

DAY 1

Arrive Paro and transfer to Thimphu

Welcome to the Kingdom of Bhutan. After immigration formalities and baggage collection you will be welcomed by our representative with a 'tashi khaddar' (white scarf offering).

After the welcome ceremony, board the vehicle and drive to Thimphu, the capital town of Bhutan. The road leads through the Paro valley to the confluence of Paro and Thimphu rivers at Chuzom.

Shortly before reaching Chuzom, you will see on your left Tamchog Lhakhang, the temple built by Thangtong Gyalpo, a pioneering engineer who introduced the construction of suspension bridges into Bhutan and Tibet (several of which are still in use today). The present bridge to Tamchog Lhakhang was restored in 2005 in the design of a traditional style with iron chains and crossing this iron bridge is a wonderful experience. (approx. 50 min, roundtrip walk).

On arrival in Thimphu, check into the hotel. The capital town of Bhutan and the centre of government, religion and commerce, Thimphu is a unique city with unusual mixture of modern development alongside ancient traditions. With the population of about 1,30,000 it is perhaps still the world's only capital city without a traffic light.

Later in afternoon visit National Memorial Chorten, a large white structure crowned with a golden spire. It is located close to the center of Thimphu city and is one of its most iconic monuments. This is the most ideal spot to interact with locals who throng in large numbers to circumambulate the chorten, whirl the large red prayer wheels and pray at a small shrine inside the gate. The paintings and statues inside the monument provide a deep insight into Buddhist philosophy.

Afterwards an exploratory walk around Thimphu Main Street and market area.

Accommodation: Six Senses Thimphu

Meal Plan Dinner

Duration 2 Nights

DAY 2

Thimphu

This morning, take a short drive to the north of town to Buddha Dordenma, located atop a hill in Kuenselphodrang Nature Park. The statue fulfills an ancient prophecy dating back to the 8th century A.D that was discovered by Tertön Pema Lingpa (Religious Treasure Discoverer) and is said to emanate an aura of peace and happiness to the entire world. This massive statue of Shakyamuni made of bronze and is gilded in gold, measures 51.5 meters in height, making it one of the largest statues, in Bhutan. 125,000 smaller Buddha statues have been placed within the Buddha Dordenma statue, each of these also have been cast in bronze and gilded. Here at Buddha Point, you have an option to perform meditation at a designated area.

Bhutan is known for its innovative postage stamps. The Postal Museum showcases the progress of postal services and to some extent the communication system in Bhutan along with the country's rare and unique stamps issued over the years. Continue on to visit the Postal office located next door to get your own personalized postal stamps made and check out various souvenirs.

Then drive to the Textile Museum. With the opening of Textile Museum, under the patronage of Her Majesty the Queen Ashi Sangay Choden, Bhutanese textile have reached new heights as one of the most visible distinct art forms. The textile museum has opened its exhibition on six major themes - warp pattern weaves, weft pattern weaves, role of textiles in religion, achievements in textile arts, textiles from indigenous fibers and the Royal collection.

This is followed by visit to The Folk Heritage Museum, dedicated to connecting people to the Bhutanese rural past through exhibits, demonstrations, educational programmes and documentation of rural life. For an insight into traditional crafts of Bhutan, visit National Institute for Zorig Chusum, established in 1971, it is the premier institute to preserve and promote thirteen traditional art and crafts of Bhutan. Commonly known as Arts & Crafts School or Painting School, the Institute offers 4-to-6-year courses in 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan.

Then explore Centenary Farmers Market. Popularly known as Weekend market, this bustling, colourful market centre is the biggest where farmers from different part of the country gather to sell their farm products. With its wide assortment of products including handicrafts and its picturesque and colourful setting, the Farmer's Market is a favourite spot for many. Conclude the sightseeing of the day with visit to Trashichhoedzong, 'fortress of the glorious religion'. This is the center of government and religion, site of monarch's throne room and seat of Je Khenpo or Chief Abbot. Built in 1641 by the political and religious unifier of Bhutan, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, it was reconstructed in 1960s in traditional Bhutanese manner, without nails or architectural plans.

