



# TRAVEL THE UNKNOWN

TAKE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED



## **MONKS & RHINOS**

**- TRIP NOTES -**

## **MONKS & RHINOS (16 DAYS)**

**Kaziranga - Majuli - Nameri -  
Dirang - Tawang - Bomdila -  
Tipi - Tezpur - Guwahati**

### **WELCOME**

Thank you for booking your holiday with *Travel The Unknown*. We love travel and we are confident that you will go away with fantastic memories of our *Monks & Rhinos* tour.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- Visit stunning Tawang monastery
- Stay on Majuli, the world's largest river island
- Rafting in Nameri reserve
- Tipi orchid sanctuary
- Elephant-back safari in Kaziranga
- Unicorn rhinos, tigers & birdlife

### **WHAT'S INCLUDED**

- Airport transfers
- Two internal flights
- Ground transport
- Accommodation
- Entrance fees to sites & parks
- Activity fees (safari)
- Most meals (15 breakfasts, 12 lunches and 13 dinners)
- Drivers and local guides
- Climate Care contribution
- Restricted Area Permit for Arunachal



### **Itinerary**

Please download the detailed itinerary for your tour from our website. We have made it simpler to navigate and there is now one-click access to each tour via the Trip Finder in the main menu, then click on the Itinerary tab to download your itinerary.

### **Itinerary Disclaimer**

Itineraries are correct at the time of printing. Our itineraries are sometimes updated during the year to incorporate suggestions from past travellers and sometimes our own research too. Please ensure that you print and review a final copy of these **Trip Notes** and itinerary a couple of days prior to travel, in case there have been changes that may affect you.

### **Joining & Finishing Points**

All travellers will be greeted at Guwahati airport by a *Travel The Unknown* representative and will be escorted to their accommodation.

All customers will be escorted to the flight departing from Guwahati airport. You can bolt on additional trips or services. Please contact us for more information.

### **Flights from London**

We normally use the scheduled services of Jet Airways (depending on availability). As flight timings and schedules change regularly we recommend you call one of our specialist sales staff or your agent to confirm up-to-date timings. Please note timings may change at a later date and cannot be confirmed until approximately two weeks before departure.

## **UK Regional Flights**

*Travel The Unknown* is committed to making joining our trips as easy as possible, wherever you may live in the UK. The Flight Inclusive price is based on a London departure, but we are happy to tailor this to your local or regional airport.

## **Accommodation**

Either ourselves or our trusted ground handlers have personally vetted all accommodation.

| <u>Location</u> | <u>Accommodation</u>       |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Nameri          | Nameri Eco-camp            |
| Kaziranga       | Jupuri Ghar (jungle lodge) |
| Majuli          | Comfortable bamboo huts    |
| Dirang          | Welcome Heritage Permalong |
| Tawang          | Gakyi Khang Zhang (hotel)  |
| Bomdila         | Hotel Siphayang Phong      |
| Tezpur          | KF Hotel                   |
| Guwahati        | Pragati Manor Hotel        |

If any of our preferred first choice accommodation is not available, we will organise something of a similar standard.

## **Style of Travel**

Our trips combine culture, activity and relaxation. We try to give you the best of everything the region has to offer and you can opt in or out of any activities you please. These tours are for independent people and so we try to be flexible where we can, and give you time to explore on your own too.

## **Meals**

Most meals are included in the price. Refer to the itinerary for details of the daily meal plan. You should budget about £10 (\$15) per day for additional meals.

## **Group Size**

To minimise the footprint our tours leave - both on the environment and the local culture - we keep our group sizes limited to 12 people.

## **Tour Guides**

We have gone to great length in trying to secure the best guides available. The group will be designated a fixed driver and escorting guide throughout the tour, and for the sightseeing aspects of the trip, we will sometimes use local guides.

## **Transport**

We use well-maintained vehicles and good drivers wherever road travel is involved. Travel in North East India can be tough at times and so we have opted for well maintained jeeps for all ground travel to maximise comfort, safety and practicality. The tour also includes all internal flights as per the itinerary and international flights where applicable.

