

Questions? Call Effie 1-415-551-1005 or email effie@hightreks.com

A Special Pilgrimage in Nepal & India with Charok Lama & Paula Chichester



Advice from Lama Zopa Rinpoche about being on pilgrimage

Rinpoche has told us that it is good to do different practices on pilgrimage, to make people's lives very meaningful and very productive.

"Normally when people go on pilgrimage, they are just like tourists; maybe they take some pictures, and that's it. They don't use the places to collect merit or to meditate or to get some benefit for their minds. If it's just like sightseeing, then it won't be that much benefit."

Rinpoche says that by doing pilgrimage, we receive blessings from the holy places where enlightened beings, great yogis, and bodhisattvas have practiced. With the blessing entering our hearts, we are able to soften; our mind becomes subdued; and we are able to decrease the delusions. We are then able to develop compassion for others and to strengthen our devotion, renunciation, and wisdom. Our mental continuum becomes Dharma.

Rinpoche has also advised that when we see the Great Stupa in Boudhanath for the very first time, even from the airplane, we should make special strong prayers.

"This stupa is so powerful that anybody who makes prayers to it has their wishes fulfilled. Whatever you pray for, it will succeed. So do your best prayer!"



Charok Lama (Ngawang Rigdzin Gyatso Rinpoche)

Charok Lama is the recognized reincarnation of the previous Charok Lama, Kusho Mangde. He was born in 1995 and called Lhakpa Tsering by his Sherpa mother. Lama Zopa Rinpoche's sister, Anila Ngawang Samden knew him from an early age and suspected he might be the incarnation of Kusho Mangden, who she knew well. She asked Trulshik Rinpoche (previous head of the Nyingmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism) for a divination. Trulshik Rinpoche confirmed that the boy was the incarnation of Kusho Mangden, a famous mountain yogi and a good friend of the Lawudo Lama, Kunsang Yeshe, the previous incarnation of Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

At age four Charok Lama moved from the remote Khumbu region of Nepal to Kopan Monastery in Kathmandu where he received his Rabjung vows and studied. At the age eight he continued on to Sera Je Monastery in South India where he was enthroned. There he received the Rikchung degree before completing study of the four main Tibetan Buddhist philosophical treatises. In 2020, Rinpoche made the decision to live as a lay person and go to the West to teach. So far he has travelled and given teachings in Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, and in the United States.

He was very close to Lama Zopa Rinpoche and remains very connected to FMPT. Rinpoche speaks fluent English.

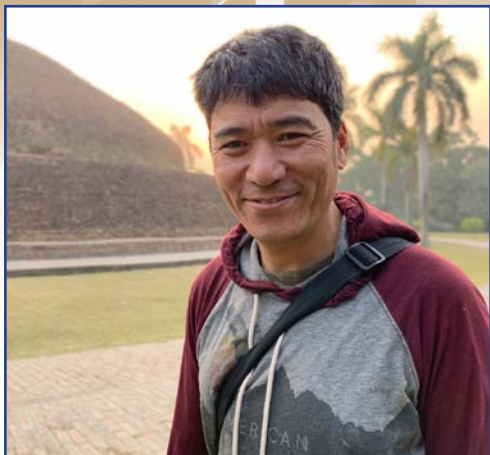


Paula Chichester

Paula Chichester is originally from Berkeley, CA, and has been interested in Buddhism since she was fourteen. About ten years later, she went on retreats with Lama Kunga Rinpoche and Lama Yeshe, and was inspired by their teachings. In 1982, after three months of teachings by Zong Rinpoche in Dharamsala, India, she left her Ph.D program at UC Berkeley to pursue enlightenment full-time.

Guided by Lama Yeshe, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and Ribur Rinpoche; and in partnership with Roger Munro, she devoted the next 23 years to full-time study and retreat. In 2005, after completion of her second four-year solitary retreat, she began splitting her year in retreat with service of the FPMT. These activities have included leading retreats, restarting Land of Calm Abiding as Co-director, and completing with Roger Monroe 108 Springs Chöd retreats in Scotland and New Zealand. She has also led a previous pilgrimage to Tibet organized by Himalayan High Treks and led meditations for the Maitreya Relic Tour in Africa and Vietnam.

In 2017, Lama Zopa Rinpoche encouraged the FPMT Centers in Europe to request Paula to lead retreats for them. Another longtime student of Buddhадharma, Geoff Jukes, offered her home in the Shetland Islands, where she could live and practice. There she hosts retreats in the little gompa by the sea. For more information about Paula and her teaching schedule, please go to www.braveview.org.



