

HIDDEN LANDS AND SECRET FIRE

A Vajra Path Journey to the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan

October 24 – November 7, 2024



This journey to the last Himalayan Buddhist kingdom will be led by Dr. Nida Chenagtsang and Dr. Ian Baker, with additional guidance from local Bhutanese yogis and yoginīs. The immersive, two-week pilgrimage will focus on healing and the foundational Vajrayāna practice of Tummo (Skt. *caṇḍālī-yoga*) in connection with the experiential realization of Dzogchen (Skt. Atiyoga). In illuminating the essential union of mind training (*lojung*) and body training (*lujung*), teachings and practice on this journey will also emphasize Jñānamudrā and Karmamudrā, or desire in the service of liberation leading to Mahāsukha, the ‘Great Bliss’ that ends Samsāra. The program will also cover Mahāmudrā, Dream Yoga, and Chöd (‘severance’) in which the yogin ceremonially offers their body to be consumed by tantric deities in a visualized ritual feast that enacts the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence (*anitya*; *mitakpa*). Emphasis, however, will be on the psycho-physical practices in which enstatic states of bliss dissolve conceptuality, heighten sensory awareness, and open the practitioner to naked awareness of the nature of mind and reality. The journey will begin in the Paro Valley, in western Bhutan, and will continue at spiritual power places, including *beyul*, or ‘hidden lands’, in central and eastern Bhutan, as outlined in the itinerary below. The trip is open to anyone with sincere motivation and reasonable fitness, irrespective of prior background or experience in Tantric Buddhism. Bhutan has been described as the ‘last jewel in Buddhism’s Himalayan Crown’, and this Vajra Path Journey represents an opportunity to experience the essence of Vajrayāna culture and practice in an enchanting environment of extraordinary cultural, artistic, and natural beauty. Concurrent with teachings and practice, participants will also be introduced to Himalayan herbs and rejuvenating formulas from the Tibetan medico-yogic tradition.

TRIP ITINERARY

Oct 24 – Arrive in Paro, Bhutan, on a morning flight from Bangkok, Thailand, or an early afternoon flight from Delhi, India. After lunch, visit the 7th century Kyichu Lhakhang, Bhutan’s first Buddhist temple, followed by orientation and introductions prior to a Bhutanese welcome dinner. Overnight hotel in Paro. (alt. 2,280 meters; 7,524 feet)



Oct 25 – Visit Ta Dzong, Bhutan’s National Museum, and hike from there to the monastic fortress of Rinpung Dzong for an immersive introduction to Bhutan’s Vajrayāna Buddhist culture. Free time after lunch to explore downtown Paro. Overnight hotel in Paro. (alt. 2,280 meters; 7,524 feet)

Oct 26 – Today begins with a 25-minute charter flight to Bumthang, Bhutan’s cultural and historical heartland with an array of ancient temples and sacred sites in a beautiful mountain valley. After lunch, we will visit the 7th century



Jambay Lhakhang, a temple dedicated to Maitreya, the future Buddha, on the final day of its annual festival. We will walk from there to Kurjey Guru Lhakhang, a temple dedicated to the tantric mahāsiddha Padmasambhava, for teachings and transmission of Tummo, the Yoga of Inner Fire. Time permitting, we will also visit Tamshing Monastery, a primary seat of the 15th century treasure-revealer Pema Lingpa, an emanation of Padmasambhava. Overnight at Mountain Resort. (alt. 2,621 meters; 8,599 feet)

Oct 27 – Today we will visit Tharpa Ling, the ‘Place of Liberation’, established in the 14th century by the great Dzogchen master Longchen Rabjam Drimé Özer. From the main temple, we will hike one hour to Choedrak Monastery (3,800m), built against a cliff face, to visit Padmasambhava’s meditation cave and the rock throne (Longchen Zhugthri) where Longchenpa wrote part of his famous ‘Seven Treasuries’. The cliff is considered the residence of the powerful deity Dorji Yudonma, one of the twelve protectresses of the Himalayan Buddhist world. Choedrak will serve as a support for teachings on Dzogchen to augment the practice of Tummo. Overnight at Mountain Resort. (alt. 2,621 meters; 8,599 feet)



Oct 28 (Dakini Day) – Today we will drive northeast to the ancient region of Lhuentse (also known as Kurtoe), the ancestral homeland of Bhutan’s kings, passing through a diversity of landscapes, passes, vegetation, and climates. Teachings and group practice in the afternoon. Overnight at Takila Guest House (alt. 1,815 meters; 5,956 feet) and/ or Phayul Resort (in Autsho). (alt. 920 meters)