For those choosing the Living Root Bridges add-on, a 40 minute helicopter ride\* across the mountains of Meghalaya to the plains of Assam will be included in the package cost.

\*Weather-dependent

## **Physical Demands**

Please note that this is a reasonably demanding overland trip. The effects of altitude, the occasional long day travelling in jeeps over rough roads, and the possibility of sudden climate changes means that this is not a trip for the armchair traveller. A basic level of fitness and decent health is assumed, as well as an ability to put up with sometimes more basic accommodation and transport than that which is common in the West. For those who can bear this, the rewards are great!

As previously mentioned, for those choosing the *Living Root Bridges* add-on, there is a strenuous trek involved to the Double Decker Root Bridge. However, easier treks to other living root bridges are also possible.

## **Optional Activities**

From time to time other activities may be possible to arrange, e.g. caving in Cherrapunjee. Costs for such additional activities will not be covered in the standard tour package. Contact us in advance of your trip for more information.

## **Single Travellers**

As experienced solo travellers, there were many times when we wanted to join tour groups, as it is a great way of meeting like-minded travellers, as well as getting to see some places that were otherwise not on our itineraries.

We try to keep our single supplements as low as possible. You will only have to pay a supplement if you want your own room. If you are open to sharing a room with another single same-sex traveller, then you pay no supplement.

## **Fellow Travellers**

Travelling in a group is very rewarding and is a great way to meet new people. There may be large variations in age and nationality. This is most often a good thing, but can occasionally cause some teething problems, so we ask you to be patient with your fellow passengers and realise that everyone likes to travel a little differently. Please consider your fellow passengers too, and try to respect meeting times, especially for game drives.

## **PRACTICALITIES**

### **Travel Insurance**

Travel insurance is compulsory for all our trips. As a minimum we require that your insurance covers you for medical expenses including emergency repatriation. We also strongly recommend you are covered for personal liability and loss of luggage and personal effects. You will be required to give details of your insurance prior to departure. Please go to [www.traveltheunknown.com/partners](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/partners) for links to excellent deals on travel insurance.

### **Visas**

**All foreign nationals, including children, require a visa to enter India. They are not available at port of entry AND must be obtained in advance.**

TravCour UK, our affiliate partner, can arrange your visa for you at very competitive rates. This would save you the time and hassle of going in person to the VFS office and/or avoiding long turnaround times if applying yourself by post (can take up to 4 weeks). Turnaround time through TravCour is typically 5 working days.

Download the form from our website and follow the instructions.  
[www.traveltheunknown.com/downloads/indiavisaform.pdf](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/downloads/indiavisaform.pdf)

**Note:** as per the latest visa regulations, if you are applying for a multi-entry tourist visa, you cannot re-enter India until 2 months after your exit from the country. There are some exceptions to this, with further details mentioned in the visa application form.

Most of our tours in North East India involve travel to Arunachal Pradesh, a state that requires Restricted Area Permits (RAP) for all visitors. Even those holding Indian passports require an inner-line permit. Travel The Unknown will require you to fill out an application form and then we will handle the permit process. Permit applications must be completed at least 40 days prior to departure and be returned to us with a copy of your passport and Indian visa. The cost of RAPs are included in the tour package.

## **Health**

All *Travel The Unknown* travellers need to be in good physical health in order to participate fully in the group travel experience. If, in the opinion of our ground handler, any traveller is unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to themselves and/or the rest of the group, *Travel The Unknown* reserves the right to exclude them from all or part of a trip without refund. Please read the itinerary for this tour thoroughly and then realistically self-assess your physical ability to complete the trip as described. Please consult with your doctor if you have any doubts or give us a call with any queries you may have.

An excellent resource for up-to-date travel medicine requirements is: [www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk](http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk). We recommend that you also consult your doctor for up-to-date medical travel information before departure. You should also carry a first aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements. Please be aware that in some remoter areas you could be some distance from medical facilities. For legal reasons our leaders are prohibited from administering any type of drugs including headache tablets, antibiotics, etc.

