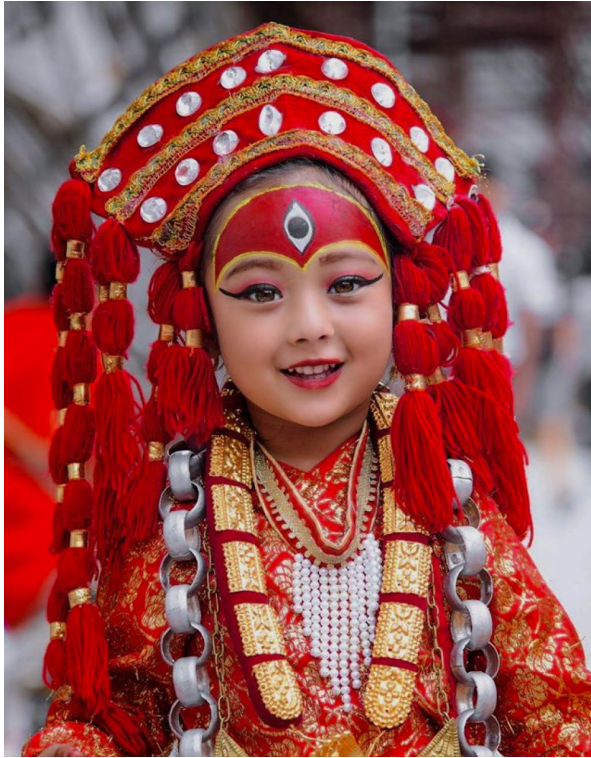
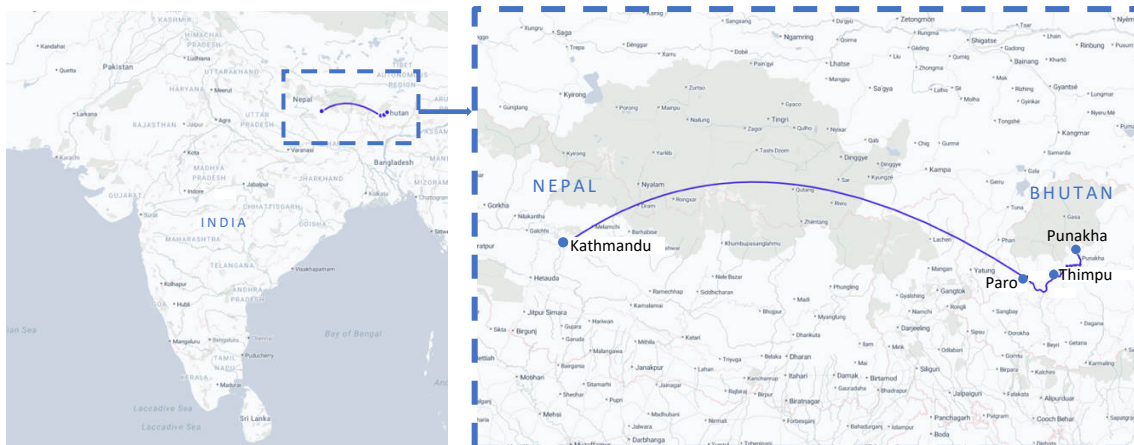


TOUR DATES: 13-21 MAY 2027



Design Tour to the Mountain Kingdoms Kathmandu and Bhutan

Where art, architecture and craftsmanship meet the
living traditions and mountain landscapes of the Himalayas



AT A GLANCE

Design Tour to Kathmandu and Bhutan 13–21 May 2027

Tour Price (Australian Dollars)

- AUD \$14,950 per person, twin share
- AUD \$4,500 single supplement

Bookings

- A deposit of AUD \$1,000 is required to secure your place on the journey (see Tour Details on page 24 for the payment schedule)

Accommodation

- The Dwarika's Hotel, Kathmandu
- Ascent by Zhiwaling, Thimpu
- Rae by Zhiwaling, Punakha
- Zhiwaling Heritage, Paro

Meals

- All breakfasts, welcome afternoon tea and farewell meal (as per the itinerary)

Transport

- Airport transfers and private air-conditioned vehicles throughout
- Flight from Kathmandu to Paro, including 30kg checked baggage and 5kg hand luggage

Visas and Bhutan's Sustainable Development Fee

- Visas for Nepal and Bhutan
- Bhutan's Sustainable Development Fee (US \$100 per person per day)

Your Hosts

- Nicole Court – Designer and Tour Host (Sydney-based) and specialist local guides

Group Size

- Small groups, typically around 12 guests

Tour Confirmation

- Tour confirmation is subject to a minimum of eight bookings by 6 January 2027

Altitude & Acclimatisation

- The itinerary has been carefully planned with a gradual progression to higher altitudes, and we avoid excessively high elevations, allowing you to enjoy the journey as comfortably as possible

Best time of year to visit?

- May is a lovely time to explore Kathmandu and Bhutan, with warm days and cooler mornings and evenings, although Bhutan's mountain climate remains cool, particularly at higher altitudes



KATHMANDU | CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: FLOWER OFFERINGS TO LORD GANESHA AT THE DWARIKA'S; LOCAL FESTIVAL HONOURING THE LIVING GODDESS; THE DWARIKA'S HOTEL

AN ARTISTIC JOURNEY THROUGH KATHMANDU AND BHUTAN

SOME JOURNEYS TAKE YOU TO BEAUTIFUL PLACES. OTHERS CHANGE THE WAY YOU SEE THE WORLD. This carefully curated journey through Kathmandu and Bhutan explores two Himalayan cultures where art, architecture, spirituality, craftsmanship and landscape are woven together in ways that are both ancient and remarkably alive.

We begin in Kathmandu, a city where medieval temples, Hindu shrines, Buddhist stupas and Tantric traditions exist alongside contemporary galleries, artists, cafés and a distinctly cosmopolitan energy. Across the Kathmandu Valley, centuries-old craftsmanship remains deeply woven into the cultural fabric of everyday life – from intricate woodcarving and metalwork to sacred painting and pottery. In its historic courtyards and holy places, ancient rituals continue to be practised, creating a remarkable continuity between the medieval city and Kathmandu today.

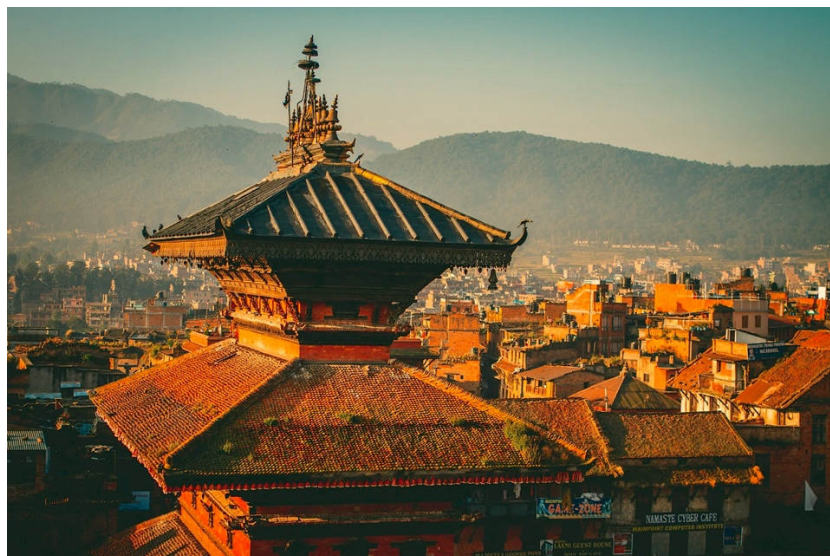
From Kathmandu, we fly across the Himalayas to Bhutan, where Buddhism permeates architecture, art, landscape and daily life. Here, richly painted temples, magnificent dzongs, traditional textiles and forested mountain landscapes reveal a culture that has maintained a strong sense of its own identity while engaging with the modern world in a carefully considered way.

