

Thimphu - Gangtey - Punakha - Paro



Trip Overview

Explore Bhutan, a Himalayan kingdom where ancient traditions, spirituality, and pristine nature coexist in harmony. From snowcapped peaks and lush valleys to sacred monasteries and royal Dzongs, this journey immerses travelers in Bhutan's cultural and natural wonders. The tour combines visits to vibrant capitals, serene valleys, historic temples, and iconic monasteries, with opportunities to meet monks, nuns, and local families, offering a deep understanding of Bhutanese life, spirituality, and traditions.

The tiny Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan awaits, nestled high in the Himalayas its isolation from the world has cultivated some culture rich in traditions, religion and a benevolent monarchy. The dramatic landscapes, from snowcapped peaks and deeply forested slopes to raging, boulder strewn rivers, sit largely undisturbed as the endeared environmental initiatives and religious beliefs leave the Kingdom pristine and a jewel of nature.

Please note that some of the sights/itinerary may change due to season, weather, national holidays, and special events. We maintain the rights to alter the itinerary since tours are made in advance and unforeseen circumstances that mandate change may arise. Itinerary changes are made to improve your

overall travel experience in Bhutan.

Total Trip Days: 08 Nights / 09 Days

Region: Thimphu – Gangtey – Punakha – Paro

Max Altitude: 3,810 m (Chelela Pass)

Activity: Cultural, Scenic & Spiritual Exploration

Trip Highlights

- Thimphu: Visit Buddha Dordenma, Memorial Chorten, Trashicho Dzong, Zorig Chosum (traditional arts school), National Library, and the Weekend Market
- Gangtey / Phobjikha Valley: Explore Gangtey Monastery, the Black-necked Crane Information Centre, and scenic nature trails with panoramic valley views
- Punakha: Experience Punakha Dzong, Chhimi Lhakhang, Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Chorten, Sangchen Dorji Lhendrup Nunnery, Punakha Suspension Bridge, and charming villages like Talo and Nobgang
- Paro: Visit National Museum, Kyichu Lhakhang, a traditional farmhouse, and hike to Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest)
- Scenic drives across Dochu La Pass and Chelela Pass with breathtaking Himalayan vistas
- Authentic cultural experiences, including traditional Bhutanese crafts, local cuisine, and interaction with monks and rural families

Itinerary

Day 1:

On a clear day, the flight to Paro is breathtaking, with views of major Himalayan peaks such as Everest, Kanchenjunga. You will fly over the southern hills, known as 'duars', or gateways into the Himalayas as they rise from the plains until they meet the great snow-capped peaks that rise up to

the sky. The descent into Paro valley takes you through a narrow valley between the mountains and past villages and houses that appear to be a little too close and makes you wonder if this is normal. Then the valley suddenly opens up to reveal a wider valley with rice fields, villages and the airstrip located along a river. Paro airport is the only airport in the world where the altitude exceeds the length of the airstrip. Although the flight and landing at Paro may sound unnerving, you are in good hands as the pilots are specially trained to fly and land here. Many have described the flight to Paro as breath taking.

On arrival, proceed to immigration where you will present your Visa Approval Letter and Passport for the official stamp. As you clear the Immigration check, please make your way to the baggage delivery area and at the exit door of the airport you will meet your Guide who will accompany you throughout your stay in Bhutan.

Transfer to Thimphu. Once a rustic village sitting in a broad, fertile river valley, Thimphu is today the nation's bustling capital. It is the center of government, religion and commerce with an interesting combination of tradition and modernity.

On arrival, check-in at the hotel.

Buddha Dordenma statue sitting on top of a hill overlooking Thimphu. The Statue of Sakyamuni Buddha is one of the tallest in Asia (51.5 m). The site of Buddha Dordenma offers unobstructed views over the capital town. (Closes Daily Nov-Feb at 4pm & Mar-Oct at 5pm)

Dinner at the hotel

Overnight at Hotel in Thimphu (B, L & D)

Day 2:

Breakfast at the hotel

Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, is a fascinating mix of traditional Bhutanese culture and modern development. It's the largest city in Bhutan, located in a valley along the banks of the Wang Chhu River, and is a great destination for exploring Bhutanese history, religion, and daily life.

Today's visit will include with Lunch at a local restaurant:

Zorig Chosum, (also known as the painting school) offers a six-year course in the 13 traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan. The students follow a comprehensive course that starts with drawing and progresses through

painting, woodcarving, embroidery and statue-making. This is a great opportunity to interact and photograph the students while they practice their skills in the classroom. (Closed on Sat 1pm, Sun, Govt. Holidays, School Break Jul, Jan-Feb).

