



Bhutan: a cultural and nature trail exploration

📅 12 Days

📍 Locations Included

- Thimphu (3 nights)
- Punakha (2 nights)
- Phobjikha (2 nights)
- Paro (4 nights)

Your itinerary

As recently as 1961 all entry into Bhutan was still only by horse back. Druk-yul, the land of the thunder dragon is only just emerging from the mists of its self-imposed isolation. The last Shangrila is an exotic land of high mountains and lush valleys, snow clad peaks with clear running springs, a pristine ecology and an incredible wealth of wildlife. A most striking feature of Bhutan is its architecture. The style and color which characterize every building and house in the kingdom is a distinct source of aesthetic pleasure. The Dzongs themselves – imposing 17th-century structures built on a grand scale without drawing and without a single nail, are outstanding examples of the best in Bhutanese architecture. Patterns of rich colors adorn every wall, beam, pillar and door in traditional splendor. Nestled deep in the eastern Himalayas between India and Tibet, the simple pleasure that this country offers gives a sense of kinship with the people and their love for the land. Essentially a rural country with 90 per cent of the people engaged in agriculture or raising livestock, Bhutan is predominantly Buddhist, practicing the Tantric form of Mahayana Buddhism

Gangtey Tshechu

The Tshechu is a religious event celebrated on tenth day of a month of the lunar calendar corresponding to the birthday of Guru Rimpoche (Guru Padmasambhava). Tshechus are grand events where entire communities come together to witness religious mask dances, receive blessings and socialize. In addition to the mask dances, tshechus also include colorful Bhutanese

dances and other forms of entertainment.

Highlights of your trip

- ① Gangtey Tshechu Festival
- ① A session with AHF Program partner RENEW (Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women)
- ① Tiger's Nest
- ① Jiligang Pine Trail Hike
- ① Black-necked Cranes

Daily Schedule

Day	Highlights	Location
Day 1	Paro - Thimphu & Sightseeing (65 km, 1 hour, Alt 2,334 m)	Thimphu Meals: Lunch, Dinner
Day 2	Thimphu Sightseeing	Thimphu Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Day 3	RENEW - A day at Gawaling Happy Home	Thimphu Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Day 4	Thimphu - Punakha enroute Lungchutse Hike (86 km, 3 hours, Alt 3,000 m)	Punakha Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Day 5	Punakha Sightseeing - Jiligang Pine Trail Hike (Alt 1200 m)	Punakha Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Day 6	Punakha to Gangtey (75 kms, 3 hours, Alt 2900 m)	Phobjikha Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Day 7	Gangtey Tshechu Festival , sightseeing	Phobjikha Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Day 8	Gangtey to Paro (170 kms , 5 hours, Alt 2200 m)	Paro Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Day 9	Trip to Kila Nunnery (1 hour, 45 kms, Alt 3900 m) or A day at leisure	Paro Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Day 10	Paro Sightseeing	Paro Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Day 11	Hike to Tiger's Nest Monastery	Paro Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Day 12	Depart	Meals: Breakfast

Detailed itinerary

1

Paro - Thimphu & Sightseeing (65 km, 1 hour, Alt 2,334 m)

Once your visa and customs are cleared, your guide will meet you outside the customs enclosure for a one-hour journey to the capital Thimphu, which is situated in a large valley traversed by the Wangchu River and overshadowed by high peaks. Depending on your flight trimmings, you may choose to rest or embark on visiting a few points of interest.



Our sights of Thimphu, begin at the Memorial Chorten, with its golden spires shining in the sun, its tinkling bells, and an endless procession of elderly people circling around it. Erected by the royal grandmother Ashi Phutsho Chodoen in memory of her son the third king Jigme Dorje, it contains a fine collection of Buddhist statues and is a center of tantric Buddhism in all its complexity.

Onward, we will visit Kuensel Phodrang, where the Buddha Dordenma resides, it is said to be one of the largest Buddha in the world, standing at 169 feet / 51.5 meters. You will see Thimphu city from a bird's eye view.

Overnight: Thimphu

2

Thimphu Sightseeing

After breakfast, we begin our day with a visit to the Changangkha Lhakhang- It is a fortress-like temple perched on a ridge above Thimphu, south of Motithang. The temple was established in 12th century on a site chosen by Lama Phajo Drugom Zhigpo, who came from Tibet. The central statue here is Chenrezig in a manifestation with 11 heads. From the courtyard of the temple, there is a fascinating view of the Thimphu valley.



Folk Heritage museum

The folk heritage museum gives you a glimpse of the traditional Bhutanese lifestyle, in addition to artifacts from rural households; it also displays an impressive collection of typical household objects, tools and equipment. The museum also organizes regular demonstrations of rural traditions, skills, habits and customs as well as hosting educational programs for children.

