

Bhutan

Tour dates:
October 18 - 30, 2010
Group: 10 persons
Cost: \$6,950 / person
double occupancy

Tour highlights:
Pristine Environment,
Vibrant Arts & Culture,
Magnificent Architecture,
Masked-Dance Festival



Tour overview



Morning at Dochu La mountain pass near Thimphu



Masked-dancers retrace the steps of Buddhist life and teachings

Few places on Earth compare to the great natural beauty and rich cultural heritage that is found in the remote Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan. Located between India and China in the high Eastern Himalayas, Bhutan rises within just a few hundred miles from the steamy plains of Assam to some of the world's highest peaks along its northern border with Tibet. This diversity of ecosystems – representing most of the climatic zones found on planet Earth but packaged within an area only about the size of Switzerland -- provides refuge to many thousands of species of birds, plants, insects and mammals that make Bhutan one of the world's most treasured biodiversity wonders.

The history of Bhutan is closely associated with the spread of Buddhism throughout the Himalayas, and Bhutan is the last place on Earth where the Vajrayana form of Mahayana Buddhism is practiced as a way of life that influences all aspects of society. Because Bhutan has never been colonized or occupied by any foreign invaders since the coming of Buddhism more than a thousand years ago, its cultural heritage and traditions remain authentic and intact. The authenticity of its robust cultural life also stems from the fact that Bhutan remains largely isolated

from the rest of the modern world -- with the first road to the outside (India) constructed in the early 1960s and with the number of permitted tourists admitted to the Kingdom averaging below 20,000 annually.

This special journey from Bhutan's Western highland areas to the important cultural sites in Bumthang -- with time for witnessing the rare masked-dances at historic Jampa Lhakhang and a stop-over in Phobjika where black-necked cranes from Tibet will be arriving for the winter -- is designed to provide an introduction to the environment of the Eastern Himalayas and the gentle way of life of the Bhutanese people -- an intellectually and spiritually exciting journey designed to provide a sense of discovery, adventure, and renewal.



Tour Leader

Preston Scott

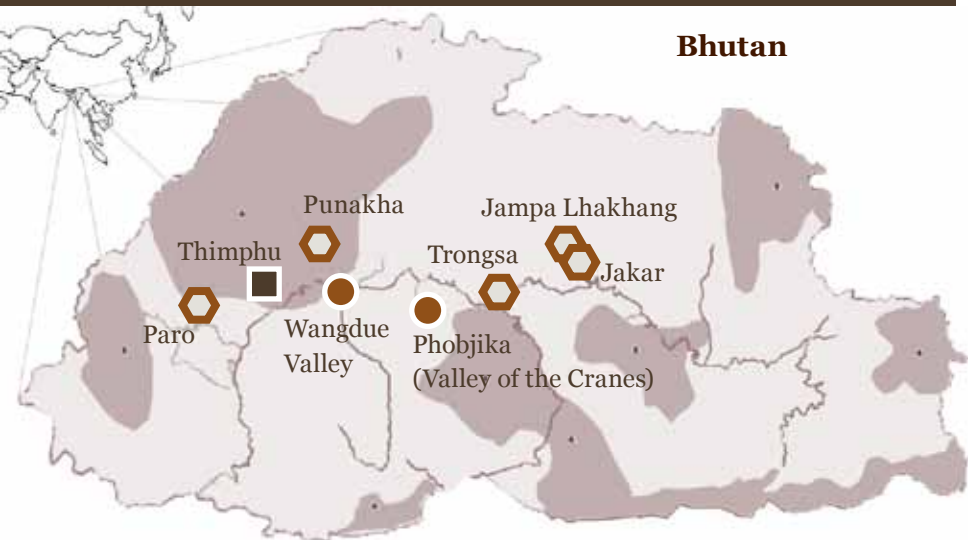
Preston Scott has worked very closely with the Kingdom of Bhutan on a host of specialized environmental and cultural conservation projects since the late 1990s and is a frequent traveler to the eastern Himalayas. He has worked directly with several ministries of the Royal Government of Bhutan including Agriculture, Education, Foreign Affairs, and Home & Cultural Affairs, as well as several international organizations active in Bhutan including the UN Development Program. Most recently, he served as curator of the historic Bhutan program at the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC, which was the largest and most comprehensive celebration of Bhutanese life and culture ever presented outside the Kingdom.