Memorial Chorten, the building of this landmark was originally envisaged by Bhutan's third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who had wanted to erect a monument to world peace and prosperity. Completed in 1974 after his untimely death, it is both a memorial to the Late King ("the father of modern Bhutan"), and a monument dedicated to peace. During the mornings and evenings, it a bustling place where people of all ages circumambulate the chorten/stupa, pray and prostrate at the shrine, turn the big prayer wheels, offer butter lamps, bask in the sun as they socialize and mingle. (Closes Daily Nov-Feb at 4pm & Mar-Oct at 5pm)

Trashicho Dzong/fortress which houses the throne room of the King and various government offices. It is also the summer residence of the Chief Abbot and the central monk body. If your visit falls on a working weekday, arrive in time to watch the hoisting of the National Flag and the March of the Guards. (Open: Mon-Fri [Mar-Oct after 5:30pm] [Nov-Feb after 4:30 pm] / Open on Sat, Sun, Govt. Holidays)

Evening free or time permitting visit Weekend Market: Most of the Thimphu's population and many valley dwellers converge on the bustling weekend market, held down by the river. A wide range of foodstuffs and local arts and crafts are sold at the market, which runs from Friday afternoon to Sunday. A visit to the market provides great photo opportunities, as well as the chance to mingle with local people and perhaps buy souvenirs. (Open Fri-Sun)

Dinner at the hotel

Overnight at Hotel in Thimphu (B, L & D)

Day 3:

Breakfast at the hotel

The Dochu La (Dochu Pass, la means pass in Dzongkha) is a mountain pass in the snow covered Himalayas within Bhutan on the road from Thimphu to Punakha where 108 memorial chortens or stupas known as "Druk Wangyal Chortens" have been built by Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuk, the eldest Queen Mother. Apart from the chortens there is a monastery called the Druk Wangyal Lhakhang (temple), built in honour of the fourth Druk Gyalpo (head of the state of Bhutan), Jigme Singye Wangchuck;] the open grounds in its front yard is a venue for the annual Dochula Druk Wangyel Festival. The pass with 108 memorial chortens is adjacent to the country's first Royal Botanical

Park. Set close to the center of Bhutan, the wide glacial valley of Gangtey, often referred to as Phobjikha Valley, is one of the most beautiful destinations in Bhutan. Extremely diverse, the sacred and protected area is home to some of the most exotic as well as rare wildlife species, including the globally endangered, black-necked cranes that arrive every year from the Tibetan Plateau. It is believed along with their sacred arrival comes a good potato harvest and prosperity for the valley.

Gangtey also boasts its own important religious sites, including the Gangtey Monastery situated at the head of the valley. It is here adventurers are spoilt with exceptional valley views as well as an array of nature trails.

Black necked cranes centre: Black-necked cranes are among the endangered birds that migrate to Bhutan during the winter season. While these endangered birds can be found in other Bhutanese regions, like Bumthang Valley, Gangtey is home to most black-necked cranes every year. Visit the Black-necked Crane Information Centre, situated on the edge of the forest and wetland to learn more about these incredible creatures.

Lunch at a local restaurant.

Dinner at the hotel.

Overnight at Hotel in Gangtey (B, L & D)

Day 4:

Breakfast at the hotel

Gangtey Monastery Perched atop a small hill that overlooks almost entire Phobjikha Valley, the spectacular Gangtey Monastery is surrounded by a large village inhabited mainly by the families of the 140 gomchens who devotedly take care of the blessed monastery. A 17th century Buddhist monastery, it is one of the most famed as well as sacred sites to visit in the entire valley. A must-visit when in Gangtey.

The Gangtey Nature Trail is one of the most scenic and popular short hikes in Bhutan, offering breathtaking views of the Phobjikha Valley. The trail is an easy and leisurely walk, making it suitable for all fitness levels. The trail offers panoramic views of the glacial valley, lush meadows, and traditional Bhutanese farmhouses. The trail passes through beautiful pine forests, bamboo shrubs, and small brooks, creating a peaceful and refreshing atmosphere. You will encounter local villagers, traditional Bhutanese homes, and herders tending to their yaks and cattle along the way.

Lunch at a local restaurant.

Dinner at the hotel.

Overnight at Hotel in Gangtey (B, L & D)

Day 5:

Breakfast at the hotel

As the sun gradually climbed higher in the sky, journey toward Punakha which is around 7 hours' drive from Bumthang valley. Punakha, nestled in the picturesque valleys, is indeed a treasure trove of exciting sightseeing opportunities. It is loved for its villages besides its temples and monasteries. The gentle terraces that line the slopes of the villages are great to the eyes.

Punakha, once the capital of Bhutan, is known for its breathtaking landscapes, historical significance, and pleasant climate. It is located at a lower altitude than Thimphu, making it a warmer region, especially during winter. The valley is also famous for its lush valleys and rice fields.

