

# MONKS & RHINOS

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TOUR DETAILS		Duration
<b>HIGHLIGHTS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visit the stunning Tawang monastery</li><li>• Rafting in Nameri Reserve</li><li>• Tipi Orchid Sanctuary</li><li>• Elephant safari in Kaziranga</li><li>• Majuli - the world's largest river island with its own culture</li><li>• Assam's famous tea estates</li></ul>		16 days
Off The Beaten Track Rating	●●●●●	Activity Rating ★★ ★

## ITINERARY

**DAY 1** Arrive midday into Guwahati, Assam (flying via Delhi or Kolkata). Your guide and driver will greet you at airport for onward drive to Kaziranga National Park. Check into your cottage. Evening free to relax. Savour a fabulous Assamese meal and have a drink by the bonfire. Overnight in Kaziranga. Meal plan: D

*181 Kms from Guwahati, the largest city in Assam, and nestled at the foothills of Eastern Himalayas, **Nameri National Park** covers an area of 200 square kilometres. The park's endangered species include the sloth, bear, tiger, clouded leopard, as well as elephants. The national park is most famous however, for its **300 rare bird species** such as Hornbills, Bee Eaters, Mainas, Barbets and the endangered white-winged wood duck*

**DAY 2** Early wake up with hot cup of chai and biscuits. Jeep will take you to the Central Sector for your elephant safari. As the sun rises, *ride on elephant-back* and wade through thick elephant grass on the look-out for the endangered unicorn rhino. Witness a host of other wildlife, including tigers, with Kaziranga being home to the largest concentration of tigers in a protected area. Return to the jungle lodge for breakfast. Morning to relax. After lunch, take an afternoon game drive. Evening free. Overnight in Kaziranga. Meal plan: B,L,D

***Kaziranga National Park** is home to two-thirds of the world's population of **Indian one-horned rhinoceros** at just under 2000. A few centuries ago, the Indian one-horned rhino ranged across the north Indian plains in the wetlands of the rivers Indus, Ganga, and Brahmaputra. Today it is found only in pockets of Assam and in Nepal. Kaziranga also boasts a range of other wildlife and harbours about 15 species of India's threatened mammals including the **densest population of Royal Bengal tigers**, Indian elephants, sloth bears, Gangetic dolphins and an extraordinary bird population. Kaziranga National Park is located partly in **Golaghat District** and partly in **Nagaon District** of Assam and covers an area of 430km<sup>2</sup>. It lies in the flood plains of the Brahmaputra and annual flooding and burning has maintained the grasslands predominant in the west. It became an official national park in 1974, but was established as a reserved forest in 1908, a game sanctuary in 1916, a wildlife sanctuary in 1950 and as a World Heritage site in 1985.*

**DAY 3** Visit to Panbari Forest Reserve to look for the elusive hoolock gibbon and visit the nearby tea estate. After lunch, rest of day free. Optional visit to Mising tribal village. Overnight in Kaziranga. Meal plan: B,L,D

**DAY 4** Early start for journey to Majuli, the world's largest river island, with its unique culture, increasingly threatened by climate change. Short ferry ride across the mighty Brahmaputra River to Majuli. After settling into your comfortable bamboo hut, stroll around and savour the atmosphere of this unique island. Overnight in Majuli. Meal plan: B,L,D

*One of the world's largest river islands, **Majuli Island** is located in the **Brahmaputra River** and runs for 80km from east to west and 15km north to south and a total area of 875km<sup>2</sup>. It used to be much bigger than this but has decreased as a result of **erosion** from the river. The island has a population of 150,000 and there are 243 villages. With a natural and cultural heritage site with water bodies covering most of the areas, Majuli attracts a wide **range of birds**. Aside from the **rice field landscapes, fish traps and water meadows**, the **local Mising people and Satras** make the island a fascinating place.*

