

Basic Itinerary for Transformational Tour to Dharamsala and India, 2-18 January 2007

Dear Friends and Dharma Travellers, Tashi Deleg

In less than six months we will be in one of the world's most amazing societies, 2 kilometres up in the sky nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas – the great spiritual mountain range and backbone of the continent of Asia. Many amazing societies with deep wisdom and spiritual knowledge have graced this planet; we have partial records of some. There is however one that exists and thrives in the world today, despite having been persecuted and thrown out of its homeland. Tibet is a living culture of deep wisdom and grace. To walk among the streets of this spiritually centred society, sit within their temples and speak with the monks and lay people as a brother/sister is far more powerful than any book or once lost yet newly found manuscript can ever portray. We will be immersing ourselves in a living culture of legendary and very real value.

Be prepared for flexibility within the itinerary. A spiritually advanced society, like this, lives far more in the present moment and unexpected meetings and synchronicities can happen. His Holiness the Dalai Lama might arrange an unexpected not to be missed teaching or His Holiness Karmapa may be called South on an urgent mission. What I have found on these journeys is that travelling with an open heart and calm yet inquisitive mind surrounded by a compassionate and friendly nature leads to just the transformational experiences the individual and group requires. Know this we will get exactly the experiences our actions (past and recent) dictate and that are perfect for our soul's unfoldment. Your companions on the journey will not be a random mix of people nor will the Indians and Tibetans we connect with, the recipe will be perfectly orchestrated by the divine, so enjoy the spiritual, environmental and cultural feast that we will share together; a smorgasbord of spirit and lives lived well. This journey is inspired to inspire you.

Allow for flexibility in the following, particularly whilst in Dharamsala/Mcleod Ganj we will almost certainly not do the activities in the order of days set out. Some of the paces listed may be changed due to a better option at short notice or an unexpected change (eg a special ceremony taking place or a Lama called away). Whilst in Dharamsala, group members are welcome to do their own thing any chosen day with the understanding that they let the tour leader (me) know in advance of the stipulated meeting time for the days activities (even if it is just a few minutes prior). Below is a guide and intention for our adventures day by day:

02nd Jan: **Fly out from Australia**, most cities have an early start. We meet at the airport lounge in Singapore and fly to Delhi on the same flight. We **arrive into Delhi**

at 9pm and will be transferred to the Connaught Hotel for a well earned rest and our first night in India.

03rd Jan: We will have a leisurely breakfast and some time to meet our travelling companions (family) before setting off for a half day soaking up the **sites of Delhi**. Our sightseeing tour will finish at the Delhi to Dharamsala coach depot where we will board the bus to Little Lhasa. We will have a luxury air-conditioned coach for the action **packed overnight bus to Dharamsala**. With the anticipation of where we are going and the hubbub on the roads sleep may be in scant supply.

04th Jan: Will **arrive into Mcleod Ganj** (Mcleod Ganj and Dharamsala are pretty much one town these days – Dharamsala lying just to the South of Mcleod Ganj, where His Holiness Dalai Lama had his residence. Mcleod Ganj is the home of the Tibetan Government in Exile.) early in the morning in varying states of rest. We will transfer to our hotel, most likely the Tibetan styled Pemathang House. The remainder of the day will be spent settling into Little Lhasa, soaking up the general atmosphere and getting used to 0 degree temperatures and 1900m elevation (1900m is equivalent to near the top of Kosciusko– you can perhaps feel the thinner air and lesser pressure, yet no need to acclimatise, around 3000m we start to have those considerations), about the same altitude as Johannesburg.

05th Jan: Gentle sightseeing around **Mcleod Ganj**, seeing people going about their daily prayers and duties. Walking around temples and gardens hoping to spot a Rinpoche. Chatting with locals and monks over some butter tea and gathering as a group.

06th Jan: **Gyuto Monastery and the Karmapa**: His Holiness 17th Karmapa is the leader of the Kagyu school of Tibetan. Now 21 years old, Karmapa fled Tibet at the age of 14 (in 1999) from his monastery home of Tsurpu to be with His Holiness Dalai Lama in Dharamsala. He is the 17th incarnation and the head of a lineage predating the Dalai Lama's. Most people I have spoken with who have been in Karmapa's presence find His energy awe inspiring. Check out the following link <http://www.karmapa.net/>.

07th Jan: **Tibetan Children's Village (TCV)** (<http://www.tcv.org.in/>) and **Dolmaling Nunnery**. Both institutions are a short drive from town. We will take a minibus to visit these two places. The TCV will be heart warming and I really enjoy sitting with Tibetan Nuns. The feel of the nunneries can be quite different from the monasteries. This is a great opportunity to meet your sponsored child (they may be at school) or nun – or find someone whose board and education you can sponsor on your return.