Throughout the Himalayas, ancient spiritual traditions remain very much alive. Deities, enlightened masters, sacred stories and powerful forces of nature are not simply remnants from a distant past; they continue to shape the cultural imagination and influence how people understand and experience the world around them.

As we travel, this way of seeing gives another dimension to what we encounter. A temple becomes more than a beautiful building – its architecture, imagery and rituals tell a story. Symbols and colours woven into a textile reveal identity and belief. And a mountain becomes part of a sacred landscape in which nature, spirituality and human life remain deeply connected.

Along the way, we will meet artists and artisans, encounter spiritual traditions and explore some of the Himalayas' most remarkable historic and sacred sites, while discovering the relationship between craftsmanship and belief. We will consider Bhutan's philosophy of Gross National Happiness and its profound question of what it means to live well, while experiencing the very different energies of Kathmandu and Bhutan.

This journey is an invitation into a living Himalayan world, where art, spirituality, landscape and everyday life remain inseparable – and where looking more closely may change not only how we see these extraordinary places, but how we see the world itself.





BOUDHANATH | THE HEART OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM IN KATHMANDU

MEET YOUR HOST: NICOLE COURT

FOR MORE THAN THREE DECADES, I HAVE EXPLORED THE INTERSECTION OF ART, CRAFT, CULTURE AND PLACE. As a designer and curator, my career has been shaped by a deep appreciation of craftsmanship, beauty and the stories embedded within the objects, buildings and landscapes we encounter.

My work as a multi-disciplinary designer has spanned textiles, interiors, homewares, publishing and landscape design. For more than a decade, I designed and produced textile and homeware collections handcrafted in India, which were sold through leading boutiques across Australia and New Zealand and featured regularly in *Belle*, *Vogue Living*, *House & Garden*, *Gourmet Traveller*, *Marie Claire* and *Inside Out*.

My connection with India is both professional and deeply personal. My aunt, Robin Duffecy, lived in Delhi for many years and developed close friendships with some of India's leading artists, designers, writers and creative families. Over time, those friendships became mine as well, giving me a window into India's creative world and a network of relationships across the region that has continued to grow over three decades.

While India has been a significant part of my life and work, my curiosity has always extended far beyond one country. I am fascinated by the way culture, spirituality, craftsmanship and the natural environment shape the way people live and the places they create. Drawing on more than three decades of travelling, designing and exploring Asia, I look at each destination through the lens of art, architecture, textiles, craftsmanship, spirituality and place.

Travelling with me is about much more than visiting beautiful places. It is about discovering the stories, meaning and connections that make them come alive. I love sharing the details that might otherwise remain hidden – the meaning behind a pattern, the hands and traditions behind an object, the symbolism within a building, or the story of the person who created it.

I believe the most memorable journeys are shaped by meaningful encounters – with interesting people, beautiful objects and places that reveal themselves slowly. This is why I seek out experiences that take us beyond the obvious, introducing you to artists, artisans, designers, local experts and people whose lives are connected to the traditions we encounter.

I design every itinerary as though I were travelling with close friends. Small groups, thoughtful pacing, beautiful hotels and exceptional access allow us to experience each destination in a way that feels personal, immersive and genuinely enriching. Every hotel, experience and journey between destinations is carefully considered for its character, comfort, sense of place and ability to enrich the experience. The aim is not simply to see more, but to experience each place more deeply.

To me, the greatest luxury is having the time and space to notice these things – travelling with the confidence that the details have been taken care of, while remaining open to the unexpected moments that make a journey memorable.

It is often these quieter moments that stay with us longest: a conversation, a shared cup of tea, a glimpse into someone's world, or simply standing together in a remarkable landscape and taking it all in.

I would be delighted to share this journey through Kathmandu and Bhutan with you – two Himalayan kingdoms where ancient traditions remain vividly present in contemporary life.

Instagram: @nicolecourtdesign



BHAKTAPUR'S DURBAR SQUARE (CENTRE) + CRAFTS OF THE KATHMANDU VALLEY | CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: NEWARI METALCRAFT; TRADITIONAL WOODCARVING; SPINNING THREAD; BLACK CLAY POTTERY

SIGNATURE EXPERIENCES

Kathmandu's Creative Insiders

Gain privileged access to Kathmandu's contemporary creative scene, visiting a gallery committed to showing artists from Nepal and the wider Himalayan region. Subject to availability, we will meet one of my favourite contemporary artists, who represented Nepal at the Venice Biennale, and hear how ancient traditions and contemporary life are being explored through art today.

The Kumari | Nepal's Living Goddess

At the heart of Kathmandu's spiritual life is the Kumari, the Living Goddess – a young girl from the Buddhist Shakya community revered as the living embodiment of Taleju, a powerful Hindu goddess. Her story offers a fascinating glimpse into the way Hinduism, Buddhism and Tantric traditions have intertwined in Nepal. We will see the new, two-year-old Kumari, chosen as Nepal's Living Goddess last year, followed by a private lunch and conversation with a former Kumari about her life within this remarkable tradition.

Boudhanath | The Heart of Tibetan Buddhism in Kathmandu

In the early evening, join pilgrims walking clockwise around the great Boudhanath Stupa, turning prayer wheels beneath the prayer flags and the watchful eyes of the Buddha. As the light fades, butter lamps glow and the sound of chanting drifts from the surrounding monasteries. It is a beautiful and atmospheric introduction to this living centre of Tibetan Buddhism.

Death is a Doorway | Pashupatinath

At dusk, visit Pashupatinath, Nepal's most sacred Hindu temple complex, rising above the holy Bagmati River and surrounded by cremation ghats, shrines and sadhus. Here, death is openly woven into daily life, reflecting the Hindu belief in the cycle of birth, death and rebirth and the possibility of *moksha* – spiritual liberation and freedom from this endless cycle. The evening rituals offer a powerful insight into a very different understanding of mortality.

Bhaktapur | A Living Medieval City

Explore Bhaktapur, the Kathmandu Valley's atmospheric medieval city, with a local who grew up here. Beyond its magnificent temples and squares, wander through narrow lanes and hidden courtyards, discovering Tantric shrines, artisans weaving and carving, corn drying in the sun and neighbours gathering in the rhythms of everyday life.

Flying from Kathmandu to Paro | Glimpsing Everest

If the skies are clear on our flight from Kathmandu to Paro, an immense succession of snow-covered Himalayan peaks unfolds below us – including Everest, the highest mountain on earth.

Textiles & Folk Art | The Living Craft of Bhutan

Explore Bhutanese design at the Royal Textile Academy, with its collection of handwoven textiles revealing the skill, symbolism and traditions woven into Bhutanese identity. At the Folk Heritage Museum, discover traditional architecture, domestic objects and rituals of everyday life.

Tantra, the Divine Madman & the Sacred Phallus

Walk through the countryside surrounding Chimi Lhakhang, the temple associated with the irreverent Buddhist master Drukpa Kunley, the "Divine Madman". His teachings embraced humour, sexuality and unconventional behaviour, offering an intriguing introduction to Bhutan's Tantric traditions. The phallic symbols found throughout Bhutan are associated with fertility, protection, good fortune and the power to ward off evil.



PASHUPATINATH | NEPAL'S MOST SACRED HINDU TEMPLE –
DEDICATED TO SHIVA, IT IS A PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE, CREMATION AND RITUAL

Gross National Happiness | What Does It Mean to Live Well?

Bhutan's philosophy of Gross National Happiness offers an alternative to measuring a country's success through economic growth alone, considering wellbeing, culture, environment and good governance. As we travel through Bhutan, we will explore what this means in practice – and perhaps ask ourselves a larger question: what does it really mean to live a good life?