Royal Textile museum.

The Royal Textile Academy is the place to learn about Bhutan's living national art of thagzo (weaving). The ground floor focuses on royal ghos, including the wedding clothes worn by the fourth king and his four wives. The upper floor introduces the major weaving techniques, styles of local dress and type of textiles made by women and men. The museum shop offers some interesting books and fine textiles.

Institute of 13 arts and crafts of Bhutan

Institute for Zorig Chusum or the Institute of 13 arts and crafts was opened in June 1997, and it reflects Bhutan's effort to provide opportunities for vocational training and especially for this region, which has always been popular with bamboo and wood crafts.

School of Astrology.

Pangri Zampa Lhakhang is one of the gems that you should certainly explore. . Bhutanese parents also visit this lhakhang for getting auspicious names and blessings for their newborns. Built in 16th century, Lhakhang consists of two temples which will be visible to you as soon as you enter the compound. Huge stone walls painted with white will make you look to the top. As you raise your eyes from the prayer wheels at the entrance to the heights of huge temple walls, you will be stunned seeing the beautiful combination of sheer scale with simplicity.

Post office.

Hard-core philatelists might be interested in this new museum, attached to the post office. Five galleries trace the development of the Bhutanese postal system, from the earliest mail runners to Bhutan's idiosyncratic and highly collectible modern stamps, also giving you a great insight into the history of Bhutan. Most importantly. (You can even get your photo printed on a Bhutanese Stamp).

Tashichho-Dzong

Also known as the 'fortress of the glorious religion', it was initially built in 1641 and later rebuilt in its present form by King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk in 1965. The Dzong houses the main secretariat building with the Throne Room of His Majesty the King of Bhutan. The National Assembly Hall is housed in a modern building on the other side of the river from the Dzong. During the warmer summer months, the monk body headed by His Holiness the Je Khenpo resides in the Dzong. You can also visit the Craft Bazaar, the Royal Government of Bhutan's initiative to display products that are only made in Bhutan promoting local craftsmanship.

Overnight: Thimphu

RENEW - A day at Gawaling Happy Home

GAWAILING HAPPY HOME Gawailing Happy Home provides an environment of physical and psychological safety for individuals and families. It is run by RENEW, the NGO which is the Australian Himalayan Foundation's Program Partner-NGO in Bhutan. The Happy Home offers counselling, legal aid (when needed), emergency medical aid, crisis intervention, meditation practices, education for the children, and livelihood training for each individual.

Overnight: Thimphu



Thimphu - Punakha enroute Lungchutse Hike (86 km, 3 hours, Alt 3,000 m)

Leaving Thimphu, we start our journey into the countryside towards the Punakha valley, the winter capital of Bhutan. The drive ascends gradually to the Dochula pass over 10300 ft (3,140 meters) with magnificent vistas of the Himalaya range.

The Dochula Monastery also known as the Druk Wangyal Khangzang Chortens is a tribute to the service and leadership of His Majesty the king. The design inspired by the Queen is a unique cluster of 108 Chortens seen from all directions. The descent to Punakha is vibrant and colorful, with the fluttering prayer flags adding to a rich topography dotted by terrace farming and rivers flowing through. At Dochula we will begin a beautiful hike.



Lungchutse Day Hike

The trail from Dochu La climbs slowly through a forest of hemlock, birch, and rhododendrons until reaching an open meadow. From there you will again enter into a forest of moss-covered rhododendrons, gigantic hemlocks, junipers, and bamboo undergrowth. The trail leads past a row of fluttering prayer flags up to Lungchutse.

Dochula To Lungchutse Lhakhang Hike

Starting Altitude: 3100 m – 3600 m approx.

Ascent: 400/500 m

Distance: 8 km

Duration 4 Hours

NOTE: Dochula is approximately 1-hour drive from Thimphu

Overnight: Punakha

Punakha Sightseeing - Jiligang Pine Trail Hike (Alt 1200 m)

The first step of Jiligang hike begins from the suspension bridge over Mochu, the female river which meanders along the valley until it meets her partner Pochu (male river) forming a confluence below the