Oct 29 – After visiting Guru Nangsey Zilneon, a colossal 173-foot statue of Padmasambhava who established numerous pilgrimage sites in Lhuentse when coming from Tibet, we will proceed to Rawabi village and Druk Zangri Khamar, a Vajrayāna center connected with the Chöd lineage of the 11th century Tibetan yoginī Machig Lhapdrön, situated on a beautiful ridge with views of Tibet. Here we will experience Machig’s ritual dance tradition for severing dualistic concepts and realizing the Buddha’s teachings on the Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā) and its connection with Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen. Overnight at Takila Guest House (alt. 1,815 meters; 5,956 feet) and/ or Phayul Resort, in Autsho. (alt. 920 meters)



Oct 30 – Today we begin a two-night trek on an ancient trade and pilgrimage route connecting eastern and central Bhutan with Tibet. Our route will begin at Ungaar village (1,500 meters), situated above Khaine Lhakhang, one of Bhutan’s oldest temples built in the mid 7th century by King Songtsen Gampo of Tibet to subdue obstacles. This was also the legendary route followed by Padmasambhava when he travelled to the Bumthang Valley after leaving the hidden land of Khenpajong along the Tibetan border. After performing Mountain Incense Smoke Offering (Riwosangchod), we will hike four to five hours through rhododendron and pine forest and areas known for medicinal plants to reach a spectacularly located campsite. Overnight at Pemi Luxury Camp. (2,950 meters; 9,678 feet)



Oct 31 – After morning practice, we will hike approximately three and a half hours from Pemi to the crest of the Rodong La pass (4,109 meters, 13,482 feet), overlooking scenic mountain valleys covered in lush pine forests to the hidden land of Khenpajong and the peaks of the Himalayas beyond. The area is rich in folklore concerning spirits and yetis as well as locations where lamas and yogis from Bhutan and Tibet practiced Tummo, the Yoga of Inner Heat, as well as Dream Yoga. From the pass, we will proceed downhill for another two hours to an alpine yak pasture. Hot meals and refreshments will be served along the way. Overnight at Phokpey Luxury Camp. (3,680 meters, 12,073 feet)

Nov 1 – This morning we will practice at the hermitage and temple of Khramai, a location renowned for Tsalung and Tummo as well as for sightings of Yeti, the proto-hominids of Himalayan lore. We will then descend approximately four hours through enchanting lichen-strung fairy forests of bamboo and hemlock to Ogyen Choling Manor, constructed in the 16th century by Tsokyey Dorji, a descendant of the treasure revealer Tertön Dorje Lingpa. Overnight at Ogyen Choling Heritage House. (alt. 3,000 meters, 9,843 feet)



Nov 2 – Teaching and rest day at Ogyen Choling Manor and its temple dedicated to twenty-one forms of Tārā, the ‘mother’ of all Buddhas. Time permitting, we will also practice at

Longchen Rabjam's 'Cave of Great Bliss' (Dechen Phug).
Overnight at Ogyen Choling Heritage House. (alt. 3,000
meters, 9,843 feet)



Nov 3 – After morning practice in Ogyen Choling's Temple of the Twenty-One Tārās, we will hike via the Bumphug ('Vase Cave') of Guru Padmasambhava and Dorje Lingpa to Tak Rimochen, a temple dedicated to Padmasambhava and his consorts Mandāravā and Yeshé Tsogyal at the base of a tiger-striped cliff. Overnight at Ogyen Choling Heritage House. (alt. 3,000 meters, 9,843 feet)

Nov 4 – Leaving Ogyen Choling, we will drive one and a half hours to Jakar for a thirty-minute flight back to Paro. After lunch, we will have free time to explore downtown Paro, to visit Jangtsa Dumtseg Lhakhang—a temple established by Mahasiddhā Thangtong Gyalpo (1361–1485 CE)—or to enjoy traditional Sowa rigpa massages and Bhutanese hot stone baths. Overnight at hotel in Paro. (alt. 2,280 meters; 7,524 feet)



Nov 5 – Today we will hike to the world heritage site of Paro Taktsang ('Tiger's Nest'), followed by a visit to Yeshé Tsogyal's 'Lion Cave' (Senge Phug) and Chöd practice at Machig Phug, the cave hermitage of the renowned female Tibetan siddha, Machig Lhapdrön. Lunch at Tiger's Nest Teahouse. Overnight at hotel in Paro. (alt. 2,280 meters; 7,524 feet)

Nov 6 – Morning group practice and discussion with Himalayan Sowa rigpa wellness programs in the afternoon. Farewell dinner and closing ceremony. Overnight at hotel in Paro. (alt. 2,280 meters; 7,524 feet)

Nov 7 – Morning departure from Paro Airport to Delhi, India, or Bangkok, Thailand.

