



TRAVEL
SCOPE
INDIA



DISCOVER BHUTAN

A Custom Private Program for Mindful Journeys

Bhutan, a kingdom where happiness is paramount, where tradition and culture remain intact and where Buddhism has predominated since the 7th century. This is the kingdom of Bhutan, the land of the Thunder Dragon, landlocked in the mystical Himalayas.

In less than 100 kilometers (60 miles), Bhutan rises 25,000 feet from the subtropical jungles of the south to the arctic cold of the high Himalayas. This extraordinary range of conditions, packed into such a small area, makes Bhutan very special. Combined with all these riches is an underlying conservation ethic, embedded deep in Bhutan's Buddhist culture and in the hearts and minds of the ordinary person.

Bhutan is a magical place, and sometimes the line between fact and fiction gets a bit blurred. The natural and the mythic worlds exist side by side as easy neighbors.

The world's last, lost kingdom, Bhutan is only just opening its doors to tourism. What better stage for your next summer than in a long-forgotten land, un-spoilt by civilization, steeped in mythology, mysticism and magic, enraptured by the pristine beauty of an untrammelled country!

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JOURNEY AT A GLANCE - MARCH 2018

| TRAVEL DATES | DESTINATION | HOTEL | STAY |
|--------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| 12/14 | Thimphu | Le Meridien | 02 nights |
| 14/16 | Punakha | Densa Resort | 02 nights |
| 16/17 | Gangtey (Phobjika Valley) | Dewachen | 01 night |
| 17/19 | Trongsa | Yangkhil Lodge Or Puenzhi Lodge | 02 nights |
| 19/22 | Bumthang | Mt Lodge | 03 nights |
| 22/24 | Paro | Le Meridien | 02 nights |

DETAILED ITINERARY

12 MAR, TUESDAY ARRIVE PARO PARO - THIMPHU

Flight Details:

Journey Time: 1.5 hour drive (65 kms)

Meals Included: Lunch, Dinner

On a clear day the flight to Paro is breathtaking with views of major Himalayan peaks like Everest and Kanchenjunga and on the final approach, Bhutan's own snowy peaks, the sacred Jhomolhari, Jichu Drake and Tserimgang.

On completion of airport formalities at Paro you will be met by our representative and transferred to your vehicle for drive to Thimphu Valley. Enroute stop at **Chuzon** which is the confluence of Thimphu and Paro rivers and is adorned by Tibetan, Nepalese and Bhutanese stupas.

Check into your hotel on arrival in Thimphu.

THIMPHU

Once a handful of hamlets, Thimphu, is today the capital of Bhutan and also its largest city and economic centre. Exuding a sense of history, from its colorful religious iconography and as a political nexus, Thimphu reflects Bhutan's culture at the crossroads between tradition and modernity. The stunningly picturesque Thimphu Valley is immersed in this charming Mountain Fortress of the Gods overlooking the mesmerizing Wang Chu river.



This afternoon visit the **Jigmie Dorji Memorial Chorten**. The Royal Grand Mother Ashi Phuntsho Choden built this chorten in 1974 in memory of the third king who died in 1972. An exterior gallery above the top floor makes it possible to circle the chorten at the level of its spires and also has a splendid view of the city.



Before sunset drive to **Sangay Gang Viewpoint** (2685 meters) for a panoramic view of Thimphu Valley. Walk through hundreds of colorful prayer flags that dot the hill overlooking the valley.

Overnight - Le Meridien

NOTE: in the event that the flight arrival time is after 12.00 hours, some of the above site visits may not be possible and we will be adjusted for the following day.

13 MAR, WEDNESDAY

THIMPHU

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

This morning visit the majestic **Trashichhoe Dzong**, located north of the city on the bank of the Wang Chhu. The dzong was the site of the lavish formal coronation of the fifth king in 2008 and now houses his throne room, secretariat and offices.

Then on to the **Folk Heritage** - the museum provides an opportunity to step inside a typical Bhutanese household and experience firsthand the daily life in Bhutan. Then on to the **Textile Museum**, which showcases Bhutan's textile's heritage. The Royal Silver and Goldsmiths and **Handmade Paper factory** showing the process of how traditional Bhutanese paper known as "dezo" is made from the Daphne plant.



Also visit the **Mini Zoo** where ‘**Takin**’, the national animal of Bhutan can be seen. This particular animal is found only in the Himalayan region – the head looks like that of a goat and body of a cow/yak.



This evening walk to the colorful **Thimphu Market (Wednesday to Sunday)** which is the largest domestic market for farmers in Bhutan. It is an explosion of colors and scents - farmers from far and wide bring their farm produce to this market. Wander along Thimphu’s main street for an appreciation of the craft bazaar, handmade paper, quality weaving and local art!

