayambhunath, a gleaming 1,500-year-old stupa with four sets of painted eyes, representing the all-seeing presence of Buddha

Christopher Noey is an art historian, author, and Emmy Award-winning producer of films on art and culture. At The Met, he created video installations for a diverse array of exhibitions including Jerusalem 1000-1400: Every People Under Heaven, and he was series director of the innovative online features 82nd & Fifth and The Artist Project, in which he interviewed 120 contemporary artists on how they are inspired by The Met and its collections. An expert in Asian and Islamic art, Mr. Noey has taught at Williams College and the City College of New York.

Monks at Punakha Dzong, Bhutan
Photos clockwise from top right: Changu Narayan Temple, Kathmandu, Nepal; Indus River; Pilgrim in Kathmandu, Nepal; Shanti Stupa, Leh, Ladakh; Hemis Monastery, Leh, Ladakh; Regional map. Front cover: Swayambhunath, Kathmandu, Nepal. Back cover: Maitreya Buddha statue at Likir Monastery, Leh, Ladakh (top); Taktsang (Tiger’s Nest) (bottom).
**Departure**
**Thursday, September 7**
Depart on an overnight flight to Delhi, India.

**Delhi, India**
**Friday, September 8**
Arrive in Delhi, where we spend a night at the luxurious Trident Gurgaon Hotel, which is surrounded by sprawling gardens, courtyards, and fountains. Gather for a welcome reception tonight at the hotel.

**Delhi / Leh, Ladakh**
**Saturday, September 9**
Take a morning flight from Delhi to Leh, the capital of the beautiful region of Ladakh, India. The landscape is dotted with white stupas flanked by rugged mountains. The afternoon and early evening are free to rest and acclimate to the 11,000-foot elevation. If time and energy permit, in the afternoon, enjoy a lecture or a gentle orientation tour of Leh, followed by a short drive to Shanti Stupa for spectacular views of the town. This evening, attend a welcome dinner.

**Leh**
**Sunday, September 10**
Travel to Sham Valley in Lower Ladakh, passing through the picturesque orchards along the Indus River to the fabled Alchi Monastery, with its 1,000-year-old murals. After lunch at a famed local restaurant, visit Likir Monastery to view the great seated Buddha of Leh, followed by a short drive to Shanti Stupa for spectacular views of the town. This evening, attend a welcome dinner.

**Leh / Kathmandu, Nepal**
**Tuesday, September 12**
Fly to Kathmandu via Delhi for an afternoon arrival, and check in at the intimate and luxurious Dwarika’s Hotel for a four-night stay. Lunch is at leisure. Before dinner, you may wish to explore the hotel’s grounds and admire the centuries-old carved wood and intricate terra-cotta brickwork of the buildings within the property. Gather for dinner tonight at the hotel’s Toran Restaurant.

**Kathmandu**
**Thursday, September 14**
This morning, drive to the hilltop Changu Narayan Temple, which dates to the fourth century and was reconstructed after a 2015 earthquake. Later, drive to Bhaktapur for lunch at the Heritage Hotel. In the afternoon, explore Bhaktapur, one of the “royal cities” in the Kathmandu Valley and deemed Nepal’s cultural gem. Called the “City of Devotees,” Bhaktapur is renowned for its elegant art, colorful festivals, and traditional dances. The city’s three squares also feature some of Nepal’s most extraordinary sacred architecture, including the five-tiered Nyatapola Temple and other tall opulent structures. Return to the hotel for dinner.

**Kathmandu**
**Friday, September 15**
After breakfast, visit the holy site of Boudhanath. This graceful and perfectly proportioned stupa is a three-dimensional symbol of Buddha’s path towards enlightenment. Then, travel north to the foothills of Shivapuri to Budhanilkantaha Temple, which is dedicated to the Hindu Lord Vishnu. Here, view one of the most revered Vishnu shrines in the valley: the massive reclining statue of Vishnu as Narayan, the creator of all life. Carved from a single block of black basalt, it appears to “float” in a pond signifying the cosmic sea. After lunch, continue to Swayambhunath, a 1,500-year-old hilltop stupa displaying four sets of painted eyes, representing the all-seeing presence of Buddha. Before returning to the hotel for dinner at leisure, explore the National Museum of Nepal at Chhauni.

**Kathmandu / Paro, Bhutan / Punakha**
**Saturday, September 16**
Take a morning flight to Paro, Bhutan. Upon arrival, drive along Dochula Pass to the fertile valley of Punakha. Stop to admire the chortens and prayer flags that decorate the highest point of the pass. Opt for a short hike to Chimi Lakhang, a Buddhist monastery dedicated to a 14th-century yogi known as the “Divine Madman,” who taught Buddhist lessons using songs.
Punakha
Sunday, September 17
Discover the awe-inspiring Punakha Dzong, Bhutan’s largest fortress. This massive structure was built in 1637 and was for many years the district’s seat of government. Return to the hotel for lunch. In the afternoon, visit Nobgang Lhakhang to admire this small temple’s centuries-old artwork and murals. Continue to the village of Talo to visit the monastery, founded in 1767. Today, Talo Goenpa contains a monastic school with 105 monks in residence.  B. L, D

Punakha / Paro
Monday, September 18
From Punakha, take a morning drive to Paro, and stop at Thimphu en route to meet with a Rimpoche (Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader). After lunch, continue to Paro, and check in at the COMO Uma for a three-night stay. On the way back to the hotel, discover the Dungtse the COMO Uma for a three-night stay. On the way back to the hotel, discover the Dungtse Lhakhang, a 15th-century temple with murals representing heaven, hell, and earth, which are some of Bhutan’s finest artworks.  B. L, D