Punakha Dzong | The Masterpiece of Bhutanese Architecture

Punakha Dzong is my favourite building in Bhutan. Set at the confluence of two rivers, its immense walls, exquisitely carved timber and beautifully painted interiors make it, in my view, the peak expression of Bhutanese architecture. Buddhist and Tantric imagery fill its sacred spaces, creating an inspired union of architecture, craftsmanship, landscape and spiritual belief.

Tiger's Nest | Taktshang

Our journey culminates with the ascent to Taktshang, or Tiger's Nest, Bhutan's most iconic sacred site, perched dramatically above the Paro Valley. Guru Rinpoche, the 8th-century Buddhist master credited with bringing Buddhism to Bhutan, is believed to have arrived here on the back of a flying tigress and meditated in a cave on the mountainside. The walk to Taktshang is itself a pilgrimage, and an important spiritual journey for Bhutanese people, many of whom make the ascent at least once in their lives. We will share the trail with pilgrims, many dressed in their finest traditional clothing, as it winds through pine forest adorned with prayer flags. The monastery gradually reveals itself through the trees before appearing dramatically on the cliff face – a fitting culmination to our journey through Bhutan, where landscape, spirituality, art and architecture come together in an extraordinary setting.



KATHMANDU TO PARO | FLYING OVER THE HIMALAYAS (INCLUDING MOUNT EVEREST!)



THIMPU | CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: FORESTED LANDSCAPES; BUDDHIST TEMPLE;
TRADITIONAL BHUTANESE TEXTILES; PATCHWORK BUDDHIST SILK BROCADE HANGINGS (CHUKORS)

ITINERARY

A 9-day Insider Journey with Nicole Court

Art | Architecture | Textiles | Spirituality | Craftsmanship

DAY 1 • 13 May | Arrival in Kathmandu

Arrival: Upon arrival at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport, my representative will be there to greet you with a warm smile and a placard displaying your name. You will then be privately transferred in your chauffeur-driven car to The Dwarika's (20 mins drive). Check in from 2 pm onwards.

Welcome Afternoon Tea: Meet your fellow travellers and your host, Nicole Court.

Stay: *The Dwarika's, Kathmandu (Heritage Deluxe Room)* | *Meals included: Afternoon Tea*
Elevation: 1,400m

The Dwarika's

In 1952, Dwarika Das Shrestha came across an old Newari house in Kathmandu being demolished, its intricately carved timber destined for firewood. He bought a single piece and began a lifelong mission to rescue and preserve Nepal's extraordinary woodwork. His passion eventually gave rise to The Dwarika's – a living expression of Newari craftsmanship that brings together rescued carved timber, hand-moulded brick, courtyards and traditional architectural details. I love its tranquil gardens and leafy courtyards. It is my favourite hotel in Kathmandu.

KATHMANDU

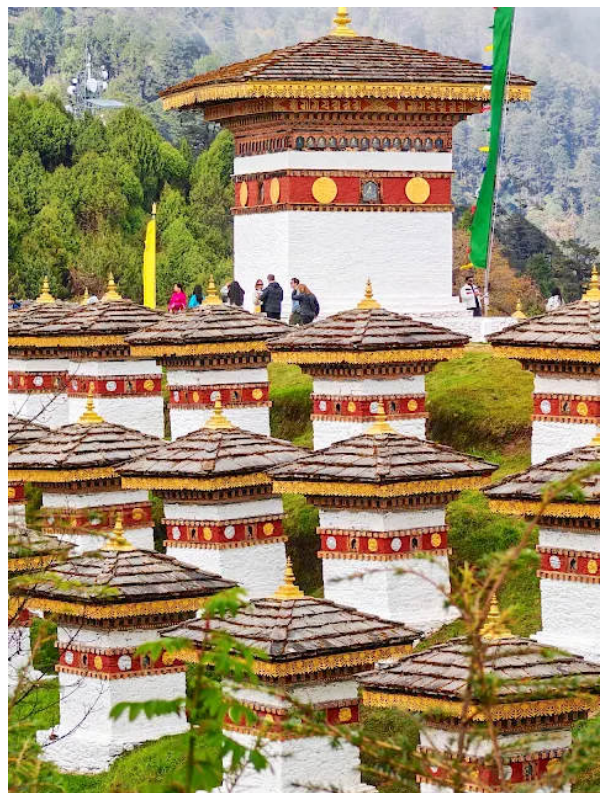
Kathmandu sits in a broad valley surrounded by mountains, but its greatest treasures are found at street level – in its courtyards, temples, shrines and ancient neighbourhoods. For centuries the Kathmandu Valley was shaped by the Newars, whose skills in woodcarving, metalwork, brick architecture and sacred art produced one of the richest urban cultures in the Himalayas. Buddhist stupas sit alongside Hindu temples; gods and goddesses appear in unexpected corners; ritual continues alongside contemporary life. Kathmandu is at once ancient and exuberantly alive – a city in which art, architecture and spirituality remain inseparable.

DAY 2 • 14 May | Kathmandu: The Living Goddess + Contemporary Art

Kathmandu Durbar Square: Afterwards, we will visit Kathmandu's historic Durbar Square which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Here, we will have the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the Kumari, Nepal's Living Goddess, before taking rickshaws through the narrow, bustling streets of the spice and vegetable market.

The Kumari – Nepal's Living Goddess: At the heart of Kathmandu's spiritual life is the Kumari, the Living Goddess – a young girl from the Buddhist Shakya community who is carefully chosen according to ancient traditions and revered as the living embodiment of Taleju, a powerful Hindu goddess. Unlike the Dalai Lama, she is not believed to be the reincarnation of a particular person; rather, she is understood to embody the goddess while she remains the Kumari. Her selection and veneration reveal the remarkable way Hinduism, Buddhism and Tantric traditions have intertwined in Nepal for centuries.

Her time as the Living Goddess lasts only through childhood. Traditionally, her reign ends with her first menstruation, when she is considered to have reached a stage of life beyond the ritual conditions required to embody the goddess, and a new Kumari is selected. Historically, the Kumari's blessing was closely associated with the wellbeing and legitimacy of Nepal's king.



FROM THIMPU TO PUNAKHA VIA THE DOCHULA PASS

More broadly, her presence is regarded as auspicious, while her expressions, movements and appearances may be interpreted for their significance and meaning.

The Kumari offers a glimpse into a living spiritual world in which the divine can be embodied in human form, and where Hindu, Buddhist and Tantric beliefs have become deeply interwoven.

Lunch with a Former Kumari: We will then enjoy a private lunch and conversation with a former Kumari. This intimate encounter offers the opportunity to hear firsthand what it was like to be chosen as the Living Goddess, to grow up within this extraordinary tradition, and to make the transition back to ordinary life.

Nicole's Note ~

I have often wondered: what must it be like to return to an ordinary life after spending your childhood as a goddess?

Contemporary Art Gallery Visit: This afternoon we will visit a contemporary art gallery supporting artistic voices from Nepal and the wider Himalayan region. Subject to availability, we will meet one of my favourite contemporary artists, who represented Nepal at the Venice Biennale. It will be an opportunity to hear directly from the artist about how Nepal's ancient spiritual traditions, contemporary life and changing cultural landscape are explored through his work.

A visit to a wood restoration workshop: This workshop brings senior master carvers together with young apprentices, passing traditional Newari woodcarving techniques from one generation to the next. We will see artisans restoring historic treasures, including carved wooden windows, beams and other architectural details, using time-honoured methods that help preserve Nepal's architectural heritage and keep these living traditions alive. This experience is subject to availability.