Mr. Scott is a graduate of the college and law school of the University of Virginia (having received de-

grees in law, and with honors in history, government and political theory), and is a member of the bars of the District of Columbia and Virginia. While at the University of Virginia School of Law, Mr. Scott served as Executive Editor of the Virginia Journal of International Law. Although Mr. Scott has worked in more than 30 countries on five continents around the world, his extensive knowledge and contacts in Bhutan provide a very special personal opportunity for IBEX travelers to experience life in the remote Himalayan Kingdom rarely possible for outsiders.



Tour Map



-  Architectural sites
-  The capital of Bhutan
-  Nature sites

Tour Costs

This trip is offered at US\$6,950 per person, and includes round-trip economy airfare from Bangkok to Bhutan, all hotel accommodations in Bhutan on twin-sharing (double-occupancy) basis, all meals/tea in Bhutan (breakfast, lunch and dinner), local transportation by private vehicle while in Bhutan with professional guides and drivers, entrance fees to all places of interest in Bhutan, Bhutan visa and

handling fees, and all other fees and taxes charged by the Royal Government of Bhutan.

The cost does not include airfare or other routing to Bangkok, transit hotel or other costs in Bangkok, extra baggage charges, 'bar', laundry, single room supplement (if requested), internet, telephone, tips, and other personal expenses.

Transportation



Over-land travel in Bhutan is provided by four-wheel-drive sports utility vehicles as required.

Transportation logistics allow for maximum possible flexibility and comfort (two people per vehicle plus driver and guide whenever possible).



Airfare to / from the gateway city

Air travel to Paro (Bhutan) from the gateway cities of Bangkok or Delhi is provided by DrukAir (the only airline permitted to fly into the Kingdom). Entry visas are secured in advance as part of any customized travel program to the Kingdom.



The high eastern Himalayas bordering Bhutan and Tibet



Bhutan's National Museum sits high above Paro with commanding views of the valley



Mt-Jomolhari towers above the northern end of Paro Valley

Travel to Bhutan

Very early morning departure from Bangkok for the flight up into Bhutan with late-morning arrival at the Kingdom's only airport in the beautiful Paro Valley. After a welcoming lunch, an introductory visit to Bhutan's National Museum at the Ta Dzong with

a commanding view of the valley. Evening at the Gantey Palace (historic 19th-century compound that was once the residence of the Governor (or 'Penlop') of Paro).

Day 2, Tuesday, October 19, 2010

Thimphu

Morning departure for Thimphu -- with stop en route to visit Simtokha Dzong (oldest in Bhutan built by the Shabdrung in 1629 and containing the finest collection of slate carvings in Bhutan). After

lunch, a visit to the new Textile Museum and Bhutan's National Library (housing one of the greatest collections of ancient Buddhist texts). Lodging in Thimphu.

Day 3, Wednesday, October 20, 2010

Thimphu

Morning visits to the Institute for Zorig Chuzom (Bhutan's Thirteen Traditional Arts) and the Institute for Traditional Medicine. Lunch at the Royal Golf Club just outside the main dzong with views of the mountains surrounding Thimphu. Afternoon visit (to be confirmed) inside the massive Tashichoedzong (housing the King's offices and summer residence of the Je Khenpo). Lodging in Thimphu.



Tashichoedzong in Thimphu houses the offices of His Majesty the King

Day 4, Thursday, October 21, 2010

Thimphu

Flex day in Thimphu and environs for supplementary visits to historic sites, hikes in the surrounding countryside, or shopping as desired. Lodging in Thimphu.



Colorful street markets enliven Bhutan's towns and villages



Yaks graze on bamboo near high mountain passes



Bhutanese architecture blends harmoniously into surrounding landscapes



Bhutan's agrarian lifestyle naturally captures the cycles of life

Travel to Wangdue

Mid- morning departure for points east -- with stops en route at Dochu La providing (weather-permitting) some of the best views of the high Himalayas towards Tibet. After lunch, a leisurely walk through rice fields and a small Bhutanese village to Chimme Lhakhang (temple built by Lama

Drukpa Kunley (affectionately known as the 'Divine Madman' because of his unorthodox ways of sharing Buddhist teachings)). Overnight in the Wangdue valley

Day 6, Saturday, October 23, 2010

Trongsa

Morning departure for Trongsa -- ancestral home of the Bhutan's Royal Family. After crossing Pele La (one of the highest mountain passes in the Kingdom), travel on towards Trongsa Dzong -- considered the most impressive in all of Bhutan (built in 1647 and described as being perched so high in the mountains that the clouds float below). Overnight in Trongsa.