08th and 09th Jan: **Trekking**. We are planning two day treks. Both will be quite gentle, around 9/10 kilometres and about 7 hours in total. We will have a guide and a packed lunch. Bring a good raincoat or goretex jacket, gloves, scarf, thermal layers, walking boots (I wear mine around town, due to the uneven pavements), thick socks and a woolly hat. Comfort is all important on short treks! You can buy cheap walking sticks in town if you need to. It is better than bringing one from home that may get bent in the aeroplane hold – unless you have an old favourite that goes everywhere with you. A stick is a good idea as part of the way will require walking through gentle snow.

This is not a trekking tour. It is very much about soaking up the Tibetan culture and ambiance, however some days spent being physical and in nature are vital components of any trip. We will visit sacred places on the trekking days to add a component of pilgrimage to our journey.

Trek 1: To Mount Elaka and the village of **Triund**. Very beautiful views and passing through mountain villages in the foothills of the Himalaya.

Trek 2: **Guna Devi Mata Temple**, a Hindu Temple.

10th Jan: **Norbulingka Institute** (<http://www.norbulingka.org/>).

Named after the Dalai Lama's Summer Palace in Lhasa, Tibet and situated next to His Holiness' residence in Dharamsala; the Norbulingka Institute is dedicated to the preservation of Tibetan culture in literary and artistic form. A museum, gallery and workshop combined.

11th Jan: **Mentsikhang** (Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute)

(<http://www.tibetan-medicine.org/>) and Nechung Monastery (home of the Tibetan State Oracle).

Tibetan medicine is a complete system using herbs, acupuncture, yoga and many techniques. The patient's astrological data is used to determine whether the complaint is karmic in nature amongst other details. We will have a lecture and tour of the facilities.

12th Jan: **Tushita Meditation Centre**. Tushita is the name of a Buddhist heavenly abode. This centre was founded by Lama Yeshe Rinpoche, who founded the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Teachings (FPMT) that has centres all around the Western World, Lama Zopa Rinpoche is the current spiritual leader of the organization.

13th Jan: **Tibetan Institute for the Performing Arts** (TIPA).

<http://www.tibetanarts.org/>

Tibetan opera is fantastic, lively and colourful. And for more light hearted shows; the Yak dance is not to be missed, it is hilarious.

Depending on availability we will see a show. A great way to complete our stay in Little Lhasa.

14th Jan: Early morning departure to Dhera Dun, a long **and scenic bus ride** guaranteed to make your heart and imagination soar and your bum numb. We will arrive into **Dehra Dun** at dark and ready for a hot cuppa and a good night sleep.

15th Jan: **Drikung Kagyu Monastery** (<http://www.dkinstitute.org/>). This is the part of the itinerary that sung out to me in dreams. The DVD “Yogis of Tibet” features some of the high Lamas at this monastery. It is a beautiful place. I am awaiting a response from the Monastery officials as to our visit here. At the very least we will have a good look round. Dehra Dun is also the home of one of my non-Buddhist teachers, Sri Shivarudrabalayogi or Babaji (<http://www.shivarudrabalayogi.com/index.html>). Dehra Dun will be a wonderful place for us to assimilate all that has happened whilst in the Himalayas.

16th Jan/17th Jan: Depending on our itinerary in **Dehra Dun** we will either drive back to Delhi (about 7/8 hours) and spend the night there followed by a relaxing day in, **Delhi** the Indian Capital, before flying out on the evening of the 17th. Or we will spend an extra night in Dehra Dun and drive directly to Delhi airport arriving in plenty of time to get the **flight home**.

18th Jan: Arrive into **Australia**. Perth people will touch down around 2pm, East Coasters; in the evening.

Tour Includes:

Return international airfare (on Singapore Airlines).
Twin share accommodation throughout the tour (breakfast included in Delhi and Dharamsala).
Airport Transfers in Ac Bus & Half Day Sight Seeing in Delhi in Ac Bus
Luxury Bus tickets to Dharamsala
3 Day Full Sight Seeing in Dharamsala minibus
2 Day Trek with Guide & Lunch (01 Day each)
1 Hour Tibetan Cultural Show at the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (Depending upon availability)
Bus to Dhera Dun

Tour Excludes:

Spending money
Meals except most breakfasts

Drinking water (bring filter and/or buy bottled water)
Entrance Fee / Monument / Temple (maximum if \$5US per person per place)
Travel Insurance
Indian visa costs

Tour Price:

The prices differ due to the airfares. Flying from:

Perth \$4250

Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide \$4490

Canberra – requires connecting flight to Sydney. Please either make your own arrangements to get to either Sydney or Melbourne or contact me for extra costs (requires additional flight and overnight stay – possible easier to drive to Sydney).

I require a deposit of \$1000 per person to be paid by 31 August 2006. A further \$1500 by 15 October and then the balance by 1 December this year. Please send me a cheque or money order made out to “Vacation World” to arrive before each of these dates. Alternatively you can pay the balance in full. Payment by bank deposit or transfer is also possible or by credit card can be arranged. The latter incurring an additional fee of 2% for Visa/Bankcard/Mastercard and 4% for Amex.

