

# Itinerary: Mystical Journey to Central Bhutan

**Duration: 12 Days / 11 Nights**

**Destinations: Thimphu, Paro, Punakha/Wangdue, Gangtey/Phobjikha, Trongsa and Bumthang**

**Package Type: Fly In/Fly Out**

## **Overview**

With extra ordinary Himalayan scenery, colorful festivals and ancient monasteries, Bhutan is a truly fascinating and unexplored kingdom waiting to be explored. Buddhism is everywhere. Countless prayer flags, stupas and monasteries demonstrate the importance of spirituality in Bhutan. Monks, farmers and herdsman turn it in gods, deities or animal figures. During the journey we encounter not only warm, mostly good-humored people, but also to explore a sensational mountain scenery, lush green forests and wide valleys with fertile rice terraces. The Government measures the development in terms of Gross National Happiness. To the local people traditional values, environmental preservation and good governance takes precedence over material things. **This tour showcases of Bhutan's popular western and spiritual central valleys.**

**Thimphu:** Capital and the largest city of Bhutan - Only capital city in the world that does not have traffic lights - Main center of Commerce, Religion and Government in the country - Most modern city of Bhutan and has abundance of restaurants, internet cafes, nightclubs and shopping center. It is one of the few cities of Bhutan having ATM facilities.

**Paro:** Small town in the western part of Bhutan - Also home to Paro Airport, Bhutan's only International Airport - The valley has many isolated small villages and is known for red rice - Also home to most of Bhutan's oldest temples and monasteries.

**Punakha and Wangdue:** Punakha and Wangdue is located in the same valley. These two places are located within a distance of 13 km. Punakha was the capital of Bhutan and the seat of government until 1955 - The valley is fed by the Pho Chhu and the Mo Chhu rivers - It is one of very few places in Bhutan which offers Rafting facilities - It is the winter seat of the Je Khenpo (Chief Abbot) and the monk body at present.

**Gangtey/Phobjikha:** The famous Phobjikha Valley is located in Wangdue district - Phobjikha is the winter roosting place for endangered black necked crane and the valley is considered one of the most beautiful glacial valleys in the Himalayas.

**Trongsa:** Also known as the Vanguard of the Warriors - The first and Second Kings of Bhutan ruled Bhutan from Trongsa - The Crown Prince normally holds the position of the Trongsa Penlop before ascending to the Throne.

**Bumthang:** Bumthang District is one of the 20 districts comprising Bhutan - The most historic dzongkhag if the number of ancient temples and sacred sites is counted - Consists of the four

mountain valleys of Ura, Chumey, Tang and Choekhor, although occasionally the entire district is referred to as Bumthang valley - Literally, Bumthang directly translates to "beautiful field". "Bum" is said to be the abbreviation for either "Bumpa" (a vessel for holy water) describing the shape and the nature of the Valley, or simply "Bum" meaning Girl, thang means field or ground.

### Highlights of the tour:

- Tashichhodzong, Punakha Dzong and Trongsa Dzong – three of the most impressive dzongs (Fortresses).
- The must visit Dochula Pass and the Druk Wangyal Chhortens
- Visit Phobjikha, the most beautiful glacial valley of Bhutan.
- Endangered Black necked Cranes in Phobjikha Valley ( only in winter months)
- First had experience of Buddhist Culture and traditional rural village life.
- Hike through pine forests to visit “Tiger’s Nest”
- Explore Bumthang, spiritual heartland of Bhutan.
- Untouched Nature and unique Art & Architecture
- Hike through pine forests to visit “Tiger’s Nest”
- Beautiful landscapes and spectacular Himalayan scenery.
- Visit Cheese and Apple Juice/Wine making factory.