Amber Tamang at Ramabhar Stupa, Kushinagar

Amber Tamang is from a small village in the Solu Khumbu region of Nepal— a hamlet not on most maps! Amber became a porter in 1992, to put himself through high school and college. He is an advocate for better working conditions for trekking staff. For his undergraduate law degree, his presentation was on legal protection for workers in tourism. He achieved a Master's Degree in History, Culture, and Archaeology. Amber has worked as the local guide for many pilgrimages. An independent researcher in the culture and religion of the Himalayas, Amber has published several articles in Nepali and English. Amber became a guide with Himalayan High Treks in 1995 and has introduced many travelers to the wonders of Nepal, Tibet, and India. Those who've traveled with him praise his patience and kindness. His English is articulate as he enthusiastically describes the local customs of the Himalaya and its people. Amber and his family live in Kathmandu.

Amber Tamang
Three Jewels Adventures, Kathmandu
+977 98510-84961
amber@hightreks.com

Your day by day itinerary in detail

Pre-Trip Arrival

Fly to our meeting point in Kathmandu, Nepal. You must arrive in Kathmandu no later than Sunday, February 8, 2026. (Travelers from the Americas 'lose' one day crossing the international dateline.) We strongly suggest you arrive a day or two early we can arrange transfers and additional accommodations on request (additional cost).



Day 1 | February 8, 2026

Everyone meets in Kathmandu. Our local staff will pick you up at the airport and transfer you to Kopan Monastery near Boudhanath Stupa (about 30 to 45 minutes). First, you will go through immigration, and then go upstairs to claim your luggage (take a cart for this), and finally, go through customs and proceed to exit the airport. As you go outside, look for a sign that says Dharma Journeys, as advised above.

Established in 1970 as a place of Buddhist teachings for Westerners and eventually a monastery for the monks of Solu Khumbu (where Lama Zopa Rinpoche is from), Kopan is beautifully situated on a hill above the Kathmandu Valley. One of the best Gelug monasteries in Nepal, it is home to 400 monks and, at Kachoe Ghakyil down the road, 400 nuns.

People come from all over the world to attend retreats and courses at Kopan, especially the famous November course. The accommodation is comfortable and the food very satisfactory. There has even been a cookbook published with favorite recipes from Kopan. Overnight Kopan Monastery. (Dinner)

Kopan Monastery

www.kopanmonastery.com

+977 (1) 482-1268

info@kopanmonastery.org



Bhouthanath, Kathmandu, Nepal

Day 2 | February 9, 2026

A typical day on retreat starts early with meditation, followed by breakfast. Then there will be teachings and discussion until lunch, with a tea break. After lunch, there will be a two-hour break during which you can take a short easy walk, rest, or study quietly in the excellent library or on your own. During the afternoon, there are more teachings and discussion; and after dinner, a final session of teachings and meditation. Often a group in retreat will opt to maintain silence for all or part of the time (for example, before breakfast, and after dinner) as this adds to the contemplative quality of the experience.

Day 3 | February 10, 2026

In the morning, we visit Swayambhunath stupa. According to legend, Kathmandu Valley was filled with a great lake, at the center of which a lotus flower grew. With the slash of the sword of the Buddha of Wisdom, Manjushri, the lake was drained and the lotus settled on top of the hill and transformed into the stupa. There is evidence that the great Indian Buddhist Emperor Ashoka visited the site 2,000 years ago.

In the afternoon visit Boudhanath stupa and temples, monasteries, and the village. Boudhanath is the religious center for Tibetans living in Nepal and is especially beloved by them. Lama Zopa Rinpoche says that upon first sight of the stupa, all one's prayers will be fulfilled. Overnight Kopan Monastery. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Day 4 | February 11, 2026

Morning tour to Pharping 15 miles outside of Kathmandu. Pharping is renowned as a place where Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) a central figure in Tibetan Buddhism, is said to have meditated and attained enlightenment in the Asura Cave.



Close up of Bough Stupa

Day 5 | February 12, 2026

Meet in the lobby at 7 AM (after tea) for transfer to the airport for our 30-minute flight to Bhairahawa airport on Buddha Air. It's an hour's drive to Lumbini and Hotel Lumbini Garden New Crystal. After lunch, visit the birthplace of the Buddha, a 15-minute walk from the hotel. Here there is an Ashokan Pillar with an inscription of King Ashoka from 250 BC, a sacred pond, ruins of the ancient monasteries, stupas, and the temple of Mayadevi, the Buddha's mother. Overnight at Hotel Lumbini Garden New Crystal. (Tea, Lunch, Dinner)

Hotel Lumbini Garden New Crystal, Lumbini

www.newcrystalhotels.com

+977 (71) 580145



World Peace Pagoda, Lumbini

Day 6 | February 13, 2026

Lumbini to Sravasti. After breakfast, we will drive to Sanauli, the Nepal–India border, an hour away. We stop for passport control and continue on an all-day drive to Sravasti, with a light lunch en route. Overnight at Hotel Lotus Nikko, Sravasti. (Breakfast, Light Lunch, Dinner)

