



## BHUTAN CULTURAL AND FESTIVAL TOUR

<i>Trip Length:</i>	<i>14 days/13 nights tour (not counting Bangkok)</i>
<i>Places covered:</i>	<i>Paro, Haa, Thimphu, Punakha, Gangtey, Trongsa &amp; Bumthang.</i>
<i>Highlights:</i>	<i>Hike to Tiger's Nest monastery, local festival in Bumthang, cultural sightseeing, rafting, day hikes, amazing mountain views, village tours.</i>

### **Day 0 (11 Nov, Monday): Arrive Bangkok**

Included in the tour price is a very early flight out of Bangkok to Paro tomorrow morning. Unless you are planning a longer stay in Bangkok at the beginning of the tour, we recommend you arrive in Bangkok sometime today and book a room for yourself at the airport Novotel. This is a fantastic hotel with easy access to check-in counters, and will make it very easy to get up and to the airport on time for our flight tomorrow. The airport hotel's website is: <https://all.accor.com/hotel/6183/index.en.shtml>

### **Day 1 (12 Nov, Tuesday): Arrive Paro**

Paro International Airport is one of the most thrilling airports due to its lofty Himalayan location. As the flight approaches Paro, you will be treated to an awe-inspiring sight of the Mount Jumolhari and Jichu Drake. Descending into the tranquil Paro Valley, you will be greeted by verdant alpine forests, charming monasteries, temples, and traditional farmhouses. Our representative will greet you at the airport. If your flight is in the morning, visit the 17<sup>th</sup> century Ta Dzong. It was used as a defence structure to protect the region from invasions. Today, it is open to the public as the National Museum of Bhutan, showcasing a range of artifacts and exhibits related to Bhutanese culture and history. Next, head to the Rinpung Dzong meaning "fortress of the heap of jewels". It has a long and fascinating history. Along the wooden galleries lining the courtyard of the Rinpung Dzong are fine wall paintings illustrating Buddhist lore. You will walk downhill till the road point crossing the wooden bridge. Overnight at a hotel in Paro.

### **Day 2 (13 Nov, Wednesday): Paro - Haa Valley, 65 km, 2-3 hours**

Today you will drive to Haa valley via Chele la Pass at 3990m - one of the highest motorable passes in the country decorated with colorful prayer flags. The Haa valley is one the best lesser-known valleys in Bhutan to visit. It was just opened to tourism in 2002. As it was tucked and hidden away, the valley is not developed in the same way as Paro and Thimphu.



You explore some picturesque villages, which offers an opportunity to experience Bhutan traditional and rustic old-world appeal. You may visit a farmhouse and enjoy a cup of 'ara', a traditionally brewed rice wine or 'suja' - the delicious butter tea. Overnight at a hotel in Haa.

**Day 3 (14 Nov, Thursday): Haa - Paro via Chele La Pass, 114 km, 3-4 hours**

Today you will begin an exciting drive to Paro with a stop at Chele La Pass. From the pass you will walk along the ridges each higher than the last. On clear weather you can see stunning views Mount Jumolhari and Jichu Drake on your right. If you are up for an adventure, you can hike further to the last ridge, Kungkarpo at 4200 meters. This spot is used for sky burials. As you ascend along the ridges, you will be greeted by an awesome view of Tiger Mountain and on your right, Mount Kanchenjunga in Sikkim, the world's third highest mountain on a distant left. Take a well-deserved rest and enjoy spectacular views of the Himalayas. Hike back to the pass and drive to hotel. You may spend rest of your time at your leisure either resting at the hotel or visiting the Paro town including Kaja Throm, the vegetable market. Overnight at a hotel in Paro.

**Day 4 (15 Nov, Friday): Paro - Bumthang via domestic flight**

Today you will have another spectacular Himalayan flight. This 35 minutes flight offers stunning views of mountains that are not seen on the international flight to Paro such as Kulagangri near Tibet and Gangkhar Puensum, the world's highest unclimbed peak. Be on the lookout for other seven and six thousand meters high mountains on the border with Tibet such as Masagang, Tshendagang, Teri Gang, Jaikangphu Gang and Table Mountain. As the flight glides above the east-west lateral highway, you will have an interesting aerial view of monasteries, meandering rivers, and villages. While in Bumthang, visit the famous Tamshing and Kenchosum Monastery. Evening is at your leisure. You may explore the charming Chamkhar town nestled near the banks of Chamkhar Chhu River. Serving as a transit point for travelers journeying from both the east and west, Chamkhar town offers a welcoming respite and serves as an ideal place for night halts. Overnight at a hotel in Bumthang.

