

# **BHUTAN 2025**

## **OTUS ASIO TOURS**

**APRIL 2-19, 2025**



*Blood Pheasant* by Leio De Souza

*Our comprehensive tour of the fascinating Kingdom of Bhutan takes us through the most intact natural habitat in the Himalayan range to experience what has long been considered the epitome of Himalayan birding. We will explore a cross-section of elevations in this bird-rich environment, from remarkably intact foothill forests, magnificent moss-draped mid-altitude forests, alpine meadows and a series of high mountain passes decorated with prayer flags. We will visit in late spring, when temperatures are comfortable at all altitudes and many species associate in mixed feeding flocks. We will be looking for some of the most enticing birds to inhabit the Eastern Himalayas, stunners such as Satyr Tragopan, Himalayan Monal, Blood Pheasant, Ward's Trogon, Himalayan Cutia, Fire-tailed Myzornis, White-bellied Heron, Ibisbill, an incredible selection of scimitar-babblers, wren-babblers, thrushes, flycatchers, warblers and tits, and mammals including the endemic Golden Langur, all against a backdrop of the high Himalayas punctuated by colorful Buddhist stupas and imposing royal palaces.*

## **TOUR HIGHLIGHTS**

A superb birding destination with a rich and exciting birdlife dominated by Himalayan specialities

plan on 350 species of birds including Beautiful Nuthatch, Himalayan Cutia, five species of sunbirds, seven parrotbills, enigmatic Himalayan skulkers including six wren-babblers and cupwings, six scimitar-babblers, and 15 species of laughingthrush

Several regional specialities of the Eastern Himalayas Endemic Bird Area including Ward's Trogon, Brown-throated Fulvetta, White-naped Yuhina, Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler, Hoary-throated Barwing, and Rusty-bellied Shortwing.

Four days along the famed Lingmethang Road, among Asia's finest birding localities, home to a diverse selection of species in fine forest habitats across a range of elevations

Numerous high elevation specialities, such as Spotted Laughingthrush, Fire-tailed Myzornis, Great Parrotbill, White-browed Bush-Robin, Alpine Thrush, Plain Mountain Finch, and Snow Pigeon

Four stunning montane pheasants: Satyr Tragopan, Himalayan Monal, Blood Pheasant, and Kalij Pheasant

Chances to see the world's most endangered heron, the stately White-bellied Heron, plus Ibisbill, Black-tailed Crake, and five species of forktail along mountain streams

A small but enticing selection of mammals including the endemic Golden Langur and delightful Red Panda

Spectacular mountain scenery extending to the snow-capped peaks of the high Himalayas at the Tibetan border

Insight into Bhutanese culture, one of the world's most intact and protected ways of life

## **ITINERARY OVERVIEW**

Day 1: Arrive in Paro and drive to east to Thimphu

Day 2: We drive further east to Punakha via Dochu La; visit Lamperi Botanical Gardens and the Pho Chu River

Day 3: Drive east to Trongsa, birding in varied habitats along the way including some fine forests at Nobding



Fire-tailed Myzomela *by Lokesh Kumar*

Day 4-5: Travel south into remote Zhemgang District to explore broadleaved forests in the foothills around Tingtibi, birding along the Dakphel Road, the Mangdue Chu River, and the Gomphu Road leading to Royal Manas National Park

Day 6: Retrace our steps to Trongsa, travelling onward to Bumthang via Yotong La

Day 7: Travel east to Yongkola, via Thrumsing La and Sengor

Day 8-10: Explore the upper and lower reaches of the famed Lingmethang Road from bases at Yongkola and Sengor

Day 11: Travel west to the Chumey Valley, passing Thrumsing La and the Ura Valley

Day 12: Travel westward and south into the glacial Phobjikha Valley, crossing Pele La and Lawa La

Day 13: Birding along the old road at Pele La, before making our way back to Paro

Day 14: Visit Bhutan's highest motorable pass, Chele La (3,890m) for our final high elevation species

Day 15: Depart Paro

## **TOUR OVERVIEW**

The Kingdom of Bhutan is situated amidst spectacular terrain in the Eastern Himalayas,



Himalayan Monal by Lokesh Kumar

nestled between the plains of northern India and the Tibetan Plateau. Measuring just 100 miles north to south, and 200 miles east to west, Bhutan was isolated for centuries by impassable topography. Today, it is home to one of the world's least disturbed cultures retaining timeless Buddhist beliefs that guard its natural heritage.