Boudhanath: In the early evening, we will visit Boudhanath, when the great white dome glows in the fading light, butter lamps flicker around the stupa and the sound of quiet chanting drifts from the surrounding Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. As dusk falls, pilgrims continue their clockwise circuit, turning the prayer wheels beneath the fluttering prayer flags and the watchful eyes of the Buddha gazing from the spire above. Boudhanath has long been an important centre of Tibetan Buddhist culture in Nepal, its history intertwined with the ancient trading routes between India and Tibet, along which Buddhist teachings travelled with the yak caravans. Today, the stupa remains a living place of pilgrimage, prayer and daily ritual.

Stay: *The Dwarika's, Kathmandu (Heritage Deluxe Room) | Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch*
Elevation: 1,400m

DAY 3 • 15 May | Kathmandu Valley: Bhaktapur + Pashupatinath

Bhaktapur | A Living Medieval City: I love Bhaktapur. Of the three medieval city-states of the Kathmandu Valley, it is the one that has retained the strongest sense of a traditional Newari town, with its handsome brick buildings, ancient temples, hidden courtyards and wonderfully unhurried atmosphere.

We will explore Bhaktapur with a local who grew up here, venturing beyond the grand medieval squares into the narrow backstreets and courtyards where everyday life continues much as it has for hundreds of years. Artisans weave cloth and carve wood, corn dries in the sunshine, and neighbours gather to bathe, collect water, play cards and catch up on the local news. Along the way, we will pass small Tantric shrines, beautifully carved windows hidden behind weathered walls and even metal cobras emerging from the green water tanks.



PUNAKHA DZONG AND ITS TANTRIC ART |
BOTTOM RIGHT: FIERCE COMPASSION IN THE FORM OF A WRATHFUL DEITY;
BOTTOM LEFT: THE WHEEL OF TIME, REPRESENTING THE TEACHINGS OF KALACHAKRA TANTRA

We will visit Bhaktapur Durbar Square, a UNESCO World Heritage site, with its magnificent temples and traditional Newari architecture, before continuing to the open-air workshop known as Potters' Square. Here, the scent of damp earth fills the air. The ground is covered with hundreds of freshly made pots drying in the sun. You may even like to try your hand at making a pot yourself.

Nicole's Note ~

While we are here, I recommend trying Bhaktapur's famous rich, creamy yoghurt, Juju Dhan, traditionally served in small clay pots. Our hotel makes a lovely version too, and I must admit I enjoy it so much that I happily eat it at breakfast, as well as at lunch and dinner!

Pashupatinath | Death is a Doorway: At dusk, we will visit Pashupatinath for evening prayers. At Nepal's most sacred Hindu temple complex, the riverbanks are lined with cremation ghats, small shrines and pilgrim shelters, while saffron-clad sadhus sit and gather throughout the sacred grounds – a striking reminder of how deeply spirituality is woven into everyday life in Nepal.

Here, death is not hidden away but remains visibly woven into the fabric of everyday life. Hindu philosophy understands existence as a continuing cycle of birth, death and rebirth, with the possibility of *moksha* – liberation from that cycle. As the evening prayers begin and rituals unfold beside the river, Pashupatinath offers an insight into a very different relationship with mortality, where the sacred and the everyday, life and death, exist side by side.

Stay: *The Dwarika's, Kathmandu (Heritage Deluxe Room) | Meals included: Breakfast*
Elevation: 1,400m

DAY 4 • 16 May | Fly to Bhutan + The Living Craft of Bhutan: Textiles and Folk Art

Flying from Kathmandu to Paro | Glimpsing Everest: If the skies are clear on our flight from Kathmandu to Paro this morning, a succession of snow-covered Himalayan peaks will unfold below us – including Everest, the highest mountain on earth. Flight time is 1 hr 5 min. Upon arrival we will drive approximately 1 hour 20 minutes to Thimphu, Bhutan's capital.

Nicole's Note ~

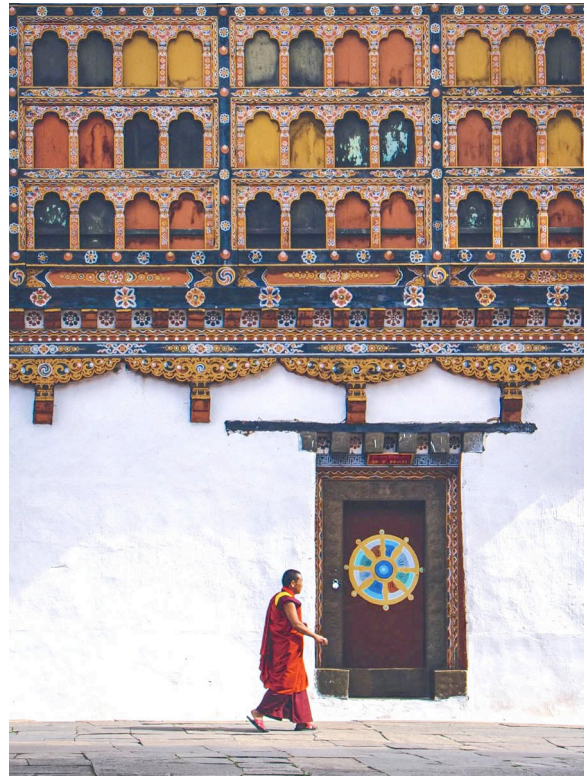
*Nothing quite prepares you for your first glimpse of Everest.
 It is one of those extraordinary moments that stays with you forever.*

Royal Textile Academy: This afternoon we will explore Bhutanese design at the Royal Textile Academy, with its collection of handwoven textiles revealing the skill, symbolism and traditions woven into Bhutanese identity. Textiles in Bhutan are not merely decorative. Weaving is deeply connected to identity, status, region and ritual, with intricate patterns and techniques passed through generations.

Folk Heritage Museum: At the Folk Heritage Museum, we will see traditional architecture and domestic objects offering an insight into traditional Bhutanese domestic life, architecture, agricultural practices and material culture.

Together, these visits provide an introduction to the relationship between Bhutanese design and everyday life.

Stay: *Ascent by Zhinvaling, Thimphu (Deluxe Room) | Meals included: Breakfast | Elevation: 2,400m*



PUNAKHA DZONG

Ascent by Zhiwaling, Thimphu

Set within 25 acres of landscaped grounds and forest, there is a sense of tranquillity throughout Zhiwaling Ascent, which blends contemporary design with distinctive Bhutanese architectural influences. Natural light spills through large windows that overlook the surrounding forest. Its position on the edge of Thimphu offers a peaceful connection to the landscape while remaining within easy reach of the capital, and the use of Bhutanese design elements gives the hotel a strong sense of place.

BHUTAN

Between the mythic and the mystic, folklore and faith, sacred and spiritual, forest and ritual, meaning and wonder – there is Bhutan.

Nestled between India and Tibet in the eastern Himalayas, Bhutan has developed on its own terms, retaining a strong cultural identity while embracing carefully managed modernisation. Its philosophy of Gross National Happiness places wellbeing, cultural preservation, environmental conservation and good governance alongside economic progress. Traditional architecture and dress remain part of everyday life, while monasteries, temples and sacred places continue to shape the cultural landscape.

At the centre of Bhutanese life is Vajrayana Buddhism, whose Tantric traditions have profoundly influenced the country's art, architecture and visual culture. Throughout our journey, we will encounter a living tradition in which spiritual belief, craftsmanship and landscape remain deeply intertwined.

DAY 5 • 17 May | Across the Dochula Pass + Temple of the Divine Madman

Thimphu to Punakha: We leave Thimphu and travel through some of Bhutan's most beautiful mountain scenery, crossing the Dochula Pass (elevation: 3,100m) before we descend through changing vegetation and landscapes to the Punakha Valley (approximately 2 hour 15 minute drive). On a clear day, Dochula Pass offers spectacular views across the Bhutanese Himalayas and is famous for its 108 chörtens, monuments that symbolise the enlightened mind of the Buddha.