### Day Wise Itinerary

#### Day 1. Paro – Thimphu:

Driving Distance: 65 Km, Driving time: 1.5 – 2 Hr., Altitude of Thimphu: 2,350 m

Your flight to Paro on a clear day, is marked with the panoramic views of the Himalayas including the Everest and other famous Peaks. The approach through the foothills and the landing (including few steep turns) at the tiny airstrip of Paro has been termed as adventurous by many travelers. After the completion of immigration formalities at the Paro Airport exit door, you will be received by your Bhutanese guide with traditional “**Tashi Khadar**”. Afterwards drive to Thimphu following the Pa Chhu River. Check-In to the hotel and have your first experience with Bhutanese Cuisine. Rest of the day is at leisure. You can explore the Thimphu valley and town or shop till your heart’s content. **A private traditional Cultural Show would be organized especially for you in the evening.**

Meals – Lunch and Dinner; Overnight at the Hotel in Thimphu

#### Day 2. Thimphu Sightseeing:

Today you would be driven in and around Thimphu covering key places of interest. After breakfast you would visit

- **Kuensel Phodrang**, the gigantic Buddha Dordenma Statue located atop a hill in Kuensel Phodrang Nature Park.
- **National Memorial Chhorten**, a Stupa built in 1974 to honor the third Druk



#### Day 4. Gangtey/ Phobjikha Valley.

A full day to explore at the

- **Phobjikha Valley**, one of the most beautiful glacial valleys in the Himalayas. It lies at an elevation of 3,000 m. It is surrounded by a many small villages. Phobjikha is best known for the rare black necked cranes that migrate here from the Tibetan Plateau to avoid the extremely cold winters.

Today, you would have a typical Bhutanese Cuisine at a farmhouse. Later, you may choose to do any of the following: Visiting villages and interacting with People, Hikes around the valley, Photography, etc.

Finally, to drive back to the hotel. Evening free for leisure.

Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner; Overnight at the Hotel in Phobjika/Gangtey.

#### Day 5. Gangtey – Trongsa - Bumthang:

Distance: 188 km., Driving Time: 6-7 Hrs. Altitude of Bumthang: 2600 m.

After breakfast, check out from hotel and drive to Trongsa across Pele-La-Pass (11,120 ft.). Here you would witness an abrupt change in vegetation, with mountain forest replaced by high altitude dwarf bamboos. On the way stop at

- **Chendbji Chhorten**, built during the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Lama Shida in the style of the great Boudhanath Chhorten of Nepal to cover the remains of an evil spirit which is said to have manifested as a gigantic snake.

Further ahead visit

- **Trongsa Dzong**, the seat of power over Central and Eastern Bhutan. It was built by Chogyal Minjur Tempa was later enlarged at the end of the 17th century by Desi Tenzin Rabgay. Trongsa Dzong is the ancestral home of the present Royal Family. The first two hereditary kings ruled Bhutan from this Dzong.
- **Ta Dzong**, an ancient watch tower built in the year 1652 by Chogyal Minjur Tempaa as per the directions of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. It has been converted into a museum and represents a tasteful blend of tradition and modernity.

Drive further to Bumthang over the Yutong-La-Pass (11,155 ft.). Enroute we would stop for lunch. While in Chumey valley in Bumthang, visit the.

- **Yathra Weaving Factory**, located in the Zungye village in Chumey, around 17 kms approximately, before reaching the main town of Bumthang. Yathra is the most famous textile product of Bumthang. Yathra is a hand woven fabric made from the wool of sheep or Yak.

On arrival check in to the hotel. Evening free for leisure and walk in the valley.

Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner; overnight at hotel in Bumthang.

**(Note: the roads to Bumthang are not good due road widening work going on)**

## Day 6. Bumthang Sightseeing:

After breakfast, you would be taken around the city to visit the

- **Jakar Dzong**, literally meaning the Castle of White Bird. The current structure was built in 1667. Jakar Dzong is now the main administrative center for Bumthang District, the Dzong also houses the regional monk body.
- **Jambay Lhakhang**, built by King Srongsen Gampo of Tibet in the 7th century and is one among the 108 monasteries built by him to subdue evil spirits in the Himalayan Region. October one of the most spectacular festival, “Jambay Lhakhang Drup” is staged here.
- **Chakhar Lhakhang**, literally meaning the Iron Castle. The original palace was made of Iron and hence the name “Chakhar”. It was rebuilt in 14th century by Dorji Lingpa, a Buddhist saint.
- **Kurjey Lhakhang**, named after body print of Guru Rimpoche. It consists of three temples. The first temple was built in the year 1652 on the rock face, where Guru Padmasambhava meditated in the 8th century. The second temple is considered to be the most holy as it is built on the site of the cave which contains the imprint of the Guru's body. In the year 1990, Ashi Kesang, the Queen mother built the third temple. All the three temples are surrounded by 108 chorten wall.