Due to their location, the Eastern Himalayas display both temperate Palaearctic and tropical Indo-Malayan climates. This fact, combined with their relative nearness to moisture-laden monsoon winds originating in the Bay of Bengal and a steep elevational gradient, has resulted in a mosaic of fertile habitats and an accompanying diversity of species that make this the richest part of the entire Himalayan range. Bhutan holds the most intact natural habitat remaining across the Himalayas, boasting glorious mountain scenery and superb tracts of bird-rich broad-leaved and subtropical forests.

Our tour begins in Paro, and proceeds southeast, dropping into the lowlands towards the border with India before returning to Bhutan's incredible Lateral Road and into the foothills and mid-elevations of the Eastern Himalayas. In the low plains and valleys of the south we'll explore the humid sub-montane forests of Black Mountain and Royal Manas National Parks around Tingtibi in search of a diverse array of lowland species including Red-headed Trogon, Black-tailed Crake and Gray Peacock-Pheasant. Climbing through the foothills, we will explore bird-rich mid-altitudes around Yongkola, Sengor, and the famed Lingmethang Road. Further north, we'll pass through a series of valleys and high mountain passes hung with prayer flags passing through a rich mosaic of habitats including alpine meadows, magnificent forests of oaks, maples, laurels, magnolias, rhododendrons and at the highest elevations, fir, hemlock and spruce

forests. Throughout our travels we will encounter a host of iconic Eastern Himalayan specialties including gems like Fire-tailed Myzornis, Himalayan Cutia, Beautiful Nuthatch, Ward's Trogon, Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler, and a good selection of laughingthrushes, scimitar-babblers, wren-babblers, parrotbills, shortwings and accentors. At the end of the tour we ascend to Chele La, Bhutan's highest drivable pass, for a chance to find some of the Himalayas spectacular montane pheasants including Satyr Tragopan, Himalayan Monal, and Kalij and Blood Pheasants.

The tour takes place in late spring when temperatures in the hills are no longer at their coldest and before the lowlands become unbearably hot. At this season many species are in mixed feeding flocks, which makes birding in forest areas fast-paced and exciting. Bhutan is the epitome of Himalayan birding and its forests, covering almost two-thirds of the country, are a vital stronghold of Eastern Himalayan species, offering a window into what the Himalayas must once have been. We can reasonably expect to see about 350 species, with many new birds even for those who have previously visited other parts of South Asia. All wildlife is relatively undisturbed here, the result of Bhutan's low population density and the respect for nature inherent in Buddhist culture. This makes birds relatively tolerant of human presence and more approachable than in many parts of Asia. This is also true of the small selection of potential mammals like the endemic Golden Langur and the more secretive Himalayan species like Red Panda and Himalayan Black Bear.

## **DAILY ITINERARY**

**April 2-3, Days 1-2:** Since most flights depart the U.S. late in the evening and arrive in Delhi late the following evening, participants will need to depart the U.S. on April 2 in order to arrive in New Delhi on the evening of April 3. Ultimately everyone will need to be in Delhi by the evening of April 4 as we will take a pre-dawn group flight from Delhi to Paro on the morning of April 5. Night of April 3 in Delhi.

***\*\*All flights to Paro, the capital of Bhutan must be on Drukair, the only carrier that flies in and out of Bhutan. A group flight from Delhi will be included in the tour cost, but if you would prefer not to connect through Delhi, they also have flights into Paro that originate in Bangkok, Singapore and Kathmandu. However, flights from these destinations are far less convenient for the group itinerary, so if you choose to schedule a flight from somewhere other than Delhi you should plan to arrive in Paro on April 4.***

**April 4, Day 3:** Today will be spent in Delhi resting and recovering from the long journey at our hotel near the airport. For those who would like to do some birding, there will be an optional excursion to Sultanpur NP about an hour's drive from the hotel. Sultanpur is a nice combination of woodland and wetland birding and a morning spent there can easily produce 75-90 species. Possibilities would include Yellow-footed Green-Pigeon, Sarus Crane, Black-necked Stork, Spotted Owlet, Asian Green Bee-eater, Black-rumped Flameback, Black Drongo, Rufous Treepie, Ashy Prinia, Large Gray Babbler, Bank Myna, Indian Robin, Red Avadavat, Citrine Wagtail and many more. Night in Delhi.