For further information please contact the Vajra Path Team at: thevajrapath@gmail.com

PROGRAM LEADERS



Dr. Nida Chenagtsang is a traditional Tibetan physician and lineage holder of the Yuthok Nyingthig, the unique spiritual healing tradition of Tibetan Medicine. Born in Amdo, in Northeastern Tibet, he began his early medical studies at the local Tibetan Medicine hospital. Later he was awarded scholarship to enter the Lhasa Tibetan Medical University, where he completed his medical education in 1996 with practical training at the Tibetan Medicine hospitals in Lhasa and Lhoka. Alongside his medical education, Dr. Nida trained in Vajrayāna with teachers from every school of Tibetan Buddhism, especially in the Longchen Nyingthig of the Nyingma school from his root teacher Ani Ngawang Gyaltsen and in the Dudjom Tersar lineage from Chönyid Rinpoche and Sremo Dechen Yudron. He received complete teachings in the Yuthok Nyingthig lineage, the unique spiritual tradition of Tibetan Medicine, from his teachers Khenpo Tsultrim Gyaltsen and Khenchen Troru Tsenam, and was requested to

continue the lineage by Jamyang Rinpoche of the Rebkong *ngakpa/ma* (non-monastic yogi and yoginī) tradition. He is the author of many articles and books on Sowa Rigpa (Traditional Tibetan Medicine) and the Yuthok Nyingthig tradition both in the Tibetan and English languages which have been translated into several languages. Dr. Nida is the Medical Director and principal teacher of Sorig Khang International and the Sowa Rigpa Institute: School of Traditional Tibetan Medicine; Co-Founder of the International Ngakmang Institute, established to preserve and maintain the Rebkong *ngakpa* non-monastic yogi/inī culture within modern Tibetan society; and Co-Founder of Pure Land Farms: Center for Tibetan Medicine, Meditation and Rejuvenation in Los Angeles, California. In addition to his work as a physician, he trains students in Sowa Rigpa and the Yuthok Nyingthig tradition in over forty countries around the world.



Dr. Ian Baker holds a PhD in History from the University of Strathclyde and a MPhil in Medical Anthropology from University College London, following earlier graduate work in Buddhist Studies at Columbia University and English Literature at the University of Oxford. He is the author of seven critically acclaimed books on Himalayan and Tibetan cultural history, environment, art, and medicine including, *Tibetan Yoga: Principles and Practices*, *The Dalai Lama's Secret Temple*, *The Heart of the World*, *The Tibetan Art of Healing*, and *Buddhas of the Celestial Gallery*, with introductions by the H.H. the Dalai Lama and Deepak Chopra. He was lead curator for an exhibition at London's Wellcome Collection entitled 'Tibet's Secret Temple: Body, Mind, and Meditation in Tantric Buddhism', and was co-curator at London's Victoria and Albert Museum for a scheduled exhibition on the interface of art and science in esoteric traditions of yoga and Vajrayāna Buddhism. He is well known for his extensive field research in Tibet's 'hidden lands' (*beyul*), resulting in National Geographic Society designating him as an 'Explorer for the Millennium'. He also undertook prolonged meditation retreats in the Himalayas of Nepal under the guidance of the Nyingma masters Chatral Sangye Dorje Rinpoche, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, and Kyabjé Dungse Thinley Norbu. He has led international groups in Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan for Smithsonian Institution and National Geographic Expeditions and is a board member of the International Society for Bhutan Studies.

Dr. Nida Chenagtsang and Dr. Ian Baker are co-founders of The Vajra Path, an initiative for bringing the practices of Vajrayāna Buddhism into interdisciplinary dialogue with the contemporary world as well as with parallel traditions across time and geographies. Curated Vajra Path Journeys are central to their mission. For more information, please contact the Vajra Path Team at: thevajrapath@gmail.com



"If you rely on the path of the Innate, you will be liberated no matter what you do."

– Vajradāka Tantra