



## **The Magical Western and Central Bhutan 10 days**

### **Day 1: Bangkok to Paro (7400 feet)**

- The flight to Paro from Bangkok is a good opportunity get a panoramic view of the Eastern Himalayan mountain range (given the weather is clear). You will fly over the massive peaks of the eastern Himalaya, including Kangchenjunga, (the third highest mountain in the world) and Chomolhari, Bhutan's holy mountain. To see the mountains, request for left-hand side seats at check-in counter
- The Druk Air counter at the Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok is at Gate 10, aisle W.
- Upon arrival at Paro, you will be received by BTT guide, vehicle and driver.
- Visit Rinpung Dzong. You will have to cross a traditional cantilevered bridge called “Nemizampa” and a short walk uphill will take you to the doors of the Dzong. Inside the Dzong you will be explore the architectural layout of the temples inside. Bhutan’s dzongs originally served three purposes: as a fortress, an administrative center of local government, and a residence and focus for the monks’ religious activity. From the Rinpun
- Visit the Ta Dzong Museum – The national museum of Bhutan. Ta Dzong was historically used as the watch tower for Rinpung Dzong and therefore offers panoramic view of Paro valley
- Halt at Udumwara Resort or similar

### **Day 2: PARO**

- After breakfast hike to one of the most important religious sites in Bhutan, Taktsang Lhakhang, known as Tiger’s Nest. This magical monastery clings to a vertical granite cliff 2000 feet above the valley floor. The legend of Taktsang dates back to 747 AD when Padmasambhava, in the wrathful form of Guru Dorji Droloe, is believed to have flown here on the back of a tiger to subdue the evil spirits of the region. Tantric Buddhist mythology tells that the vanquished spirits were transformed into protectors of the dharma. One of them, Singye Samdrup, is recognized today as the guardian deity of Taktsang. After about an hour of rather steep hiking, you reach a small tea house that has a wonderful panoramic view of the temple. If you are interested, it is possible to get a closer view by hiking



another hour (each direction) to reach the temple. Otherwise you can relax at the tea house and enjoy the breathtaking views.

- The rest of the afternoon is free to relax or do some exploring in Paro.
- Halt at Udumwara Resort

### **Day 3: PARO TO PUNAKHA (4400 feet)**

- Leave for Punakha and on the way you will pass Thimphu valley. We continue east over the Dochu La (la means pass). Here in Dochula you will see the 108 chortens or stupas that were built by the Queen Mother for peace and prosperity of Bhutan. From the summit, in good weather, 200 miles of snowcapped Himalayan peaks are visible.
- Drive to Punakha you will note a dramatic change in vegetation. Cactus, banana, poinsettia and other semi-tropical plants dominate the landscape. After a few hours, we reach the green and gold terraced fields of Punakha. Punakha is the ancient capital of Bhutan. The valley is dominated by the impressive Punakha Dzong, which sits at the confluence of the Mo (female) and Po (male) rivers. Built by Shabdrung in 1647, this massive dzong is one of the holiest in Bhutan. It houses some of the country's most sacred relics, including Shabdrung's preserved remains. The Central Monk Body move from Thimphu to Punakha every winter as the lower elevation creates more temperate climate.
- Before arrival, you will stop to visit the Chime Lhakgang. You will walk briefly through paddy fields. Chime Lhakgang is built in honor of Lama Drukpa Kuenly or also known as the Divine Mad Man and he is a highly revered saint who made the phallic symbol famous in Bhutan.
- Halt at Damchen Resort or similar

### **Day 4: PUNAKHA TO BUMTHANG (7300 feet)**

- After breakfast leave for Trongsa, 5 to 6 hours drive. Following the Dang Chu toward its source, you climb steadily through semi-tropical vegetation which eventually gives way to pine forests, rhododendrons and dwarf bamboo. Look for grey languor monkeys, often spotted on this portion of the drive.
- After crossing Pele La (11,286 feet), stop briefly at Chendibji Chorten, an ancient shrine built on the old walking path that runs across the country. First view of Trongsa Dzong, the largest dzong in Bhutan, comes from



- across the valley but the road stretches another 12 miles before reaching Trongsa.
- Visit Trongsa Dzong and explore its intricate maze of buildings and temples where there are wondrous views down to the river valley.
  - Continue onto our final eastward stretch of road to the Bumthang region. You will cross two more mountain passes - Yutong La (11,155 feet) and Kiki La (9515 feet) - before entering the Chume Valley, the first of the four valleys that comprise Bumthang. Next you reach the small town of Jakar, the main town of Bumthang.
  - Halt at Yu Gharling Resort or similar