Nicole's Note ~

Here, we will have the opportunity to tie prayer flags, following a tradition deeply woven into Bhutanese spiritual life. Printed with sacred mantras and images, prayer flags are traditionally placed where the wind can carry their blessings and goodwill across the landscape. Tying prayer flags is a small but meaningful way to pause, make a wish or set an intention, and take part in a tradition that is such an integral part of Bhutanese life.

Chimi Lhakhang: This afternoon we visit Chimi Lhakhang, the temple associated with the irreverent 15th-century Buddhist master Drukpa Kunley, popularly known as the Divine Madman. He challenged conventional ideas about how enlightenment should be pursued, using humour, sexuality and outrageous behaviour as part of his teachings. The temple is particularly associated with fertility, and the phallic imagery found throughout Bhutan can be understood within this wider cultural and religious context – as a symbol of fertility, prosperity and protection from negative forces.

Stay: Raè by Zhiwaling, Punakha (Deluxe Room) | Meals included: Breakfast | Elevation: 1,500m



KHAMSUM YULLEY NAMGYAL CHORTEN, PUNAKHA

Raè by Zhiwaling, Punakha

Opening in October 2026, this new boutique hotel offers a peaceful retreat in the fertile Punakha Valley, surrounded by Bhutan's dramatic mountain landscape. Its design combines contemporary comfort with natural materials and elements inspired by traditional Bhutanese architecture, creating a relaxed and considered sense of place.

DAY 6 • 18 May | Sacred architecture of Punakha

Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chörten: A beautiful walk through the countryside this morning to reach the Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chörten, commissioned by the Queen Mother, Ashi Tshering Yangdon Wangchuck. Built to protect the kingdom and its people from negative forces, the chörten is a fine example of Bhutanese sacred architecture. Its elaborate paintings and sculptures reveal the visual complexity of Vajrayana Buddhism, with layers of symbolism embedded into every level.

Punakha Dzong: This afternoon we visit Punakha Dzong. Set dramatically at the confluence of two rivers, its monumental whitewashed walls, intricate timber work, elegant courtyards and richly painted interiors make this a masterpiece of Bhutanese architecture. Within its sacred spaces, beautiful Buddhist and Tantric imagery creates a powerful dialogue between art, spirituality and place.

Stay: *Raè by Zhiwaling, Punakha (Deluxe Room)* | *Meals included: Breakfast* | *Elevation: 1,500m*

DAY 7 • 19 May | Punakha to Paro

This morning we drive to Paro (approximately 3 hours 10 minutes).

Paro Museum: A visit to the National Museum of Bhutan, housed in a historic dzong above Paro. The museum's collections span Bhutanese art, religious objects, textiles, weapons, and household objects, offering another opportunity to look at Bhutan through its material culture – to see how belief, craftsmanship and everyday life have informed one another over centuries.

Paro Dzong: We continue to Rinpung Dzong, one of the most impressive examples of Bhutanese architecture in the Paro Valley. Great whitewashed walls, timber galleries and richly decorated interiors are characteristic of Bhutanese architecture, yet each dzong is designed in response to its landscape and purpose, giving it a distinct sense of place.

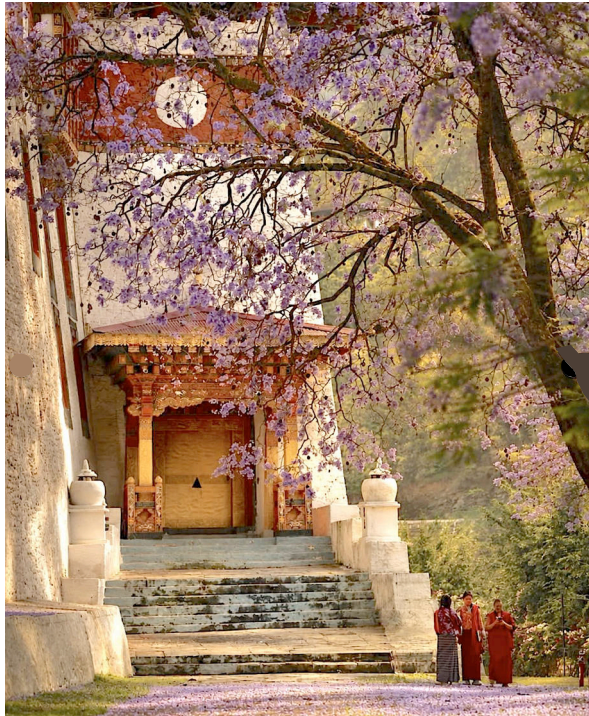
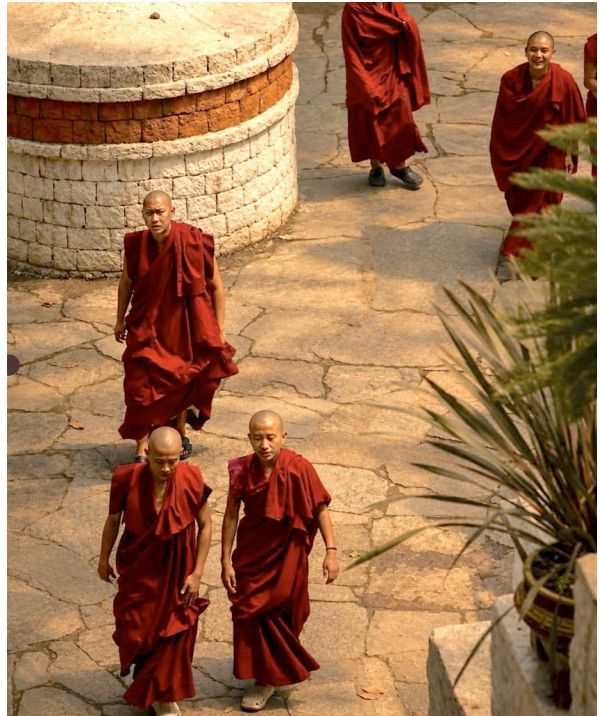
Stay: *Zhiwaling Heritage, Paro (Junior Suite)* | *Meals included: Breakfast* | *Elevation: 2,200m*

Zhiwaling Heritage, Paro

Designed in the style of Bhutan's historic dzongs and wholly Bhutanese owned and staffed, Zhiwaling Heritage combines traditional craftsmanship, warm hospitality and contemporary comfort. Set within 12 acres of gardens and forest in the Paro Valley, the hotel is an ideal base for exploring the valley's temples and monasteries. At its heart is a beautiful temple built from reclaimed timber from historic Gangtey Monastery, adding a particularly meaningful connection to Bhutan's architectural heritage.

DAY 8 • 20 May | Tiger's Nest: Bhutan's most sacred pilgrimage

Tiger's Nest: Clinging dramatically to a cliff face high above the Paro Valley, Taktshang, or Tiger's Nest, is one of Bhutan's most iconic sacred sites. Guru Rinpoche, the 8th-century Buddhist master credited with bringing Buddhism to Bhutan, arrived here on the back of a flying tigress and meditated in a cave on the mountainside.



PUNAKHA DZONG | TEMPLE MURALS

The walk to Taktsang is as much a part of the experience as the monastery itself. The trail winds through pine forest, across stepped inclines and flatter paths, with prayer flags fluttering in the mountain air. The monastery appears and disappears between the trees, gradually revealing itself as you climb. It is a long rather than technically difficult walk, although there are some steep sections and, towards the end, a series of staircases that descend before climbing again to reach the monastery.

Nicole's Note ~

One of the things I particularly love about the walk is sharing the trail with Bhutanese pilgrims, many dressed in their finest traditional clothing. A visit to Taktsang is an important spiritual experience, and Bhutanese people are encouraged to make the journey at least once in their lives.