*Red-headed Trogon* by Leio De Souza

*Rufous-necked Hornbill* by Lokesh Kumar

**April 5, Day 4: Arrival in Paro and transfer to Thimphu:** There is only one flight per day into Paro and as of this writing it departs Delhi at 4:00 AM and arrives in Paro at 6:00 AM. It is a breathtaking flight and must be done in the early morning because weather conditions frequently deteriorate by mid-morning. Once our group has assembled, we will begin the 2-hour drive along the Lateral Road, an extraordinary feat of engineering that bisects the country. We will travel east to Thimphu, the capital of of Bhutan where we will spend the night. Upon arrival we will spend the afternoon birding around the local sewage ponds looking for Ibisbill, which is one of our primary targets. Other birds will include Black-tailed Crake, Brown Dipper, White-capped and Plumbeous Redstarts and perhaps Himalayan Bluetail and Blue Whistling-Thrush. Night in Thimphu.

**April 6, Day 5: Thimphu to Punakha via Dochu La**

We will set out early on the 3-hour drive northeast to the subtropical valley of Punakha for the night. Our route will take us up to Dochu La pass, which at an elevation of 10335 feet permits a spectacular panorama of the Himalayas when clear conditions prevail. As we travel towards the pass the road passes through forests of blue pine, rhododendron and evergreen oak. These forests are home to a many of the Himalayas most sought after species including Fire-tailed Myzornis, Wallcreeper, Gold-naped Finch, Scaly-breasted Cupwing, White-browed and Rufous-breasted Bush-Robins, Black-eared Shrike-Babbler, Dark-rumped and Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinches, Crimson-browed Finch, Maroon-backed Accentor, Lemon-rumped, Ashy-throated and Whistler's Warblers, Gray-headed, Red-headed and Brown Bullfinches and Black-throated Parrotbill. Dochu La is one of the most spectacular sites in Bhutan, with prayer flags in the pines and the high Himalayas as a spectacular backdrop. We will spend the remainder of the day at Punakha birding the Pho Chu Valley. We will begin at Lamperi Botanical Garden looking for Brown Parrotbill, Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, Hoary-throated Barwing, Chestnut-tailed Minla, Blue-fronted and Hodgson's Redstarts and



*Golden Langur by Leio De Souza*

White-browed Fulvetta among others. We will also drive along the Pho Chu River in hopes of finding another of our primary targets, the enigmatic and critically endangered White-bellied Heron. Other notable species here include Pallas's Fish-Eagle, Crested Kingfisher, Ibisbill, Ruddy Shelduck, Bar-headed Goose three species of forktail, Red-headed Trogon, Small and Rufous-bellied Niltavas, Yellow-vented Warbler and Slender-billed Oriole. We may find time for a brief visit to one of the area's cultural treasures known as the 'Palace of Great Bliss'. Built in 1637 between the confluence of the Pho Chu and Mo Chu Rivers, this fortress is one of the most beautiful in the country, and can only be accessed by the world's second longest suspension footbridge. Night in Punakha. Night in Punakha.

#### **April 7, Day 6: Punakha to Trongsa via Nobding**

After breakfast we will begin the five-hour drive to Trongsa. Along the way we will pass through a variety of habitats as we move east along the Lateral Road. As we ascend we will enter an area of broadleaved forests near Nobding. In these forests we will search for three highly prized species, Wards' Trogon, Himalayan Cutia and the elusive Yellow-rumped Honeyguide. The drive will take us through a variety of habitats including bamboo forests, cultivated farmland and scrub will provide plenty of opportunities to stop along the way. Some of the birds we might encounter include Bhutan Laughingthrush, White-browed Shrike-Babbler, Gray-bellied Tesia, Green-tailed and Mrs. Gould's Sunbirds, Fire-capped Tit, Mountain Tailorbird, Himalayan Prinia, Rufous Sibia, Golden-breasted Fulvetta, Ultramarine Flycatcher, White-tailed Nuthatch, Gray

Treepie, Green-billed Malkoha, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Maroon Oriole, Golden Bush-Robin, Crested Bunting and Nepal House Martin. Night in Trongsa.