#### **Days 5: EXPLORE BUMTHANG**

- After breakfast explore Bumthang, it is noted as one of the most beautiful valleys in Bhutan (Bumthang literally translates to “Beautiful Valley”). Bumthang also has the country’s highest concentration of ancient temples and sacred monuments. Its history is replete with the numerous visits from Padmasambhava as he brought the Buddha’s message to Bhutan. He meditated in many local caves that now have temples and shrines dedicated to him. Kurje Lhakhang, a 17th-century temple, now features a spectacular new monastery built in traditional style.
- You walk and visit Tamshing Monaster. Tamshing was founded in 1501 by Pemalingpa, “the treasure discoverer.” Pemalingpa was a famous 14th-century blacksmith from Bumthang who is one of Bhutan's most revered Buddhist saints and teachers.
- Next you visit Membartsho, the “burning lake” - a sacred place associated with Pemalingpa. Membartsho is not actually a lake but rather a water-worn defile in a granite streambed where the water moves slowly. Legend has it that Pemalingpa had a vision in which Padmasambhava instructed him to retrieve a ter, or hidden treasure, from this spot. He dove into the water holding a lamp (a lamp that miraculously stayed lit) and returned with texts and treasures of the Guru. Ters are an important aspect of Mahayana Buddhism as they provide a continual stream of teaching and revelation to future generations. Pemalingpa was one of the greatest tertons (treasure finders).
- Halt at Yu Gharling Resort or similar



### **Day 6: BUMTHANG TO PHOBJIKHA (9800 feet)**

- Today you commence our journey back towards western Bhutan. The drive from Jakar to the Phobjikha takes about five to six hours. Near the summit of Pele La, you turn down a side road leading to Phobjikha. This stunning valley is encircled by pine-covered mountains and rhododendron forests. The Black Mountain National Park links up with Royal Manas National Park to the south creating a territory of alpine, temperate and subtropical ecosystems. The combined reserve is home to a wide array of flora and fauna, but the area is most famous for being the winter abode of the endangered black-necked crane. Experts estimate that fewer than 6000 cranes exist in the wild. The cranes migrate from Tibet in mid-November and stay through March.
- Halt at Dewachen Hotel or similar

### **Day 7: PHOBJIKHA**

- Visit to the Gangteng Gumpa. This 17th-century monastery commands a beautiful location overlooking the verdant hills of Phobjikha. The complex consists of a central monastery, meditation hall, monks' quarters and a school. The head lama of Gangteng Gumpa is the ninth incarnation of the body of Pemalingpa.
- Continue to the Crane Center to learn more about these rare birds. Later you may choose to enjoy crane trail, one of the many exhilarating hikes into the surrounding villages, forests
- Halt at Dewachen Hotel or similar

### **Day 8: PHOBJIKHA TO THIMPHU (4400 feet)**

- Depart early morning for Thimphu, driving back across Dochu La for a second chance to view the Bhutanese Himalaya. By early afternoon, we arrive in Thimphu.
- The rest of the day is free to explore the attractions in and around the capital. As the largest city – with a population of approximately 70,000 - Thimphu is Bhutan's "Big Apple." With the seat of the Royal Government, homes of the Royal Family, and main offices for international aid organizations located here, Thimphu is a mix of Himalayan and Western sensibilities.
- Halt at Hote Phuntsho Pelri or similar



### **Day 9: THIMPHU TO PARO**

- If today is a weekend day, we start with a tour of the colorful weekend market, held beyond the parade ground north of Changlimithang Stadium. Each week, villagers from the outlying areas cart their wares to Thimphu. The items for sale consist primarily of vegetables and grain produced in the nearby valleys. On the other side of the river by crossing a traditional cantilever bridge, you will find locally produced handicrafts including religious objects, textiles and hats from various minority groups. The market provides a wonderful opportunity to mingle with the Bhutanese.
- Back in town explore the local shops selling traditional Bhutanese handicrafts.
- You may also visit the textile museum, a paper factory, Drubthob Gompa Nunnery, or the Takin Zoo, the curious national animal which mildly resembles a musk ox.
- If the monk body is not present, we will visit Tashichho Dzong, the “fortress of the glorious religion.” This massive building was constructed completely by hand and without a single nail! It houses government offices, the king’s audience chambers, the Je Khempo (head of the Drukpa Kagyu line of Mahayana Buddhism in Bhutan), the National Assembly, a multitude of temples, and many monks.
- In the late afternoon we return to Paro for a restful evening in preparation to departure next morning.
- Halt at Udumwara Resort or similar

### **Day 10: Flight to Bangkok**

- Depart for Bangkok