**DAY 5** Explore Majuli – visit the island's ancient satras (rare Hindu Vaishnavite monasteries where Lord Vishnu is worshipped). Pop into the local mask shops and watch master craftsmen at work. Alternatively hop into a boat and take in the local surroundings. Overnight in Majuli. Meal plan: B,L,D

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*There are just under 30 **Satras** in Majuli and each Satra acts as a cultural activity centre for its region in festivals and occasions. Formed by the Assamese philosopher, **Sankardev**, the religion is based on the **caste system** and **idol worship**. Dance and play-acting of scenes from the holy Hindu scripture (*Bhagavad Gita*) have an important role. Pottery in Majuli is also very famous because it is made from beaten clay that is burnt in ovens fired with driftwood.*

**DAY 6** Free day. Bikes are available and a bike ride is a good way of exploring the island. Overnight in Majuli. Meal plan: B,L,D

**DAY 7** After breakfast, set off for the Eco-camp on the fringes of Nameri National Park. Go for a wander in the open fields, watch villagers gather their cattle as the sun sets. Feast on delicious Assamese cuisine in the open air banquet area and enjoy a drink by the bonfire. Stay in excellent bamboo tent/cottages, complete with comfortable bamboo beds and attached bathroom. Overnight in Nameri. Meal plan: B,L,D

**DAY 8** Early morning chai, then set off for walking safari. Cross the river by boat to Nameri National Park. Explore the forest by foot, looking out for langur monkeys, wild elephants, barking deer, rare birdlife and more. Return to eco-camp for breakfast, then embark on journey up the Himalayas to Dirang. Evening free. Overnight in Dirang. Meal plan: B,L,D

**DAY 9** Spend the day exploring Dirang. After breakfast, visit picture-postcard Old Dirang, its winding streams and Old Fort. Take a light trek through Sangti Valley and enjoy fantastic views of Dirang, encountering its people and wildlife on the way. Afternoon lunch, rest of day to relax or wander through Dirang. Dinner and overnight in hotel. Meal plan: B,L,D

**DAY 10** After breakfast, we start our journey to Tawang, one of the Buddhist heartlands of India. Rise high above Himalayan clouds and through snow-capped peaks. Drive via Sela Pass, one of the world's highest motorable passes at 4400 metres passing yaks on the way. Arrive late afternoon, put your feet up and relax. Munch on Tibetan-style food for dinner. Overnight in Tawang. Meal plan: B,L,D

*Tawang is believed to have derived its name from the dramatic **Tawang Monastery (Gompa)** perched on the edge of the ridge running along the western part of Tawang. '**Ta**' means Horse and '**Wang**' means chosen. Legend says **Merak Lama Lodre Gyasto**, searching for somewhere to establish a monastery, could not find an appropriate site so he prayed for guidance of a divine power. After praying, he realised his horse had disappeared. The place that he found him is where Merak Lama Lodre Gyasto founded his monastery 1681. The monastery is central to both social and religious life in Tawang and is the second largest Buddhist monastery complex in the world.*

*The **Dalai Lamas** are believed to be the reincarnation of spiritual leaders, reborn in order to enlighten others. They are the head of state, patron saints of Tibet and the spiritual leader of Tibet. **The 6<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso was born in Urgelling Gompa in 1682. Ani Gompa** is one of the oldest **nunneries** in the Tawang district and is 12km from Tawang. This was commissioned by Karchen Yeshe Gelek in 1595 and houses about **45 nuns**. These nuns rely on **begging** for food to survive as they are so poor.*

*The **Tawang War Memorial** is a monument dedicated to the **martyrs of the 1962 war with China**, defending their borders. The **40-foot-high colourful war memorial** was designed by the Army and constructed at a cost of about Rs 15 lakh. It was dedicated to the nation and blessed by **Dalai Lama in 1997**. The names of **2420 dead soldiers** are etched in gold on 32 black granite plaques. The memorial is flanked by two memorial halls.*