Meal Plan Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

DAY 3

Thimphu to Gangtey

After breakfast, drive up to Dochu-la pass stopping briefly here to take in the view and admire the chorten, mani wall, and prayer flags which decorate the highest point on the road. If skies are clear, the following peaks can be seen from this pass (left to right): Masagang (7,158m), Tsendagang (6,960m), Terigang (7,060m), Jejegangphugang (7,158 m), Kangphugang (7,170 m), Zongphugang (7,060 m), a table mountain that dominates the isolated region of Lunana - finally Gangkar puensum, the highest peak in Bhutan at 7,570m.

At Dochula Pass, 108 chortens or stupas known as Druk Wangyal Chortens have been built by Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuk, the eldest Queen Mother. These chortens are built in three layers, the first lowest level layer has forty-five chortens, the second has thirty-six and the top layer has twenty seven, built around the main chorten.

Drive onwards to Gangtey, passing through dense forest. The valley of Gangtey is one of the most beautiful and unspoiled places in Bhutan. The surprise of finding such a wide, flat valley without any trees after the hard climb through dense forests is augmented by an impression of vast space and is an extremely rare experience in Bhutan where most of the valleys are tightly enclosed. A few kilometers beyond the Gangtey Monastery, on the valley floor lies the village of Phobjikha.

In the afternoon explore fascinating Phobjikha valley, the winter home of black necked cranes that migrate from the plains in the north to pass winter in milder and lower climate. The valley boasts two beautiful meandering rivers, Nakay Chhu (Chhu Naap-black water) and Gay Chhu (Chhu Karp-white water).

Afterwards, visit Black Neck Crane Information Centre which is situated on the edge of the forest and wetland along the main road of Phobjikha valley and has an observation room equipped with high power telescope and spotting scopes for catching the best view of the cranes. The centre also offers displays of information that outline

the natural and cultural history of the area. There is a small gift shop, which sells handicrafts produced by the local people.

Accommodation: Amankora Gangtey

Meal Plan Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Duration 1 Night

DAY 4

Gangtey to Punakha

After breakfast visit Gangtey Goemba, which sits atop a ridge and offers stunning views of the valley below. This monastery was led by Gangtey Tulku, who is believed to be the ninth reincarnation of Pema Lingpa, a renowned Buddhist teacher and saint.

Continue on a walking excursion to Gangtey Nature Trail. Enjoy a delightful walk that allows you to experience the scenic beauty of Phobjikha valley. Beginning at a small hilltop with breathtaking views of Gangtey Goemba, you will descend through lush flower meadows to reach Semchubara village. From there, you will continue through beautiful forests and into the open valley. The trail concludes at a local community school, passing by a chorten and Khewa Lhakhang along the way.

After lunch, drive onward to Punakha.

Punakha served as the capital of Bhutan and seat of government until 1955 and still it is the winter seat of Je Khenpo (the chief abbot). Blessed with temperate climate and owing to its natural drainage from Pho Chhu and Mo Chhu rivers, the fertile Punakha valley produces abundant crops and fruits. Located at an elevation of 1300m above sea level, Punakha enjoys mild winters and is popular year-round destination.

On your way to Punakha, visit the Wangduephodrang Dzong. Founded in 1638 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, this fortress sits atop a high ridge between the Punak Tsang Chhu and Dang Chhu rivers, providing a stunning panoramic view of the valley below. The Wangdue Dzong has significant historical importance in Bhutan and its strategic location allowed the Penlop (Governor) of Wangduephodrang to defend the routes to Trongsa, Punakha, Dagana, and Thimphu, making him the third most powerful ruler after the Governors of Paro and Trongsa. Although it was damaged by a fire in 2012, the Dzong has been restored to its original grandeur and splendor as of 2022.

Accommodation: COMO Uma Punakha

Meal Plan Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Duration 2 Nights

DAY 5

Punakha

After breakfast, a beautiful hike takes one to the regal Khamsum Yuelley Namgel Chorten, which was built to remove negative forces and promote peace, stability and harmony in the changing world. The Chorten dominates

the upper Punakha Valley with commanding views across the Mo Chhu and up towards the mountainous peaks of Gasa and beyond.

After lunch, visit Punakha Dzong, Palace of Great Happiness, built at the junction of the Phochu and Mochu rivers in 1637 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal.