We descend down till we reach the village of Lobeysa/Mitsina. On arrival, visit Chhimi Lhakhang (temple), a 30-40-minutes gradual walk through a village and paddy fields. Situated on a hillock below the village of Metshina, the temple is dedicated to Lama Drukpa Kuenley (also known as the Divine Madman). The temple is popular among women who have difficulties conceiving children.

Lunch at a local restaurant.

Dinner at the hotel.

Overnight at Hotel in Punakha (B, L & D)

Day 6:

Breakfast at the hotel

Today's sightseeing includes:

Khamsum Yulley Namgyal Hike is located in the Punakha District of Bhutan, about 17 miles northeast (as the crow flies) of Thimphu, the largest city and capital of Bhutan. From the town of Punakha, it's about a 20 minutes' drive and about 30-minute hike along a trail that crosses a suspension bridge and then goes up the hill to the chorten.

Khamsum Yulley Namgyal was built with a very specific intention in mind. Rather than being a place of communal worship, a monastic retreat or a

place of education, it was built to provide spiritual protection, peace and harmony.

Punakha Dzong, the Dzong built in 1637 by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal to serve as the religious and administrative center of the region. Damaged over the centuries by four catastrophic fires and an earthquake, the Dzong has been fully restored in recent years by the present monarch.

Punakha Suspension Bridge. One of Bhutan's longest suspension bridges, stretching over 160 meters, it connects the Punakha Dzong to nearby villages. The bridge offers stunning views of the river and surrounding mountains, and it's an exciting experience to walk across, especially for those seeking a bit of adventure.

Sangchen Dorji Lhendrup Nunnery, perched on a ridge with spectacular views of the Punakha and Wangdue valleys. The temple houses a 14-ft bronze statue of Avalokiteshvara, one of the biggest in the country. The statue was handcrafted exclusively by local artisans. The temple houses a complex for higher studies and meditation center for nuns. Apart from religious trainings, the nuns are also provided skills such as embroidery, tailoring and statue making.

Lunch at a local restaurant.

Dinner at the hotel.

Overnight at Hotel in Punakha (B, L & D)

Day 7:

Breakfast at the hotel

Paro is one of Bhutan's most picturesque and culturally significant destinations. Known for its stunning valley, rich history, and religious sites, Paro is also home to Bhutan's only international airport, making it the gateway for most visitors.

This morning, set off for Paro after once again crossing Dochula pass. On arrival, check-in at the hotel. After Lunch drive towards the north end of the valley to visit the National Museum. The museum collection includes ancient Bhutanese art and artifacts, weapons, coins, stamps and a small natural history collection. National Museum- Perched above Paro Dzong is its ta dzong (watchtower), built in 1649 to protect the undefended dzong and renovated in 1968 to house the National Museum. The unusual round building is said to be in the shape of a conch shell, with 2.5m-thick walls. The ta dzong suffered damage in the 2011 earthquake but reopened in 2019 as

the nation's premier museum.

Kyichu Lhakhang: This hakhang, built in the 7th century, is one of the two oldest and most sacred shrines in Bhutan (the other being Jambey Lhakhang in Bumthang). Kyichu Lhakhang is composed of twin temples. The first temple was built by the Tibetan king, Songtsen Gampo in the 7th century. In 1968, H.M. Ashi Kesang, the Queen Mother of Bhutan, arranged for a second temple to be built alongside the first one, in same style.

In the evening, visit a traditional farmhouse for an opportunity to interact with a local family and learn something of their lifestyle, and rest of the day at leisure.

Lunch at a local restaurant.

Dinner at the hotel.

Overnight at Hotel in Paro (B, L & D)

Day 8:

Tiger's Nest is a must-visit for anyone traveling to Bhutan. The combination of natural beauty, cultural significance, and the sense of achievement from completing the hike makes it one of the highlights of any trip to Bhutan.

In the morning, take an excursion to Taktsang Monastery also known as Tiger's Nest. It is believed that Guru Rinpoche, founding father of the Bhutanese form of Mahayana Buddhism, arrived here on the back of a tigress and meditated at this monastery. The main structure was severely damaged by fire in 1998, but after many years of painstaking restoration work, the complex has now been fully restored to its former glory.

Balance of the day at leisure to explore beautiful craft market in Paro town.

Lunch at a local restaurant.

Dinner at the hotel.

Overnight at Hotel in Paro (B, L & D)

Day 9:

Breakfast at the hotel

Drive to Paro airport to leave this beautiful Himalayan country and take a flight back to your homeland. We hope you have taken lots of everlasting

photos and memories with new friends. We look forward to seeing you back to this enchanting Himalayan realm.

The driving and hiking times mentioned are approximate times and do not include breaks in the journey for sightseeing, photo/tea/meal/rest stops.

During the treks/hikes, there may be delays or diversion of hiking trails due to trail conditions, inclement weather and other unforeseen circumstances.