**NOTE:** Do not leave it to the last minute to see your doctor as you may have to get immunised or start taking tablets some time prior to departure. You should see your doctor or visit a travel clinic at least 45 days before your departure.

When organising your own meals, be selective where you eat. Choose places that seem quite clean and where many locals eat. A high turnover usually means food is not left lying around and has been made fresh. We recommend that you stick to drinking bottled water, even when brushing your teeth.

At the time of writing the following vaccinations were recommended for travel to India:

Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Rabies, Tetanus, Typhoid.  
Malaria tablets (Malarone) are recommended for Assam.

## **Safety**

Many national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues involved with international travel. We recommend that you check your government's advice for their latest travel information before departure. For the UK, please visit: [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk).

We strongly recommend that you use a neck wallet or money belt while travelling to ensure the safety of your documents and other valuables. It is not advisable to bring valuable jewellery when travelling. A lock is recommended for securing your luggage.

Your leader will accompany you on all included activities; however during your trip you will have some free time to pursue your own interests, relax and take it easy or explore at your leisure. Any optional activities you undertake are not part of your *Travel The Unknown* itinerary, and *Travel The Unknown* makes no guarantees about the safety of the activity or the standard of the operators running them. Please use your own good judgment. *Travel The Unknown* cannot be held responsible for any injuries or losses that may occur for any such optional activity. Please also note that *Travel The Unknown* retains the authority to amend or cancel any part of the trip itinerary if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns.

You may experience altitude sickness and slight oxygen deprivation whilst travelling in Tawang (on the Monks circuit). This is particularly apparent when arriving in Tawang, at just above 3000 metres, so we have allowed time for acclimatisation and the increase in sleeping altitude is gradual. If you do not feel well please inform your group leader at the first available opportunity.

## **Dangers**

India is generally a very safe place to travel. However, you are still subject to the same problems that you find the world over – e.g. pickpockets can operate in busy places. Travelling with an experienced group leader will make your trip more protected from such external dangers but do not let your guard down completely. You are still responsible for your own belongings.

Assam has suffered from various low-level insurgencies, however there is rarely any trouble in the areas our tours cover and tourists have never been targeted. We closely monitor the safety situation on a continuous basis, using both government sources and our own network of contacts on the ground. Please check the FCO website ([www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)) for the latest government advice on travel to the region. Please contact us if you have any further questions or concerns about safety issues.

## **Electricity**

Electricity in North East India can be very sporadic. On the Assam leg of this tour the electricity is generally quite reliable (maybe with the exception of Majuli).

Electricity in India is 240 volts, alternating at 50 cycles per second. You will require a voltage converter if you are carrying a device that does not accept 240 volts at 50 hertz. The following three types of voltage converters may be used:

### Resistor-network converters

This type of converter usually supports approximately 50 -1600 Watts. They are lightweight. You can easily use this converter for high-wattage electrical appliances like hair dryers and irons. But, you can use them for short periods only and they are not ideal for digital devices.

### Transformers

Transformers support low watt rating, around 50–100 watts. Generally, you can use them continuously. Also, they provide better electricity for low wattage appliances like battery chargers, laptops and cameras.

### Combination converters

Combination converters are a combination of a resistor network and a transformer in the same package. You can easily switch between the two modes. If you need both types of converters, then it is better to buy this combination converter.

Outlets in India generally accept the following types of plug:

- Two round pins (continental European plugs & adapters will suffice)
- Three round pins arranged in a triangle

If your appliance(s) plug has any other shape, you will need a plug adapter.

Check out [www.traveltheunknown.com/estore](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/estore) for some adapters that will be suitable for India.

## **Communication**

While there will be some internet cafes and call shops en route, the reliability of the services can sometimes be poor or slow. International calls, while theoretically possible in most call shops, are frequently not possible. Although most foreign mobile phones will work throughout India, they will most likely not work in North East India. Your group leader will have a local mobile phone with him at all times.

## **Time**

India is 5½ hours ahead of GMT.

Note, the time difference will reduce to 4 ½ hours when clocks go forward for summer time.