Thereafter you would be taken to a local restaurant for lunch. In the afternoon you would be taken to

- **Tamshing Lhakhang**, literally meaning the Temple of the good message. It was established in 1501 by Terton Pema Lingpa and has ancient religious paintings such as 1000 Buddhas and 21 'Taras' (female form of Bodhisattva).

**The evening ends with a visit the cheese and apple juice/wine making factory. Taste the Locally made Red panda beer here.**

Finally, after a culturally fruitful day, you are driven back to the hotel.

Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner; Overnight at hotel in Bumthang.

## Day 7. Bumthang Sightseeing

After breakfast, we would take you to an excursion to the remote Tang valley. Stop to visit

- **Membar Tsho**, also known as “The burning Lake”. It is one of the most sacred sites in the region and relates to the famous treasure revealer, Terton Pema Lingpa. Following a prophecy by Guru Rinpoche, Terton Pema Lingpa unearthed a treasure from the bottom of the lake. He dived into the lake with a burning butter lamp and reappeared with the butter lamp still burning and a chest and scroll of paper in his hand (treasures)
- **Drangchel Village**, the birth place of Pema Lingpa. Pema Lingpa was a famous saint and siddha of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism. He is considered a terchen and is

considered to be foremost of the "Five Terton Kings". In the history of the Nyingma school in Bhutan, Pema Lingpa is second only in importance to Padmasambhava.

Have lunch, in a local restaurant. Later visit

- **Ugyenchholing Palace**, a major attraction in the Tang Valley. The Palace now houses the family Museum and was restored in the 19th century. It gives an interesting insight into life in an aristocratic family in the last century

After completing the sightseeing, you would return to your hotel for dinner and retire for the night.

Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner; Overnight at hotel in Bumthang.

### **Day 8. Bumthang to Punakha/Wangdue**

**Distance: 220 km., Driving Time: 8- 9 Hrs. Altitude of Punakha: 1310 m.**

After breakfast, check out from hotel and drive to Punakha/Wangdue. On the way stop for Lunch. Post arrival check into the hotel. Evening free for leisure.

Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner; Overnight at Hotel in Punakha/Wangdue.

### **Day 9. Punakha/Wangdue Sightseeing**

After breakfast, you would be visiting

- **Khamsum Yulley Namgyel Monastery**, a monastery that stands majestically on a strategic ridge above the Punakha valley. Built over a period of 9 years, Bhutanese craftsmen consulted holy scriptures rather than engineering manuals, to construct this 4-storey temple. It takes an hour to hike to the Temple passing through rice fields on the way.

After lunch, you would visit

- **Punakha Dzong**, built in 1637 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. For many years until the time of the second King, it served as the seat of the Government. It is still the winter residence of Je-Khenpo (The Chief Abbot of the Central Monastic Body of Bhutan)
- **Chhimi Lhakhang**, a famous Temple, which is also known as "The Temple of Fertility" built by Lama Drukpa Kuenley

Later you would come back to your hotel. Evening free for leisure.

Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner; Overnight at Hotel in Punakha/Wangdue.

### **Day 10. Punakha – Paro:**

**Driving Distance: 135 km, Driving Time: 4-5 Hr., Altitude of Paro: 2280 m**

After breakfast, you would check out of the hotel to proceed to Paro for the final leg of the tour. On the way stop at

- **Royal Botanical Park, Lamperi**, also known as the Rhododendron Garden. It is the first Botanical Garden of Bhutan. It is famous for 46 species of rhododendrons.

After arriving at Paro, you would be transferred to your Hotel for Check In. Post lunch, you would be taken around to visit

- **Paro Rimpung Dzong**, also known as Fortress of the heap of jewels, built during the time of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1646
- **Ta Dzong**, an ancient watch tower overlooking Rimpung Dzong built in 1951 now converted into national museum.