What to Bring:

- 1) You will require a passport valid for at least six months from our arrival in India (so not due for renewal before August 2007) and an Indian tourist visa. Visa's can be obtained direct with an Indian consulate, through many travel agency or through us.
http://www.indiaoz.com.au/travel/travel_viscust.shtml contains visa forms and details of Indian Consulates.
- 2) Travel insurance. It is a requirement of the tour that you have valid travel insurance. You can arrange this yourself or through me. If we all have the same policy, through the same company it makes things easier if we are required to make a claim, for example in the event of our flight being delayed for a day; we will only require to telephone one company to arrange accommodation cover – as opposed to telephoning multiple insurance companies. However this is only one consideration. You may receive a discount or preference to a particular institution. The company I use is Covermore, I have found them excellent. It will cost \$177 per person with Covermore's top level of cover, without cover for non-included conditions.
- 3) Money. About \$US500 should be enough for your, food, water and entry fee spending and a few souvenirs. If you like to buy a lot of souvenirs and have an expensive appetite you will need a little more. I normally carry \$US500 cash and \$US500 in travellers cheques. Cash is more readily changeable and

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- US dollars by far the easiest currency. Euro is good too. Most places you can change Aussie dollars, if you choose to bring Aussie dollars have some US at least.
- 4) Donations and offerings. It is custom and cultivates good merit to offer money at statues, shrines and monasteries. This can be pocket change or major donation depending on your means and intention. \$50 would not be unreasonable to offer during the tour.
 - 5) Tips. We don't have a Tibetan or Indian guide with us for the whole trip but we will do for some periods (eg the treks and some tours). If they have given you good service, showing your appreciation with a tip is a very good idea.
 - 6) Camera, film and batteries. Some people like to journey and see the land they are visiting without the distraction of taking photographs. If you are of the other persuasion I recommend bringing plenty of spare batteries (cold reduces the life) and plenty of spare rolls of film or memory cards. It is easy to take many more pictures than you thought and the exact film you want might not be available or more expensive in remote areas.
 - 7) Snacks. Bring some of your favourite goodies from home. Not fresh fruit or produces though and they must be unopened when going through quarantine control at either end. I bring nuts and trailmix.
 - 8) Water. Don't drink the water anywhere, even if the waiter says it is okay. Don't eat salad or fruit salad in any but the most expensive palatial restaurants. Buy bottled water (and check the seal – most outlets are reputable, but its always worth checking) or bring a good water filter with you.
 - 9) Bag. A small day back you can sling over your shoulders, to carry your camera, jumper, 2 litres of water and sometimes pack lunch and coat. For your clothing I recommend a big strong hold all, about 60-90 litres. They are easiest to carry and pack into coaches and buses and easy to access your clothes.
 - 10) Warm weather gear. It doesn't rain very much in Dharamsala in January but it probably will rain a few times. During the day it will hover a little above 0 centigrade. I will bring a goretex windproof and waterproof jacket (a ski jacket will work too), under which I can wear layers of fleece jumpers and thermals. Gloves, scarf and beanie. I will bring some sports/walking shoes and a pair of boots plus warm socks. Linen will be provided where we stay but I will bring a very thin sleeping bag (an inner bag with a little down) just in case my room is colder than desired and for snuggling on the bus trips.
 - 11) Clothing. Bring as little as necessary, make sure it is comfortable and simple to wash. I will bring 2/3 pairs of trousers – 2 walking trousers and 1 thick chino/soft jeans that I can get away with looking semi smart. 2 fleeces and 4 or 5 thick t-shirts/long sleeve shirts. We will be able to have washing done so half a dozen of each for socks and undies will keep you fresh. Bring the toiletries you need, don't rely on shops over there. Excessive fragrance is considered a distraction in temples and monasteries – so go easy on the deodorant and cologne.

- 12) An inquisitive, happy and flexible attitude. Itinerary changes can happen at the drop of the hat. You will be the subject of intrigue to some of the locals. Each country and India most of all has its own way of doing things – relax and enjoy the ride even if it is on the other (not wrong) side of the road, that's a big part of why we are going there. Buddha said something to the effect of half of the Dharma is submerging yourself in a foreign culture – the world will reflect many aspects of yourself back to you that you have not seen before – through detached yet active observation you enlighten.
- 13) Money belt. I wear one around my neck, it is waterproof and has room for my passport, airticket and money. I also carry some money elsewhere on my body. Back at the hotel I have a little emergency money and **photocopies** of my passport info page, Indian visa (and Australian if not an Australian or NZ resident), airticket, travel insurance cover note. I have a combination lock on my bag and the photocopies neat and hidden in the bag. I find travelling in Asia by far the safest and have never been robbed, I take sensible precautions and this is my backup plan to save hassles in the event of losing my documents – I always aim not to lose them, that's the best way.

I look forward to travelling with each of you. This is a journey I have planned and dreamt of for many a year and I am honoured to be sharing it with each and every one of you.

Best wishes

Jeremy Ball
Transformational Tours