#### **April 8, Day 7: Trongsa to Tingtibi**

Today, we detour from the Lateral Road heading south to explore Bhutan's lush lowlands. The 4-hour drive will take us through Zhemgang, one of Bhutan's most heavily forested regions. Dense broadleaved forests spanning a range of elevations make this an exceptional and largely undisturbed birding site. We will spend much of the day exploring the lower altitudes targeting low elevation species which are unlikely to be found elsewhere during the tour. Some of our targets here will include among others Sultan Tit, Scarlet-backed and Fire-breasted Flowerpeckers, White-bellied Erpornis, Blue-winged Minla, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Long-tailed, Grey-chinned and Scarlet Minivets, Common Green Magpie, Nepal Fulvetta, Himalayan Bluetail and Asian

Emerald Dove. Upon reaching Tingtibi at an elevation of just over 2000 feet, we will explore the Dakphel Road looking for Beautiful Nuthatch, Rufous-chinned, Blue-winged and Grey-sided Laughingthrushes and Red-faced Liocichla. This area will also be our best chance to encounter Golden Langur, an endangered and geographically restricted primate endemic to a small area in southern Bhutan. Night in Tingtibi.

#### **April 9, Day 8: Black Mountain & Royal Manas National Parks**

We will spend the day birding the Tingtibi area on Gomphu Road which runs through the forested foothills of Black Mountain and Royal Manas National Parks. Along with Thrumshingla National Park and India's Manas National Park, these protected areas form a vast landscape containing a rich mix of habitats including evergreen forest, alpine meadows and stands of bamboo that are home to a dazzling array of birds. Just a few of the species we will hope to see include Great and Wreathed Hornbills, Red-headed Trogon, Chestnut-bellied and White-tailed Nuthatches, Pin-tailed Green-Pigeon, Barred Cuckoo-Dove, Striated Bulbul, Long-tailed Broadbill, Brown-throated Fulvetta, Red-billed Leiothrix, Silver-eared Mesia, Long-tailed Sibia, Small Niltava, Yellow-cheeked and Black-throated Tits, Black-throated Sunbird, Baym Woodpecker, Lesser Yellownape, Puff-throated and Rufous-capped Babblers and Scarlet Finch. Along the way there will be chances to scan the Mangdue Chu River, looking for Spotted, Little and Slaty-backed Forktails as well as more chances to see the endangered White-bellied Heron. Irregardless of the day's final bird tally, it is certain to be a memorable experience for everyone involved. Night in Tingtibi.

#### **April 10, Day 9: Tingtibi to The Bumthang Valley via Yotong La**

This morning, we will retrace our steps to Trongsa and continue our journey eastward on the Lateral Road to Bumthang. This is a 6-hour drive, so it will be primarily a travel day, but there will be opportunities to pause along the way. As the road ascends from Trongsa we will pass through lovely rhododendron forests looking for the brilliantly colored Fire-tailed Myzornis. As we gain elevation the rhododendron gives way in succession to bamboo, juniper, spruce and hemlock forests. Eventually we will reach Yotong La, situated at an elevation of 11,300 feet. This is an excellent spot for several





*Satyr Tragopan* by Lokesh Kumar

skulkers including Spotted and Black-faced Laughingthrushes, Scaly-breasted Wren-babbler, Slender-billed Scimitar-babbler, Brown Parrotbill, Red-headed Bullfinch, Green Shrike-Babbler and Chestnut-headed Tesia. As we travel we will make a short detour from the Lateral Road descending to Jakar in the Bumthang Valley, an area consisting of open meadows, scrub and farms. Species associated with these open habitat include Black Redstart, Olive-backed and Rosy Pipits, Gray-backed and Long-tailed Shrikes, Yellow-billed Blue-Magpie, Yellow-bellied Fairy-Fantail, Blue-capped and Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrushes, White-collared Blackbird and Gray Bushchat. Night in Dakar in the Bumthang Valley.