We will take things slowly and steadily, allowing plenty of time to soak in the sacred atmosphere once we reach the monastery. The complex of temples and meditation caves is built around the sacred cave where Guru Rinpoche is believed to have meditated, with richly painted interiors filled with vivid Buddhist and Tantric imagery. Phones and cameras are not permitted inside, allowing the experience to remain focused on this remarkable place of pilgrimage.

It is a fitting culmination to our journey through Bhutan, a place where landscape, spirituality, art and architecture come together in an extraordinary setting.

Stay: *Zhivaling Heritage, Paro (Junior Suite) | Meals included: Breakfast, Farewell Dinner*
Elevation: 2,200m

DAY 9 • 21 May | Departure

Enjoy a relaxed final morning before checking out of the hotel at noon, marking the end of our tour.

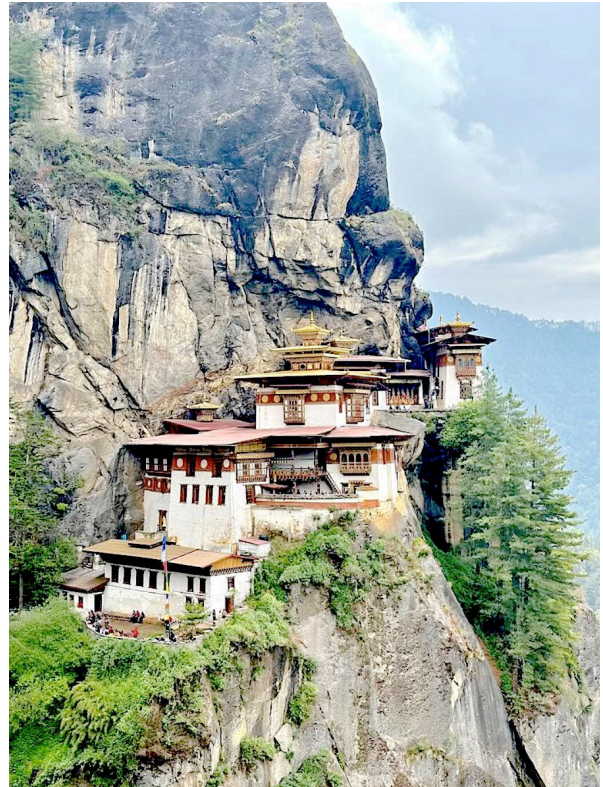
Your airport transfer to Paro International Airport is included in the tour cost.

Please refer to Drukair's current flight schedule when planning your onward travel. Direct flights from Paro currently include, but are not limited to:

- Bangkok
- Singapore
- Dubai
- Kathmandu

You may wish to extend your time in Bhutan, return to Kathmandu, or continue your journey via Bangkok or Dubai.

Meals: *Breakfast*



PARO | CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BOYS WEARING THE TRADITIONAL KHO;
TAKTSANG (TIGER'S NEST); TRADITIONAL DANCERS; THE WALK TO TIGER'S NEST

TOUR DETAILS

How to Reserve Your Place

To reserve your place on this journey, please request a Booking Form (including Terms & Conditions) by emailing:

nicole@nicolecourt.com.au

To confirm your booking:

- Complete and return the Booking Form.
- Pay the AUD \$1,000 deposit.

To enable this journey to proceed, a minimum of eight bookings must be received by 6 January 2027. Once confirmed, bookings will remain open, subject to availability.

Payment Schedule (all prices are in Australian Dollars)

At the time of booking

- AUD \$1,000 deposit

6 January 2027

- Additional payment due, bringing your total payments to 25% of the tour price

6 February 2027

- Final balance (75%) due

Later Bookings:

Bookings received after 6 January 2027

- 25% of the tour price is payable at the time of booking.

Bookings received after 6 February 2027

- Full payment is required at the time of booking.

Tour Dates

Design Tour to Kathmandu and Bhutan

13-21 May 2027

What's Included

- 8 nights' accommodation in carefully selected hotels
- All meals as outlined in the itinerary
- Airport arrival and departure transfers
- Ground transport in air-conditioned vehicles with experienced drivers
- Economy airfare from Kathmandu to Paro (including 30kg checked baggage and 5kg of hand luggage)
- Visa for Nepal
- Visa for Bhutan
- Bhutan's Sustainable Development Fee of US \$100 per day
- Complimentary bottled or filtered water throughout the journey

What's Included (continued)

- Tour leadership by Nicole Court, together with full support from our accompanying Nepalese and Bhutanese tour managers
 - Specialist local guides at key destinations
 - Entrance fees, monument charges, taxes and gratuities
 - 24-hour support from our expert Nepalese and Bhutanese travel teams
-

What's Not Included

- International airfares (except the flight from Kathmandu to Paro which is included in the tour cost)
 - Meals not specified in the itinerary
 - Alcoholic beverages
 - Visa costs
 - Comprehensive travel and health insurance (mandatory)
 - Medical expenses
 - Costs arising from voluntary or unavoidable itinerary changes
 - Personal expenses (including laundry, snacks, telephone calls and internet)
 - Video camera fees at certain museums and heritage sites
-

Cancellation Policy

Should you need to cancel your booking, please notify me by email.

- Before 6 January 2027 – the AUD \$1,000 deposit is non-refundable.
 - Between 6 January and 6 February 2027 – 25% of the tour price is payable.
 - From 6 February 2027 – 100% cancellation applies.
-

Tour Confirmation

This journey requires a minimum of eight guests to proceed.

Please wait until you receive written confirmation before booking your international flights (or ensure your flights are fully refundable).

Should minimum numbers not be reached by 6 January 2027, you will be advised on 7 January 2027. At that time, the tour may either:

- proceed at a revised cost; or
- be cancelled.

Should the tour be re-costed, you may either accept the revised price or cancel your booking within one day of notification.

If the tour is cancelled – or you choose not to proceed with a revised price – you may elect to receive either:

- a full refund of all monies paid (including your deposit), or
- a credit towards a future journey.

Refunds will be processed within five business days.

Medical Assistance

All hotels have access to on-call medical assistance should it be required.

Dietary Requirements

Dietary requirements can usually be accommodated. Please advise me at the time of booking so arrangements can be made in advance.

Flexibility

Every effort has been made to deliver the itinerary exactly as described. However, travel in Kathmandu and Bhutan occasionally requires minor adjustments. Should an activity need to move to another day, or a site unexpectedly close, an alternative experience of equal interest and quality will be arranged.



IN BHUTAN, ASTROLOGY IS TAKEN VERY SERIOUSLY – A READING WITH A BUDDHIST MONK
CAN BE ARRANGED AT A PRIVATE TEMPLE IN PARO

BEFORE YOU GO

Packing & Travel Tips

Dressing for different temperatures

Kathmandu is typically around 28°C during the day and 15°C at night in May. In Bhutan, temperatures vary considerably with altitude, with daytime temperatures generally around 18°C and nights around 4°C in the valleys we visit. Mountain weather can be changeable, and recent May conditions have been cooler than usual – in May 2026, temperatures averaged around 8°C during the day and -2°C at night. Layering is key. I also recommend dressing conservatively throughout the journey, particularly when visiting temples and monasteries. I tend to avoid sleeveless tops and shorts and carry a light scarf or shawl for additional coverage when needed.

Shoes

If you are planning to bring white trainers, leather is a better choice than canvas as they are much easier to clean.