[Hotel Lotus Nikko, Sravasti](#)

[+91 \(5252\) 265-2 91](#)

info@lotusnikkohotels.com

Day 7 | February 14, 2026

After breakfast, we visit Jetavana Grove, in Sravasti, the capital of the ancient Kosala kingdom, where Buddha and his disciples retreated every rainy season for twenty-five years and where he gave many of his teachings. According to Lama Zopa Rinpoche, it is easy to meditate here. Relax in the afternoon, or visit the cave of the former bandit, Angulimala. After meeting Lord Buddha, the bandit calmed down and embraced Buddhism. Overnight Hotel Lotus Nikko, Sravasti. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)



Monks at Jetavana, Shravasti.

Day 8 | February 15, 2026

Drive to Kushinagar, stopping for a light lunch en route. In the afternoon enjoy a couple of hours of free time before dinner. Kushinagar is the place where Buddha passed away. His last words were said to be, “Decay is inherent in all component things. Be diligent in your practice.” Overnight Hotel Lotus Nikko, Kushinagar. (Breakfast, Light Lunch, Dinner)

Hotel Lotus Nikko, Kushinagar

+91 (5564) 273 026

info@lotusnikkohotels.com

Day 9 | February 16, 2026

In Kushinagar. After breakfast, we visit Mahaparinirvana Temple where there is the statue of Buddha passing away in meditation. In the afternoon, we visit the unadorned but very holy Rambhar Stupa, where Buddha was cremated. “Do not be sad,” he told his disciples. “Let the Dharma I have taught you be your teacher after my passing.” Overnight Hotel Lotus Nikko, Kushinagar. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Day 10 | February 17, 2026

An all-day drive from Kushinagar to Rajgir via Patna, in the state of Bihar. Light lunch en route. Overnight Indo Hokke Hotel. (Breakfast, Light Lunch, Dinner)

Indo Hoche Hotel, Rajgir

+91 (6112) 255245

<https://www.theroyalresidencyhotels.com/rajgir.php>



Reclining Buddha, Kushinagar

Day 11 | February 18, 2026

Enjoy a morning visit to the ruins of Nalanda Monastery. From the 5th to the 12th centuries, Nalanda was a major Buddhist university with 10,000 monks and students in residence. After lunch at the hotel, we'll visit Vulture Peak, where Buddha gave many teachings, including The Heart Sutra. We will take a leisurely walk up to the top for meditation and teachings. Later in the afternoon, we drive to Bodhgaya and visit Mahabodhi Stupa, the site of Buddha's enlightenment. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