#### **April 11, Day 10: Bumthang to Yongkala, via Thrumshing La**

Today we will continue our way east to Yongkola, a 4-hour drive. This scenic route will traverse open meadows and dense forests eventually reaching the towering firs of Thrumshing La, the second highest mountain pass in Bhutan. Treeline in this part of the Himalayas is as high as 13,000 feet and even at this altitude the pass is shrouded in thick forest with a dense understory of rhododendron. Our targets here will be some of the spectacular montane pheasants the Himalayas are famous for. With luck and diligence we will hope to find Blood Pheasant, Himalayan Monal and Satyr Tragopan. In addition to this triumvirate of pheasants we also hope to find Snow Pigeon, Spotted Nutcracker, Collared Grosbeak, Red-billed Chough, Great Parrotbill, Fire-tailed Myzornis, Goldcrest, Fire-tailed Sunbird, White-browed Fulvetta, Stripe-throated Yuhina, Spotted Laughingthrush, Alpine Thrush, Dark-rumped Rosefinch, Alpine, Altai, and Robin Accentors and the enigmatic Wallcreeper that forages on the sheer rock faces.

Once we cross the pass at Thrumshing La, we will begin our exploring the ornithologically significant Limithang Road, one of the finest birding sites in all of Asia. We will have 3 full days in this part of Bhutan allowing us ample time to explore the forests that span an elevational gradient from 2000-12,500 feet. Obviously the species mix across this gradient is incredibly diverse and we can expect a rich mix of Himalayan specialities during our time here. Night in Yongkola.

#### **April 12-13, Days 11-12: Yongkola and the Lingmethang Road**

From Yongkola we will have quick access to both the upper and lower sections of the Lingmethang Road. Since mountain weather can change rapidly we will move up or down as conditions dictate possibly descending as far as the floor of the Shonkhar Chu Valley at the road's lower limit where meadows and terraced fields will be a stark contrast to the forested slopes above. The avian possibilities here are far too numerous to list, but some of the possibilities will be Ward's Trogon, Rufous-necked Hornbill, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, Golden Babbler, Red-faced Liocichla, Scaly and Blue-

winged Laughingthrush, Golden Bush-Robin, Slaty-bellied Tesia, Rufous-faced Warbler, Lesser and Gould's Shortwings, Himalayan Cutia, Beautiful Nuthatch, Golden-breasted and Yellow-throated Fulvettas, Sapphire Flycatcher, Large Niltava, White-breasted, Black-throated and Pale-billed Parrotbills, Purple Cochoa, Red-headed, Gray-headed and Brown Bullfinches, Scarlet Finch, Sultan Tit, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Speckled Wood-Pigeon, Chestnut-breasted and Rufous-throated Partridges, Black and Rufous-bellied Eagles and Collared Owlet. Many of these species are widespread in this part of Asia, but we will also attempt to locate some of the more range restricted and reclusive birds in this part of Bhutan including Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler, the monotypic Spotted Elachura, Slaty-bellied Tesia, Long-billed Wren-Babbler and Pygmy Cupwing. We will also look for the secretive Hodgson's Frogmouth at dusk. Nights at Yongkola.

#### **April 14, Day 13: Yongkola to Sengor along the Lingmethang Road**

This morning, we will begin a gradual ascent retracing our steps back to Sengor, about an 1.5-hour away. We will spend the day birding the upper reaches of the Lingmethang Road, where the spectacular views will provide a continual breathtaking backdrop. The area is particularly rich in tits and we may find as many as 6 species: Rufous-vented, Coal, Gray-crested, Green-backed, Black-throated and Yellow-browed, Roving mixed flocks might contain a nice variety of fulvettas, yuhinas, sunbirds and warblers. Other possible species at these altitudes include Crimson-naped Woodpecker, Hodgson's Treecreeper, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Rusty-fronted and Hoary-throated Barwings, Bar-winged Wren-Babbler, Black-faced and Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrushes, Himalayan Bluetail, Blue-fronted Redstart, Tibetan Serin and the striking Gold-naped Finch. As always when birding at this elevation we will keep our eyes out for the spectacular Satyr Tragopan. We will arrive in the tiny settlement of Sengor by afternoon and take some time to explore the meadows and pastures surrounding the village where we hope to find Snow Pigeon, a unique highland pigeon found that sometimes descends to feed in the fields. Night at Sengor.