## **Laundry**

Laundry can be arranged, however, we advise you not to leave laundry to the last minute as sometimes drying times may be required and laundry will not be available at all stops.

## MONEY

### Spending Money

Every traveller is different and therefore spending money requirements will vary. Some people spend a lot of money on drinks, whereas others may spend more on souvenir or present shopping. Please consider your own spending habits when it comes to allowing for drinks, shopping, participating in optional activities and tipping.

### Tipping

Tipping is a very difficult and often emotive subject. Although wholly at your discretion (and only if you are provided with good service), tipping is totally voluntary and often not expected. It is however almost always appreciated. You should need no more than £30-40 (\$60-80) for tipping local staff in restaurants, hotels etc. It is also customary to tip guides and drivers if you have been happy with their services. If you are happy with your service, you should tip about £4-5 per person/day for your guide and £2pp/day for your driver.

| Staff                     | Tip                                                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bellboy/porters at hotels | INR 20 per bag                                                    |
| Local guides              | INR 100 half day / INR 150 full day                               |
| Hotel staff               | INR 50-75 per day                                                 |
| Driver (transfers)        | INR 50 for arrival/departure<br>INR 100 per day for long journeys |

### Departure Tax

Unless otherwise specified departure tax will be included in the cost of your package when you booked your international flight with *Travel The Unknown*. Where you are arranging your own international flights please check with your travel agent or airline.

### Emergency Funds

Please also make sure you have access to an additional £200 (\$350), to be used when unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control (eg. a natural disaster, or political strife) necessitate a change to our intended itinerary. This is not a common occurrence but it's better to be prepared.

### Money Exchange

Currency exchange rates often fluctuate. For the most up to date rates please refer to the following website: [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).

There are many ATM machines (which accept both Visa and Mastercard) throughout India, though they are usually limited to major cities. Although this is now a safe and convenient way to access money during your trip, we do recommend that you carry some money in the form of cash/travellers cheques for when these ATMs cannot be accessed. For travellers cheques, the easiest to change are Thomas Cook or American Express in USD currency. Cash should be in US dollars. Black markets no longer exist in India. Major credit cards are accepted in the larger shops and restaurants but only in the bigger cities.

ATMs in North East India can be problematic. We recommend you take out the majority of the spending money you require when you arrive at the airport or in Guwahati, and distribute it and keep it in secure places throughout the rest of the trip.

**TIP 1:** Slightly torn, faded or badly marked banknotes may be difficult to exchange. Coins are typically not exchangeable.

**TIP 2:** We recommend you take out the majority of the spending money you require when you arrive in Delhi and distribute it and keep it in secure places throughout the rest of the trip.

**NOTE:** Make sure you inform your bank of the exact dates that you are going to India and that they ensure your card is not blocked when you are travelling.

## **RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

### **Responsible Travel**

As regular travellers, one thing that never ceases to amaze and inspire us while travelling is the kindness and generosity of people, who often have very little to their name. We firmly believe that the people who make these places special should also benefit from them. Therefore as first preference we use local guides and locally-owned lodges, shops and eateries. We do our best to ensure that the benefits of our tours reach as widely as possible into the communities where they operate and also invest a significant amount of our profits in development projects within those communities.

### **Future Generations Arunachal**

Future Generations Arunachal is an NGO that focuses on community participation. The concept is to provide skills and education to a voluntary section of the community who then act as local specialists. They in turn dispense advice and run workshops themselves in the villages, transferring these skills within their communities. Projects run on this basis include basic medical training, recognition of medicines for the illiterate, basic literacy and numeracy, fuel conservation initiatives and village-run microfinancing. All of these programmes are run by the Village Women Workers. Further initiatives include environmental awareness and personal development workshops for children, and self sufficiency and conservation training for farmers. With a permanent staff of only 13, they have gained the participation of approximately 1000 volunteers.