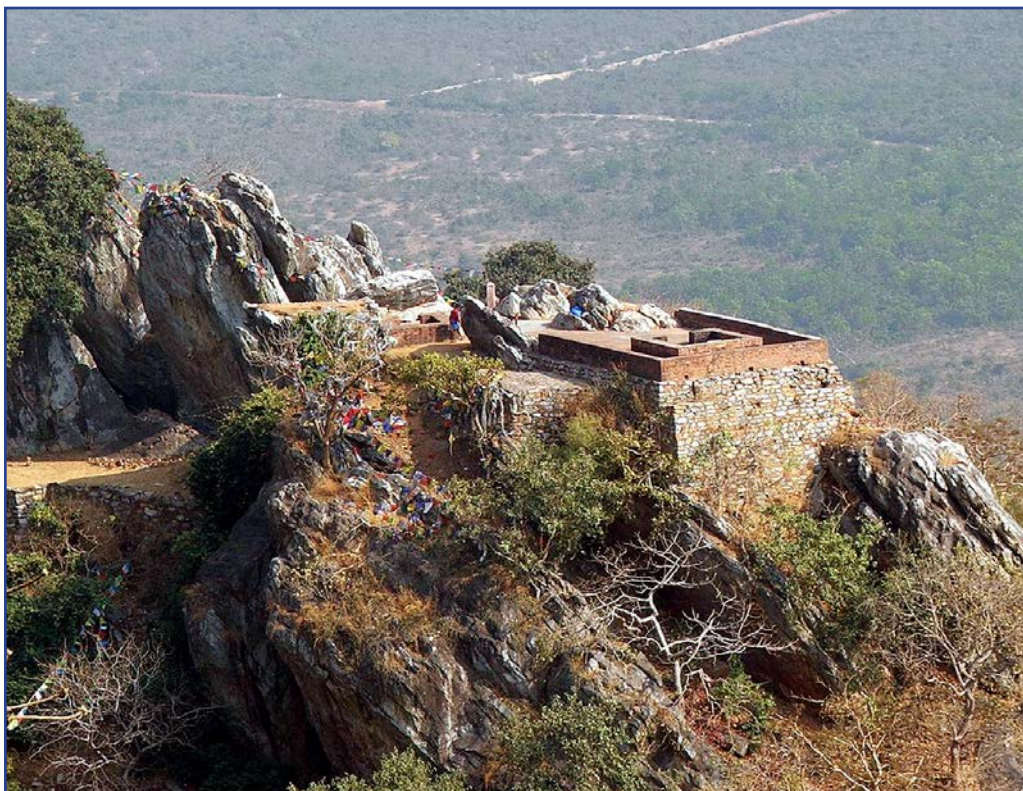
Marasa Samovar Premiere

+91 (631) 220 0222

<https://www.sarovarhotels.com/marasa-sarovar-premiere-bodhgaya/>

Day 12 & 13 | February 19 & 20, 2026

Visit Root Institute, an FPMT center set in tranquil gardens. Continue on to visit other FPMT centers to learn about charitable activities such as the Maitreya School and Tara's Children Project. In the evening, we can enjoy another visit to Mahabodhi Stupa. Overnight at Marasa Samovar Premiere. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)



Vulture Peak, Rajgir

Day 14 | February 21, 2026

Bodhgaya to Varanasi. We'll get an early start for the drive to Varanasi and have a simple breakfast en route then a late lunch/early dinner at the hotel.

In the early evening, we can pay an optional visit to the banks of the famous River Ganges, one of the holiest Hindu sites. Overnight Radisson Hotel, Varanasi. (Light Breakfast, Early Dinner)

Radisson Hotel, Varanasi

www.radissonhotels.com/en-us/hotels/radisson-varanasi

+91 542 250 1515

Day 15 | February 22, 2026

Visit Deer Park at Saranath where Lord Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma for the first time, teaching the four noble truths and the eightfold path to the five ascetics who were his first disciples. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)



Boats on the Ganges River, Varanasi

Day 16 | February 23, 2026

Travel to Kathmandu. Early check-out from the hotel and transfer to the airport. Transfer to the hotel and check in then some free time and overnight at the Hyatt Regency in Kathmandu. (Light Breakfast)

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Boudha
www.kathmandu.hyatt.regency.com
+977 (1) 449-1234

Day 18 | February 24, 2026

Optional tour of Kathmandu then our final group activity, a late-afternoon puja at Boudha Stupa, followed by dinner at the hotel. Overnight at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. (Breakfast, Dinner)

Day 19 | February 25, 2026

Transfer to the airport to depart Kathmandu or continue exploring the region. (Breakfast)

Other Cost and Considerations

Passport; Visa(s); Physicians Visit; Immunizations and medications as needed; Emergency Medical & Evacuation Insurance; Travel to Nepal; Meals beyond what is listed in the above itinerary; Beverages; Spending/Personal Money.

Trip Activity Level

Mild: Accommodations except at Kopan are in comfortable three to five- star hotels. Activities are usually mild and can include day hikes of less than four hours in length. Vehicle time can include fatigue with long travel along rough roads.

Pilgrimage Cost

The **TOTAL** program cost of US \$5450 includes land cost and in-trip air cost.

Land cost (as itinerary has described): US \$4950.

In-trip airfare estimate (air during the itinerary program): US \$500.

If you prefer a private room, you'll be charged a single supplement of US \$1200.

Pilgrimage costs are based on a typical group size of at least 15 participants.

A minimum of 10 participants is necessary to operate the pilgrimage and it is limited to 25 participants.

Program cost includes a donation to The Buddhist Center, Thubten Norbu Ling, Santa Fe, NM

The deadline for sign-up is Nov. 8, 2025.

Late sign-ups may be accepted if there is space available, with a service charge of US \$100.

Should this trip be undersubscribed (less than 15 but more than 10), a surcharge of US \$300 per

person will apply (added upon registration and removed once/if the threshold of 15 participants is reached).

A deposit of US \$500 holds your place. **Pay your balance by check or bank transfer and save \$200.**

Notes:

- This is meant only as a guide to what our days will be like. Changes may be made as we go along and will be announced as well as posted when possible in the hotel reception areas. These changes will be based on local conditions, health, and hotel availability.
- The times mentioned are all approximate and rounded off.
- Sturdy vehicles with air-conditioning will be provided.
- Airport transfers are included on Day 1 and Day 18. We can arrange optional transfers and services at a modest cost should you arrive early or depart late from the program.
- Included meals for each day have been shown at the end of each daily description.
- Hotel contact information is subject to change.
- The format for the phone numbers is country code, city code, then the local number in parentheses. Nepal's country code is 977 and India's country code is 91. For mobile phones in Nepal, you don't need to put the city code 1 after the country code as you do for other local numbers.

— *Effie Fletcher, Sept. 1, 2025 / Himalayan High Treks, CST 2085690-40*

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