**Day 5 (16 Nov, Saturday): Attend a local festival in Bumthang. Evening drive to Trongsa.**

Today you will attend a local mask dance festival in Bumthang. The festival is an honor to the teachings of Guru Rinpoche who came to Bhutan in 746 AD and introduced Buddhism in Bhutan. It is believed that the mask dances bless onlookers, cleanses sins, and bring good fortune. People of all ages dress up in their best attires and come to witness the festival. It is a good opportunity to mingle with the locals. In the late afternoon, take a 2 hours' drive to Trongsa, the ancestral home of the royal family. The journey takes you through Yutong



La Pass at 3400 meters and from the pass, travel on winding roads that descend amidst a breathtaking forest adorned with pine and vibrant rhododendron trees. Your drive will lead you to Trongsa, where you will find respite for the night. Overnight at a hotel in Trongsa.

**Day 6 (17 Nov, Sunday): Trongsa - Gangtey, 73 km, 2-3 hours**

In the morning visit Trongsa Dzong, the masterpiece of Bhutanese architecture. The dzong offers panoramic views of the surrounding landscapes, including the Ta Dzong, a watchtower which is now a museum. You will visit the museum next; it provides insight into Bhutan's history and culture. Then drive to Gangtey, the winter habitat of the black-necked cranes. Enroute, you will see the beautiful Chendebji Stupa, the only chorten which resembles the Boudhanath of Nepal. Ascend gradually through several villages of yak Herders and through Pele la Pass at 3423 meters. With an alpine environment of rhododendrons and dwarf bamboo, the pass is the boundary between West and East Bhutan. From the pass you can view the high snow-capped peaks and at this time of the year, you might also spot yaks. Descend from the pass and drive for about 8 km till Phobjikha, the largest glacial valley in Bhutan. Check into the hotel on arrival. Overnight at a hotel in Gangtey.

**Day 7 (18 Nov, Monday): Gangtey - Punakha, 79 km, 2-3 hours**

Have breakfast and then begin the day with a visit to the Crane Information Centre, which has elaborate information about cranes and eco-tourism. Try to look for the endangered Black Necked Cranes as this time around they migrate from the harsh weather of Tibet. From the Khene Lhakhang, you will set out for an exploratory hike on the Gangtey Nature Trail. It is a relatively uphill easy hike, winding through hillsides overlooking the Phobjikha valley and roosting sites. Walk amongst beautiful pine forests, and scenic meadows with stunning views of the surrounding mountains. The hike ends at Gangtey Goenpa Monastery, the only monastery in the west Bhutan where they practice Vajrayana Buddhism. From there, you will be transported to Punakha. The journey to Punakha encompasses a scenic downhill drive through Nobdhing, Teka Zampa bridge and Wangdue, where you will catch glimpses of the majestic Wangdi Dzong and the Punatsangchhu bridge. As you continue your drive, you will pass through picturesque rice fields and follow the meandering path along the banks of the Punakha River. Upon reaching Punakha, you will check into your hotel. Overnight at a hotel in Punakha.

**Day 8 (19 Nov, Tuesday): Sightseeing & Rafting in Punakha**

Have a relaxed breakfast in the hotel. First sightseeing on the list today is the Punakha Dzong, which is stunningly situated in between the male and female rivers like an anchored ship. The way to the dzong is through the famous 'Bazam' which is a traditional Bhutanese



cantilever bridge. The most beautiful dzong in Bhutan which once served as the ancient capital is now the winter residence of the central monastic body. The dzong holds great historical importance as it hosted the royal wedding of the current monarch. Start walking from the dzong, passing a local funeral ground to the suspension bridge. Walk along the longest suspension bridge spanning to 180 meters over the Pho Chhu (male river). Walk back to the start of the bridge and climb a small ridge. Then descend into the rice fields and forest of conifers, continuing upstream Pho Chhu River all the way to the put-in. Meet your rafting crew here. After a safety briefing and getting geared up, you will be ready to raft. Rafting in the Pho Chhu River is not only an adventure but also a unique mode of sightseeing. Rafting experiences differ with the seasons, the summer rivers are larger, and tides are stronger. Whereas the river in the winter is calm and clear. As you continue your rafting adventure you will see villages and people going about their daily lives. Staggering cliffs, forested valleys, and exotic birdlife surround the riverbanks. You will come to a placid section where you will have some refreshments. Then continue rafting down navigating through different rapids of II and IV, cross the suspension bridge and the majestic Punakha Dzong. It is an amazing experience with breathtaking panoramic views of the valley around you. Take out is at the River Confluence marking the end of your rafting trip. Late afternoon you can explore the small town of Punakha. Overnight at a hotel in Punakha.

**Day 9 (20 Nov, Wednesday): Punakha - Thimphu, 76 km, 2 hours**

After breakfasting this morning, you enjoy a scenic drive to Thimphu via Dochu La pass 3100 meters, where on a clear day you can get spectacular views of the Himalayas. En route stop at Metsina and hike through rice paddies and up to the Chimi Lhakhang Temple. This temple is dedicated to the great Yogi of 14th century known as Drukpa Kuenley, or the "Divine Madman," who is believed to bless women who seek fertility. In the temple you will see paintings, images and symbols having been used to depict the teachings of Buddhism for centuries. After visiting the temple, continue driving to Dochula Pass. From the pass, drive downhill through the forests of rhododendron, fir, and hemlock all the way to Thimphu. While in Thimphu, visit the National Memorial Chorten which is the most beautiful stupa. Afternoon is free time to explore Thimphu of your own. Overnight at a hotel in Thimphu.