Punakha Fortress, Palace of Great Bliss. The breeze of the splashing glacier river and the swinging bridge will give you a prior taste of the adventure of the beautiful hike ahead. From the Himalayan river breeze to the sight of wavering paddy fields, enjoy a relaxed hike through traditional Bhutanese houses replete with Bhutanese farm life. Hike uphill till you reach about 1,800 meters on the hilltop through the chirpine forest. The moderately strenuous hike is through the cool shades of pine trees and serene environment with peeping views of the Punakha Dzong and valley below. As you hike up, the aesthetic view of the meandering river and the melodic chirping of the birds will welcome you all the way. During summer, numerous species of tropical birds can be spotted including the Himalayan water birds. As you climb a little higher, the view of Jiligang Monastery will wash away your weariness and a gush of newfound energy will greet you along with the warm smiles of the caretakers of the temple. The trail passes through the Yebesa village and later ascending through the Pine trees above the village. Scenic views of the Yebesa Village, Khamsum Yuellay Namgyal Chorten and the meandering Mochu river can be observed while climbing uphill above the Yebesa village. Along the trail breathing scenic views of the meandering Mochu river, Lakhu village, Kabesa village and Kabji Chorten Nyinpo Lhakhang can be observed at the other side of the Mochu River. Most prominent is the Punakha Dzong view



Jiligang Lhakhang:

It was built by Lam Ngawang Chogyel in the 15th Century. According to legend, the name of the Lhakhang has been derived from the event when Lam Drukpa Kuenley asked his cousin brother Lam Ngawang Chogyel to prove his spiritual attainment. In response to it Lam Ngawang Chogyel proved his spiritual attainment by sending a cat from beneath the mountain base of Sonagatsa, which came out from the top of the hill. Thus, the name 'Jili' which means cat and the 'gang' means mountain and when put together it means 'Jiligang' which means Cat Mountain. From the hilltop you can enjoy 360 degree of the nearby mountains, nine villages to be a precise and a spectacular view of the snowcapped mountains in the distance. Jiligang Monastery is believed to have the same values and blessings as Chimi Lhakhang, the Temple of Fertility located in Punakha.

Distance: Yebesa – Jiligang : 3.50 km, Jiligang – Punakha – 2. 6 kms (6 kms)

Altitude: 1257 m- 1820m – 1240m (Yebesa – Jiligang – Punakha)

Ascent: 536 m

Descent: 580 m

Duration: 6 hours approx

Overnight: Punakha

Punakha to Gangtey (75 kms, 3 hours, Alt 2900 m)

After breakfast visit the Punakha Dzong and Chimi Lhakang before heading to Gangtey Valley.

Punakha Dzong sprawled at the confluence of the Phochu (male) and Mochu (female) rivers. It was built by Shabdrung Nawang in 1637 and serves as the winter residence of the head abbot, Je Khenpo and headquarters of the district administration.



Chimi Lhakhang

Built by the great Lama Drukpa Kinley in 1400 to subdue local demons. The temple is a popular pilgrimage point for all Bhutanese and is especially revered by women for its fertility powers.

Overnight: Phobjikha

Gangtey Tshechu Festival , sightseeing

After an early breakfast, we will begin our sightseeing in Phobjikha valley.

Gangtey Tshechu (7-9th Oct)

Tshechu is a religious festival meaning "tenth day" held annually in various temples, monasteries and dzongs throughout the country. The Tshechu is a religious event celebrated on tenth day of a month of the lunar calendar corresponding to the birthday of Guru Rimpoche (Guru Padmasambhava). Tshechus are grand events where entire communities come together to witness religious mask dances, receive blessings and socialize. It is believed that everyone must attend a Tshechu and witness the mask dances at least once to in order to receive blessings and wash away their sins. Every mask dance performed during a Tshechu has a special meaning or a story behind it and many are based on stories and incidents from as long ago as the 8th century, during the life of Guru Padmasambhava. In monasteries, the mask dances are performed by monks and in remote villages, they are performed jointly by monks and village men.



Gangtey Nature Trail

This pleasurable walk will give you a nice feel for the Phobjikha Valley. From the small hilltop overlooking Gangtey Goemba, you head downhill through flower meadows to Simchubara Village and from here through beautiful forest and into the open valley. After passing a Chorten and Khewa Lhakhang, the trail ends at the Tabiding football ground. If you wish to start your hike from the lodge this involves a thirty minutes walk upto the Gangtey Monastery. The nature trail can be combined with a visit to Gantey Goemba.

Gangtey Nature Trail:

Distance: 2 hours approximately.

Altitudes: 3000 m

Ascent: 200 m

Distance: 4km

Overnight: Phobjikha

Gangtey to Paro (170 kms , 5 hours, Alt 2200 m)

We start our journey into the countryside Paro valley, stopping at the Dochula pass for tea or photographs. Afternoon at leisure at hotel.