#### **April 15, Day 14: Sengor to Bumthang via Thrumshing La**

Today we begin moving back to the west eventually reaching Bumthang, about a 4-hour drive. We will have another opportunity to explore the high elevations of Thrumshing La and will spend the morning birding among the temperate conifers draped with colorful prayer flags. If the skies are clear we will be able to see Mt. Gangkar Puensum (24770ft.), Bhutan's highest peak and the highest unclimbed mountain in the world. Our route will take us through the Ura Valley, where we can search for the aptly named Plain Mountain Finch and Russet Sparrow. One expected highlight of today will be a visit to the Tharpaling Monastery for close views of another brilliant montane pheasant, the Himalayan Monal, which frequently congregates around the monk's quarters to feed. Seeing this normally reclusive pheasant is sure to be one the tour's highlights! Night in Bumthang.

#### **April 16, Day 15: Bumthang to the Phobjikha Valley via Trongsa and Yotong La**

We continue our journey west, with a 5-hour drive that will take us into the Phobjikha Valley. Although this will be primarily a travel day, we will watch for birds we haven't seen. Possibilities will include Speckled Wood-Pigeon, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, Black Eagle and White-throated Needletail. In Trongsa, we will stop and visit Trongsa Dzong, the largest fortress in the country and the ancestral home of Bhutan's royal family. Hopefully the gorgeous scenery will mitigate any unpleasantness wrought by the lengthy drive. The route crosses two high passes before dropping into the dwarf bamboo forests beyond Lawa La where we can look for Spotted Laughingthrush, Eurasian Nutcracker and Great Parrotbill. From here, we will descend into the vast glacial valley of Phobjikha, nestled at the northwest tip of the Black Mountains. The valley's mosaic of grasses, scrub and small farmsteads supports a good number of species including Red-throated and Black-throated Thrushes, Himalayan Prinia, Russet Sparrow, both Red-billed and Yellow-billed Choughs and Snow Pigeon. Night in Phobjikha.

#### **April 17, Day 16: Bumthang to Paro**

Another long drive (5 hours) on the Lateral Road will take us back to Paro where we will spend the final two nights of the tour. We begin by climbing through broad-leafed woodland into evergreen forests with increasingly spectacular views of the distant snow capped Himalayas. Here in the open meadows and rhododendron thickets along the road we have chances for a host of high-altitude specialities such as Spotted and Bhutan Laughingthrushes, Alpine, Himalayan and Long-tailed Thrushes, Gray-winged Blackbird, Dark-sided Flycatcher, Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch, Rusty-flanked Treecreeper, White-browed Fulvetta, Chestnut-tailed Minla, Collared and White-winged Grosbeaks, Himalayan Griffon and Lammergeier. Much of the drive passes through prime pheasant habitat, so we will have more chances for Satyr Tragopan and Himalayan Monal, and if we are extremely lucky, the delightful Red Panda. Making our way back through Thimphu, we will arrive in Paro by evening. Night in Paro.

### **April 18, Day 17: Paro and Chele La**

On our final day in Bhutan, we will set out early to spend the morning birding among the alpine meadows of Chele La at an elevation of 12760 feet. This is the highest pass accessible by road in Bhutan and provides us the opportunity to ascend above the treeline where we can expect a selection of enticing high altitude specialities including both Kalij and Blood Pheasants which both often feed along the road early in the morning. Our wandering here will again be set against a lovely backdrop of alpine vegetation with spectacular views towards Kanchenjunga, the third highest peak in the world. Other species we may encounter here include Eurasian Nutcracker, Collared Grosbeak, Blue-fronted Redstart, Rufous-bellied and Darjeeling Woodpeckers, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, White-browed Bush-Robin, Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, Himalayan Griffon and a selection of tits, rosefinches and laughingthrushes. Night in Paro.