Overnight - Le Meridien

14 MAR, THURSDAY THIMPHU - PUNAKHA

Journey Time: 3 hour drive
Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today after breakfast proceed to Punakha, the old capital of Bhutan until 1955, driving up to Dochu-la-pass (3088 meters) and stopping briefly to admire the views and prayer flags decorating the highest point on the road. If skies are clear, the high Himalayan peaks can be seen in all its glory!

On arrival check into your hotel

PUNAKHA

The city of Punakha was once the capital of Bhutan, and still plays a significant role in its political and economic scene. Today, the agrarian heart of the country with two rivers flowing through is a great draw for tourists. Famed among the country’s many fortress-monasteries, the Punakha Dzong is also the most beautiful, and attracts pilgrims and tourists alike. The regal past and the



religious influences have lent Punakha a serene charm.

This afternoon visit Nalanda Buddhist Institute, a truly spiritual place is also known locally as Daley Goenpa or Dalida, is a Buddhist monastic school (shedra). The name Nalanda means 'insatiable giving' and the Monastery was founded in 1757 by the 9th Je Khenpo, Shakya Rinchen .



Image Credits: David Wood / CC BY 3.0

INTERACT WITH MONKS ABOUT THEIR LIVES over TEA

This is where you will have the opportunity to spend some quality time interacting with the monks who have devoted their life to spirituality and Buddhism. Even if you are not a religious person, you will appreciate not only the location but the peace of this unique place.

Overnight - Densa Resort

15 MAR, FRIDAY PUNAKHA

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

We begin our day with a hike through fields of rice along the banks of Mo Chhu river to the upper end of the valley to the **Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten**, a stunning recent monument!

This afternoon visit to the magnificent **Punakha Dzong** built in 1637. Damaged by fire, flood and earthquake over the centuries, it has now been fully restored to his original splendor.

Overnight - Densa Resort



16 MAR, SATURDAY PUNAKHA - PHOBJIKHA (GANGTEY)

Journey Time - 5 hour drive

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Today after breakfast drive to Phobjikha. After driving over the pass you will descend into the Wangduephodrang Valley (1700 meters below the Pass). Follow the scenic Dang Chhu before climbing through forests of bamboo and oak, cross the Pele La pass and finally arrive at the hidden Phobjikha Valley.

On arrival check into your hotel.

PHOBJIKHA

The broad, U-shaped glacial valley of Phobjikha is well-known for its scenic splendour, and is fringed by the Black Mountains and the Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park. One of the most important wildlife preserves in the country, hosting annual wintering flocks of black-necked cranes, as also muntjacs or barking deer, wild boars, Himalayan black bears, leopards, red foxes and sambars - Phobjikha is an interesting place to for wildlife enthusiasts. The Gangtey Monastery and a few treks, also add to its tourist appeal.

This afternoon visit the **Gangtey Gomba monastery**, perched atop a small hill and surrounded by a large village inhabited mainly by families of the Gomchens who take care of the monastery. In winter these families along with the monks move away to another monastery in the south.

Overnight - Dewachen



17 MAR, SUNDAY PHOBJIKHA (GANGTEY) - TRONGSA

Journey Time: 4.5 hour drive (120 kms)
Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

This morning explore Phobjikha valley, hopefully sighting some black necked cranes.

Late morning drive to Trongsa across Pele-la Pass (10,830 feet) which is traditionally considered the boundary between western and central Bhutan.

En route is **Chendebji Chorten**, patterned on Kathmandu's Swayambhunath Stupa, with eyes painted at the four cardinal points. It was built in the 18th century by Lama Shida from Tibet, to cover the remains of an evil spirit that was subdued at this spot.

On arrival check into your Lodge.



TRONGSA

This town, perched on steep slopes above a river gorge, forms the central hub of the nation and is the place from where attempts at unifying the country were launched in former times. The landscape around Trongsa is spectacular and its impressive dzong, stretched along a ridge above a ravine, first comes into view about an hour before the winding, mountain road leads you into the town itself.

This afternoon visit **Ta Dzong** and **Trongsa Dzong**

Ta Dzong - this watchtower, which once guarded Trongsa Dzong from internal rebellion, stands on a steep slope above the town. Climb up the path to visit Ta Dzong which now houses a shrine dedicated to the epic hero, King Gesar of Ling. A visit to this former watchtower provides visitors with an insight into the significance of Trongsa in Bhutan's history.



Trongsa Dzong - built in 1648, it was the seat of power over central and eastern Bhutan. Both the first and second kings of Bhutan ruled the country from this ancient seat. The dzong is a massive structure with many levels, sloping down the contours of the ridge on which it is built. Because of the dzong's highly strategic position, on the only connecting route between east and west, the Trongsa Penlop was able to control effectively the whole of the central and eastern regions of the country from here.

Overnight - Yangkhil

18 MAR, MONDAY **TRONGSA**

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day at leisure to explore your surroundings!