Overnight: Paro



Trip to Kila Nunnery (1 hour, 45 kms, Alt 3900 m) or A day at leisure

The short steep descent from the Chelela will take us to the nunnery of Kila Goemba, nestled in a craggy patch on the mountainside below the Chelela pass and perched precariously along the rock face.

This small nunnery is home to many nuns who have renounced their worldly life and have chosen to lead the path of enlightenment. The Temple is about an hour 's walk amidst a magnificent wooded area. Here the nuns, called anims, live a life of contemplation and seclusion, with daily prayer and spiritual practice. The temple itself is surrounded by numerous meditation huts, and many hidden caves lie inside the rocky cliffs. The goemba is surrounded by a lush forest dominated by tall firs and sparkling mountain streams wind down the slopes, which are covered with a variety of wildflowers and plants. The community is one of the oldest of seven nunneries in Bhutan, and was initially established in the early 9th century as a meditation site. After being destroyed by fire, the temple was rebuilt and officially established in 1986 as an Anim Dratshang (religious community of Buddhist nuns).

Kila Goemba is historically significant as a sacred meditation site. Many renowned Buddhist saints have come here to find peace and seclusion. The main temple houses ancient statues of Chenrezig. Avalokiteswara) and Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) among others. Life here is simple. The day begins and ends with prayers. The anims arise at 3 AM and study Buddhist scripture until 8 AM when they go to the temple for prayers. The first simple meal of the day (rice, vegetables and tea) is eaten at 10 AM, after which studies continue until 9 PM when a simple supper is served. The nuns retire after a final session of prayer. Most of the nuns have given up properties and left their families to live with the bare minimum of material things. Their studies and subsistence are supported by the government. Some of the older nuns have retired into meditation, while many of the younger ones pursue basic Buddhist studies and perform religious ceremonies. The course takes 5-6 years, after which they begin meditation, which can range from four months to three years. The walk down from here to the road is lined with small white chortens and it will take you about an hour

Overnight: Paro



Paro Sightseeing

Today is devoted to exploring quaint Paro and its surrounding areas. Your sightseeing itinerary can include:

- Paro Dzong. Also called Rinpung Dzong, or the Fortress of a Heap of Jewels. Constructed in the early 15th century as a diminutive fort, it was developed into a much more commanding fortress in 1646. This is one of the kingdom's finest examples of traditional Bhutanese architecture. Once, great catapults here flung stones at invading Tibetans. Today it houses a monastic school.
- Ta Dzong. This watchtower was 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. Displays include an impressive collection of thangkas, both ancient and modern, depicting Bhutan's important saints and teachers, as well as fearsome festival masks grouped according to their tsechu dances. There's a natural-history gallery with a 3D map of Bhutan, while the Heritage Gallery contains such oddities as an egg laid by a mule and a horse horn attributed to Guru Rinpoche.
- Kyichu Monastery. This is one of the oldest monasteries in the country, built in the 7th century by Tibetan King Songsten Gampo. The story goes that a giant demoness lay across the whole area of Tibet and the Himalayas and was preventing the spread of Buddhism. Butter lamps are the most powerful offering because their light symbolizes wisdom. Just as a lamp dispels darkness, offering light from a butter lamp represents removing the darkness of ignorance to attain Buddha's luminous clear wisdom.
- Drugyel Dzong ruins. The name means victorious fortress, and it was built 1644-49 to commemorate the Bhutanese victory over the Tibetan-Mongol forces. In 1951 it was engulfed in fire by accident. On a clear day, Mt. Jumolhari, Bhutan's holy peak, can be seen from here.

Overnight: Paro



Hike to Tiger's Nest Monastery

After breakfast, drive for about 25 minutes to begin your hike to one of Bhutan's most revered pilgrimage sites, the Taktshang Lhakhang, popularly known as the Tiger's Nest Monastery.

The trek offers spectacular views of this sacred monastery, which is perched precariously on a sheer rock face 3000 feet (900 m.) above the valley floor. Legend has it that Guru Rimpoche, father of Bhutan's stream of Mahayana Buddhism, arrived in the Paro Valley more than a millennium ago on the back of a tigress. He meditated for three months in a cave, which was converted into this monastery.

The hike from the base to the cafeteria will take at least 90 minutes. From there, it's about an hour's trek through some stunning landscape to reach the monastery. On the return, stop once more at the cafeteria for lunch.

The trek is easy to moderate, and takes 2-3 hours in total. Ponies are available for the uphill portions at an additional cost.

Overnight: Paro



Depart

In the morning our representatives from Trophel Tours & Travels will escort you to Paro International Airport and bid you Goodbye and a safe flight back home.

Tashi Delek!