Later you are driven back to the Hotel. Evening is free for **leisure activities such as Archery experience, National Dress wearing experience** and shopping.

Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner; Overnight at the Hotel in Paro.

### **Day 11. Paro:**

After breakfast, start your day with a hike to

- **Taksang Monastery (Tiger's nest)**, the abode of gods and monks situated at an altitude of 3100m on the Upper Paro Valley, Bhutan. As per the legend, Guru Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche), the tantrum mystic who brought Buddhism to Bhutan, came in the form of Dorje Droloë riding a flying tigress to subdue the demon that was obstructing the spread of Buddhism in the Himalayas.

After the completion of the hike, you would be served picnic lunch among the woods. Post lunch, visit

- **Kyichu Lhakhang**, one of the oldest monasteries in Bhutan built in the 7th century by the Tibetan Emperor Songtsen Gampo

**Later in the day, you would then drive to village house to witness the traditional rural life in a Bhutanese village. Also you have an option of experiencing a Traditional Hot Stone bath in the village house. You can also choose to have your dinner in the house with the Family or also spend your overnight in the village house (needed to be confirmed at the time of confirmation of the Tour) or be driven back to your hotel.**

Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner; Overnight at the Hotel in Paro.

### **Day 12. Departure:**

Today we will bid farewell to this beautiful country and take an early flight back. We hope by now you must have made some good friends and also have taken photographs and beautiful memories of Bhutan. We certainly hope of serving you again on your next visit to this great country or the Last Shangri-La. Tashi Delek

### **Footnotes**

- Except for the overnight destinations, we keep the itinerary flexible in order to give the travelers the best opportunities to capture and experience Bhutan as per the situation, interest and convenience during the time of travel. The Day 1 itinerary is subject to early arrival of the flight in Paro.
- Please note that some of the sightseeing may be closed on government holidays and certain occasions. In such cases you shall be given options for other sightseeing or opportunities to capture and experience Bhutan.
- All the itineraries can be customized as per the requirements of the travelers for any duration or within any destination and can be combined with any kind of activities such as trekking, rafting, walking tour, cycling , etc. Extra Cost may be applicable for some of the activities.

**BHUTAN TOUR PACKAGE  
2016 / 2017  
(3 Star Standard Hotels only)**

<b>Season</b>	<b>1 Pax</b>	<b>2 Pax</b>	<b>3 Pax and above</b>
Low Season	3025	2695	2310
High Season	3135	2805	2420

**Tariff Based on US Dollars / Per Pax**

*Low Season: December, January, February, June, July & August*

*High Season: March, April, May, September, October & November*

Included in the minimum daily tariff package:

- Visa process and arrangement
- Royalty to the government and all other taxes
- Government surcharge for individual groups travelling as one or two pax
- All accommodations in 3 Star standard hotels
- Standard room on twin sharing basis only
- Meals on fixed buffet (Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner)



- Full time English speaking guide
- Private transportation for airport pick up/ drop and all sightseeing
- Entrance fees to events, historic sites, museums and parks as indicated in the itinerary

Not included in the minimum daily tariff package:

- Visa fee for single entry (US\$ 50)
- Refreshment, water and any alcoholic/non-alcoholic beverages
- Travel Insurance (Must for Trekking) applicable
- Single room supplement charges (US\$ 40/Night) applicable
- Luxury star hotels and resorts available at an additional cost
- Luxury camping/trekking can be arranged at an additional cost
- Gratuities to guide, driver, trekking staff, etc.
- Specialized guides (Foreign Language, Photography, Bird Watching, Buddhism or any specialized guide) available at an additional cost
- Any personal expense
- **Extra services like Cultural Show, Hot Stone Bath, Archery Session and National Dress Wearing Experience. For these services supplemental charges would be applicable as below.**
- **Special Group Discounts available**

Supplemental Costs:

- Cultural Show - \$ 95 Per Show
- Hot Stone Bath at Rural House - \$ 25 Per Person Per Bath
- Archery Session and National Dress Wearing Experience - \$ 15 per person per session.

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