IBEX group near the dzong in Trongsa

Day 7, Sunday, October 24, 2010

On to Bumthang (Jakar)

After breakfast, continue on to Bumthang -- the cultural and environmental heart of the Kingdom. Periodic stops at points of interest along the way. Jampa Lhakhang in Jakar is one of the most historic temples in Bhutan -- consisting of a complex of richly decorated sanctuaries surrounding a central courtyard. The masked-dances -- which are a defin-

ing aspect of Bhutan's remarkable cultural heritage -- make up part of the annual festival cycle at the temple and vary daily. Lodging in Jakar.



Masked-Dance Festival at Jampa Lhakang

Special opportunity to experience the ceremonies and dances of the annual masked-dance festival at historic Jampa Lhakang in Jakar -- one of the most traditional of all of Bhutan's historic sacred masked-dance festivals. Lodging in Jakar.

Colorful costumes coupled with the athleticism of monastic dancers combine for especially intriguing spectacles.



Rare sacred masked dances and related ceremonies are performed

only on special days, but are a highlight of any visit to Bhutan.

Day 9, Tuesday, October 26, 2010

Travel to Phobjika (Valley of the Cranes)

Morning departure for the start of the return to the West. After lunch en route, continue west towards Phobjika -- the legendary wintering valley of the black-necked cranes. The landscape changes dramatically as the road rises to the higher elevations around Phobjika (yaks can sometimes be seen as the road enters the high-elevation short-bamboo pastures of the upper valley). Deeper into the valley (which has no electricity in order to protect the migrating cranes from the hazards of power-lines), opportunities to see the black-necked cranes (provided there are some early arrivals from Tibet). Overnight on the edge of the forest with views of the pristine valley.



The secluded and pristine Phobjika Valley is where the very rare black-necked cranes from Tibet fly to spend the winter

Day 10, Wednesday, October 27, 2010

Gantey & Punakha

A morning visit to historic Gantey Gompa (monastery) in the heart of the Phobjika Valley, where ongoing reconstruction according to traditional methods can be witnessed. After lunch, an afternoon visit to Punakha Dzong -- one of Bhutan's most beautiful situated on an island on the river. Evening at a hilltop inn near Punakha with views overlooking the river valley.



Punakha dzong abounds in art and history in the heart of the peaceful river valley.



Enjoying the clear morning sun



Simtokha dzong (Bhutan's oldest) was recently rededicated as an important study center



Bhutanese festivals are alive with color and ceremony



Monks welcome visitors with an informal mix of both grace and dignity

On to Paro

Morning departure for Paro allowing time for stops en route and arrival in time for visits into Paro vil-

lage (or elsewhere) as desired. Overnight in Paro.

Day 12, Friday, October 29, 2010

Taktshang

Travel up the Paro Valley towards Taktshang -- most sacred monastery in Bhutan hugging the cliffs 2,000-feet above Paro Valley. The upward path towards Taktshang passes through forests of fir and rhododendron before reaching the higher elevation forests of live oak and hanging mosses. Every effort will be made to accomplish the climb to enter the

monastery, which was rededicated in early summer 2005 with completely restored paintings and sculpture. Lodging at the Gantey Palace.



A visit to Taktshang perched high above the Paro valley is a high point for most visitors to Bhutan.

Day 13, Saturday, October 30, 2010

Departure from Bhutan

Morning departure flight returning to Bangkok for connecting flights home .





The Pristine Environment of Bhutan and the eastern Himalayas

Bhutan is a small country about the size of West Virginia that lies in the eastern Himalayan mountains and is bordered only by China and India. While one of the world's smallest countries surrounded by two of the world's largest, Bhutan has maintained its independence and not been colonized or occupied by any foreign powers since the coming of Buddhism

to the region more than one thousand years ago. Known traditionally as "Druk-Yul" or "Land of the Thunder Dragon," Bhutan protects one of the most pristine and diverse environments found on Earth today while its people carry on traditions that have evolved over centuries even as they prepare for change in the 21st century.

The people of Bhutan (known traditionally as "Drukpa" or "people of the Thunder Dragon") tended to migrate and settle in the temperate and secluded valleys that are found throughout Bhutan's mid-elevation range. There they organized life around very small villages and farms which continue to define Bhutanese society today.