**Day 10 (21 Nov, Thursday): Explore Thimphu city**

After a hearty breakfast in the hotel, you will visit the Takin Preserve to see Takins, the national animal of Bhutan. These unique creatures hold a significant place in Bhutanese culture and folklore. Next drive to the National Institute of Zorig Chusum also known as the school of 13 Arts and Crafts. Then head to the Bhutan Post Office which exhibits a vast



collection of postal stamps from the early days of the runner to the modern era. You can also make personalized stamps using your own photographs. The stamps can be wonderful souvenir. Have your lunch. After lunch, visit the Royal Textile Academy, an exhibition hub of both ancient and modern textile, and notable artifacts. The museum also displays Bhutan's rich tradition and vibrant culture of waving and embroidery. Right next to the museum is the craft bazar. Small bamboo houses are lined up displaying interesting and unique locally made arts and crafts. You can explore stalls and even shop for some souvenirs. Then walk for about 15 minutes to the Weekend Market, the largest vegetable market in the country. You can see the variety of food of the country, including basket upon basket of fiery chillies, fresh cheese, and fruits. This is perhaps a good opportunity for photography and to mingle with locals who come from the nearby villages to sell their farm products. Afterwards, you may either rest in the hotel or explore Thimphu town. Overnight at a hotel in Thimphu.

**Day 11 (22 Nov, Friday): Your free time in Thimphu.**

Today you will have a whole day to explore Thimphu on your own. Thimphu is a charming city with a unique blend of ancient traditions and modernity. Over time, it has gradually embraced modern elements, transitioning from traditional dwellings to contemporary concrete structures. The city now boasts an increasing number of trendy coffee shops, bars, and restaurants. You can spend this day exploring this city on your own, visit coffee shops, cafes, and local shops. Thimphu is also an excellent place to discover authentic Bhutanese handicrafts. Overnight a hotel in Thimphu.

**Day 12 (23 Nov, Saturday): Kuenselphodrang Hike, then drive to Paro.**

In the morning, drive to Kuenselphodrang where the 169ft giant Buddha sits overlooking Thimphu. It is supposedly the largest bronze statue in the world. You can spend some time exploring and clicking pictures. Then drive a few turns further down Kuenselphodrang to reach the starting point of the hike. After walking for about 20 minutes through pine forest and scattered poplar trees, you will turn south at 2550 meters and walk on wide barren land. From this vantage point, an enchanting view of south Thimphu unfolds before you. Simtokha Dzong and the eastern highway will be visible in the distance, along with captivating sights of the Thimphu expressway, Babesa sewage ponds, and the settlements of south Thimphu. After an hour of walking, you will arrive at the charming upper Debsi village, where your vehicle awaits to transfer you to Thimphu for lunch. After lunch, drive to Paro. This one-hour drive is through the villages of Babesa, Namseling, Khasadrupchu and Wangsisina. As you continue, you will encounter Chuzom, the confluence of Pachu River and Thimchu River. The confluence is marked by three stupas, and it is also a tri-junction of roads leading to Thimphu, Paro and Haa. From the confluence, follow the Pachu River



till you reach Paro. Check into the hotel on arrival. The evening is yours to enjoy at your leisure. Overnight at a hotel in Paro.

**Day 13 (24 Nov, Sunday): Hike to Tiger's Nest Monastery**

After breakfast, you will hike the most iconic sight of Bhutan - the Tiger's Nest Monastery. The Taktsang is a sacred and one of the most popular Buddhist sites in Bhutan. We often see locals and people from as far as Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim coming for pilgrimage. The hike is a great way to experience the culture and spirituality of Bhutan. The trail is well-marked and not too strenuous, making it suitable for most hikers. The monastery is perched on a rocky ledge 900 meters above the Paro valley.

The 8th century Spiritual Master, Padmasambhava popularly known as Guru Rinpoche in Bhutan is said to have flown on the back of a tigress to meditate in a cave where Taktsang Monastery now stands. With unique architecture and breathtaking views, the monastery has number of shrines, temples, and meditation caves. After exploring the monastery, hike back to the half point where you will have your lunch at the cafeteria. After lunch you will walk further down to valley floor where your transport will be waiting to transfer you back to the valley. On the way to your hotel, you will explore Paro town, which is marked by pretty traditional houses, interesting souvenir shops and modern style cafes. Overnight at a hotel in Paro.

**Day 14 (25 Nov, Monday): Depart Paro**

After breakfast, you will drive to the airport for departure. Our representative will bid farewell. We hope you enjoyed your trip to the Kingdom of Bhutan with us. We include the return flight to Bangkok today. Tour services end with arrival in Bangkok.