

Itinerary: The Last Shangri-la Tour

Duration: 13 Days / 12 Nights

Destinations: Thimphu, Paro, Punakha/Wangdue, Gangtey/Phobjikha, Trongsa, Bumthang, Mongar, Trashigang, Trashiyangtse and Samdrup Jongkhar

Arrival: Fly In/Drive Out - Samdrupjongkhar

Overview

Eastern Bhutan is one of the least explored regions of the kingdom and offers one of most authentic experiences for adventure-oriented tourists. The entire region is awash in unspoiled natural beauty, towering cliffs and pristine forests with great variations in altitude and climatic conditions. It is one of the longest trip. In Bhutan Buddhism is everywhere. Countless prayer flags, stupas and monasteries demonstrate the importance of spirituality in Bhutan. 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 tour begins from Paro and gradually you move from western part to eastern part of the country. **The main highlight of this tour is that visitors can experience contrasting and diverse culture and tradition of western and eastern Bhutan.**

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.

Mongar: Covers an area of 1,954 sq. kms and ranges from 400 m to 4,000 m in altitude - Deep Gorges and stark cliffs amidst dense conifer forest constitute its landscapes and the landscape is spectacular with stark cliffs and deep gorges set amidst dense conifer forests - The road to Mongar is one of the most adventurous and spectacular. The sheer cliffs, beautiful fir forest and green pastures constitutes the environment as you drive to Mongar - The area also gives the opportunity to see countless varieties of rhododendrons and on clear days the view of the mountain Gangkar Puensum, (7541 meters), the world's highest unclimbed mountain, is a great experience.

Trashigang: Situated on the banks of the Gamri Chhu and is the country's largest district - It is the junction which connects Samdrupjongkhar in the Southeast Bhutan and the central and western districts - Trashigang is the eastern terminus of the Lateral Road, Bhutan's main highway leading to Phuntsholing in the southwest.

Trashiyangtse: Is a small but a rapidly growing town and administrative center of the district - The main town is situated in a small river valley and is a lovely spot to take walks in the countryside - This area is famous for wooden containers and bowls.

Samdrupjongkhar: Samdrup Jongkhar town holds the distinct honor of being one of the oldest town in Bhutan - This border town is a bustling little settlement packed to the brim with shopkeepers and hawkers from across the border - The town is located at the south-eastern part of Bhutan and borders the Indian state of Assam - As a border town, Samdrup Jongkhar is often used as the entry point for merchants and tourists entering Eastern Bhutan overland.

Highlights of the tour:

- Entire Bhutan touring opportunity from west to east at a single go
- Visit almost all of the important Dzongs inclusive of Tashichhodzong, Punakha Dzong and the Trongsa Dzong
- First hand experience of Buddhist Culture and traditional rural village life.
- 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)
- Hike through pine forests to visit "Tiger's Nest"
- Explore Bumthang, spiritual heartland of Bhutan.
- Untouched Nature and unique Art & Architecture
- Beautiful landscapes and spectacular Himalayan scenery.
- Visit cheese and apple juice/wine making factory.

Day Wise Itinerary

Day 01. Paro

Altitude of Paro 2,280 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”**. Thereafter you are driven to your hotel and do your check in. You can relax for the rest of the day. In the evening, explore the Paro Town and valley.

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

Day 02: Paro Sightseeing:

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 Droloe 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 3. Paro Sightseeing - Thimphu:

Distance: 65 km, Driving Time: 2 Hrs. Altitude of Thimphu: 2350 m.

After breakfast, you would be taken to

- **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.

You would have lunch, in a local Restaurant. Post lunch, you would be transferred to the Capital City of Bhutan – Thimphu. On the way visit

- Visit **Tamchog Lhakhang**, located along Paro-Thimphu highway on the base of a mountain across the Pa Chhu river built in the early 15th century by the great iron bridge builder Thangtong Gyalpo.

On arrival check in at the hotel. You can relax for sometime in the Hotel. **Later a private traditional Cultural Show would be organized especially for you in the evening.**

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

Day 04: 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 Gyalpo, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. Every morning till night old people and young people circumambulate the Chhorten. **You may choose to light butter lamps and also circumambulate around the Chorten.**
- **Zorig Chusum**, Premier institute of traditional arts and crafts in Thimphu established with an objective of preserving “thirteen arts and crafts of Bhutan”.
- **Folk Heritage**, traditional house giving an insight to the Bhutanese lifestyle, and artifacts from the rural households

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

- **Sangaygang View Point**, also known as BBS Tower offering panoramic view of Thimphu Town situated at an elevation of 2,685 m.
- **Changangkha Monastery**, popular fortress like temple perched on a ridge above Central Thimphu built in 15th Century by Lama Phajo Drugom Zhipo.
- **Takin Preserve Centre**, see Takin (National animal of Bhutan) It is a unique combination of Goat and an Antelope
- **Tashichhodzong**, or ‘the fortress of the glorious religion’. Initially erected in 1641 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, it was rebuilt in the 1960s during the reign of Bhutan’s third king in the traditional style, without plans or nails. It houses some ministries, His Majesty’s secretariat, and the central monk body and opens after 5 PM.

On the completion of sightseeing, you are driven back to your hotel. After relaxing for sometime you shall be served with dinner.