IBEX tours to Bhutan are escorted by Mr. Preston Scott, who was the curator of Bhutan's participation at the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC and is one of the most knowledgeable people about Bhutan today. The October 2010 trip to Bhutan with Mr. Scott offers visitors a very rare opportunity to experience Bhutan's western and central valleys that will be highlighted with many personal visits with the Bhutanese people themselves and enriched by aspects of daily life from one of the world's most remarkable places.



Mt. Jomolhari rises majestically above the ruins of Drukjel dzong at the northern end of the Paro Valley

The Bhutanese landscape rises from lowland tropical jungles along its southern border with India to snowcapped peaks and glaciers along some of the highest points on Earth along its northern border with China. Sandwiched within this range of only a few hundred miles, representative examples of virtually every climatic zone existing on Earth can be found.

Bhutan has remained isolated from most of the world for most of its history. Its geography protected its people from invasion from all directions, while they inhabited small isolated valleys located high up in the mountains connected only by footpaths known only to them. Blessed with a temperate climate for most of the year as well as abundant rainfall and rivers, the Bhutanese people have developed a genuinely agrarian society where most people still live very close to the land that sustains them.



Terraced farming allows farmers to make the most of Bhutan's rugged vertical landscape



The unusual takin is Bhutan's national animal



Vibrant Arts and Culture

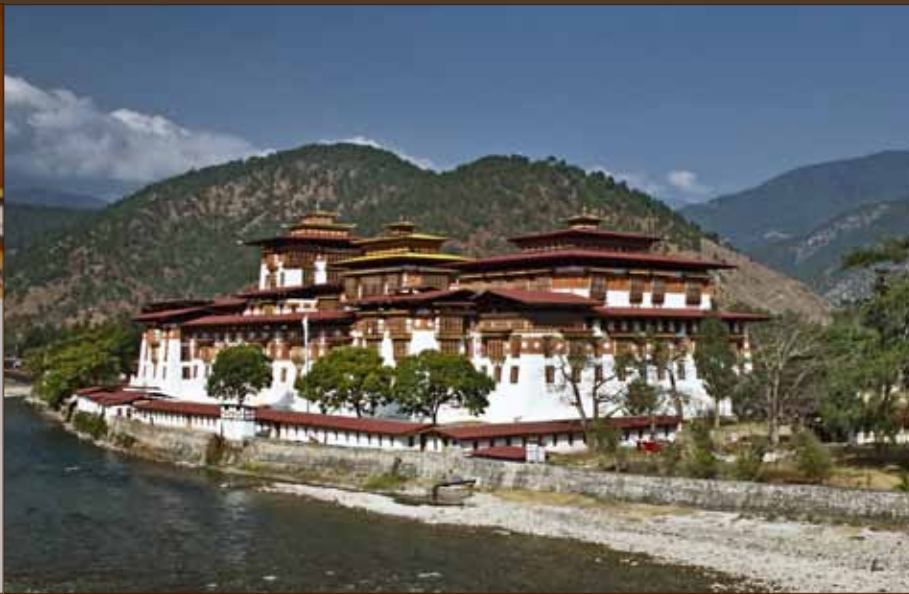
The Bhutanese words “zorig chusum” refer to the thirteen traditional arts that have been cultivated, taught and celebrated in Bhutan for generations as important to the life of Bhutanese culture. These include painting, carving, sculpture, calligraphy, metal casting, gold- and silver-smithing, embroidery, bamboo work, wood-turning and lacquering, weaving, pottery, blacksmithing and masonry, and incense- and paper-making.

In the 17th century, a school was established in

Bhutan to teach the arts of zorig chusum which had important monastic connections. As in Europe centuries ago, monastic traditions and communities in Bhutan have played a very important role in the development, encouragement and ongoing enrichment of cultural life throughout society. The importance of zorig chusum in contemporary Bhutanese society is reflected once again through the achievements of well-respected schools for zorig chusum that will be visited during the IBEX October 2010 tour to Bhutan.



The Bhutanese arts of zorig chusum remain very much alive today, and visually enrich Bhutan's stunning architecture, landscape and people



Magnificent Architecture

One of the most unique architectural structures seen in Bhutan is the dzong, which were originally built as fortresses but continue to serve as both administrative and monastic centers throughout Bhutan today. While some elements of the architectural form date back as far as the 12th century in Bhutan, the magnificent dzongs seen today in Bhutan were built mainly in the 17th century by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who first brought

religious and other purposes.