In the past, this grand dzong played a dual role as both the religious and administrative center of Bhutan. Spanning an impressive 600 by 240 feet, the dzong features a striking six-story tower adorned with a golden dome. Within its walls lie courtyards and religious statues that offer a glimpse into the rich history and spiritual traditions of this sacred site. Gain a deeper appreciation of the intricacies of this incredible culture, which has been deeply rooted for centuries.

Continue to a short excursion to Chimi Lhakhang.

Located atop a hillock in the heart of the valley, the Chimi Lhakhang is commonly referred to as the Temple of Fertility. It is widely believed that couples who desire a child but have been unsuccessful in conceiving can receive a blessing from the temple, often leading to the birth of a child soon after. Make your way across the lush rice fields, the trail leads you to the quaint settlement of Pana, which means 'field.' A walk through the village and the surrounding area near the temple offers a rare glimpse into the daily life and lifestyle of the villagers.

In the evening, explore newly developed Wangdue town and its local market.

Meal Plan Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

DAY 6

Punakha to Paro

After breakfast, drive to Paro along scenic highway and make a stop to visit the beautifully designed Simtokha Dzong. This impressive fortress was constructed in 1629 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, and it was modeled after the Gyal Gyad Tshel Institute of Ralung in Tibet. Simtokha Dzong, also known as Sangak Zabdhon Phodrang, which means Palace of the Profound Meaning of Secret Mantras, is considered by many to be the first dzong built in Bhutan. Interestingly, it is also the oldest dzong that has remained intact as a complete structure.

On arrival in Paro, check into the hotel.

Paro valley, known for its breathtaking scenery, boasts a rich cultural heritage and numerous myths and legends. It is home to some of Bhutan's oldest temples and monasteries, as well as the National Museum and the country's only international airport. At the northern end of the valley, the majestic Mount Chomolhari (7,314m) stands tall, and its glacial waters cascade through deep gorges to form the Paro River (Pa Chhu). Moreover, Paro is renowned for its terraced fields that produce a significant amount of the locally famous red rice, making it one of the most fertile valleys in the Kingdom.

After lunch, head to Ta Dzong, which was initially built as a watchtower but now serves as the National Museum. The museum's extensive collection comprises antique thangka paintings, textiles, weapons and armor, household items, and an array of natural and historical artifacts.

Take a short walk down the trail to explore Rinpung Dzong, also known as Paro Dzong, which has a fascinating history. The wooden galleries that line the inner courtyard are adorned with exquisite wall paintings depicting Buddhist legends, such as the four friends, the old man of long life, the wheel of life, scenes from the life of Milarepa, Mount Sumeru, and cosmic mandalas.

Evening explore Paro city centre and market area.

Accommodation: Bhutan Spirit Sanctuary

Meal Plan Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Duration 2 Nights

DAY 7

Paro

After having breakfast, embark on a fascinating excursion to Taktshang Monastery, also known as Tiger's Nest. This monastery is one of Bhutan's most well-known and is perched on the side of a cliff 900 meters above the Paro valley floor. Legend has it that Guru Rinpoche arrived here on the back of a tigress and meditated at this monastery, hence the name "Tiger's Nest". It is regarded as a sacred place and was visited by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1646. Today, it is a must-visit destination for all Bhutanese at least once in their lifetime.

In the late afternoon, take a drive to the end of the valley to visit the newly restored Drukgyel Dzong. This dzong was built by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in 1646 to commemorate an early military victory over Tibetan invaders, hence its name "victorious Druk". Despite being destroyed by fire in 1951, this dzong remained historically and strategically significant and was even featured in the National Geographic magazine in 1914. On a clear day, enjoy a commanding view of Mount Chomolhari (7,314m) from the village below the dzong. Visit a nearby typical farmhouse. These Bhutanese farmhouses are colorful, decorative, and traditionally built without the use of a single nail. The majority of the population of Bhutan continues to live as they have for centuries, in small, isolated farms and hamlets surrounded by terraced fields of rice, maize, and buckwheat.

While driving to Paro town, make a stop en route at the 7th-century Kyichu Lhakhang, which is one of the 108 temples built in the Himalayas by Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo. This temple marks the introduction of Buddhism to Bhutan.

Evening at leisure in Paro city centre.

Meal Plan Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

DAY 8

Depart Paro

Transfer to the airport for your flight. Our representative will help you with exit formalities and then bid you farewell.

Meal Plan Breakfast