Paro / Tiger’s Nest (Taktsang)
Tuesday, September 19
At nearby Ramthanka, gather for an optional half-day hike to the legendary Taktsang (Tiger’s Nest), a breathtaking Buddhist monastery perched on a cliff 10,000 feet above the Paro Valley and one of the most sacred Buddhist sites. A less strenuous option will offer views of Tiger’s Nest and a visit to view the ruins of Drukgyel Dzong, which was destroyed by a fire in 1951 but remains an impressive sight.  B. L, D

Paro
Wednesday, September 20
Attend a morning lecture by a local historian before visiting Ta Dzong, a former watchtower that now houses the National Museum. In the rotunda view exhibitions of the country’s art, relics, and intricate thangkas (Tibetan Buddhist paintings depicting deities or religious scenes). Continue to Punakha Lhakhang, one of Bhutan’s oldest temples. After a picnic lunch by the river, visit the Kyichu Lhakhang temple and partake in a traditional Buddhist lamp-lighting ceremony. Also, stop at a local farmhouse to learn how these traditional and colorful homes are built without the use of a single nail. This evening, enjoy a special performance followed by a farewell dinner at the hotel’s courtyard.  B. L, D

Paro / Delhi, India / Return
Thursday, September 21
Fly to Delhi in the morning. Day rooms will be provided in Delhi at the Trident Gurgaon Hotel prior to international flights this evening.

Walking Activities Note: On this journey to the Himalayas, you will visit high-altitude historical sites with unevenly paved pathways and steep staircases without handrails. Guests should be in good health, be able to stand unassisted for more than an hour at a time, and be capable of walking up to a mile without stopping. Broken-in walking shoes are a must.

This itinerary is subject to change at the discretion of The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Arrangements Abroad. For complete details, please carefully review the terms and conditions at www.arrangementsabroad.com/terms.

Program Rate
$16,999 per person, double rate
$21,499 single rate

Rate Includes
— Thirteen nights accommodations as per itinerary
— Meals as indicated in the itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, R=Reception, D=Dinner). Bottled water, soft drinks, juices, and coffee/tea with all meals; special cocktails and local beer at welcome and farewell dinners
— Enrichment program of lectures and talks
— International economy-class flights (Delhi-Leh-Delhi-Kathmandu / Kathmandu-Paro-Delhi)
— Escorted sightseeing, transportation, and entrance fees for all included visits
— Airport/hotel/airport group transfers for all participants on suggested flights
— Taxes, service, and porterage charges; gratuities to local guides and drivers

Not included in rates
International airfare; passport fees; visa fees for India, Nepal, and Bhutan; meals not specified; alcoholic beverages other than noted in inclusions; personal items and expenses; airport transfers other than for those on suggested flights; baggage in excess of one suitcase for the internal flights; trip insurance; any other items not specifically mentioned as included.

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Reservation Form
To secure your reservation, please call Arrangements Abroad at 844-TRVLMET (844-878-5638), email met@arrangementsabroad.com, or complete this form and return it with your deposit of $1,000 per person (of which $500 is non-refundable for administrative fees), to be paid by debit card, credit card, wire transfer, or check payable to Arrangements Abroad. Mail to: Arrangements Abroad, 260 West 39th Street, 17th Floor, New York, NY 10018-4424.

Names in full as on passports. Please print.

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Signature (required)  Date

Signature (required)  Date

For additional information, please call 844-TRVLMET (844-878-5638) or to opt out from receiving mail, email travelwiththemet@metmuseum.org
Photos from top: Temple carving, Patan Durbar Square, Kathmandu; Colorful thangka at the Hemis Monastery in Leh, Ladak; Thiksey Monastery, Leh, Ladak
Accommodations

Trident Gurgaon Hotel, Delhi
Designed by Thai architect Lek Bunag, this magnificent oasis is spread over seven acres with gardens, courtyards, and reflecting pools. The hotel has 136 rooms and suites furnished with modern amenities, a spa, a swimming pool, and several restaurants.

TUTC Camp, Leh
Short for The Ultimate Travel Camp, luxurious tents are set up in Chamba Camp Thiksey in Leh. The tents are kitted out with all the modern amenities of a five-star hotel, but unlike a hotel, the campsite allows for sleeping amidst Leh’s starry sky overlooking the magnificent Thiksey Monastery. The tents have climate control, hot showers, jasmine-scented toiletries, a mini-bar, and 24-hour butler service.

Dwarika’s Hotel, Kathmandu
Rooms are designed with terra-cotta floors, comfortable sitting areas, intricately carved woodwork, and fabrics hand-woven by local artisans. Other amenities include a swimming pool, yoga/fitness center, spa, business center, library, shops, Wi-Fi, and five restaurants.

COMO Uma, Punakha
This intimate luxury lodge is located at the far western end of the lush Punakha Valley. The hotel overlooks the Mo Chu river with every room commanding sweeping views of the Punakha Valley and the river as it winds its way through the rice fields and orchards.

COMO Uma, Paro
Perched on a breathtaking tree-clad hill overlooking the town of Paro, this hotel features luxurious rooms combining the colorful accents of traditional Bhutanese craftsmanship with contemporary design. Other amenities include a fitness center, spa, and award-winning cuisine.
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New York, NY 10028

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