**DAY 11** Early morning walk to Tawang Monastery, the largest Buddhist monastery outside Tibet. Perched majestically on a Himalayan cliff face looking into Bhutan, admire the huge statue of Lord Buddha and the sublime views. Proceed on to Urgelling Gompa, the birthplace of the 6th Dalai Lama, then on to charming Ani Gompa (nunnery), and watch the lowering of the Indian flag at the Indo-China War Memorial. Dinner and overnight in Tawang. Meal plan: B,L,D

**DAY 12** Free day. Overnight in Tawang. Meal plan: B,L,D

**DAY 13** After early breakfast, start drive down to the small town Buddhist town of Bomdila. Lunch en-route. On arrival, check-in to hotel and refresh. At dusk, visit the local monastery when the monks go to prayer. Evening free. Overnight in Bomdila. Meals: B,L,D

***Bomdila** offers views of stunning landscape and snow-clad mountains of the Himalayan Range. Its cool climate, apple orchards, snow-capped Himalayan peaks and Buddhist Gompas make it another fascinating place to visit.*

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**DAY 14** After breakfast drive to Tezpur (6 hours) en-route visiting the Orchid Centre at Tipi. It houses over 7500 orchids. On display are some of the finest species of orchids in the world, with intriguing names like the Dainty Lady's Slipper! Lunch at Tipi. Continue drive to Tezpur, and check into hotel on arrival. Optional evening sightseeing tour of Tezpur, a city steeped in mythology and history. Overnight in Tezpur. Meals: B,L

*Tipi Orchid Centre is 65 km away from Tezpur in Assam. One of the main attractions of the centre is the **orchid glass house**, with a fibreglass roof, display gallery and a central pond with fountain. The house alone accommodates about 1000 exotic orchids displayed in pots and hanging baskets. **Tezpur** is one of Assam's most **beautiful** cities filled with **parks, lakes, stunning views and the Brahmaputra River** running through its centre. Sights include **Chitrlekha Udyan** (a U-shaped pond set in lawns with sculptures) and **Ganeshgarh temple**. **Agrigarh Hill** is believed to be the site of Banasura's legendary fire fortress, used to protect his daughter from suitors.*

**DAY 15** After breakfast leave for Guwahati (4 hours). Check into hotel on arrival. Rest of day free. Optional activities can be arranged, for example a visit to the Kamakhya Temple, where animal sacrifices are still a daily occurrence, or a visit to the quaint Umananda Temple located on a small island in the Brahmaputra. Overnight in Guwahati. Meals: B

*The **Kamakhya Temple** had been built in reverence to **Goddess Sati**. King Nara Narayana of Cooch Behar rebuilt the temple in 1665 after it had suffered destruction at the hands of foreign invaders and this is why images of the builder and related inscriptions can be seen there. The temple consists of **seven oval spires**, each topped by **three golden pitchers**, and the entrance spirals down to a curved path, linking the main road to the temple. Animal sacrifices are still practised daily here, so be warned!*

*On **Peacock Island**, the temple of **Umananda** was built in 1694 by the Bar Phukan Garhganya Handique by the order of His Majesty Swargadeo Gadadhar Singh one of the ablest and strongest rulers of the Tai Ahom dynasty. The **Shiva temple** is set at the top of a flight of steps. The original temple was however immensely damaged by a devastating earthquake of 1897. Later, it was reconstructed by a rich local merchant who chose to inscribe the interior part of a Siva temple with Vaisnavite slogans.*

**DAY 16** After breakfast, transfer to airport for onward flight to Delhi or Kolkata. Meals: B

- END OF SERVICES -

## PRICE INCLUDES

Internal flights from Delhi/Kolkata  
Airport pick-up & drop-off  
Ground transport  
Restricted area permits

Accommodation  
Most meals (refer to daily meal plans)  
Activity fees (rafting, safari)

Entrance fees to sites  
Drivers and guides  
Climate Care contribution

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