Because the dzongs were used for protection, they often had a major associated watchtower nearby that was known as the ta dzong. The ta dzong in Paro, which was built in the 1640s on the hill above Paro dzong and is shaped like a conch shell, now houses Bhutan's National Museum.



Leisurely visits to the most magnificent dzongs and other architectural treasures in Bhutan will be a highlight of the October 2010 IBEX tour

Bhutan's disparate valleys into a unified confederation and who is considered to be the early founder of modern Bhutan.

While each dzong is unique, most are generally divided into two main areas (one for religious purposes including monastic living quarters and one for government offices). There is usually a main courtyard that is paved with stones and surrounded by multistoried rooms that are used for both monks' living quarters and classrooms. At the center of the dzong is usually a prominent tower-like structure that contains many rooms that may be used for both

Since the dzongs were the principal centers of both temporal and religious authority, they were usually built at places of great strategic importance. The first dzong built by the Zhabdrung was built at Simtokha in 1629 near the pass that opens towards the Thimphu valley as well as leading to most points eastward towards DochuLa. Other major dzongs built by the Zhabdrung and still in use are in Paro, Punakha, Wangdue, and Trongsa (these and other dzongs including the main dzong in Thimphu that houses the offices of His Majesty the King will be visited during the IBEX 2010 tour to Bhutan escorted by Mr. Preston Scott).



Ancient Buddhist Traditions

Bhutan is the last place on Earth where traditional Himalayan Buddhism is practiced widely and influences all aspects of daily life and society. Since Bhutan has never been colonized or occupied by any foreign invaders since the coming of Buddhism in the 7th century, Buddhist traditions in Bhutan have evolved unbroken for more than one thousand years.

education available. After some years of academic training, some monks take up artistic traditions including dance, music, painting, and tailoring that continue to thrive in the monastic communities throughout Bhutan. In recent years some monks and nuns also have begun to learn skills associated with the preservation and restoration of some works of art such as textiles and thangkhas.

Ancient Buddhist traditions continue to harmonize all aspects of life in modern Bhutan, providing a foundation in the past even as Bhutan changes to adapt to the challenges and opportunities for life in the 21st century



There are approximately 6,000 monks living in hundreds of monastic communities that dot the Bhutanese landscape -- ranging from the fortress-like dzongs to remote high-mountain monasteries and temples. Although monastic life in Bhutan is essentially male, there are some nuns who live in small communities also mainly in the remote countryside. Most Bhutanese families have at least one person who is a member of a monastic community.

Monastic communities continue to follow religious academic traditions, which at one time was the only

In addition to keeping Buddhist traditions and teachings alive, Bhutan's religious communities also serve their broader surrounding communities through ceremonies performed in public places as well as in family homes and associated acts of charity. The IBEX October 2010 tour to Bhutan will offer many opportunities for participants to meet many monks and to visit many of Bhutan's most important sites associated with its ancient Buddhist traditions including Taktshang ("Tiger's Nest").



The Masked-Dance Festival at Jampa Lhakhang in Bumthang



The chance to witness and participate at a masked-dance festival is a special highlight for any visit to Bhutan, and the festival at the Jampa Lhakhang in Bumthang is one of the Kingdom's most colorful

Bhutanese masked dances reflect one of the country's most remarkable traditions and incorporate many rituals and symbols concerning the meaning as well as mystery of life. The IBEX October 2010 tour to Bhutan offers participants the very rare opportunity to experience the masked-dance festival at historic Jampa Lhakhang near Jakar in the central Bumthang valley that only takes place once a year.

The dances are performed mainly as ritual – not as entertainment. However, virtually all Bhutanese masked dances are performed in communal contexts where community involvement and celebratory enrichment from the experience form an important part of the tradition.

There are many different masked dances in Bhutan, but virtually all involve the telling of a ritual teaching or sharing of a mystical experience. The dancers wear spectacular colorful costumes. The type of mask worn depends on the specific dance. Masks may represent different types of animals, reptiles

and birds, wrathful as well as beneficent deities, many different manifestations of spiritual beings as well as ordinary people.

Atsaras appear as clowns whose expressive masks and provocative postures play an important role in all Bhutanese festivals. For example, they challenge monks and other religious elders while also entertaining the crowd with salacious jokes. But, their role ultimately is to inspire Buddhist values while also poking fun at the very traditional roles that so often appear in Bhutanese drama and dance.