Travel The Unknown is proud to support Future Generations Arunachal and plans to develop further community-based tourism projects together with them. We will make regular contributions towards their projects and help to raise the profile of the organisation in the UK and beyond. For more information, please visit:

[www.traveltheunknown.com/futuregenerations](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/futuregenerations)

## **Environment**

The biggest environmental impact of your holiday with *Travel The Unknown* is the CO<sub>2</sub> generated by your flights and land travel. As a responsible tour operator, we have included in our tour prices the costs of offsetting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from all international and domestic flights as well as land travel forming part of the tour.

We have partnered with *Climate Care* for this purpose. If you are making independent flight arrangements, we urge you to take responsibility for your CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by offsetting through *Climate Care*, or another reputable offsetting scheme.

We also ask you to be vigilant about disposing of your waste. Dispose of all rubbish correctly and do not leave litter or cigarette butts in natural environments.

Our brochures and stationery are printed on FSC-accredited or recycled paper. To minimise waste, all of our brochures and trip notes are available for download online.

Visit [www.traveltheunknown.com/responsible](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/responsible) for further information.

## **Culture Shock**

India is a country which may be very different to anything you may have experienced before. It is not always the easiest place to travel. Pollution, poverty and the swirling crowds can result in initial culture shock, but take a deep breath and go for it, and you will understand what makes this land so enchanting. Note that on this tour you will be visiting remote tribal areas where the way of life may seem quite basic.

When packing be aware that dress standards are conservative throughout India. Loose, lightweight, long clothing is both respectful and cool in the predominantly hot Indian climate. Singlets, tank tops and shorts are not suitable for much of India. The North East however is more relaxed than the rest of India in this regard and t-shirts and knee-length shorts are commonly worn and quite acceptable. If you have any questions please feel free to contact us.

## **Climate**

The places visited on this itinerary experience similar weather throughout the year, i.e. scorching, humid summers and pleasant winters and spring. June is the peak of the monsoon season, where rain can cause havoc with localised flooding causing traffic chaos. Rainfall tends to be lower at other times of the year.

In Assam, typical daytime temperatures between October and February will be in the low 20s (Celsius) with minimum temperatures at 6 – 8. Temperatures start to reach the low 30s by mid May. Arunachal Pradesh is generally cooler than Assam given its higher altitude and proximity to the Himalayas.

Irrespective of the time of the year travelling, you should take precaution against the sun.

## **WHAT TO BRING**

The list below is not exhaustive:

- Day pack – useful for carrying basic items
- Binoculars
- Malaria tablets and any other required medicines
- Torch (check batteries)
- Sunglasses and sun cream (min factor 15)
- Sunhat
- Waterproof bag for documents and electronics
- Insect repellent
- Small towel
- Basic toiletries (inc. hand sanitiser)
- Tissues
- Drinking bottle
- Watch (strict time-keeping is required at times)
- Money for meals, souvenirs, contingencies (credit/debit cards will only work in Delhi and other big cities)
- Notebook, pen
- Book
- Small items from home can make nice personal gifts
- Travel pillow (can come in handy for longer journeys)

You will require clothing for the generally warm weather. Temperatures at night should be cooler so remember to bring an extra layer. We will send you a detailed list of all the things you need to bring at the time of booking. Many of the items required are also available in our e-store: [www.traveltheunknown.com/estore](http://www.traveltheunknown.com/estore)

## **Electronic Items**

- Digital camera – bring accessories: memory cards, battery, charger
- If film camera – bring film, lenses, batteries, etc.
- Mobile phone and charger (although does not always work in Arunachal Pradesh)
- Plug adaptors (2-round pin – same as European style)
- Music player (MP3, CD player, Ipad and relevant charger)
- Laptop and charger (useful if you want to keep a blog and upload photos)

## **Tour Photos**

We prefer to use photos taken on our tours on our website so we actively encourage you to send us your photos. If you send us pictures we will also enter you in a draw to win some special prizes. Happy snapping!

## **Our Newsletter**

If you would like to find out about new tours and all that is happening with *Travel The Unknown* then sign up to our newsletter on our website.

## **Feedback**

We have spent much time and effort to make your trip a memorable experience for all the right reasons. However, we are constantly looking to improve our tours and any feedback you can give us or suggestions you may have would be very much appreciated.