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

Day 05. Thimphu – Punakha/Wangdue Sightseeing:

Distance: 77 km., Driving Time: 3 Hrs. Altitude of Punakha: 1310 m.

After breakfast and completion of Check Out formalities you are driven to Punakha/Wangdue, for your next leg of the tour. On the way, you would stop at

- **Dochula Pass**, lies at an elevation of 3,150 m and is a great place to view the higher Himalayas. The landmarks around the pass includes 108 Druk Wangyal Stupas built under the patronage of Queen Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuk

After arrival at Punakha, check in to the hotel. Post 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 are driven back to the Hotel. Evening free for leisure activities.

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

Day 06: Punakha – Gangtey/Phobjikha:

Distance: 78 km., Driving Time: 3 Hrs. Altitude of Gangtey/Phobjikha: 2900 m.

After breakfast, check out of the hotel and get driven to Gangtey/Phobjikha. On the way you can stop for photography opportunity. While in Phobjikha, visit

- **Gangtey Goemba**, an important monastery of Nyingmapa school of Buddhism, the main seat of the Pema Lingpa tradition. The present Abbot, Kunzang Pema Namgyal is the ninth re-incarnation. It is one of the the largest Nyingma monastery in Bhutan.

Later, you would be taken to a local farmhouse for a typical Bhutanese lunch. Post lunch, you can explore

- **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.

Thereafter return to your hotel. Evening free for leisure.

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

Day 7. 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 18th 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 at the hotel. Evening free for leisure and walk in the valley.

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

Day 8. 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.
- **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.
- **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).

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

- **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)

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

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

Day 9. Bumthang – Mongar:

Distance: 190 km., Driving Time: 6-7 Hrs. Altitude of Mongar: 1600 m.

After breakfast, drive to Mongar. Stop at places to view scenery and for photography. Drive from Bumthang to Mongar shall take you across the highest point in Bhutan’s motorable road. The point is known as the Thrumsingla Pass at an altitude of 4000 m. Picnic lunch on the way. The evening ends exploring the Mongar town.

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

Day 10. Mongar – Trashigang:

Distance: 91 km., Driving Time: 3 Hrs. Altitude of Trashigang: 1500 m.

After breakfast, visit the.

- **Mongar Dzong**, which was rebuilt in 1953 and it is unique as it has two entrances. There are about 60 young monks residing in this Dzong. You will see the images of the Buddha of long life, as well as Guru Rinpoche and the Shabdrung. No drawings or nails have been used in building the Dzong

Then drive to Trashigang and have lunch. While in Trashigang, visit the

- **Trashigang Dzong** - This Dzong lies on the headland of the Dzongkha that gives us the confluence of the Drangme Chhu and the Gamri Chhu. The Trashigang Dzong was built in the year 1659 and serves as the administrative and religious seat for the Trashigang district.

In the evening, explore the Trashigang town.

Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner, Overnight at Hotel in Trashigang.

Day 11. Trashigang – Trashiyangtse – Trashigang:

Distance: 52 km, Driving Time: 2 Hrs. Altitude of Trashiyangtse: 1715 m.

After breakfast, you would go for a day excursion to Trashiyangtse. Trashiyangtse was established as a district in 1992 and lies at an elevation of Dzongkhag is 1750-1880 m. This place is also the winter homes to endangered black-necked cranes. It is also the home to Ludlow’s Bhutan Glory, the national butterfly of Bhutan. The place is also famous for “dapa and pop” (hand crafted traditional wooden plate and mugs). On the way visit the

- **Gomkora Lhakhang**, situated 24 km from the Trashigang Dzong in Trashigang in the eastern Bhutan. The name Gomphu Kora (Gomphu - “Meditation Cave”, Kora - “Circumambulation”) is derived from a cave in the place. It is said that in the 8th century, an evil spirit named Myongkhapa escaped from Samye in Tibet and concealed himself inside a rock where Gomphu Kora stands today. Guru Rinpoche meditated for three days inside a rock cave in this place and subdued the evil spirit. Gongkhar Gyal, grandson of Lhasay Tsangma, built a small shrine at Gomphu Kora around the 10th century A.D. In the 14th century, Terton Pema Lingpa, visited Gomphu Kora and enlarged the existing shrine. It was renovated and enlarged in the 15th century by Yongzin Ngagi Wangchuk, the grandfather of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel. He also inscribed murals on the walls of the temple.

Drive further to Trashiyangtse. On the way stop for lunch. Later visit the

- **Chhorten Kora**, the most important stupa in Trashiyangtse built in the year 1740 by Lama Ngawang Loday, the nephew of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. The stupa was built to subdue a demon believed to have been living at the site where the chorten is now located. Modeled after the famous Boudhanath stupa in Nepal and was consecrated by the 13th chief Abbot of Bhutan Je Sherub Wangchuk.

In the evening, drive back to Trashigang.

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

Day 12. Trashigang – Samdrupjongkhar:

Altitude of Samdrupjongkhar 220m

After breakfast, drive to Samdrupjongkhar. In the evening, explore the Samdrupjongkhar Town.

Meals – Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner, Overnight in Hotel.

Day 13. Departure:

Today we will bid farewell to this beautiful country. 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.

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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