



Bhutan
September 18 - 28, 2017
11 Days and 10 Overnights

Day 1 Tuesday, Sept. 18

Arrival Paro, Bhutan

Upon arrival at Bhutan's international airport in Paro you will be met by our guide who will transfer you to our charming Bhutanese hotel. You will have the remainder of the day to relax, do a bit of sightseeing and possibly enjoy exploring the charming town of Paro which is located in one of the most historic valleys in Bhutan. Both trade goods and invading Tibetans came over the pass at the head of the valley, making Paro the closest cultural connection with Tibet of any Bhutanese district.

Overnight Paro

(L/D)

Day 2 Wednesday, Sept. 19

Paro

Today, we'll enjoy a full day visiting Paro's most notable attractions including Paro Rinpung Dzong. (A dzong is a distinctive type of fortress architecture found in Tibet and Bhutan.) Perched on a hillside adjacent to a river, it is one of the finest examples of traditional Bhutanese construction. Built in 1644, it was used to defend the valley from invasions. Next up - Dungste Lhakhang Temple. Built in 1433 by the famous bridge builder, Thangtung Gyelpo, it is said to rest on the head of a demoness. Shaped as a Chorten (a unique form of Buddhist architecture housing sacred items), it is the repository of considerable art. Our final stop for the day will be the small, well organized National Museum which provides an excellent introduction to Bhutanese culture and includes a wonderful collection of masks.

Overnight Paro

(B, L/D)

Day 3 Thursday, Sept. 20

Drive to Thimphu

This morning we'll make the short drive to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. For the remainder of the morning we'll visit the Zilukha nunnery, the Takin Preserve (the Takin is Bhutan's national animal) and Memorial Chorten - an elaborate monument built in 1974 to honor the third King, and a daily destination for many Buddhists.

In the afternoon we'll experience the magic of a Tsechu festival, held in the courtyard of Tashichhoedzong. Tsechus are festivals extolling the great deeds of Guru Rinpoche who founded Tibetan Buddhism. The Thimphu Tsechu is one of the most popular. Attended by thousands of people from all over Bhutan, it consists of mask and folk dances intended to teach the Buddhist dharma and evoke deities who will protect audience members from misfortune and grant them good luck.

Overnight Thimphu

(B/L/D)

Day 4 Friday, Sept. 21

Thimphu

We return to the Thimphu Tsechu Festival this morning and in the afternoon tour in and around Thimphu visiting Buddha Dodenma, a massive golden statue of Shakyamuni Buddha - one of the world's largest and also one of the most beautiful. You'll have the opportunity to visit a textile museum, and Changlimithang stadium where you can watch an archery match. Archery is the national sport of Bhutan and is very competitive.

Overnight Thimphu

(B/L/D)

Day 5 Saturday, Sept. 22**Drive to Gangtey**

We depart this morning for the longest drive of the trip. Because of road construction the drive to the Phobjikha Valley, can take over 5 hours. The Phobjikha valley is one of the most beautiful spots in Bhutan and an official conservation area. In the late afternoon we'll take a walk through the local village.

Overnight Phobjikha**(B/L/D)****Day 6 Sunday, Sept. 23****Gangtey**

This morning, we'll explore Gangtey Monastery aka Gangtey Gompa. Ideally located overlooking the valley, it is the largest Nyingma monastery in Bhutan. Recently constructed, it is a magnificent structure. Later in the day, enjoy a leisurely walk in the valley visiting local villages.

Overnight Phobjikha**(B/L/D)****Day 7 Monday, Sept, 24****Drive to Punakha**

Our day today starts with an early morning 3 hour drive to Punakha and Wangdue valley where you'll visit Chimi Lhakhang , a temple dedicated to Lama Drukpa Kunley, an iconic figure for Buddhists. Also known as 'The Divine Madman' he is best remembered for his outrageous teachings with sexual inclinations. The small town we walk through to reach the monastery specializes in selling phallic symbols.

Overnight Punakha**(B/L/D)****Day 8 Tuesday, Sept. 25****Punakha**

This morning, we'll take an idyllic hike up to Khamsum Yuley Chorten. The views along the way of the terraced rice fields are lovely, and the view from the top of the ridge overlooking the valley is quite spectacular. The temple was built in the 1990's by the Queen Mother and is dedicated to the well being of the Bhutanese.

After a picnic lunch, we'll visit Punakha's most notable attraction, the Punakha Dzong. Located at the confluence of two rivers, the Dzong is formally known as Pungthand Dechen Phodrang, which means the palace of Great Happiness. Historically, it served as the winter capital of Bhutan. The monastic body living in the Dzong continues this tradition by moving to Thimpu in the summers and returning to Punakha for the winters. Built in the 14th century, it is where the kings of Bhutan receive their ceremonial scarves prior to their coronation. If time allows, we'll also visit the nearby nunnery.

Overnight Punakha**(B/L/D)****Day 9 Wednesday, Sept, 26****Drive to Paro**

Today we'll make the leisurely drive back to Paro. It's approximately a 4 hour drive, and the scenery is magnificent. We'll cross the Dochula pass (10,000 feet) along the way and if the sky is clear, you'll have a magnificent view of the mountains.

Upon arrival in Paro, you may choose to take advantage of our hotel's exquisite spa in preparation for your climb tomorrow to Tiger's Nest. The Menlha Spa offers a fitness centre, sauna, steam room as well as a traditional Bhutanese outdoor hot stone bath. The steam room, sauna and exercise facilities are complimentary. If you chose to have an individual treatment (not included), each of the treatment rooms are dedicated to one of the aspects of Tara, the radiant goddess. All treatments begin with your therapist invoking the healing energy of Tara and conclude with the balancing resonance of the Himalayan singing bowl.

Overnight Paro**(B/L/D)**

Day 10 Thursday, Sept, 27**Paro**

The iconic and highly venerated Taktshang Monastery, aka Tiger's Nest Monastery, awaits you today. The steep climb up to this fascinating destination can take anywhere between 1 ½ to 3 hours, depending on one's level of fitness. A popular option is to take a pony for a portion of the hike. According to legend, Guru Rinpoche, who spread Buddhism through the Himalaya, flew here in the 8th century on the back of a tiger in order to defend Buddhism against its detractors. The climb is challenging, but it is so worth the effort and a major highlight of the entire trip. After exploring the monastery and meeting the monks, you'll walk a bit downhill to a cafeteria for lunch before hiking all the way down the hill.

In the afternoon you'll enjoy visiting the small town of Paro where you will have time for some shopping in the charming shops that line Paro's main street.

Overnight Paro**(B/L/D)****Day 11 Friday, Sept. 28****Departures****(B)**