Overnight - Yangkhil

19 MAR, TUESDAY **TRONGSA - BUMTHANG**

Journey Time - 2 hour drive (68 kms)

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

This morning after breakfast we drive to Bumthang, The drive onward to Bumthang takes you over the picturesque Yotong La and down into the Chhume valley, home to Bhutan's famous 'Yatra' weaving.

On arrival check into your hotel

BUMTHANG

With its picturesque patchwork of fields growing crops like wheat, buckwheat, rice and potato, the Bumthang region comprising of 4 valleys (Humey, Choekhor, Tang and Ura) is peppered with ancient temples and sacred sites. Bumthang falls within the many protected area networks across Bhutan, and boasts a rich biodiversity - notably the large flocks of black-necked cranes that visit over the winter months.

Overnight - Mt Lodge

20 MAR, WEDNESDAY **BUMTHANG**

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

This morning we visit the **Choekhor valley** (1.5 hour drive). Explore Wangdichhoeling, home to the 2nd king. Heading up valley, you will take in the **grand Kurje Lhakhang**, one of the most sacred places in the kingdom as Bhutan's "patron saint", Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) meditated here. From Kurje monastery, a tarmac road heads south along the right bank of the



river to **Jambey Lhakhang**. This temple, erected by the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo in the 7th century, is one of the two oldest in Bhutan (the other being Kyichu Lhakhang in Paro).

After lunch, we will visit **Tamshing Lhakhang**, founded in 1501 by Pema Lingpa. It contains interesting and ancient Buddhist wall paintings. Later on we will visit **Jakar Dzong**, “the castle of the white bird”, then take a stroll through Bumthang’s market area before returning to the lodge.



Overnight – Mt Lodge

21 MAR, THURSDAY BUMTHANG

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today you will explore further in Bumthang district with an excursion the stunningly beautiful Tang Valley. This seldom visited valley offers a treat in revealing some off the beaten track lhakhangs and monasteries, and the amazing museum at **Ugyen Choeling Palace**.

A short hike takes you up to this well maintained Palace and its cultural treasures inside. Along way you will stop for a traditional picnic with breathtaking views of the pristine surroundings. Way back, just below the main road junction visit **Tang Mebartsho** (Burning lake), where the Terton Pema Lingpa, the reincarnation of Padmasambhava, is supposed to have discovered religious treasure in the 12th century.

This lake is very sacred and is visited by many Bhutanese during auspicious days to offer butter lamps. The importance of the site is indicated by the extensive array of prayer flags and is considered as one of the most holy places for Buddhist pilgrimage.

Overnight – Mt Lodge



22 MAR, FRIDAY PUNAKHA - PARO

Flight Details

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today after breakfast drive to Bumthang airport to board your flight for Paro. On arrival you will be met and transferred to your hotel.

PARO

With Bhutan's only international airport, Paro is a first stopover for most tourists. The streets of the city are lined with charmingly decorated houses, restaurants and shops depicting the traditional architecture of Bhutan. Paro is steeped in history and mythology, with numerous temples and monasteries in the vicinity, the most popular one being the Rinpung Dzong - a fortress-monastery overlooking the Paro valley. Keep a ear out for the colourful legends of every place, and soak in the charm and mysticism of this ancient town.



This afternoon visit the impressive **Ta Dzong** - the ancient watch tower which now houses the National Museum. The museum has an interesting assortment of costumes from the different regions of Bhutan along with a wonderful collection of painted and appliquéd Thangkas.

Visit a family in Paro Valley

In the evening, visit a farmhouse and join the family for a cooking demonstration and tasting. Enjoy a delicious meal of fresh butter tea, and home brewed liquor - fiery arra or sweet sinchang. Help them make ema datsi (cheese chili), and pancakes with red rice, served along with hot chili curries. After lunch help the family with their daily chores such as taking care of the livestock and crops. Over 85% of Bhutanese still practice subsistence farming and this afternoon affords an authentic encounter with the Bhutanese traditional way of life.

Overnight - Le Meridien



23 MAR, SATURDAY PARO

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

In the morning, take an excursion to Taktsang Monastery, also known as Tiger's Nest. "Tiger's Nest" monastery, most famous of Bhutan's monasteries, is spectacularly located on the side of a cliff 900m above the valley floor (a 2 hour tough climb and 1.5 on the return). Legend has it that Guru Padmasambhava flew to this rocky craig in the 8th century on the back of a tigress and hence the name. Padmasambhava is credited with introducing Buddhism to Bhutan.



The surrounding area has numerous temples and monasteries where monks and nuns meditate. Option to walk up to the view point for spectacular views of Taktsang (a cafeteria is situated at the top).

Return to your hotel
This afternoon will be at your leisure.

Overnight - Le Meridien

24 MAR, SUNDAY DEPARTURE PARO

Meals Included: Breakfast

Today you will be transferred to Paro airport. Assistance will be provided for checkin formalities at the airport.

We wish you a pleasant flight back home.
END OF SERVICES