Bhutan's masked-dance festivals provide important occasions for Bhutanese people to gather together to see their neighbors, for being seen (because most people wear their finest clothes), and for celebrating recent successes. Picnics prevail punctuated by good-humored flirts and flaunts that ultimately celebrates a society at peace with itself (while also not taking itself too seriously (!)).

Comments from Other IBEX Travellers to Bhutan

“Many people have never heard of Bhutan. And there are reasons for it. It's a tiny kingdom hidden next to India and China, two huge countries that are so frequently visited by tourists from all over the world. It is really one of a kind. Nothing we read about it could ever prepare us for what we saw. All the natural beauty of the Himalayas, the unique architecture of the monasteries, the colorful clothing the Bhutanese wear are all true enough. But we could never imagine the graceful harmony between nature, people, and Buddhism that permeates everything in Bhutan. We would advise anyone to go and

experience it all now before the country is swallowed up by the modern world, with its advanced technology, fast food and standardized culture. Experience the warmth and attentiveness of Bhutanese people who are always smiling, hospitable, and generous. Last but not least there is no one who can show you Bhutan as well as Preston Scott, the ultimate authority on Bhutan, a scholar and the best companion. He was just as perfect as Bhutan was, a dream come true...”

Elena & Vladimir Kilinsky, New York, NY, 2010

IBEX is not liable for any errors or omissions. All pricing and itineraries are subject to change.

Weather in the region

Weather-factors are highly variable in Bhutan (depending on the season). Late autumn and mid-spring are ideal times to travel to the eastern Himalayas (although a trip can be planned for any month of the year). Daytime temperatures typically range from the high-50s to mid-70s with nighttime temperatures ranging from the low-30s to mid-50s throughout most of the year (and depending on location).

Health Information

There are no immunization requirements for entry into Bhutan. Anti-diarrhetics (it can happen) and motion-sickness pills (because of the mountain roads) are recommended. Bottled water is available throughout.

The elevation of most lodgings is between 6,500 ft –9,500 ft (depending on locale). Short passes as high as 12,000 ft may be experienced on the road.

A note about Accommodations

We select hotels with cultural interests as well as optimum settings (most are situated on hilltops or along rivers providing quiet views of the surrounding areas). Most traditional Bhutanese lodges are pleasant, clean and comfortable with friendly and attentive staffs -- but not 'luxurious' by international standards. Baths and showers are simple and functional with plenty of hot water. Nights can be quite cool in Bhutan (depending on locale and the season) -- extra blankets are the norm where and when necessary. Food is generally well-prepared, plentiful and delicious. Every effort is made to try to accommodate any special dietary needs with advance notice.



International BioExploration Society (IBEX) is affiliated with Rutgers University. IBEX Tours are developed by leading Rutgers faculty. IBEX is a non-profit organization that invests all proceeds in conservation and biodiversity research

which benefits natural habitats and human health in the host countries. You as a traveler directly contribute to preserving our planet's environment, improving human health, and supporting environmentally sustainable communities.



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Registration Form

I would like to register for IBEX tour:

Tour title: _____

Date: _____

Registration Information

Full Name (as it appears on your passport): _____

Name for Participant List: _____

Phone (home): _____ Phone (work): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email address: _____

Passport Number: Expiration Date: _____

Date of Issue: _____ Place of Issue: _____ Citizenship: _____

Birthday (mm/dd/yyyy): _____ Birthplace: _____

Wedding Anniversary or special occasion: _____

We will do our best to accommodate your needs. Please contact us with any questions.

Personal Information

Allergies: _____

Special dietary needs: _____

General health: _____

Contact information of a person who is not traveling with you, who we should contact in case of emergency.

Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Phone (home): _____ Phone (work): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Travel will be made in the least expensive economy class airfare, unless otherwise directed.

Travel will be from your home city of departure to the Tour's Gateway City using the most direct flights available which will enable you to arrive in time to join the IBEX Tour.

Airline travel request

Please provide the following information:

Home City Airport of Departure: _____

Return reservations will be made to this city, unless otherwise directed

Airline seat preference: _____ Aisle _____ Window _____

Airline Frequent Flyer Number: _____

Please fax or email this form to IBEX partner Kriegner Travel. Each participant must complete their own form

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