Altitude

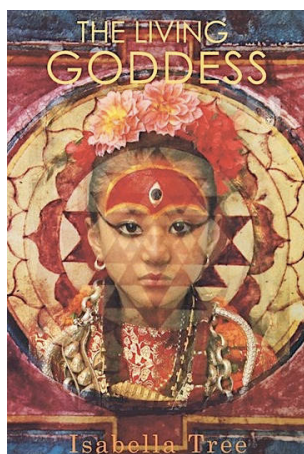
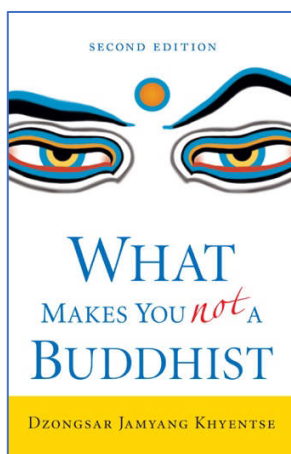
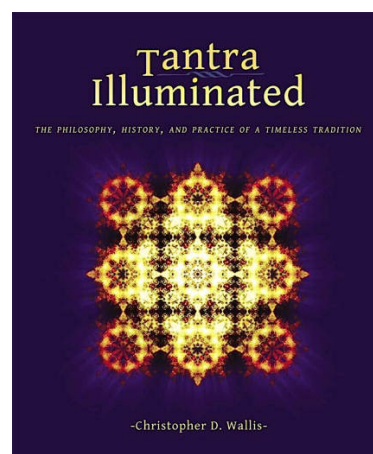
I live at sea level and am quite sensitive to altitude, so I have deliberately planned the itinerary to keep the overall altitude as low as possible, without compromising the experiences that make this journey so special. I know from experience that elevations of 3,500 metres and above are challenging for me. I feel completely normal in Kathmandu and Punakha, at around 1,400 metres. I still feel good at 2,200 metres in Paro and 2,400 metres in Thimphu, although I notice that I am slightly “out of puff” when climbing stairs and my appetite is a little reduced. Although these are relatively low altitudes for this part of the world, we will still take things gently as we move to the higher elevations. On our final full day, we will walk to Taktshang (Tiger’s Nest), taking it slowly and stopping to rest along the way. By then, we will have had several days to gradually adjust to the altitude. In the months before the tour, I like to do regular 30–60 minute walks three to six days a week, which I find helps my body adjust to being at altitude.

Refillable Water Bottle

Please bring a reusable water bottle. Bottled water will also be available throughout the journey, while filtered drinking water is available at each hotel for refilling. Using a refillable bottle helps reduce single-use plastic. I refill mine each morning before we leave the hotel and carry a small bottle brush so I can give it a thorough clean every few days.

Recommended Reading

- *The Living Goddess: A Journey into the Heart of Kathmandu* by Isabella Tree (a fascinating read!)
- *What Makes You not a Buddhist* by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse
- *Tantra Illuminated* by Christopher D. Wallis



TESTIMONIALS

I HAVE NOW DONE TWO TOURS WITH NICKY. Two unforgettable, wow every single day, in fact, often multiple times a day, wow! moments. It was evident from the moment I landed in Delhi, warmly greeted, walked through the airport, onto a waiting bus and into the comfort of the first of many beautiful hotels. All the way through to the moment I flew out again, filled to the brim with awe and delight.

Every single detail of the tour was thoughtfully curated. Nicky is a natural curator. Her attention to detail. Her love of all things India. Her passion for authentic human experiences all shine through with grace and love. Yes, love. I feel spoilt by my two incredible tours through India with Nicky. I'm not sure there is any other way to do it now!

Sally, Sydney

NICOLE COURT'S DESIGN TOUR WAS A LUXURY TRAVEL EXPERIENCE THAT CANNOT BE MATCHED. Travelling with my sister, for my 50th birthday present, this tour was a complete success for me; the places we travelled to, the experiences that were curated and timed perfectly to build up our understanding of this complex and wonderful and diverse culture and place. I experienced utter beauty and fulfillment in many forms, be it the world class hotels, food or seamlessly planned activities.

Mostly it was a wonderful human experience, feeling safe and totally cared for, allowed me to confidently explore this foreign country, supported and connected to both Nicky and our guides, and finding new connections with a fantastic tour group that have ensured I have some wonderful new friends for life. I cannot recommend Nicole Court's Design Tours highly enough.

Jacqui Williams, Perth

THE METICULOUS PLANNING OF THE DESIGN TOUR TO INDIA, the attention to detail, lovely surprises along the way, and our extremely knowledgeable guides all made this experience incredibly enlightening, where history, creativity and spirituality entwine, an unforgettable adventure for anyone passionate about design, textiles and architecture.

Spice scents, tiles, saris, hand-painted walls, incense, etched glass, hand-blocked prints, and temple bells have left an indelible mark on my soul. I feel completely spoilt and privileged to have been. It far exceeded all my expectations. I would go again in a heartbeat with Nicole and the team. Highly recommended. A huge thank you. Heart open.

Suzanne Maher, Bellingen NSW

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR THE MOST MAGICAL AND AMAZING TRIP. We were so well looked after at every moment and felt so safe, secure and well supported. Mum is still buzzing from the trip and her face lights up when people ask her about it. I've made us a photo book and she's showing everyone. Such great memories for us both to treasure.

It was also really special to spend time with you and watch you work and weave your magic. You have a real gift for what you do and you always operate with such grace, authenticity and a real sense of ease and calm. And fun!! So many giggles and so much fun. I can really feel the love in what you do - even though I know it's not always as easy as you make it look.

Lara Esden, Sydney

TESTIMONIALS (CONTINUED)

I'VE BEEN TO NORTH INDIA TWICE BEFORE, but doing a tour with Nicky Court on her Design Tour is by FAR the best way to see India. You see the best of the best along with the chaos, but knowing you are safe and well taken care of. Just sit back and trust! There was something wonderful in every day along with pleasant surprises. We saw the most unique places, beautiful palaces, tombs, and ruins along with how the masses live on the streets, compatibly with cows, dogs, elephants, camels, donkeys, goats, sheep, bicycles, rickshaws, tuk-tuks, motor bikes, cars, buses, and trucks. The two most challenging components are the air and water quality but that faded as we basked in the glow of all that was so wonderful!!

MJ, Sydney

FROM THE EXTRAORDINARY STEPWELLS IN AHMEDABAD, to the spotted leopard spotting, the textile exhibitions and the fabulous palaces of Rajasthan, the India tour was full of surprises and “wow” moments. Along the way the accommodation was superb and the company great fun. Nicky and her team went to no end of trouble to ensure everything went smoothly and that we got the most out of all our visits. Grateful for the opportunity to learn so much about Indian architecture and culture from our expert guides. Highly recommended!

Anne W, Sydney

- What would you do again: All of it
- Funniest moment: Hooning around in tuk-tuks wherever we were
- Favourite hotels: RAAS Jodhpur, RAAS Chhatrasagar and Samode Haveli, Jaipur
- Best meal: The food everywhere was amazing, but it was also about the gin and tonic
- Most enjoyable experience: The colours and the textiles (especially the Calico Museum and the Anokhi Museum), architecture in Ahmedabad, the leopard adventure, the stepwell dinner, bird watching on the lake, palace visits, and the shopping in Jaipur!!

Sarah Ogilvie, Melbourne

IT WAS AN AMAZING TRIP and I would recommend it to other Kiwis and Aussies – I feel that it was the right balance for us and Nicky knows what we want. Going in the winter is highly recommended. The trip was well run and organised. All the hotels were good. Highly recommend this trip to anyone wanting an informative trip to India with no hassles.

Michelle, New Zealand

NICKY TOOK US ALL ON A MAGIC CARPET RIDE through Calcutta and India's North-East on her Design Tour. I have been to India many times, and I have been on a lot of group tours – this was one of the best I have experienced. Nicky was a great host and showed us things we would never have discovered ourselves, in a less travelled part of India.