### **April 19, Day 18: Departures from Paro and flights home**

The tour will end today with flights from Paro back to Delhi. Flights generally arrive in Delhi around mid-day and flights back to the U.S. depart very late in the evening. To make this journey back home easier, upon arriving in Delhi, we will be transported to a hotel near the airport where everyone will have the use of day rooms to clean up, reorganize your luggage and have dinner before returning the airport for your flights home. The tour will end this evening with departure flights from Delhi back to your final destination.

## **TOUR INFORMATION**

### **Tour Size**

The tour will be limited to 8 participants.

### **Tour Cost**

The cost for this tour will be \$10,250 double occupancy from Delhi. There will be a \$600 single supplement charge for anyone wishing to room alone or for whom we cannot arrange a roommate. Note that single rooms may not be available in all locations. The price includes all lodging beginning with Day 2 in Delhi through Day 18 in Paro, use of day rooms in Delhi on April 19, all meals beginning with breakfast on Day 3 through dinner on Day 18, a day birding trip to Sultanpur on April 4, round trip airfare between Delhi and Paro, all ground transportation, entrance fees, Bhutan Sustainable Development Fee, Bhutan visa fees and all guide service throughout the tour.

### **Tour Registration**

To register for this tour, please send a signed and completed registration form to Otus asio Tours at 900 Hillsborough Road in Chapel Hill NC 27516. The deposit for this tour is \$1100 per person. The deposit is payable by check; credit cards are not accepted. The balance of the tour fee is due 90 days prior to the tour departure date and final invoices will be sent in December 2024.

## **Cancellations & Refunds**

Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule:

90 or more days before the tour departure date (January 3, 2025 or before): 50% of the deposit will be refunded

Less than 90 days before the departure date (January 4, 2025 or later) and after full payment has been received, refunds will be limited to that which can be recouped from vendors, airlines and booking agencies. This may be as little as 25% of the amount paid

## **Travel Insurance**

The purchase of a travel insurance policy is mandatory for this tour. In order for anyone to receive a visa for Bhutan they must provide a copy of a valid travel insurance policy as part of the application.

## **Travel Documents**

A passport valid for 6 months beyond the date of your return to the U.S. (with at least 2 blank visa pages) is required for entry into both Bhutan and India. Visas will also be required for both India and Bhutan. The visa costs for Bhutan are included in the tour price, but those for India are not. Visas for India can be obtained online through a variety of e-visa services and the estimated cost is \$50-75 USD.

We will take care of the applications for all visas for Bhutan, but all participants will need to provide the following for the application:

A scanned copy of their passport that shows all details clearly

A recent digital passport-sized photograph (or scan of)

Their postal address, phone number and profession

A copy of a travel insurance policy valid for the duration of stay which clearly shows the provider, policy number and their name

## **Accommodations**

Accommodations in Bhutan are generally simple, especially in the rural areas. We will spend 3 nights in camps set up by our Bhutanese ground team. Camps will consist of comfortable tents with cots and will be in beautiful venues. Many meals (virtually all breakfasts and lunches) will be freshly prepared in the field by our Bhutanese ground team. Dinners will be at the various lodges and camps. Electricity is widespread but not always reliable, so a flashlight or headlamp with a good supply of batteries will be important. It should be possible to recharge batteries at all of our hotels, but possibly not when we are camping. All of our hotels have hot water, but it can sometimes be sporadic and everyone must be prepared to deal with the possibility that there may not be hot water in their room sometimes. Most hotels do not have central heating, but

individual rooms have space heaters or wood stoves and an ample supply of blankets. At the camps, hot water is provided in bowls for shaving, putting in contacts sponge baths etc. In general, everything works well most of the time, but in order to enjoy this trip you will have to be prepared to accept that there will be times when you will be inconvenienced.