Susan B, Sydney

TRAVELLING WITH “DIETARY REQUIREMENTS” was not a problem with Nicky as our leader. She ensured that all our accommodation chefs were warned in advance and I never ever had an upset stomach. This is a small example of the attention to detail and care Nicky takes in planning her tours. Not to mention the wonderful places and people we saw, and accommodation we stayed in. I highly recommend Nicky's Design Tour.

Karen Robinson, Sydney

TESTIMONIALS (CONTINUED)

I'VE RECENTLY RETURNED FROM INDIA and was fortunate enough to be part of Nicky Court's Design Tour. As I was travelling alone, I did have some reservations about how I would manage, never having been to India before and being a little nervous in unfamiliar places. Fortunately, everything was taken care of with thoughtfulness and care.

From the moment I alighted the plane until the moment I boarded to return home everything was looked after. The detail of what we did down to where the next clean bathroom would be, were all taken care of.

I enjoyed hearing about the history of beautiful buildings. We experienced delicious meals in beautiful locations, from a Mughal-inspired garden to a step well, lit with hundreds of candles.

The timing of our glamping in the beautiful wilderness park was impeccable. After a week of taking in so much history, culture and horns beeping it was lovely to enjoy the solitude and see the stars.

Nicky is a kind and gracious woman whose care for others made the trip what it was. Her humbleness and willingness to help with any issue made everything seamless and stress free for the guests. Her knowledge and cultural insight was fantastic and we were well informed throughout the trip, much has stayed with me as I've settled back into life at home.

Thank you for everything, I would highly recommend any trip to India that Nicky would organise.

Carla M, Sydney

MY TRIP TO INDIA with Nicole Court was just magical. Her knowledge and care and kindness for us all was outstanding. I have been to India many times but never like this. A small group of like-minded travellers, some were travelling to India for the first time. Everything was organised so it was hassle free. At times India can overwhelm but there was a great mix of excursions and relaxation. We stayed in luxury small hotels and palaces which were divine. I cannot recommend this trip highly enough or India. India's people, culture, customs are intoxicating and with Nicole you are immersed fully. Thank you so much.

Denise Wright, Melbourne

NICOLE'S INTRICATE DETAILED ITINERARY allowed us the privilege of experiencing unique insights into the personal lives of those connected to art and culture. Traversing through the backstreets, inhaling the flower market scenes, witnessing artisans at work... Nicole certainly gets the balance right: exploring and seeing the essence of each place, as well as having some peaceful times in nature. Nicole and her "on-ground" experienced network gave us a sense of inclusiveness and fine hospitality. Indeed, trust is the word to have as one's mantra, allowing the serendipitous adventure to unfold.

Jane Grossberg, Sydney

I HAVE COME BACK TO EARTH AFTER THE WONDERFUL TRIP YOU ORGANISED FOR US. I feel privileged to have travelled with you in such an understated and interesting way, just how I like it. We could never have envisaged an itinerary like that so thank you.

You did it all with calm efficiency. Aditya was very kind and helpful to us. And the driver, what a man, not a worrying moment as he weaved his way amongst all that life along the roads.

Sophie Wilson, Sydney

TESTIMONIALS (CONTINUED)

THANK YOU FOR AN AMAZING TRIP. You curated an incredible experience for us and while I'm still processing India, all of the details that made our trip comfortable were taken care of by you..

I have never stayed in such magnificent accommodations. And I know you put a lot of time and effort into your choices.

It was wonderful to be met at the airport in Delhi and whisked through customs. I loved meeting and learning from the local vendors you took us to, and your restaurant choices were spot on. You and your on-the-ground team were delightful and I enjoyed learning about Rajasthan from all of you. There did not seem to be any detail overlooked.

You are a great tour guide because you solicit input and listen to those who have toured with you. You also have an infectious love of India which transfers to those fortunate enough to be on a tour with you!

Your attention to detail and the thoughtful planning of all we did was not lost on me and, although India stretched me in many ways, I thoroughly enjoyed seeing it through your eyes. The history, the colour, the people, were all things I loved seeing. I know you put in countless hours planning and it showed.

I would highly recommend your trips to anyone interested in exploring India with you. Thank you for giving this hesitant traveller to India an incredible experience!

Julie Ogden, Colorado, USA

IT WAS SUCH A SPECIAL EXPERIENCE! You designed an incredible experience for us. What an honour it was to be able to join you!

Teri LeClair, Washington State, USA

I REMEMBER THE FEELINGS OF AMAZEMENT WE EXPERIENCED EVERY DAY as you put more of beautiful Rajasthan, Delhi and Agra before us.

Leanne Geneve, Perth

IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR A SOFT INTRODUCTION TO INDIA THIS MAY BE THE TRIP FOR YOU! Nicole Court's Design Tour to South India is perfectly curated to cover all aspects of the sub-continent with an itinerary that is flexible enough to include spontaneous experiences if they present themselves. Traversing the bottom of India from East to West provides enormous variety of cultures, landscapes and excursions all carefully chosen by Nicky. On our trip, her Operations Manager, Aditya, kept everything running smoothly along with Nicole, both keeping their cool and never ruffled by the occasional hiccup which would present itself...it is India after all!!

Thanks to Nicky and her team you will love everything and come away enlightened. Highly recommended.

Kathie Bridge, Adelaide

THE DESIGN TOUR TO CALCUTTA WAS FABULOUS, as was the group of friends I came away with.

May Clementson, Sydney

TESTIMONIALS (CONTINUED)

THANK YOU FOR A MEMORABLE HOLIDAY. I was conscious (but not too) of the hard work that you put in to make it so. On reflection it is hard to pinpoint single events as all the days were so individually rewarding, rather like a colossal film set on a Cecile B. DeMille scale.

Just riding on the coach with kaleidoscopic images of village and road life was fascinating enough to say nothing of the set pieces which will live in both our memories. To cap it all my scepticism about seeing tigers in the wild (a private childhood fantasy bound up with Jim Corbett) was fully bowled at Panna.

We have done a lot of travel in our lives, at coffee today we both reflected that this trip was right up there and gave some insight into Robin and your fascination with the place.

It is no surprise after absorbing *The Golden Road* that India was a very major influence of cultures East and West well before the birth of Christ and will continue to be. We eschewed our hippy peers all those years ago who left to pay homage and I take all that back.

I acknowledge how much personal insight, attention to detail, romance and good taste that endowed this trip, thank you for allowing us to share it.

Tim Wilson, Sydney

ALL I CAN THINK ABOUT IS THE NEXT TOUR I WILL DO WITH NICOLE COURT. I don't think there is any better recommendation for a travel experience than that. I have just returned from her Design & Architectural Tour of Southern India and am still processing all the amazing places and experiences, and, of course, the several thousand photographs I took along the way.

As a first timer in India, it was incredibly reassuring to be guided by Nicole and her outstanding team of local experts. Every detail was thoughtfully handled, from the beautiful hotels, delicious meals, seamless transportation, unforgettable excursions and visits with remarkable artisans. She also shared tips on shopping, spa treatments, and much more. But as Nicole says, you do have to leave room for the unexpected in India, and those were the magical things that can't be pre-planned but give such joy.

Each day was a completely new experience and feast for the senses. I totally fell under India's spell and that is entirely due to Nicole's ability to lead us to the best southern India has to offer. People keep asking me for my top three highlights, but that's impossible – every single day was full of them.

Laura Reid, Sydney

OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS, I HAVE THOUGHT OF YOU OFTEN AND OUR WONDERFUL SRI LANKAN EXPERIENCE. It was a great trip. Brilliantly designed and executed (and obviously well researched). I especially loved your cheerful competence. So nice to be around. Very special trip indeed.

Vicki Craig, Sydney



TASTES OF KATHMANDU | CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MASALA CHAI; JUJU DHAU (BUFFALO CURD);
YOMARI WITH A SWEET SESAME FILLING; NICOLE DRINKING CHAI; MOMOS (DUMPLINGS)