## **Altitude**

Bhutan is a mountain kingdom and much of this tour be conducted at high elevations. The maximum elevation we spend time at will be about 12,750 feet and we will be over 10,000 feet on eight days. Although we will bird down to as low as 300 feet most of the time will be above 6000 feet. Nights will always be spent lower than we go during the day; our two highest nights are at 10,000 feet (Sengor camp & Phobjika Valley) near the end of the tour. Other accommodations will range from 6500-8500 feet. When birding we will try to walk downhill and then make the return ascent by vehicle though this won't always be possible.

## **Pace**

This will a very unique and special tour that will provide a thorough sampling of all of Bhutan's accessible birding habitats. At the same time, we will also take time to experience and enjoy this country's culture and landscapes. We will make sure everyone has plenty of time for photography and we will visit the capital of Thimphu and visit the incomparable Punakha Dzong. That said, this tour will be intense in that every day we consist of long hours in the field and driving. Sunrise in Bhutan is around 5:00 AM at this season and to make the most of our birding we will have very early starts. After birding for a few hours we will often have a leisurely breakfast. Because of the travel involved there will not be many days that we can return to a lodge for a mid-day rest and we will usually reach our lodge or camp in the late Afternoon. The best times for napping will likely be during the drives and we will try to allot time for some relaxation at the end of our days rather than in the middle.

## **Climate**

In April, because of the wide range of altitudes (300-13,000 feet) that this tour covers, we must expect and be prepared for a wide range of temperatures and conditions including the possibility of some snow, and almost certainly some rain. In the lowlands we should expect very warm and humid weather with very bright sunshine. As is always the case in montane environments, the weather can swing quickly between cold and warm extremes, so being prepared for just about anything is the best way to plan for this tour.

## **Clothing**

Casual, durable and easy to wash clothing is strongly suggested for this tour. Sturdy hiking boots will be essential as the ground will be wet much of time. Rubber boots are not necessary, but your hiking boots should definitely be water-resistant. .

Please note that laundry service will be limited. There may be times when the camp staff can wash some of your clothing, but this will be limited and you shouldn't count on it. Laundry can be left at the lodge in Trongsa to be picked up when we return, but most of the time you will have to plan on washing out clothing in your rooms in the evening.

This is a difficult trip to pack for due to the expected wide range of temperatures, so dressing in layers is always the best way to remain comfortable. Rain gear is strongly recommended, in addition to a warm sweater and warm jacket or vest. Other essential items will include a warm fleece or stocking cap, gloves and a scarf or neck gaiter. Silk, wool or synthetic thermal long underwear are very handy for sleeping and for cool early mornings. You may not need all of this gear, but much better to be safe than sorry. Sunglasses are important especially at high elevations and for drives on sunny days.

## **Currency**

You will need Bhutanese currency on this tour and the easiest way to obtain it is to exchange dollars at the airport upon arrival. Indian rupees are accepted, but the notes must be in 100 denomination or lower (not worth much), so they are not very practical. Credit cards are accepted by very few places in Bhutan so having cash is important. ATMs are not widely available and when present they often do not work well or provide large amounts of currency when there do. It is also a good idea to carry some \$1 and \$5 US bills which can be very useful for minor tips or in an emergency.

## **Electricity**

Electricity in both India and Bhutan is 220 volts. In Bhutan the power can be unreliable, so a flashlight or headlamp with a good supply of batteries is essential. Do not rely on having electricity available everywhere for charging your batteries except at the major lodges, so bringing an adequate supply of extra batteries and a portable power pack is really important for this tour.

## **Time**

Both countries are 10.5 hours ahead of EST.

## **Health**

There are no required vaccinations for this tour, but it is always a good idea to be up to date with tetanus and Hepatitis A vaccines. Tap water in India and Bhutan is not safe for drinking, but bottled water will be available throughout the tour and is included in the tour cost. Please check with the CDC for all current health recommendations for travel in Bhutan.

## **Bird References**

The best birding resource for this tour is the Merlin bird pack for Bhutan. These can be downloaded to your smartphone and accessed in the field without internet service. This

method is now preferred by most birders and is much easier than carrying heavy books while in the field. There is also a Merelin bird pack for Northern India which would cover our day of birding at Sultanpur.

### **Information**

For more information on this tour contact Jan Hansen at [otusasiotours@gmail.com](mailto:otusasiotours@gmail.com) or at 919-259-9423.